



HUMAN INTEREST
STORIES : SOUTH SOUTH
DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION



WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Building Bricks for Life

There is no limit to the excitement of an individual employed for the first time. Elita Kwisongole's happiness is therefore natural. To acquire a job in a country where the Human Development Index is 0.414 (UNDP, 2013), Elita considers herself to be fortunate and blessed. This became possible when Technology and Action for Rural Advancement (TARA) along with Eco Matters Ltd., introduced the Vertical Shaft Brick Kiln (VSBK) technology in Malawi supported by the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the Department for International Development (DFID)–India, Government of UK's Knowledge Partnership Programme (KPP).



Acknowledging the change of fate she recollects, *"I lost my parents when I was young. My grandfather took care of me, and my siblings. Although he supported us, my education was interrupted by various economic and social problems that we faced. It took me 25 years to complete and pass my twelfth standard examination. I look forward to pursue advanced studies and have been saving for that".* Today she lives with her brother and sister in Mthyoke. Earning MK 45,000 per month, a decent salary according to Malawian standards, Elita supports her family and takes care of her grandfather. Her life exemplifies the increasing number of women preferring to work in the construction sector.



Brick making in Malawi has always been male centric. Women are seen working on fields or at small road side shops, besides their daily household chores and responsibilities. What is notable is that this South-South Development Cooperation project, introducing the VSBK has employed 40 women amongst their 100 employees. Breaking the gender bias in the construction sector and (by) getting trained in a new technology Elita testifies the efficiency and capability of women in this domain. As a result of 5.22% rate of urbanisation the demand of burnt clay bricks for construction has increased in Malawi. These "burnt clay bricks" are produced with wooden moulds and then fired in inefficient kilns using wood. Not only does it emit smoke but also green house gases. Thus in addition to reducing deforestation, environmental emissions and green house gas during brick production, the VSBK technology promotes sustainable livelihoods by creating green jobs for Elita and other women employees .

"I am 27 years old and this is my first job. I really like to work with machines and want to explore the brick sector."

The Hand That Rocks the Cradle

"The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" aptly defines Ruth Chinere's life. Ruth aged 37 works at the Vertical Shaft Brick Kiln (VSBK) in Mthyoke, Malawi. *"All my life I have been engrossed in taking care of my family. I was married at the age of sixteen. I could not complete my education and studied only till grade four. I was a part of constructing the kiln that began two years ago. But this is my first job"* says Ruth.



Although Malawi is ranked as the poorest country in the world with GDP per capita as USD 765, Ruth is fortunate to be employed with an income of MK 45,000 i.e. ~USD 960 per year. She supports her five children, one grandchild and her husband, who is a farmer. When Technology and Action for Rural Advancement (TARA) along with Eco Matters Ltd. supported by the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Department for International Development (DFID) – India, Government of UK's Knowledge Partnership Programme (KPP) introduced the Vertical Shaft Brick Kiln (VSBK) technology in Malawi it provided a platform for Ruth to stand on her own feet and break free of the gender bias visible in the construction sector. She is one of the 40 women employed at the Kiln.

Explaining the giant leap forward she reaffirmed, *"Today I am economically empowered and take my own decisions in life. I have been investing in agricultural fertilizers and buying construction materials to build a house of my own."* She is also happy that she has paved a way for her children to move beyond using wood as fuel and explore the opportunity of using other domestic energy resources like coal.

Malawi's construction sector consumes an alarming 8, 50,000 metric tons of wood for brick making alone. In order to meet its high rate of urbanisation at 5.22% it has become necessary to build a minimum of 21,000 housing units annually. This has led to an increase in the demand of core material i.e. burnt clay bricks. These "burnt clay bricks" are produced with a wooden mould and then fired in inefficient kilns using wood. Not only does it emit smoke but also greenhouse gases. If this process continues for the next 25-30 years, it will exhaust Malawi's entire forest resources. Propagating coal as a potential energy source and promoting sustainable livelihoods through green jobs Ruth and other women employees will not only help reduce deforestation but also reduce energy consumption and green house gas emission by 60-80%. In addition it will produce high quality bricks for construction.



" I have been associated with VSBK since the time the foundation was laid. I have seen it grow gradually. It is now an integral part of my life, supporting me and my family"

A Budding Brick Entrepreneur

"Being an eco brick entrepreneur is my dream. I want a career in the brick making sector" affirms Iness Chimpeni. Her dream got wings when she was employed at the Vertical Shaft Brick Kiln (VSBK) in April 2015. Exemplifying the courage to pursue her desire she explains "Prior to VSBK I had a business of my own where I used to sell doughnuts and earn MK 5000 per month." When Technology and Action for Rural Advancement (TARA) along with Eco Matters Ltd. supported by the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Department for International Development (DFID) – India, Government of UK's Knowledge Partnership Programme (KPP) introduced the VSBK technology in Malawi; 21 year old Iness Chimpeni grabbed the opportunity to work there.



Residing with her family at Satzima village near the VSBK site she further explains, *"I live with my parents, seven sisters and one brother. Although I did complete my primary school I couldn't pursue secondary education as it was expensive."* Today she earns MK 45,000 per month and not only supports her family but also invests in agricultural fertilizers. She grows tobacco, groundnut and other vegetables in her field. *"I invested in fertilisers and rearing pigs to generate extra income. It helps me lead a life of independence"* says the budding entrepreneur.

Breaking the stereotypical nature of work women perform and the gender bias in the construction sector at Malawi, Iness emerges as an exemplary employee of the 100 employed at VSBK. Through her future business of distributing eco bricks she will not only contribute to reduce deforestation and green house gas emissions in Malawi but also create green jobs for other women. The brick making sector consumes 8, 50,000 tons of wood every year to meet the current urban housing deficit. If the



consumption of wood to fire bricks in inefficient kilns continues it will exhaust the entire forest resource of Malawi in next 25-30 years. To change this situation, she would help promote sustainable livelihoods using VSBK technology. It will not only reduce energy consumption and associated emissions by 60-80%, but also produce high quality bricks for construction.

"I would like to have my own brick business, but not the regular type of kilns that I see. There are for men. In the future I will have my own small VSBK, producing and selling bricks and even building houses"
