



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**MALAWI**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Villagers Earn Investing In Each Other

**By pooling their funds, women create the capital to become self-sufficient**

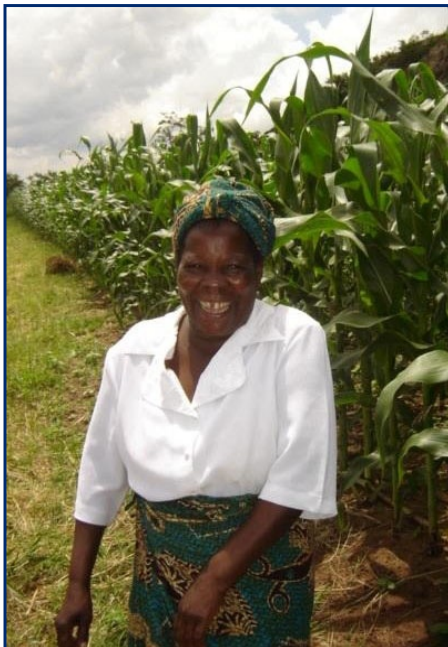


Photo: I-LIFE

Through village savings and loans, Anes Chikadzuma was able to access funding at lower interest rates to increase her crop production.

***Anes Chikadzuma said, "With VS&L (village savings and loans), there is no bad weather. Knowledge is power; everything I have learnt is in my head and I will never depend on handouts again."***

Telling Our Story  
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USAID initiated the I-LIFE program, which aims to improve the lives of rural women by increasing their food security using village savings and loans.

I-LIFE currently supports more than 600 village savings and loans (VS&L) groups. A group consists of approximately 20 members, each of whom make small individual contributions to a shared fund every week. The group members can access credit and borrow from the pooled savings at an interest rate far below that of local money lenders. As the members continually use and repay money lent, the fund earns interest and grows, allowing the members to access more money each year.

After Anes Chikadzuma's husband passed away, her family became destitute, growing only enough food for four months every year, with no money for health care or education. Anes, from Central Malawi's Chauwa village, joined the village savings and loan, through which she was able to buy fertilizer, pay for farm labor to increase her crop production, and learn about other income generating activities.

Anes said, "February and March are the height of the hungry season in Malawi, where food stocks normally run low before the next harvest in April. This year, I still have food reserves in the house. With VS&L, there is no bad weather. Knowledge is power; everything I have learnt is in my head and I will never depend on handouts again. The most important lesson is to have many different strategies for making a living and not rely only on crop production. We are currently starting up a chicken farm to raise and sell broilers to our local and neighboring markets."

Anes has been selected to test and demonstrate new hybrid seeds and a labor-saving way of cultivating maize on her land. She also regularly addresses village meetings and encourages others to join VS&L activities. Now her daughters — one of whom is in high school, and the other at business college — are learning to become independent, successful businesswomen.