

LOCAL PARTNERS TAKE THE LEAD WITH A COLLECTIVE VOICE

Farmer associations have the potential to increase the income-generating power of their members by providing them with such help as financing, information on new agricultural practices and more bargaining power in the marketplace. Rooted in the communities that they serve, these associations also can act as a vehicle to elevate the voices of smallholder farmers in agricultural policy and rural development discussions.

In Malawi, where many rural smallholder farmers struggle to produce enough crops and earn enough income to feed and care for their families, Feed the Future's Integrating Nutrition in Value Chains (INVC) program helped farmer associations realize this potential.

Putting local actors in the lead by partnering with prominent local [civil society organizations](#) (CSOs), INVC provided capacity-development assistance to select associations. The local CSOs helped to identify viable associations and to ensure that those associations got help that met their self-identified priority needs. INVC also helped local partners to strengthen their technical and organizational capacity so they could continue to serve as leaders in the agricultural sector long after the project ended.

One farmer association requested support from an INVC local partner to help it meet the terms of a recently signed marketing agreement. After a governance analysis, the association decided to change its leadership to ensure that the right people were at the helm and that it could meet the terms of the deal. The INVC local partner, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, provided business management training to the new leadership. Association leaders learned about business practices, market research, feasibility plans, value addition and basic bookkeeping. All association members were trained in governance so that good leadership could be reinforced through a proactive and involved membership that knows its roles and responsibilities.

The association leaders and members took the lead, identifying their own priorities and establishing their own vision. The local CSO partner used simple, experiential and active training workshops supplemented by on-the-ground assistance to ensure the association grew to meet the objectives it set forth.

With INVC assistance, the farmer association improved its business and accounting systems and started recording all member transactions to ensure transparency and accountability. As the association earned its members' trust, farmers started selling more and more of their products, taking advantage of the



Association members in the warehouse. Photo Credit: DAI.

association's higher prices for products and a supplemental rebate that provides them with a more reliable source of income.

By increasing the association's effectiveness and helping it to improve its member services in the short term and maintain itself for the long term, INVC supported strong agriculture-led growth in Malawi.

“Following the training, we feel a sense of ownership. We contribute to decision-making, and the executive committee has become more prudent in its decision-making and management of association affairs.”

- Farmer Association Member

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