



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

MALAWI AG DIVERSIFICATION ACTIVITY

Q1Y1 REPORT: OCTOBER 2016 - DECEMBER 2016

Palladium International



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ACRONYMS

Acronym	Definition
ACE	Agriculture Commodity Exchange
BCC	Behavior change communication
CARE	Care International
CoP	Chief of Party
CIP	International Potato Centre
CSA	Climate SMART Agriculture
FRT	Farm Radio Trust
GoM	Government of Malawi
INVC	Integrating Nutrition in Value Chains
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OFSP	Orange Fresh Sweet Potato
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
USAID	United States Agency For International Development
VC	Value Chains
YONECO	Youth Net & Counselling
ZOI	Zone of Influence

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Feed the Future Malawi Ag Diversification Activity contributes to USAID/Malawi's Feed the Future goal of sustainably reducing poverty and stunting in eight districts of Central and Southern Malawi. It builds on the Feed the Future Malawi: Integrating Nutrition in Value Chains (INVC) Project whose main focus in the previous four years was to increase incomes and reduce stunting in the Zones of Influence (Zol). The Ag Diversification Activity was contracted to Palladium International for a period of five years, starting October 2016. The Activity seeks to increase the competitiveness of high-value, nutrient-rich value chains through support for agricultural enterprises, and increased access to markets and finance. It also aims to foster inclusive and sustainable growth of Malawi's agricultural sector, and improve the nutritional status of women and children under five through a proven nutrition-sensitive approach of layering agriculture and nutrition behavior change interventions in rural communities.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS QUARTER

- **START-UP**
 - Mobilization of staff, brainstorming and exchanging of notes with key partners, including the Malawi Government departments, the USAID Mission in Malawi, USAID partners and major subcontractors.
 - Identification of office space, recruitment of key staff and procurement of project equipment. All eight districts; Balaka, Lilongwe Rural, Machinga, Mchinji, Ntcheu, Dedza, Mangochi and Blantyre rural have been earmarked as zones for early intervention.
 - Environmental compliance: Palladium developed a SOW and contracted Karen Menczer, an expert in environmental compliance to develop the Activity's EMMP.
- **OUTCOME 1: Increased Incomes and Employment**
 - Engaged potential partners in the value chain such as Agricultural Commodity Exchange, ACE.
 - Building on communication platforms which Sunseed Oil and a group of VSLs started to develop in the areas of good production practices and aggregation.
 - Conducting rapid inventory of VSLs to build on their successes starting with VSL groups in Mchinji where INVC worked.
 - Held interviews for Outcome 1 position.
- **OUTCOME 2: Improved Climate Resilience**
 - Strategic meetings were held with the USAID funded PERFORM project to identify CSA options to integrate and scale out in the Machinga district. Similar collaborative meetings were held with government departments.
 - Attended the launch of the *National Agriculture Policy and Irrigation Policy* which represents the Government of Malawi's overarching agenda in transforming agriculture. Ag Diversification Activity aligns to the vision of the NAP which focuses on assuring food

- security and nutrition in a more coordinated and diversified approach through the commercialization of Agriculture.
- Carried out a review of evaluation reports on INVC, studies from USAID projects and reports from other relevant project to identify entry points on building the resilience of smallholder farmers in the Zols.
 - Adapted the crop calendar for the targeted value chains, including groundnuts, soy beans, pigeon peas and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes (OFSP).
 - **OUTCOME 3: Improved Nutrition**
 - Held first meeting with USAID to share and discuss Outcome 3 priorities.
 - Held meetings with: Tiwalere (a project by Feed the Children); a Ministry of Agriculture working group for harmonizing nutrition-sensitive IEC materials; the Principal Food and Nutrition Officers at Lilongwe's Agriculture Development Division (ADD) and Department of Agriculture and Extension Services (DAES); Concern Worldwide and Project Concern International; and the District Nutrition Focal person and the nutritionist for the Lilongwe District Council.
 - Literature review: The team conducted a rapid literature review to get information on current practices on consumption of legume-based diets and vitamin A rich foods, as well as the processing and storage of such food, in order to inform the message development for promotion in the Zols.
 - **OUTCOME 4: Women's Empowerment**
 - Held stakeholder engagement meetings with key gender sector stakeholders, including, but not limited to the Ministry of Gender and UN Women. A total of 5 stakeholders have been contacted and opportunities for collaboration have been explored.
 - Gender Analysis Framework: Discussions with Atethemis on an initial gender analysis framework were held. A draft Gender Analysis Framework was developed.
 - Development of gender related tools and frameworks: The lead reviewed a number of training materials and tools developed and being implemented by the Ministry of Gender, USAID-funded UBALE Program, UN Women and other partners. The review has informed the design of gender related tools and frameworks for the activity.
 - Recruitment: Recruitment process for two Regional Gender Coordinators was initiated (shortlisting and interviews done) and will be finalized within the next reporting period.
 - **OUTCOME 5: CDCS Priorities for Integration Advanced**
 - Held a number of meetings with USAID collaborative partners that include Tetra Tech, IMPACT, INVC outgoing project, PCI and CRS.
 - **Cross- Cutting Themes**
 - Developed Communications Strategy and submitted it to USAID for approval.
 - In line with the strategy, a number of activities were implemented, such as the production of a two-page briefer, the branding of staff signatures and the production of business cards. Weekly and monthly reports were also drafted and submitted accordingly.
 - Under M&E, the Activity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (AMEP) was drafted alongside the Collaborating, Learning and Adaptation Plan (CLA).

