

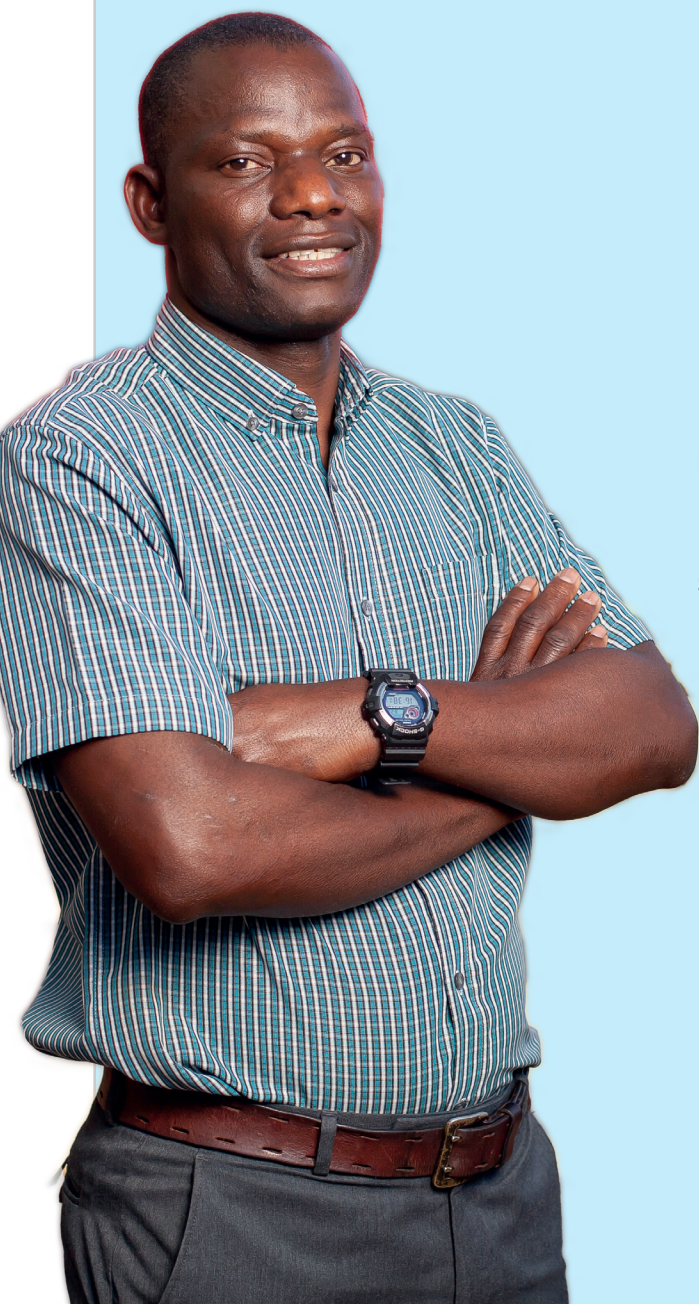


CENTER FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE
Newsletter

SECOND EDITION-2026



Executive Director Foreword



Gilbert Banda

In the first half of 2026, the organisation continued implementing various interventions aimed at strengthening livestock extension service delivery, improving agricultural production systems, promoting natural resource-based enterprises, supporting sustainable natural resource management, and enhancing income security.

A core methodology in our work is the use of Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) to bring essential animal health services closer to smallholder farmers, especially those in underserved and hard-to-reach communities. Our experience continues to demonstrate that this approach is both practical and sustainable. Through animal treatments and other animal health services within their communities, CAHWs are not only helping farmers protect their livestock and improve productivity, but are also generating substantial income for themselves. This income enables CAHWs to increase their assets and gradually strengthen their economic capacity, transforming animal health service provision into a meaningful livelihood opportunity. The approach creates benefits on both sides: farmers have improved access to timely and affordable animal health services, while CAHWs earn a living through the services they provide.

In this second issue of the CCEI newsletter, we share practical experiences, achievements, and lessons from our work. The stories presented demonstrate CCEI's continued commitment to inclusive development, community empowerment, strengthened local service delivery, and improved livelihoods, while working closely with government extension staff, women, and communities in underserved and hard-to-reach areas.

Meanwhile, we are forever grateful to all our partners which include VSF-Netherlands, Edgard and Cooper Foundation, Wilde-Ganzen, and AFAS Foundation for supporting our work. We also are thankful for the Government of Malawi for the continued support.



