Meet Sophilina

After receiving credit and training on good agricultural practices, Sophilina was able to turn her subsistence farm into a thriving business.
Sophilina is a thirty-five year old farmer, wife, and mother of four living in the small village of Chilima in the Lilongwe District of Malawi. Sophilina used to be a subsistence farmer on a small piece of land growing groundnuts, sweet potatoes, and other crops. Although she wanted to grow more, she lacked the technical knowledge to improve her yields.

In August 2015, Sophilina was invited to participate in trainings on good agricultural practices (GAPs), which were being offered through a partnership between Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation, Opportunity Bank of Malawi (OBM), Catholic Relief Services of Malawi, and the Catholic Development Commission of Malawi. OBM is partnering with Partnering for Innovation to strengthen the groundnut, soybean, and orange-fleshed sweet potato (OFSP) value chains in five Malawi districts. OBM and its partners are collaborating to help smallholder farmers increase their productivity, yields, and incomes by providing linkages to financial products and services; utilizing innovative technology; facilitating GAPs training; and strengthening market linkages.

Sophilina decided to attend a training in order to learn techniques to improve her farming methods. She was specifically interested in learning more about OFSP, as she had met farmers at the market selling it and wanted to better understand its nutritional value, the varieties available, and how she could purchase them. After attending several trainings, Sophilina received her own bundle of OFSP vines as part of the project, and planted them on her small plot using the techniques she had learned. Her harvest yielded two full oxcarts of OFSP vines, which she sold at the market for approximately $250. The success of her first harvest led Sophilina to establish her own nursery of vines in 2016 in order to have them ready for early planting next season.

Sophilina also learned about the benefits of participating in a farmer group. She decided to join Thawale Club, which was already multiplying OFSP vines on a two-acre nursery along the Diamphwi River and offered benefits like collective bargaining during the selling of crops.

Sophilina now strongly believes that by approaching her farming activities as a business, it will help her realize benefits that will change her social and economic status in the village. Sophilina is looking forward to using her anticipated income after the next season’s harvest to build a good house with bricks and iron sheets. “I am planning to plant OFSP on 2.5 hectares of land, because I will have enough vines. These vines will be from my backyard nursery and from the club nursery.” Sophilina has also gained confidence and applied for an agriculture loan from OBM for $205 to support and expand her farming activities. This year, Sophilina hopes to harvest more than five tons and earn at least $680 at the market.