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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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.