Strengthening Frontline Capacity to Combat Rabies and Other Animal Diseases

Government livestock officers serving communities across Malawi's Northern Region attended a two-day refresher training aimed at strengthening the prevention, diagnosis, reporting, and control of rabies and other high-impact animal diseases. The training was supported by the CCEI as part of its continued engagement with district livestock teams to strengthen the capacity of frontline officers who play a critical role in protecting communities and their livestock.

The training brought together agriculture, Assistant Veterinary Officers (AVOs), senior officers from the Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development (DAHLD). These officers represent some of the first points of contact for communities when livestock and animal health emergencies arise. A major focus of the training was rabies, a fatal but almost entirely preventable disease that remains dangerously underrecognised. Facilitators Dr Sam Mvula and Dr Watson Mbilizi guided participants through key aspects of rabies transmission, animal reservoirs, disease progression, and the rapid onset of fatal symptoms once clinical signs appear. The sessions also introduced updated approaches to sample handling and reporting, while reinforcing the immediate life-saving measures required following exposure to a suspected rabid animal. These practical lessons equipped frontline officers with knowledge and guidance that they can take directly to the communities they serve.

The training also provided an opportunity to review Malawi's National Rabies Control Strategy and the country's commitment to the global 2030 Zero Rabies target. The discussions reinforced the message that preventing rabies deaths is achievable and requires coordinated action across government, communities, veterinary services, and other stakeholders. Beyond rabies, participants also refreshed their knowledge of other important livestock diseases, including lumpy skin disease and African swine fever, as well as the importance of accurate veterinary reporting and proper documentation. The training concluded with a renewed commitment to strengthen implementation of the 2030 Zero Rabies campaign, improve the diagnosis and management of rabies cases, promote responsible dog ownership, and support continued implementation of the National Rabies Control Strategy at district level.

BREEDING BETTER COWS, BUILDING BETTER LIVES

For Thomas Mhone, livestock farming is more than a source of income. It is a passion that has grown through years of hard work, continuous learning and a strong commitment to helping farmers improve the health and productivity of their animals. Thomas is a CAHW having been trained by CCEI. But he also doubles as an Artificial Insemination (AI) Technician. He works closely with a local milk bulking group in Lusangazi in Northern Malawi, supporting farmers with AI services, livestock management knowledge and regular training.

Thomas started working as a CAHW in 2018. His dedication and hard work in supporting farmers earned him an opportunity to train as an Artificial Insemination Technician in 2021. The training gave him specialised skills that have since opened new opportunities for him while enabling him to provide an important service to dairy farmers.

“I assist artificial insemination for the cows at the cooperative and also train farmers on how to take care of their cattle,” says Thomas.

His role at a local milk bulking group goes beyond AI. Every Thursday, Mhone holds training sessions and meetings with members of the cooperative, where he teaches farmers how to properly care for their cattle, heat detection and understanding the importance of timely AI. The meetings also provide farmers with an opportunity to ask questions, share their experiences and gain more knowledge that they can apply in their daily livestock activities. Thomas’s own professional growth has also been strengthened through the support he receives from the Centre for Community Empowerment Initiatives (CCEI) and its partners, VSF Netherlands and Wilde Ganzen. CCEI provides Mhone with refresher trainings that enable him to continuously gain new knowledge and strengthen his livestock management and AI skills. He then takes this knowledge back to the farmers he supports at Kapacha Cooperative Group and in other communities around Lusangazi. The impact of this support extends beyond the bulking group. Mhone has assisted over 606 farmers, including with livestock advisories, animal health support, artificial insemination services and training.

Mhone is deeply appreciative of CCEI, VSF Netherlands and Wilde Ganzen for investing in his skills and supporting his work. At the same time, his work as an AI Technician has become an important source of income and a pathway to building his own farming enterprise. His AI work has also enabled him to purchase a motorbike worth K4.5 million. Of this amount, K1.5 million came from fees he earned by providing AI services to farmers. For Mhone, speed and mobility are important when dealing with cows that are on heat. Artificial insemination requires proper timing, and being able to reach a farmer quickly can make a significant difference.

“The motorbike assists me to travel fast and in time to assist farmers in need” he concluded.



Thomas Mhone



KAPACHA TURNS MILK INTO YOGHURT, INCOME & OPPORTUNITY FOR FARMERS

Yoghurt production is transforming locally produced milk into income, improved nutrition and new opportunities for farmers at Kapacha Cooperative Group in Mzuzu, Northern Malawi. The cooperative so far has processed over 400 liters of milk into yoghurt-packaged in 250ml bottles and 500ml and sold to customers in the surrounding. The cooperative sells the 250ml bottle at Malawi kwacha (Mk)1,500 each while the 500ml bottle is sold at Mk2500. This has translated into a revenue of over Mk 2 million. The yoghurt has become popular among people in the Kapacha area, creating a reliable market for the cooperative's products. The cooperative has 60 members, comprising of 45 women and 15 men, who are involved in dairy farming and the production and marketing of fresh milk and yoghurt. The yoghurt business has been strengthened through support received from CCEI, through its partners VSF-NL and Wilde Ganzen. The cooperative received two refrigerators, solar equipment and a gas cylinder for yoghurt production, as well as support to construct improved animal shelters for its dairy cows. The donation has brought a major change to the farmers' dairy business.

