

# SMALLHOLDER FARMERS: THE BACKBONE OF FOOD SECURITY

## A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE FROM SOUTHERN AFRICA

"When I received cowpea and orange maize seeds, I was very anxious because we experienced drought and flooding for the past two seasons. But WFP encouraged us to adopt conservation agriculture to help us plant in times of uncertainty and help our crops retain water. I am expecting to harvest at least 40-50 kg bags of orange maize, which will help me take care of my family. I have never grown cowpeas before," said Monde, a 22 year old smallholder farmer from Zambia. Through WFP, he is receiving drought-tolerant seeds, training in how to grow new varieties of nutritionally valuable crops and techniques including minimum tillage, inter-cropping and crop rotation and access to low cost technologies such as air tight storage bags to reduce post harvest losses.



## WFP'S APPROACH TOWARDS SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

Smallholder farmers, many of whom are women, are the primary food producers in Southern Africa, contributing to up to 90% of food production in some countries. However, often food systems in the region do not support profitability for smallholder farmers. This includes the infrastructure and systems needed to enable smallholder farmers to grow, store, transport and sell their produce in formal markets.

WFP's work with smallholder farmers aims to address bottlenecks in food systems to enhance resilience of vulnerable communities. While WFP works in different context appropriate ways with smallholder farmers, some cross cutting priorities include improving smallholder farmers' livelihoods, promoting climate adaptive production techniques, facilitating aggregation and market access and ensuring smallholders are food and nutrition secure.

WFP support to smallholder farmers in the region includes:

- disseminating climate and crop information to enable farmers to make better decisions
- facilitating nutrition sensitive behaviour change
- distributing resilient seeds and building farmers' capacity in innovative farming practices
- organising farmers support groups to improve their access to information and systems
- training farmers in post harvest handling to reduce losses
- distributing low cost storage solutions such as hermetic bags to reduce post harvest losses
- procuring produce from smallholder farmers for WFP food assistance programmes
- providing market access through innovative means such as online farmers markets or creating linkages with private sector and schools
- creating assets (such as roads, market infrastructure etc.) to enhance farmers' resilience





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WFP's work with smallholders spans promotion of fortified crops; supporting robust storage facilities; building/rehabilitating small-scale irrigation and water harvesting systems among others. Outlined ahead are some of the initiatives in the Southern Africa region.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, WFP and partners work with displaced and local communities to build assets that enhance smallholder farmers' production and trading capacities and improve the community's resilience to shocks and provide trainings especially to promote women's empowerment.

In **Lesotho**, WFP is building smallholders' capacity in climate smart agriculture techniques, food quality and safety, access to financial services and marketing nutritious food.

In **Madagascar**, WFP is strengthening smallholders' skills and their ability to access information, assets and markets. One of their initiatives is supporting farmers access affordable technologies to reduce their post harvest losses and linking them to schools through WFP's home-grown school feeding initiative and thus providing access to a market while reducing classroom hunger.

One innovative way in which WFP is working with smallholders in **Malawi**, is by distributing low cost off the grid cool boxes that rely just on water to function. These cool boxes are extending the shelf life of the farmers' excess fresh produce and reducing food waste.

In **Mozambique**, WFP found that over 30% of losses occur weeks after harvest due to improper handling and storage. WFP has been training smallholder farmers on post harvest crop management and distributing hermetic bags (vacuum sealed bags) for grain storage.

In the **Republic of Congo**, WFP works with smallholder farmers to increase the production of beans and other nutritious commodities and linking them with schools who purchase their produce for their school feeding programmes. WFP is also working with female smallholder farmers in the production of a local nutritious snack made of cassava and peanut flour, which is then provided to school children.

In **Zambia**, working with finance providers, WFP is increasing affordable finance options for smallholders and setting up aggregation centres. At the centres, good agricultural practices that enhance efficiencies along the value chain are shared and digital solutions that promote last mile access are piloted and promoted.

In **Zimbabwe**, WFP has been working with smallholders strengthening the production of drought tolerant traditional grains through trainings on climate smart agricultural techniques, building their marketing capacities and supporting with increasing sales. WFP's climate smart agriculture trainings have resulted in farmers' increasing their yields threefold in comparison to those not yet benefitting from this assistance.

## Smallholder farmers transform schools in their community into green and productive oases

Matilda Chikondo is a smallholder farmer and a mother to two children who study at Namilongo School in Malawi. She shares, "I have been supported by WFP since 2017 to improve my farming practices to increase my yield. In my community, we felt it was important to support our school and the school meals programme so we came together to make sure our children also benefit from a better learning environment." In addition to addressing the immediate food needs in the community, WFP is supporting smallholder farmers and rehabilitation of community assets that contribute to enhancing the community's resilience and improving their food security. In Namilongo school, WFP linked smallholder farmers with their restoration project. The smallholders focused on planting grass, trees, flowers, a fruit orchard that not only helps with reforestation but also provides fruits for the children, a vegetable garden and a nursery. Surplus vegetables from the school's vegetable garden are sold at a local market and profits are used to provide children in need with school supplies and uniforms. Additionally, the previously dusty surroundings of the school have been transformed into a sea of green, offering many shaded spots for the children to play and learn. By linking agriculture with school feeding, WFP promotes smallholder farmers empowerment by providing market access while also promoting consumption of diversified diets.



Photos: Monde Sikota (right) with his wife, mother and grandparents on his farm in Shang'ombo district. © WFP/ Paul Mboshya  
Odile, microinsurance beneficiary working in her fields in Anjahamahavelo, Madagascar © WFP/Alice Rahmoun  
Matilda and students gathering surplus produce to sell at a local market © WFP/Badre Bahaji

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