START-UP

The Ag Diversification Activity took off to a quick start in October 2016. Highlights in the quarter included the mobilization of staff, and brainstorming and exchanging of notes with key partners, including the Malawi Government departments, the USAID Mission in Malawi and USAID partners. Other priority areas were identification of office space, recruitment of key staff and procurement of project equipment.

Palladium International headquarters (HQ) technical and operational staff mobilized to Malawi for initial meetings with USAID, key personnel, and project partners. The HQ staff attended, among others, a full day Post-Award Orientation meeting with USAID, covering: technical orientation, environmental compliance, financial management and taxes, monitoring and evaluation, contractual compliance, branding and communications. The team also held initial meetings with representatives from major subcontractors, including:

- CARE Malawi – leading gender activities and supporting nutrition activities
- Practical Action – supporting resilience activities
- Farm Radio Trust – supporting farmer outreach and behavior change activities
- YONECO – supporting youth activities

Other meetings were held with subcontractors who re-affirmed their availability to participate in the project and confirmed shared space for satellite offices. Contracts were discussed and work planning was done alongside joint recruitment. The team held an internal kick-off and work planning meeting with all four Outcome Leads and representatives from all local subcontractors on October 18, 2016. The all-day session included introductions, presentations from HQ staff, and expectations for initial deliverables and break-out sessions for small-group work planning.

The Palladium HQ staff met with former CoP of INVC, Ben Lentz, and discussed issues ranging from technical and operational lessons learned from implementing INVC to how to work with both VC development and food emergency response. Palladium also inquired about potential staff needs and whether any outgoing INVC LTTA staff or INVC network consultants would be recommended in areas like Finance and Admin, Grants Management, Access to Finance and Organizational Development. The former CoP of INVC made several useful suggestions. Subsequently, INVC reached out to dispose of motorcycles used on the project. Ag Diversification has taken possession of 32 motorcycles.

The Ag Div team engaged all key partners in discussion to map out strategic areas for collaboration and leveraging. Meetings were held in October to kick start potential collaborations. The most important one was held with Africa Rising/Bridging Activity. The bridging exercise is filling the vacuum that would

have existed with the exit of the INVC project. Ms. Elizabeth Sibale and Mr. Elon Gilbert from IITA, who are managing the bridging exercise, attended as well as representatives from USAID.

The Bridging Activity works in close collaboration with ACE, FUM, CARICON, the MOST Project, the MIST Project, and DAES. Notably, the MIST Project deals in OFSP. Both the Ag Diversification and Bridging projects presented their outcomes and specific activities. Palladium stressed that its approach was to work through Lead Firms to stimulate demand and promote quality standards in the groundnut, soya bean and OFSP value chains. INVC Bridging staff stressed that working with IITA implies also close collaboration with ICRISAT (the latter works in pigeon pea and ground nuts, the former engages in soybean, maize and cassava).

Both parties agreed to draft and sign an MoU between the Bridging Activity and Ag Diversification and to share their respective work plans. Specifically, the issue of seed quality, stemming from the fraudulent trading and distribution of seed, was discussed at length. The Bridging Activity, provides seed loans to individual farmers through producer organizations and follows a policy of in-kind or specific repayment (pay back in cash or grain).

More brainstorming meetings and exchanges of notes between the Activity's technical team and stakeholders were held throughout the quarter. Among others, meetings were held with the Oil Seed Technical Working Group and a Southern Africa Trade Hub investment consultant on potential project collaboration.

The Ag Diversification team was boosted in December with the arrival of Carl Larkins and Rachel Sibande – Activity CoP and DCoP, respectively; both bringing diverse knowledge and experience in project implementation and management within and beyond Malawi. They held introductory meetings with USAID COR for the project, Lynn Schneider. Their arrival fast-tracked the recruitment of other key staff. Vacancies were advertised in the local newspapers and Palladium's website to reach out to many suitable people. One key position that needed to be filled was that of Outcome One Lead which had been rendered vacant following the death of Mr. Henry Gaga. Henry died in a motor accident barely month into the quarter. A potential candidate was identified through competitive interviews and is set to join the Activity in the next quarter.

The first quarter had a few strategic milestones that include the production of the Communications Strategy, Activity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (AMEP), and Collaboration and Learning Plan. The Director of Communications and Monitoring and Evaluation Lead, with input from Palladium local and home office teams, drafted these strategic documents. These documents were the key deliverables during the quarter and have been duly submitted to USAID for approval. The Operations Office supervised the furnishing of the new office in Area 3 which will house the Activity. The final touches on the new site are almost complete and the Activity, which is temporarily housed in the HP+ offices, Amina House in Lilongwe, is set to relocate to the new premises in the next quarter.

Environmental compliance: Palladium developed a SOW and contracted Karen Menczer, an expert in environmental compliance to develop the Activity's EMMP.

Regarding implementation, the three districts of Balaka, Lilongwe Rural and Machinga have been earmarked as zones for early intervention. This is because they are regarded as areas of proven productivity for soybean, groundnuts and OFSP – the three value chain crops the Activity is promoting. With key staff in place, office space secured and partners ready for implementation, roll out is imminent and the next quarter will be a defining period as various Outcomes gear up to move into the Zols. Below are the outcome-by-outcome achievements accomplished during the start-up quarter.



OUTCOME I: Increased Incomes and Employment

I. Introduction

Outcome I focuses on taking a market-driven approach to value chain development by forging closer commercial relationships between smallholders and more lucrative end markets to create a “demand pull” in the target value chains, thereby stimulating increased smallholder production. The end goal is to increase incomes and employment for smallholder farmers.