"The support has really changed our lives as farmers. We are now able to make an income from our milk and use the money to support our families. We can pay school fees, buy farm inputs and provide better nutrition for our households," said Jean Munthali, Chairlady of Kapacha Cooperative Dairy.

"In the past, we could lose money when milk went bad because we could not sell all of it. Now we can turn the milk into yoghurt, package it well and keep it in the refrigerator. This has helped us earn more from the milk we produce," said Margret Kaunda, Treasurer of the cooperative.

Currently, the yoghurt produced is enough to serve customers around Kapacha. However, the farmers believe that increasing production would allow them to supply other areas, particularly towns where they expect to access a much larger market. The experience of Kapacha Cooperative Dairy group demonstrates how supporting smallholder farmers with appropriate equipment can help transform produce into profitable businesses. The support from Wilde Ganzen has enabled the cooperative's to reduce milk wastage, add value and create new opportunities for income generation. For the farmers, the donation has not only improved their dairy enterprise but has also given them a stronger foundation to support their families and contribute to the nutritional wellbeing of their community. The farmers remain grateful to VSF-NL and Wilde Ganzen for investing in their dairy enterprise and helping turn locally produced milk into a growing source of income, nutrition and opportunity for both men and women.



Kids enjoying yoghurt produced by Kapacha



Jumbe Banda, a CAHW from Mbalachanda



New Microscope to Boost Rabies Surveillance in Malawi's Northern Region

A fluorescent microscope is set to strengthen rabies surveillance in Malawi's Northern Region following support from the Edgard and Cooper Foundation to the CCEI. Through the support, CCEI is implementing the Action Towards Elimination of Rabies Project (ATERP 2) in the Northern Region. The project is aimed at contributing to the prevention and eventual elimination of rabies, a deadly zoonotic disease that can be transmitted between animals and humans. Under ATERP 2, CCEI is targeting the vaccination of approximately 50,000 dogs against rabies. Dogs are the main source of human rabies infections in many settings, making mass dog vaccination one of the most effective ways of reducing transmission of the disease. The project is supporting the procurement and distribution of rabies vaccines, while the actual vaccination is being carried out by government livestock staff, in line with national laws and regulations governing animal health services in Malawi.

In addition to supporting vaccination activities, CCEI has procured a state-of-the-art microscope to strengthen laboratory-based rabies surveillance. The equipment, purchased at a cost of approximately 2,300 Euros, is expected to improve the capacity of authorities to examine samples and generate information that can support rabies control efforts in the region. The procurement of the microscope is considered an important investment because effective rabies elimination requires more than vaccinating dogs. Surveillance is essential for understanding where the disease is occurring, identifying suspected cases and providing information that can guide interventions.

To ensure that the equipment is used effectively, training has also been conducted for relevant personnel. Building this technical capacity is expected to complement the new equipment and improve the quality and reliability of rabies surveillance. Speaking during the handover ceremony, Dr Sam-Mvula, representing the Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development, thanked CCEI for the support and said the microscope would help strengthen surveillance of the disease. Dr Sam-Mvula's remarks underscored the importance of collaboration between government institutions, NGOs and development partners in tackling diseases that affect both animals and people.

Through the ATERP 2, CCEI supported the vaccination of 29,444 pets, comprising 28,030 dogs and 1,414 cats, across the project districts. In addition to purchasing the vaccines, CCEI provided financial and logistical support that enabled government-trained vaccinators to reach remote and underserved communities.

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE LUMPY SKIN DISEASE CONTROL

Cattle are an important household asset, providing income, food security, draught power, manure, and wealth. They also serve as a financial safety net during crop failures and climate-related shocks, particularly because many smallholder farmers depend on rain-fed agriculture. However, livestock diseases such as Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) can undermine these benefits through reduced milk production, weight loss, infertility, skin damage, mortality, and restrictions on livestock movement and trade.

In April 2026, an LSD outbreak in Mzimba District affected more than 500 cattle across several Extension Planning Areas, prompting government-led vaccination, farmer awareness activities, and livestock movement restrictions. In response, CCEI, through project supported by VSF-NL and Wilde Ganzen, conducted a rapid assessment in selected areas of Mzimba North, Nkhata Bay, and Rumphu to understand the extent of the disease and identify gaps in prevention and control.

