

## LEVERAGING YOUTH SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

### MALAWIAN YOUTH IN AGRIBUSINESS



Uniterra is a Canadian volunteer cooperation and international development program that is jointly operated by WUSC (World University Service of Canada) and CECI (the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation). The program supports inclusive economic development to benefit women and youth in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Uniterra works with key private, public, and civil society partners to facilitate growth and change in markets that have the greatest impact on the marginalized.

The Associated Center for Agro-based Development and Youth Entrepreneurship Support (ACADES) is a network of young men and women that focus on making agribusiness a viable option for youth employment and economic empowerment. ACADES' work has notably increased the participation of young people in agribusiness with a particular focus on young women.

### Barriers to Employment

High youth unemployment rates in Malawi have an adverse impact on the economy as 70% of the population is under the age of 35. There is a growing interest among youth to engage in agriculture, but they face challenges in accessing opportunities in high value markets, having limited skills and information and a lack of production inputs and resources. Young women in particular can experience barriers to participation as cultural norms may discourage women from engaging in group activities with men, especially in rural areas.

ACADES provides a platform where youth are challenged to become more actively engaged in agribusiness through provision of loans, skill development trainings and market facilitation. It provides support services that facilitate youth investment and growth in agribusiness. ACADES is the only organization in Malawi's agriculture sector that focuses exclusively on youth and has grown to become the largest network of youth in agriculture in Malawi with 3117 registered members. Uniterra volunteers have supported ACADES by identifying institutional gaps and assisting to develop strategies for sustainability, conducting market research, and supporting the expansion of the agribusiness youth network.

### Impact on Youth

In 2018, ACADES membership increased by 15% from 2650 to 3100, of which more than 60% of new members were young women. In 2018 alone, ACADES linked 854 youth farmers to markets, 50% of whom were women. In 2017-2018, ACADES, was able to train and support 950 members who in turn increased their incomes by more than 200% annually. The club that saw the most success was the Tembwe Youth Club in Mchinji in the Central Region of Malawi. The youth club grossed \$8200 USD from soya seed production sales, a revenue increase of more than 400% from previous years.

*ACADES started by working with young women and men in general but changed its approach when they observed variations in the participation of young women. In 2017, they introduced gender guidelines for all of their agribusiness groups to follow, including 50/50 gender participation in all activities and 50/50 gender composition in groups wanting to join the ACADES network and group leadership positions. ACADES is also working on piloting all female Youth Agribusiness Groups in Mchinji.*

With the support of the Uniterra Program, ACADES participated at the African Youth SDGs Summit with the theme “Youth as Drivers of Sustainable Change” in Accra, Ghana in November 2017. As a take away from the summit, ACADES began to conceptualize and has recently launched and mobilized a youth agro-processing and value addition incubation centre to support youth innovation in agribusiness.

In May 2018, ACADES successfully conducted a National Youth in Agribusiness Forum in partnership with the National Youth Council of Malawi (NYCOM), Uniterra, and Oxfam. The forum brought together 400 youth in agribusiness. Thirty-two private sector firms and service providers participated in sharing information on available agribusiness opportunities and linkages. Through the forum, young men and women were exposed to a wide range of agribusiness information, networks, and success stories. ACADES’ work contributes to the progress of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of decent work and economic growth, gender equality and reduced inequalities.



Uniterra Volunteer Emily Wimbles worked as the Uniterra Youth Engagement and Inclusion Advisor. She contacted ACADES after meeting them at the 2017 National Youth Council International Youth Day to partner with Uniterra for collaboration on expanding their organizational reach. Emily sat on the ACADES Steering Committee for the 2017 Youth Agribusiness Investment Forum and supported the planning, development, funding and partnership development for the event. Funders who attended the event saw the impact it had on urban and rural youth and this paved the way for future partnerships with ACADES.

*“As young people, we have to leverage on our youth social capital to increase opportunities for ourselves. While access to resources, especially finance, is a challenge, the one thing we have is each other. We can build youth networks and that is our strength. We are learning to work together by leveraging our youth social capital – our prospects as young people are promising”*

**Mada Chipekwe,**  
ACADES Program  
Development Officer

## Sustainability and Scaling-Up Operations

ACADES is leveraging its public and private partnerships to sustain the services that it provides to youth by utilizing shared technical and financial resources for program implementation. Members of ACADES pay membership fees and also contribute to other services such as training and logistics. Currently, ACADES is looking at graduating the member groups into a cooperative. ACADES has a revolving loan facility and intends on transforming it into a certified microfinance enterprise by the end of 2019.



ACADES founders, graduates of Malawi’s Bunda College of Agriculture