2. Accomplishments

The outcome faced a setback when its initial Lead, Henry Gaga, died. Nevertheless, the Ag Diversification team, led by Project Director (HQ) Peter Boone, undertook various consultation meetings with key players to ensure there was progress. The team met with the USDA Malawi Strengthening Inclusive Markets for Agriculture (MSIKA) project. MSIKA is a five year project funded by the USDA Food for Progress Program. Its objective is to improve the commercialization of the fruit and vegetable sectors for value addition, and ultimately increased trade in key target zones in Malawi. The target districts for MSIKA are: Mchinji, Dedza, Ntcheu, Mangochi, and Salima (all these districts except Salima are Ag Diversification target districts). The two teams discussed potential collaboration on seed material and nurseries for fruits and vegetables.



Happy soy farmers

The team also met with Jonathan Jacobs and Craig Hardie from Longevity, a Malawi-based financial advisory firm. They discussed the possibility of them assisting the Ag Diversification Activity conduct a mapping for the three value chains. The mapping will help Ag Diversification in mobilizing finance, investment, and brokering market linkage deals between smallholder producers and lead firm buyers, both domestic and regional. This work would, through performance-based contracts or grants, help the activity achieve its goals in both access to finance and enhancing market linkages. The team further met with Tradeline Malawi regarding the potential for them to work with the Ag Diversification Activity on linking smallholders to commercial markets, as well as on training smallholders on crop conditioning. They worked with Palladium (CARANA) under MLI and are familiar with the proposed approach. The Outcome, in consultation with USAID, developed quick wins which include:

- Organizing buyer-seller forums (buyers' tours) in the districts of Lilongwe Rural, Mchinji, Dedza, the Mangochi highlands, and Ntcheu to link smallholders with lead firm buyers. The following buyers will be invited: Rab Processors, Nthiransembe Co-operative, Agora, Chitsosa Trading, Dalitso, Export Ag Trading Group, the ACE Commodity Exchange, Sunseed Oil, Sun Valley (Universal Industries) and CP Feeds. These firms have expressed interest in working with the Ag Diversification Activity to assist small producers and aggregators meet standard market requirements (quantities, varieties, grades, standards, aggregation, packaging arrangements and price points), and better integrate them into their commercial value chains.
- Building on communications platforms which Sunseed Oil and a group of VSLs started to develop in the areas of good production practices and aggregation. The Activity will also build on those developed by INVC.

- Conducting rapid inventory of the VSLs to build on their successes starting with VSL groups in Mchinji where INVC worked. More VSL groups will be incrementally added in the other districts (videos prepared under INVC are ready to use for messages. They will be distributed in December-March).

The Ag Diversification Activity seeks to utilize modern technologies in servicing its constituents. In pursuance of this, it has been meeting organizations who are employing innovations in the implementation of its pro-poor interventions. One such organization is Compatible Technology International (CTI). The team met representatives of CTI to learn more about their innovative and yet affordable tools and technologies that have been approved by the government of Malawi to help smallholder farmers harvest, store and process groundnuts.



OUTCOME 2: Improved Climate Resilience

1. Introduction

Under Outcome 2, the Ag Diversification Activity is taking a comprehensive approach to integrating soil, water and nutrient management with improved agriculture technologies and Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) to improve farmer resilience to potential climate shocks.

2. Accomplishments

Stakeholder engagement: During Q1, the Outcome 2 team focused on partnership interactions and the development of quick wins. Quick wins for Outcome 2 included water harvesting linked to public works program (MASAF4 and WFP); provision of immediate farmer “hands-on” training and learning exchange visits on landscape and on-farm rehabilitation activities. Some of the farm activities to be promoted are such as the use of truncheons for protection of watersheds or sources linked to irrigation. This would ensure sustainable availability of water for irrigation and agroforestry species to improve soil health. Strategic meetings were held with the USAID funded PERFORM to identify CSA options to integrate and scale out in Machinga district. Similar collaborative meetings were held with government departments to learn what resilience interventions are being promoted in the districts, and the relevant stakeholders implementing such activities and how they align with government priorities. The team also carried out a review of technologies to assess what had worked on similar projects elsewhere and what had not, as well as what modifications the Activity could consider in scaling up proven technologies.

The Outcome 2 team attended the launch of the *National Agriculture Policy and Irrigation Policy (NAP)* which represents the Government of Malawi’s overarching agenda in transforming agriculture. Ag

Diversification Activity aligns to the vision of the NAP which focuses on assuring food security and nutrition in a more coordinated and diversified approach through the commercialization of Agriculture.

Reports review: The Outcome 2 team carried out a review of evaluation reports on INVC, studies from USAID projects and reports from other relevant projects to identify entry points on building the resilience of smallholder farmers in the Zols. The team then undertook preparatory steps towards the development of a resilience index. To this end, meetings were held with potential STTA for general outlook, reference materials and variables in line with USAID policy and guidance on building resilience to recurrent crisis.

One major accomplishment during the quarter was the adapting of the crop calendar (field activities) for the targeted value chains, including groundnuts, soy beans, pigeon peas and OFSP. This will be a useful guide in planning for quick wins which include: using drip irrigation as a game changer, building on water harvesting interventions.

The team also participated in a regional meeting on *Climate Smart Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security* organized by the Development Fund of Norway with participation from international organizations, government institutions, NEPAD/COMESA, research and the private sector. Lessons will feed into the Ag Diversification work planning linked to outcomes 1 & 2.



