

COVID-19 Stories from the Field: Coping with Lock-Down and Securing Value Chains

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The [Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services](#) (GFRAS) and [Young Professionals for Agricultural Development](#) (YPARD) recently launched, with IFAD support, a call for stories asking for local solutions that enable the agricultural sector to operate under the current COVID-19 driven partial or full lock-down of societies. This call was organized in the context of the Last-Mile Programme, a project ran by GFRAS and its regional networks that aims at enhancing the capacity of rural advisory service (RAS) providers to effectively facilitate knowledge and technology flows within agricultural innovation systems in ways that foster equitable, resilient and sustainable market-oriented smallholder agriculture. Eight countries were eligible to submit entries, and panels formed by the regional networks chose the most compelling examples.

The examples, coming directly from the field, mostly talked about how farmers were ensuring the continuity of their activities, and securing their livelihoods, all the while respecting various lock-down restrictions and measures to fight the COVID-19 outbreak.

Below is one of such stories, awarded first prize in Malawi, in the youth category, told in the words of Joseph Gondwe, a young farmer in Malawi.

CHEMA world is a livestock production company that raises "naturally raised" pigs, chickens and goats. Naturally raised means that there are raised without addition of hormones, antibiotics or animal feeds for an improved health. The business operates in Kasungu, Malawi and its vision is to become the main supplier of naturally livestock and livestock products in the region.

The company has been performing smoothly since its inception in 2017. For the past years the main product of the business has been porkers (8 to 12 months old pigs) sold to off-takers linked to supermarkets, whose main goal was profit maximization. They valued quality lean meat which they sold to higher income earners.

The business was realizing profits until COVID-19 came. It started with a call from one of my customers "Joe, things are not working." That statement made my muscles lose the energy and my lungs relaxed the breath. "I don't know how to say this, but you know, this corona pandemic has affected my business. I just said "Okay" in my melancholy.



(Joseph Gondwe with some of his porkers)

With the coming of corona, my customers froze the purchases, but I still had to make sales. I opted for vendors, only to make a loss. The off-takers were buying my products at MK 75,000 and the vendors were buying at MK 40,000 which is too low a price for a profit. I struggled to make a good sale of my pork and a month passed without realizing any profit. The panic of not making a sale, watching the pigs grow older each passing day, was an unexpected blow to me.

After operating in losses for a month, I thought of changing my product from porkers to weaners (2 to 3 months old pigs). I used social media to advertise my products, so to get new customers, and I even

offered free online lectures on pig production. I also offered free delivery considering that with COVID-19 my customers' mobility is limited.

This time I targeted the middle income who have faced the fear of losing their jobs, so they may decide to buy pigs for production as an alternative income source. I even supplied to organizations which are doing livelihood projects, one of which is Catholic Development Commission in Malawi (CADECOM).

CADECOM is doing livestock pass-on project, it was looking for a supplier of weaners, came across my social media advert, and called me to supply them. A great deal was sealed and was therefore agreed on. I offered them a relatively lower price - normally, I sell weaners at MK 25,000 but offered CADECOM a slight discount since it bought a good number. I also understood they were helping the poor in the villages - it was for a social obligation.



Selling weaners made me more profits because it factors out production costs. For a period of 3 months I have made MK 540,000 profit which is higher comparing with other 3 months which I only made MK 405,000 for porkers. It has also given me a sense of fulfilment, when I heard CADECOM's project coordinator saying, "thanks to CHEMA world, for offering us a lower price and we were able to buy more pigs to reach out to many."

(Joseph Gondwe – on the right – with a customer)

Two weeks later, one beneficiary called me saying "your pigs are health and strong, I thought they will die like the ones we received 4 years ago". I haven't just made higher profits but I have achieved my corporate social responsibility.