

Connecting Lives



Welcome to Connecting Lives!

Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM) works because it releases people's creativity and critical thinking. This process, that Eagles has been facilitating for 20 years, starts with people's identity. CCM Bible studies address lies like 'I'm not good enough' and 'I can't change anything'. They help people see themselves as creative agents of change—in their own lives and in their wider community.

Contagious hope

Three years ago, Felester (photo above) felt like a failure. As a widow with six children, she couldn't keep covering her children's education fees. Her three oldest children had worked very hard to get into university, teacher training and a technical college. This was an incredible achievement in Malawi—especially in a rural area like Kamanzi village, Central Malawi.

◀ *I was depressed because I felt like my children were doing their part. They worked hard in school and managed to access opportunities like these. But they could not go back to college because I had failed to provide for them.* ▶

How would you help her? Would you offer her money or employment or advice? The Church and Community Mobilisation training from Eagles gave her hope and confidence. Now, a few years later, all Felester's children have graduated from university and found jobs! How? Read on!

Innovating irrigation!

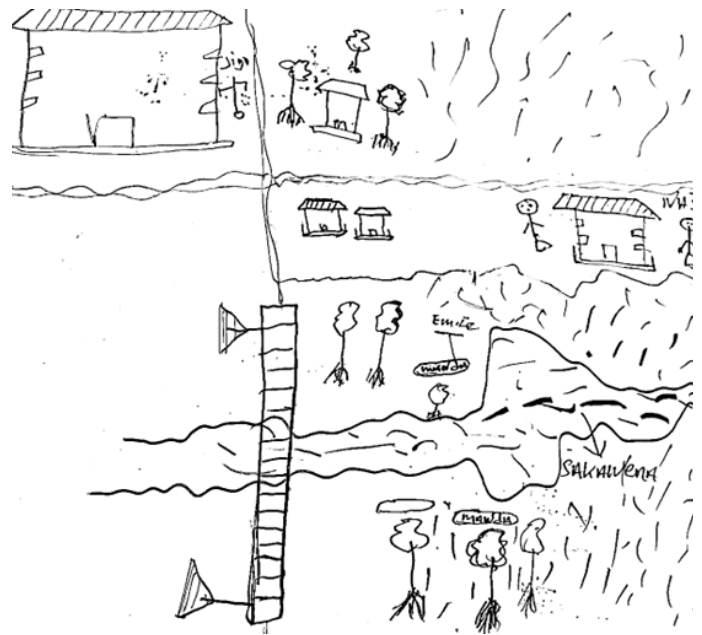
Irrigation is now essential for survival in many parts of Malawi. Historically, people have depended on rain-fed agriculture. But how can you depend on rain that doesn't fall? Or falls too late? Or falls too little? Climate change has made irrigation non-optional.

This poses a challenge in CCM. Handouts and imposing ideas create dependency and don't last. But waiting for the full three year process to finish so people can plan action on irrigation at the normal stage condemns many to more years of hunger.

Jimmy, Eagles' CCM Coordinator in the South, is innovating with communities to explore how to find the balance. Here's what a process looks like that balances ownership, local experience and diverse expertise:

1. Ensure the community genuinely identifies the issue themselves.
2. Involve as many people as possible in an inclusive mapping process, to bring further understanding of the problem and a shared realisation of the resources that could address it.
3. Engage wider stakeholders from local government to learn from their expertise.
4. Design solutions together that ensure communities commit their own resources, have full decision-making power and take responsibility into the future, with a plan for maintenance and repairs.

For example, men and women farmers came up with these options: they could save up for pumps in groups; build cheaper ones using locally available resources; or rent a pump from Eagles in a highly subsidised rent-to-buy arrangement that gives them ownership of the pump after a year. Jimmy, Eagles CCM Coordinator, explains why this kind of process is so critical:



Community map of area for irrigation

◀ *This is a very important process because it helps people to think about and understand the importance of taking responsibility, the potential that they have and the resources that exist within themselves. It helps them to participate fully and contribute towards whatever work they decide to do together.*

This makes the difference when it comes to sustainability. If we give them the irrigation pumps, what happens when they break down? If they don't go through this process, they will not take responsibility for repairing those pumps. Then, irrigation doesn't belong to them because you have just brought it to them. But because they know its importance, have contributed and are taking responsibility, they will take good care of the pump.

Jimmy, Eagles CCM Coordinator—Southern and Eastern regions



Since Eagles' training, community members in Zomba, South-East Malawi, have already experienced significant change, just through recognising and using the resources they have. According to Pastor Shadreck, *"We realise now that we have trees and that they can help stop the soil from being eroded ... We have also made dykes to control the flooding of the rivers."*

Those who can afford it have been renting an irrigation pump to allow them to plant and harvest in the dry season as well—something only possible with irrigation. This allows them to feed their family for the whole year, as well as to pay school fees and buy other necessities that they previously could not.

◀◀ *You cannot harvest enough from rain-fed cultivation, but when you do irrigation farming, you have enough food to last the whole year. ... Dry season farming helps us pay school fees and even buy clothes for our children because we have surplus. In the past, there was no peace in my family because there was not enough food, but after I started doing irrigation farming, there is peace in my family because we have enough food.* Annette ▶▶



Annette can now provide for her whole family!

However, they want to do even better than this. Whenever people want to rent the pump, they often find that someone else has already hired it. Even if it is available, the pump and the fuel cost large amounts of money for them. Annette's maize is withering away.

So Annette and her community are continuing the next steps in their irrigation design process over the coming months. They are passionate about finding sustainable solutions for their community. If you want to support this exciting innovation hub, please contact Malawi Support! We would love to let you know how it goes!

Left: Community members map the area, marking on the resources they have available for irrigation, as well as problems to address.



Contagious Hope (cont from p.1)

When Eagles began the CCM training in her area, Felester says she found new hope. She realised that she was not helpless and that she had resources that could help her - not only to raise the money she needed for the children's education, but even to transform her family completely.

Felester sat down with her children and considered everything they had and how they could use it more effectively. Felester used local resources to make her own fertilizer. She changed the types of crops she was growing so that they could be sold for more money. She worked out that, in their wetland area where they don't need irrigation, she could plant crops three times in the year instead of once. With relentless innovation and determination, Felester earned all the money she needed to see all three children graduate from university.

After learning from Eagles, we worked hard. I used everything we were learning. I decided not to give up!

I am a happy mother! And now I have become a facilitator of the same [CCM] process that brought back hope to our family!

Felester often shares her story when she is facilitating, bringing hope to other widows who have heavy responsibilities, so that they too will not give up.

Youth innovators

It's not just adults who are changing their own lives with determination and creativity.

In Chilobwe, Central Malawi, young people who took part in CCM Bible studies have begun their own initiatives and reclaimed their future.

Rather than relying on others to pay for their education, they decided they could generate income themselves, together. They are now practising irrigation farming so they can grow more crops (photo right).



Both girls and boys have new dreams. The Eagles training led to them appointing gender and safeguarding champions among the youth. The Champions facilitated Bible studies and reflection on gender roles. They have set up a 'Back to School' programme. As a result, the young people have transformed how they see themselves and how they see each other. Girls' education has rarely been a priority in the struggle for survival. But now, girls, as well as boys, have gone back to school. And the whole community is working together with police and government Social Welfare staff to make sure every child is safe and supported.