OUTCOME 3: Improved Nutrition

1. Introduction

Outcome 3 promotes dietary diversity, especially among pregnant/lactating women and infants 6-23 months, through integration of nutrition-sensitive kitchen gardens, small scale poultry production, and cooking techniques with highly nutritious foods. Outcome 3 is also critical for promoting year-round food security through processing, marketing, food preservation and storage.

2. Accomplishments

Stakeholder engagement: With support from Palladium's Technical Nutrition Advisor, Angie Stene, the nutrition team kicked off its activities with a series of meetings to lay down foundations for coordination and partnerships. The team held its first meeting with USAID to share and discuss Outcome 3 priorities.

Another meeting was held with Tiwalere II – a project by Feed the Children. The project aims at improving health and nutrition of children through care groups by improving the availability and access to foods rich in micronutrients, increasing adoption of essential hygiene practices and securing access to safe water. The purpose of the meeting was to explore potential areas of collaboration with their care groups in the districts where the two projects overlap. Feed the Children's senior team, a team from Palladium's HQ and the Outcome 3 Lead also attended the meeting. The team learned some of the basics of the Tiwalere program in order to identify areas for collaboration and complementary programming.

- Tiwalere has a food distribution program for fortified CSB that works on increasing access to and availability of food for vulnerable target groups (pregnant and lactating women and children <5 years old). They also engage in the 1,000 day effort to reduce child undernutrition.
- Tiwalere has a strong emphasis on work through a plethora of existing Care Groups.
- Total Land Care (TLC) is responsible for back-yard gardens, OFSP, small irrigation, small livestock, conservation agriculture, fruit trees and VSLAs.

Further meetings were held, primarily for collaboration, networking and potential leveraging. For example, the Outcome 3 team participated in a meeting on the development of Nutrition-sensitive IEC materials at the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, organized in collaboration with the Department of Nutrition, HIV and AIDS. The working group seeks to harmonize existing materials developed by different organizations. This process is of importance to the Ag Diversification Activity because it also intends to develop curricula for backyard gardening and food processing.

A meeting with the Principal Food and Nutrition Officers at Lilongwe's Agriculture Development Division (ADD) and Department of Agriculture and Extension Services (DAES) in Lilongwe was also held. Several documents were collected during the meeting, including an integrated homestead manual, a child feeding manual and a copy of the guidelines for the annual food amount requirements per individual.

Another meeting was held with Concern Worldwide and Project Concern International to explore potential areas of collaboration and synergy in the Ag Diversification Zones of Influence. Concern is implementing a nutrition project in Mchinji, using care groups to target pregnant and lactating mothers, and children under the age of two. They are largely into nutrition-specific interventions and the promotion of OFSP vine multiplication and processing. They also promote the production of highly nutritious indigenous vegetables through backyard gardens. They are open to entering into a collaborative relationship with the Ag Diversification Activity along with their care groups, especially on the issues of food processing, food safety and engaging the care groups to participate in the soy and groundnut value chains.

At the district level, the Outcome 3 team held a meeting with the District Nutrition Focal person and the nutritionist for the Lilongwe District Council, both of whom are also members of the District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC). The purpose of the meeting was to understand how they operate and to get an idea of how partners and stakeholders working in the nutrition sector were implementing their interventions. The district shared a list of organizations implementing nutrition interventions. These will be consulted for possible collaboration with the Ag Diversification Activity.

Literature review: The team conducted a rapid literature review to get information on current practices on consumption of legume-based diets and vitamin A rich foods, as well as the processing and storage of such food, in order to inform the message development for promotion in the Zols. The team also worked on a document to outline how the various outcomes in the Ag Diversification Activity are aligned to the National Agriculture and Investment Plan (NAIP). The NAIP has identified four key program areas as a priority, namely: sustainable high-yielding production, export-oriented market development, resilience and food security, and sector strengthening.

A review of nutrition-sensitive agriculture related materials from different projects was conducted to inform the programming activities once implementation on the ground starts.



OUTCOME 4: Women's Empowerment

1. Introduction

Outcome 4 implements activities to empower youth and women at the household, community and institutional levels in order to increase their participation and leadership in household decision making, access to and control over credit, incomes and productive assets.

2. Accomplishments

Stakeholder engagement: The Outcome 4 Lead held stakeholder engagement meetings with key gender sector stakeholders, including, but not limited to the Ministry of Gender and UN Women. The lead also reached out to USAID initiatives like UBALE and other CSO implementing gender equality and women empowerment initiatives. A total of 5 stakeholders have been contacted and opportunities for collaboration have been explored.

Gender Analysis Framework: Discussions with Atethemis on an initial gender analysis framework were held. A draft Gender Analysis Framework was developed.

Development of gender related tools and frameworks: The lead reviewed a number of training materials and tools developed and being implemented by the Ministry of Gender, USAID-funded UBALE Program, UN Women and other partners. The review has informed the design of gender related tools and frameworks for the activity.

Recruitment: Recruitment process for two Regional Gender Coordinators was initiated (shortlisting and interviews done) and will be finalized within the next reporting period.



OUTCOME 5: CDCS Priorities for Integration Advanced

2. Introduction

Outcome 5 seeks to enhance integration between Ag Diversification and other USAID implementing partners within the Agriculture sector as well as other USAID CDCS development objectives.

2. Accomplishments

In this quarter, Ag Diversification had conducted collaborative meetings with USAID and other donor partners. This was to share where and how they are implementing activities within the Activity's ZOI. The USAID collaborative partners that have been involved in the meetings includes PERFORM implemented by Tetra Tech, FISH implemented by IMPACT NJIRA being implemented by PCI and

UBALE being implemented by CRS. There were also strategic meetings with former INVC CoP on how Ag Diversification would leverage some of the work done under INVC activity. These meetings were done by the then Acting CoP, Peter Boone.