The assessment revealed significant gaps in disease prevention and surveillance. Households keeping local cattle owned an average of 11.5 animals, compared with 2.4 among dairy farmers. About 21.1% of cattle-owning households reported signs consistent with LSD, yet only 17.4% reported suspected cases to government livestock officers. Vaccination coverage was also low, with only 23% of cattle owners reporting that they had vaccinated their herds. Limited vaccine availability, access, and affordability were among the major barriers. Most farmers instead relied on veterinary drugs and dipping to manage livestock health problems. Livestock management practices also contribute to disease transmission. Most local cattle farmers used communal grazing areas and shared watering points, increasing opportunities for disease spread, particularly where vaccination coverage is low.

Farmer knowledge was another concern, with approximately 75% of cattle owners demonstrating low to moderate understanding of LSD prevention and control. Among households reporting LSD, 20% experienced cattle deaths, with losses exceeding MWK 4 million in the most severely affected household. The assessment also highlighted CAHWs as an important resource for improving animal health service delivery. The assessment recommends scaling up vaccination, improving vaccine affordability and access, strengthening disease surveillance and farmer awareness, formally integrating CAHWs into the national animal health system, promoting better livestock management and biosecurity, strengthening coordination during outbreaks, improving livestock financing through Village Savings and Loan Associations, and investing in disease preparedness, monitoring, and operational research.

Thus, controlling LSD requires sustained investment and coordinated action. Strengthening vaccination, surveillance, farmer knowledge, veterinary services, and community-based approaches such as CAHWs will be critical to reducing livestock losses, protecting household incomes, and building a more resilient livestock sector capable of preventing and responding effectively to future disease outbreaks.



VSF-NL and CCEI Reflect on Systems, Finance & Performance



As part of ongoing efforts to strengthen organisational development and institutional capacity, VSF-NL and CCEI held a workshop early this year focusing on strengthening organisational systems, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and strategic organisational performance. The workshop opened with a presentation by Janke, who provided an overview of VSF-NL's historical background, followed by an update on projects currently supported in Northern Malawi and projects in the pipeline. Gilbert Banda from CCEI subsequently presented an overview of the organisation, highlighting its mandate, programmes and institutional context. Financial management

was a key area of discussion. Peter facilitated a session on budget formulation, financial reporting and budget follow-up, emphasising the importance of sound financial planning and accountability. Importantly, the workshop provided an opportunity for both VSF-NL and CCEI to jointly identify action

CCEI Strengthens Local Fundraising Capacity



CCEI participated in a five-day Change the Game Academy (CtGA) Local Fundraising Workshop organised with support from Wilde Ganzen. The training aimed to strengthen participants' knowledge, skills and attitudes for mobilising local resources and reducing dependency on foreign funding. The workshop emphasised that local fundraising is not begging, but rather about building relationships and mobilising financial and non-financial resources, including services, time, knowledge and moral support. Participants explored emerging local funding opportunities such as

philanthropy, corporate social responsibility, fundraising events, individual giving and digital platforms. Key areas covered included analysing potential funding sources, identifying and engaging prospective donors, planning fundraising events, building effective fundraising teams, developing compelling cases for support, using social media, and maintaining strong relationships with donors through communication and appreciation. The training also highlighted the importance of diversifying funding sources in response to declining donor resources and the changing development financing landscape. CCEI was tasked with developing a case for support for local fundraising, with further technical assistance to be provided by CtGA. The workshop marks an important step towards strengthening CCEI's resource mobilisation capacity, promoting organisational sustainability and empowering the organisation to explore locally driven solutions to development challenges.



Know Our Staff: Tionge Chunda

Tionge is a dedicated animal health professional with a strong passion for livestock health, disease prevention, and community engagement. She holds a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Parasitology, Disease Vector and Control from Mzuzu University and a Diploma in Animal Health and Production from Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Her professional journey has provided her with valuable hands-on experience working directly with farmers and veterinary teams. Between 2020 and 2021, Tionge worked as a Veterinary Assistant with the Ministry of Agriculture. In 2022, she further expanded her practical experience through her work with the private sector, where she supported the provision of veterinary medicines and vaccination of animals. These experiences have strengthened her skills in animal disease prevention, vaccination, livestock management, farmer engagement, data collection, and veterinary support. Tionge is passionate about taking practical animal health knowledge closer to farming communities. She understands that for many households, livestock are more than just animals—they are a source of food, income, savings, and livelihood security. Through her work, she contributes to helping farmers protect their animals, strengthen their livelihoods, and build more resilient communities.



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