



Emily in her irrigated field, planted with improved maize, tomatoes and beans.

that one of her neighbours would occasionally lend her to pump water down to the field and then watering her crops with a watering can.

In this way, Emily managed to harvest one 50 kg bag of shelled maize and just under one bag of beans – nowhere near enough to feed two adults and seven children. ‘I was hungry and hopeless considering the size of my family’, says Emily. But she continued her efforts and in the 2006 dry season her determination was rewarded when Africare staff working under the USAID funded I-LIFE program drove by Mkolimbo and noticed Emily’s bright green irrigated plot in the dry surroundings.

Africare met with the villagers and many of these expressed a keen interest in doing irrigation activities. They had watched Emily grow her crops in the dry season for four years and, by now, their initial scepticism had been overcome. With support from RIPE, the irrigation initiative under I-LIFE, Africare introduced Emily and other Mkolimbo village members to gravity fed irrigation based on river diversion and an 8 hectare site was established. Here, 40 farmers

have grown a variety of crops in the 2007 dry season, including maize, tomatoes, beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes and different green leaf vegetables.

In August, 2003, Emily Baziwell found herself back in Mkolimbo, her mother’s village in Ntcheu District, with the responsibility of looking after not only her own four children but also her widowed mother and three younger siblings. Her only asset was the knowledge of irrigation that she had acquired from her estranged husband. And with that, Emily set out to change what looked like a desperate situation.

Ntcheu lies in Southern Malawi along the border with Mozambique and straddling the Western escarpment of the Great Rift Valley. With its hilly landscape Ntcheu is blessed with perennial streams and rivers and has great potential for irrigation. But the potential is largely unfulfilled; in the month of August the soil is hard packed and dry and only the occasional spray of bright red flowers breaks up the dusty browns and grays of the barren fields and natural Miombo woodlands.

Here, Emily did her own week-long survey of the small Mphate river that runs close to her village and saw the possibility of using it to water a lower lying field that lay idle in the dry season. She started irrigation farming on a small 10 by 25 meter

Emily herself has cultivated 0.4 hectares of maize, tomatoes and sugar beans. This is 16 times the area she managed to irrigate on her own and the impact on her life is enormous. ‘Unlike in the past, this year I expect to have a bumper production because I have applied recommended farming methods, which Africare staff taught us’, Emily said when we visited her half way through the season, adding that the coming of RIPE had reduced hunger in the entire Mkolimbo community. She has now harvested enough to feed her family for a year and even managed to sell her surplus production for 177 USD.

But it is not only Emily’s food security situation that has changed dramatically. When she returned to the village in 2003, Emily was regarded with suspicion by her neighbours - a situation faced by most single women in rural Malawi. Today, she is considered a progressive farmer and respected member of Mkolimbo society. And the irrigation site that she inspired has been expanded with a reservoir, which has the potential to increase the irrigated area to 15