Ag Diversification has also planned district level meetings with local councils in the eight districts to brief members of District Executive Committee, DEC on how and where the project will be implemented. The DEC meetings have been planned for Q2Y1.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Communications, Advocacy, Monitoring & Evaluation cut across all the five outcomes. Communications and Advocacy support the outcomes with internal and external communication interventions. It has two major partners: Farm Radio Trust, supporting farmer outreach and behavior change activities, and YONECO, supporting youth activities. On its part, the M&E Lead is responsible for program activity data collection, quality control, analysis, interpretation, synthesis, and dissemination.

During this quarter, the Director of Communications was tasked with developing a Communications Strategy for the Ag Diversification Activity. A literature review was carried out on various Communications Strategies being used by various USAID-funded projects. A review of the USAID Communications Survival Manual was also conducted. The communications strategy was subsequently developed and duly submitted to USAID for approval. In line with the strategy, a number of activities were implemented, such as the production of a two-page briefer, the branding of staff signatures and the production of business cards. Weekly and monthly reports were also drafted and submitted accordingly.

Under M&E, the Activity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (AMEP) was drafted alongside the Collaborating, Learning and Adaptation Plan (CLA). The M&E Lead worked in close collaboration with Palladium HQ's technical advisors for M&E, GIS and CLA to complete the plans and submit in early December.

ANNEX 1: SUCCESS STORIES

FRT: Chance to Reach Record Smallholders!

The joy of Farm Radio Trust's involvement in the Ag Diversification Activity as a key outreach partner goes beyond their primary role of providing extension services to smallholders. Equally exciting, it has given them the edge to reach verifiable figures with the community listenership.



Farm Radio Trust's studio

FRT is a pioneer in radio and ICT agricultural extension services and has reached out to thousands of smallholders along various value chains. With their participation in the Ag Activity which targets 350,000 households in eight districts, FRT admits the Activity is one of the rare occasions when they have been challenged to reach out to so many people in a single project. The NGO is also aware that by virtue of using prominent radio stations with national coverage and community radio stations based in the selected areas, they might just be able to hit millions of smallholders with information that will boost nutrition intake, farm productivity and income generation through the three value chain crops: soybean, groundnut and OFSP.

“It is a fantastic opportunity for us to put to use our technological excellence to meet a need of this great magnitude. Working with the Activity gives us the platform where we reach more numbers,” said the Director of Programs at FRT, George Vilili.

FRT will develop and implement farmer extension messages, communications and training programs in the target value chains, working in an integrated fashion across Outcomes I through 4, using ICT-based extension services in the agriculture value chains. For the Activity, it will also utilize the ICT platforms to leverage radio broadcasts such as the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems.

With behavior change communication as one key tool for mindset and behavior change around agriculture productivity, CSA, nutrition, and women and youth empowerment, FRT's creativity and technological innovation will make the a world of difference for the attainment of project goals.

What is more exciting for FRT is the combination of outcomes the Activity has put together such as farmers' productivity, their resilience to climate change, and nutrition and gender as a cross-cutting issue. In all these ICT will play an important role in passing information to the project's audience. FRT are eager to take another step in facilitating the flawless flow of timely information to the smallholders.

"On ICT we are going crazy. We have the call center where farmers can call to get information on agriculture. We have set up ICT hubs where farmers sit in groups to listen to radio programs and practice. That aside, we will provide the groups with smartphones where they will be uploading video clips so they can learn new technologies the Ag Diversification Activity has designed for them," said Viliili.

FRT also works with the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, IIAT (they are working on the INVC–Ag Diversification bridging program) and other organizations working in nutrition-sensitive agriculture. This means FRT have a source of approved information from credible organizations that can be of importance to the farmers.

To ensure they are up to a quick start, FRT has already carried out a Rapid Rural Appraisal to establish media preferences across the Zols.

OFSP to Reach More Households!

Postani Phiri of Chikoloko Village, T/A Chitukula in Lilongwe recalls how, until last year, he would wrestle with poverty only to come out severely bruised. All his efforts investing in maize and other commercial crops yielded too little for this father of twelve to lift his family out of the poverty trap.

But, that was then. Today, the 59-year-old smallholder bears testimony of how Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potatoes (OFSPs) carry a transformative power to build strong incomes for local farmers like him while improving the family's nutritional status.



Postani Phiri in his OFSP garden

“It is a miracle crop,” he said.

Phiri is a seed multiplier who grows OFP certified vines from the International Potato Centre (CIP) and sells them to other farmers. CIP approached him last year to pioneer vine multiplication for the crop in T/A Chitukula. Although he had been disappointed with the other crops, he did not hesitate, but invested all his efforts into the new crop. Today, he earns enough to take care of his family.

“The nutritive advantage of the OFSP over other crops is evident. People want to grow and consume this potato. It is also marketable. Just yesterday, I made K37,000 (US\$49) through sales of the vine. Today, I am expecting 36 farmers from various agricultural clubs. Each has placed orders for vines worth MK1000 (US\$1.3). Last week, some doctors from the general hospital came to buy vines for their own gardens,” Phiri explained.

Calls by government and development partners for scaling up the vitamin A-rich potato has created a huge demand for certified seed multipliers. No wonder Phiri intends to extend his three hectares of OFSP land to five.

Production and consumption of the nutritious OFSP varieties feature prominently on the agenda of Feed the Future's Ag Diversification Activity. The USAID-funded project, which aims to reach 350,000 households with its interventions, promotes the cultivation of the potato among its beneficiaries and will leverage certified seeds from CIP and other certified vine multipliers.

Certified seeds guarantee quality. Seed multipliers like Postani Phiri, whose seed is frequently inspected by government experts from Chitedze Research Station, will become critical in the scaling up of the crop to households in the project's eight ZOI.

The Ag Diversification Activity will train smallholders on how to grow the potato for business and on how to process it into a variety of nutritious foods for commercial and home consumption. Just as Positani Phiri is able to post profits from the OFSP, so are many other farmers set to benefit through the Activity in the districts of Mchinji, Ntcheu, Dedza, Machinga, Mangochi, Balaka, Lilongwe Rural and Blantyre Rural.

ANNEX 2: MONTHLY REPORTS

MONTHLY REPORT – OCTOBER 2016

Background

The Feed the Future Malawi Ag Diversification Activity contributes to USAID/Malawi's Feed the Future goal of sustainably reducing poverty and stunting in eight districts of Central and Southern Malawi. This activity will increase the competitiveness of high-value, nutrient-rich value chains through support for agricultural enterprises and increased access to markets and finance. It also fosters inclusive and sustainable growth of Malawi's agricultural sector and improves the nutritional status of women and children under five through a proven nutrition-sensitive approach of layering agriculture and nutrition behavior change interventions in rural communities.

Project Start-Up

Palladium International headquarters (HQ) technical and operational staff, as well as the Chief of Party mobilized to Malawi the week of October 10th for initial meetings with USAID, key personnel, and project partners. Key personnel and HQ staff attended a full day **Post Award Orientation** meeting with USAID, covering:

- Technical orientation,
- Environmental Compliance,
- Financial Management and Taxes,
- Monitoring and Evaluation,
- Contractual Compliance, and
- Branding and Communications

The team held initial meetings with representatives from **major subcontractors**, including:

- CARE Malawi, leading gender activities, and supporting nutrition activities
- Practical Action – supporting resilience activities
- Farm Radio Trust – supporting farmer outreach and behavior change activities
- YONECO – supporting youth activities

Subcontractors confirmed their availability to participate in the project, confirmed shared office space availability for satellite offices, and discussed contracts, work planning and joint recruitment efforts.

The team held an internal **Activity kick-off and work planning meeting** with all four Outcome Leads and representatives from all local subcontractors on October 18th. The all-day session included introductions, presentations from HQ staff and the Chief of Party, expectations for initial deliverables, and break-out sessions for small-group work planning.

Palladium HQ staff met with Ben Lentz COP of INVC about **technical and operational lessons learned** from implementing INVC. How to work with both VC development and food emergency response was discussed along with several operational issues and challenges. Palladium also inquired about potential staff needs and whether any outgoing INVC LTTA staff or INVC network consultants would be recommended in areas like Finance and Admin, Grants management, Access to Finance, and Organizational Development and INVC made several useful suggestions. Subsequently, INVC reached

out to dispose of motorcycles used on the project. Ag Diversification has taken possession of 32 motorcycles.

Operationally, the project is off to a quick start, highlights include the following:

- **Registration** - Palladium is already legally registered in Malawi so new formal registration was not required and we can operate immediately in the country.
- **Office Space** – the team is temporarily co-locating in the Health Policy Plus offices (also implemented by Palladium) and has viewed four potential office locations. The team is currently receiving quotations for rent and repairs.
- **Recruitment** – Advertisements for all vacant staff positions and interviews are underway for several positions.
- **Finance and Taxes** - The team has compared several local banks and is currently opening accounts. The team has also begun the VAT exoneration process.

CDCS Priorities for Integration Advanced (Integration and Collaboration)

The Ag Diversification team prioritized meeting donor projects with which they will collaborate closely. The following are brief summaries of each meeting held in October.

Africa Rising/Bridging Activity (10/19 and 10/25): Elizabeth Sibale, Elon Gilbert (IITA) and Martin Banda (USAID) were in attendance as well as several AgDiv representatives.

- Both projects presented their outcomes and specific activities. The Bridging Activity works in close collaboration with ACE, FUM, CARICON, MOST Project, the MIST Project, and DAES. Notably, the MIST Project deals in OFSP. Palladium stressed that our approach is to work through Lead Firms to stimulate demand and promote quality standards in the VCs. Bridge staff stressed that working with IITA implies also close collaboration with ICRISAT (the latter works in pigeon pea and ground nuts, the former engages in soybean, maize and cassava).
- Both parties agreed there is a need to develop and sign an MOU between the Bridging Activity and Ag Diversification and that the respective work plans need to be shared.
- Specifically, the issue of seed quality and fraudulent trading and distribution of seed was discussed at length. Bridge provides seed loans to individual farmers through producer organizations and follows a policy of in-kind or specific repayment (pay back in cash or grain).

Tiwalere (10/19): James “Bud” Eaton, Docile Kalanga, and Efnita Banda from Feed the Children attended, as well as Palladium’s HQ Nutrition Specialist, Angie Stene, the COP, and local Nutrition Specialist, Maggie Mzungu. The team learned some basics of the Tiwalere program, to identify areas for collaboration and complementary programming.

- Tiwalere has a food distribution program for fortified CSB to increase access and availability of food to vulnerable target groups (pregnant and lactating women and children < 5 years old). They also engage in the 1,000 day effort to reduce child undernutrition.
- Tiwalere has a strong emphasis to work through a plethora of existing Care Groups.
- Total Land Care (TLC) is responsible for back-yard gardens, OFSP, small irrigation, small livestock, Conservation Agriculture, fruit trees, and VSLAs.

LGAP (10/20): Angie Stene and the Ag Div COP attended LGAP’s kick-off meeting, which focused on Partner coordination and collaboration to strengthen local governance at the District and Ward level. IPs in attendance included: SANE, Staple Crops, ASPIRE, and others.

- LGAP and Ag. Diversification have the same overlapping zones for Lilongwe Rural, Blantyre Rural, Mangochi, Machinga, and Balaka.
- LGAP and Ag. Diversification will hold a follow-up coordination meeting in the coming weeks.

Njira (10/26): The Ag Diversification COP met with Michael Ghebrab of the Ngira project to discuss each project's mandate and planned activities. Njira works in crops (pigeon peas, cowpea, HH gardens, Moringa), agroforestry (Msangu, Moringa, and Sesbania), VSLA, MCH, nutrition, WASH, reproductive health, Watershed Management (with TLC), DRM, DRR, Gender, local governance, and Resiliency. Lots of opportunities to collaborate. Follow up discussions and meetings via SKYPE are planned.

MIST (10/27): The Ag Div team met with COP Naomi Kamanga, who share what MIST does and how Ag diversification can fit into their strategy and on-the-ground actions, defining several areas for collaboration.

MOST (10/28): The team met with Cuan Oppermann. Team Leader MOST and learned that MOST works in 5 crops (cotton, sunflower, ground nut, soy, and sesame), and engages in finance and marketing (collaboration with ACE). The teams intend to have a full scale planning meeting to fully exploit the significant synergies.

Priority Issues

- The team is working to quickly fill vacant staff positions, set up operations and offices.
- The team is prioritizing a draft work plan, but continues to meet with stakeholders and partners to further define collaboration with other projects and activities, which will be integrated into later versions of the work plan.
- The team is reviewing proposed indicators in light of current conditions, and meeting with USAID to determine indicator definitions as well as responsibilities for M&E collection and verification, to include in the AMEP, which will be submitted in 30 days.

MONTHLY REPORT – NOVEMBER 2016

Background

The Feed the Future Malawi Ag Diversification Activity contributes to USAID/Malawi's Feed the Future goal of sustainably reducing poverty and stunting in eight districts of Central and Southern Malawi. This activity will increase the competitiveness of high-value, nutrient-rich value chains through support for agricultural enterprises and increased access to markets and finance. It also fosters inclusive and sustainable growth of Malawi's agricultural sector and improves the nutritional status of women and children under five through a proven nutrition-sensitive approach of layering agriculture and nutrition behavior change interventions in rural communities.

Project Operations and Start-Up

The Palladium Project Director and Operations Associate returned to Malawi in early November to continue mobilization activities throughout the month. Operational start-up progress in November included the following:

- Registration** - Palladium is already legally registered in Malawi so new formal registration was not required and we can operate immediately in the country.
- Office Space** – the team is temporarily co-locating in the Health Policy Plus offices (also implemented by Palladium) and has viewed five potential office locations and received quotations for rent and repairs. The team selected a space, negotiated a price within the original budgeted amount. The team completed due diligence on the landlord and drafted a lease. The landlord has begun partitioning and installing security.
- Personnel** – Advertisements for all vacant staff positions are posted and interviews are underway for several positions. Progress on specific personnel and recruiting tasks include:
 - Two finance/operations staff members have been selected and issued offer letters; they should be under contract soon.
 - Replacement candidates for the COP and DCOP have been submitted to USAID for approval.
 - All existing staff now have email addresses in the following format:
firstname.lastname@FtFagdiv.com
- Finance and Taxes** - The team has compared several local banks and is currently gathering all the documentation, with appropriate notarization and approvals, required to open an account at FMB. The team has also begun the VAT exoneration process. The tax exemption letter was submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture (copied to MRA and the Treasury)
- Procurement** - The team has received 30 motorcycles from the INVC project and one car from the Mobile Money project. We have procured laptops for staff that are on board, and will begin procuring office furniture in early December to outfit our new space. A request for quotations has been issued for furniture, office supplies, generator, air conditioning and security services

Outcome I Progress Report

Outcome I focuses taking a market- driven approach to VC development by forging closer commercial relationships between smallholders and more lucrative end markets to create a “demand pull” in the target VC and stimulating increased smallholder production.

In November, the team focused on work planning and developing potential early wins. In addition, the acting COP and technical consultant, Lourdes Martinez undertook the following activities:

- Met with the USDA Malawi *Strengthening Inclusive Markets for Agriculture* (MSIKA) project. MSIKA is a 5 year project funded by the USDA Food for Progress Program. Its objective is to improve the commercialization of fruit and vegetable sectors for value addition, and ultimately increased trade in key target zones in Malawi. Discussed potential for collaboration on seed material and nurseries for fruits and vegetables. The target districts for MSIKA are: Mchinji, Dedza, Ntcheu, Mangochi, and Salima (all these districts except Salima are Ag Diversification target districts).
- Met with Compatible Technology International (CTI) learn more about their innovative and affordable tools and technologies that have been approved by the government of Malawi which help smallholder Malawian farmers harvest, store and process groundnuts.
- Met with Jonathan Jacobs and Craig Hardie from Longevity, a Malawian based financial advisory firm. Discussed the possibility of them assisting Ag Diversification in mobilizing finance and investment, and brokering market linkage deals between smallholder producers and lead firm buyers, both domestic and regional. This work would through performance-

based contracts or grants to help us achieve our project goals in both access to finance and market access facilitation.

- Met with Tradeline Malawi about the potential for them to work with Ag Diversification by linking smallholders to commercial markets and train smallholders on crop conditioning. They worked with Palladium (CARANA) under MLI, and are familiar with the proposed approach.
- Interviewed several candidates for Outcome 1 Lead, Agricultural Production Specialist, and Capacity Building Specialist.

Outcome 2 Progress Report

Under Outcome 2, Palladium will take a comprehensive approach to integrating soil, water, and nutrient management with improved agriculture technologies and Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) to improve farmer resilience to potential climate shocks.

Frank Tembo, the Outcome 2 Lead, is on board and focused primarily on developing early wins for the revised interim work plan. In addition, he and Outcome 2 technical staff from Practical Action undertook the following activities this month:

- Held Strategic meetings with PERFORM to identify CSA options to integrate and scale out in Machinga.
- Discussion and orientation of regional resilience coordinators on year 1 work plan with Practical Action and to strategize on early wins.
- Attended launch of The AGRI call Center hosted by UMODZI Consulting. The AGRI Call Center is a platform that delivers timely and relevant information and advisory services to clients (interactive where farmers provide feedback). Focus of the AGRI Call center is on dissemination of agriculture and agribusiness information, linked to interventions in Outcome 1 and 2 of Ag. Diversification Activity especially reaching critical masses of smallholder farmers with timely information for decision making.
- Review of technologies under Outcome 2 focus on adaptation as to what has worked on similar projects and what has not; what modifications the team can consider in scaling up proven technologies. Review of evaluation reports on INVC and other projects to identify entry points on building the resilience of smallholder farmers in the Zones of influence.

Outcome 3 Progress Report

Outcome 3 will promote dietary diversity especially among pregnant/lactating women and infants 6-23 months through integration of nutrition-sensitive kitchen gardens, small scale poultry production, and cooking techniques with highly nutritious foods. Outcome 3 is also critical for promoting year-round food security through processing, marketing, food preservation and storage.

Currently, the team is comprised of the Outcome 3 Lead, Maggie Mzungu, with support from Palladium's Technical Nutrition Advisor, Angie Stene. This month, they focused on:

- Understanding USAID Outcome 3 priorities, met with the COR and Nutrition Advisor.
- Revising the work plan, including ideas for Early Wins in nutrition
- Recruiting of the Nutrition Technical Specialist
- Literature review on previous studies (UBALE, INVC) to inform the planned formative research / barrier analysis on nutrition behavior change for a social behavior change and communications.

- Began developing a scope of work for a consultancy on barrier analysis

Outcome 4 Progress Report

Under Outcome 4, the team will implement activities to empower women at the household, community, and institutional levels to increase women's participation and leadership in household decision making and control over credit, incomes, and productive assets.

In November, Outcome 4 Lead Billy Molosoni prioritized:

- Updating the draft initial work plan, particularly focusing on early wins
- Gender Analysis Planning - held planning discussions with Atethemis on the Gender Assessment Framework and plan. Palladium finalized the SOW for Atethemis, which will begin work on the assessment in December.
- Recruitment of Regional Gender Coordinators. Potential candidates have been identified and reference checks were in process at the end of the month.

Outcome 5: CDCS Priorities for Integration Advanced (Integration and Collaboration)

The Ag Diversification team prioritized meeting donor projects with which they will collaborate closely. The team held many initial meetings in October. In November, the team met with the PERFORM project to discuss climate smart agriculture integration and the USDA Malawi *Strengthening Inclusive Markets for Agriculture (MSIKA)* project to discuss seed material and collaboration on nurseries.

Cross-Cutting Themes

M&E: This month, the team worked to develop the Activity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (AMEP) and the Collaborating, Learning and Adaptation (CLA) Plan. Director of M&E, Mwiza Simkonda joined the team in mid-November and had an initial meeting with USAID. He is working in close collaboration with Palladium HQ's technical advisors for M&E, GIS and CLA to complete the plans and submit in early December.

Communications: Ag Diversification's Director of Communications developed a two-page Activity brochure this month, which was approved by USAID. The team is now distributing the basic activity information to partners. Mr. Masingati is now working to develop an initial Communications Strategy for the Activity.

Environmental Compliance: Palladium developed a SOW and contracted Karen Menczer, an expert in environmental compliance, to develop the Activity's EMMP. Ms. Menczer works with Palladium on multiple projects in Africa, and has recent experience in Malawi. She will travel to the field in early December.

Priority Issues

- The team continues to actively recruit to fill key personnel and other vacant positions
- The team is working to quickly set up operations and offices.
- The team prioritized revisions to the work plan, but continued to meet with stakeholders and

partners to further define collaboration with other projects and activities, which will be integrated into later versions of the work plan.

MONTHLY REPORT – DECEMBER 2016

Background

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- **Personnel** –
 - Chief of Party Carl Larkins and Deputy Chief of Party Rachel Sibande
 - Operations Manager Wenham Mpelembe and Finance and Operations Officer Ekari Mkhupela officially joined the team December 5 and 6 respectively. They have been integral in moving other operations and finance issues forward.
 - The team has also continued to conduct interviews for key personnel positions, focusing on identifying an Outcome I Lead. The team has additionally reviewed potential candidates for Director of Finance and Administration, Grants Manager, Field Officers and District Coordinators
- **Finance and Taxes** - The team has compared several local banks and is currently gathering all the documentation, with appropriate notarization and approvals, required to open an account at FMB. The team has also begun the VAT exoneration process. The tax exemption letter was submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture (copied to MRA and the Treasury)/
- **Procurement** – The team has evaluated all proposals for security, office furniture, office supplies, air conditioner unit and generators, and has shortlisted suppliers.

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