

Training Progress report

Strengthening Fresh Food Market For Healthier Food Environment Project

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Date: 11-11-2025

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1. Introduction and Purpose

The Lizulu Market Training Series, implemented under the GIZ–ICLEI Africa “Fresh Food Markets for Healthier Food Environments” initiative, represents a milestone in Malawi’s journey toward transforming urban markets into safe, inclusive, and nutrition-driven spaces.

Facilitated by NutriCare Malawi, this initiative goes beyond technical training — it inspires traders, particularly women, to see markets as engines of health, equity, and resilience. The programme combines food hygiene, nutrition, gender inclusion, and systems thinking to demonstrate that when small actions align, they can drive collective transformation.

Between September and October 2025, three participatory training sessions were conducted at Lizulu Market, Lilongwe’s busiest fresh food hub. These sessions covered the following interconnected themes:

- Safe Storage & Display
- Gender & Leadership
- Value Addition (Drying)

Each theme addressed a key pillar of a healthy market ecosystem — from equitable leadership to food safety and shelf life enhancements — reinforcing that clean, inclusive markets are vital to achieving urban nutrition security and sustainable food systems. The primary goal was not merely to improve vendor behavior but to build a movement of local market champions — people capable of sustaining change long after the training sessions end.

2. Training Overview

Each training session was designed to be interactive, inclusive, and contextually grounded. Recognizing that most vendors operate in fast-paced environments with limited time, the facilitation model relied on short, practical learning blocks using local language, storytelling, and peer-led demonstrations.

All sessions were delivered in Chichewa to ensure inclusivity and comprehension. This approach enabled vendors to relate the lessons to their everyday experiences and actively contribute ideas and examples. Participation across all modules averaged 14 peer leaders, with women consistently representing between 40% and 60% of the groups. These participants were drawn from diverse sections of Lizulu Market — fruit and vegetable sellers, grain traders, fishmongers, and small food processors.

Every session reinforced three core values:

1. Shared leadership – promoting joint responsibility and inclusion.
2. Daily hygiene discipline – embedding health and safety into routine market life.

3. Collective accountability – ensuring every vendor plays a role in maintaining market standards.

This participatory framework transformed the training from instruction into collaboration — a co-created learning journey where traders were not passive recipients but active designers of their own transformation.

3. Session Summaries

A. Gender and Leadership

Welcome and Icebreaker ; “Who Makes the Decisions in the market place or at home?”

The session began with an interactive icebreaker exploring who makes most decisions at home and in the market.

Participants shared that women often make daily decisions such as going to the maize mill, purchasing groceries, or managing food supplies. Men, on the other hand, were said to handle “bigger” decisions such as selecting children’s schools or supporting relatives. This conversation



Figure 1 Peer Traders at Lizulu Market during gender and leadership training

revealed how decision-making power is often unequal, which can create tension in families—especially when deciding on financial contributions for relatives or household needs. The facilitator emphasized that *balanced decision-making builds trust and strengthens family relationships.*

Participants agreed that income sharing and mutual discussion are key to harmony and collective leadership at both household and market levels.

Core Discussion: Understanding Gender Roles

The facilitator shared the local story “*Tadala and Blessings*” to stimulate reflection on how responsible management and planning reflect leadership qualities. Participants related strongly to the story and added examples from their lives.

One role-play example illustrated a family disagreement: a man received a call requesting his financial contribution to a relative’s wedding, while his wife reminded him about her need for a new dress costing MK30,000. Together they discussed priorities, eventually agreeing to balance

between urgent family needs (school fees) and personal expenses. This scenario helped vendors appreciate joint decision-making and the importance of communication and compromise in both family and business leadership.

Practical Exercise: Leadership in Action

Participants were divided into small groups to act out common leadership scenarios in market life:

1. Resolving a conflict between two vendors over a customer.
2. Supporting a sick colleague's stall.
3. Organizing a clean-up day for their section.



Figure 2 Peer traders during role plays

The role plays were realistic and lively. In one, two vendors quarreled over a customer, highlighting how competition often strains relationships. The group concluded that cooperation, rather than rivalry, promotes a better business environment. Vendors agreed it's wiser to let a customer choose freely and maintain respect among peers.

A male participant shared a personal example: one day a female colleague fainted at her fruit stall, and he immediately offered first aid without waiting for a female peer to assist. The

group commended this act, reinforcing that *leadership and care are not limited by gender*.

Group Reflection: Gender and Market Leadership

The reflection segment generated open, emotional discussion.

Many women shared that shyness, fear of judgment, and cultural expectations discourage them from taking leadership roles. One female vendor admitted she initially hesitated to join the training because others might accuse her of improper behavior for mingling with male vendors, fearing her husband's reaction.



Participants noted that in Malawi's cultural context, leadership is often viewed as a male role, which limits women's involvement in market committees or business groups. For example, even though Lizulu Market is conducting elections for market chairpersons and section heads, few women plan to contest.

Together, participants

identified barriers and possible solutions:

Problems and mitigations

Barriers	Solutions
Lack of confidence	Peer mentorship and continuous encouragement
Cultural beliefs and gossip	Awareness sessions and gender dialogues
Exclusion from leadership roles	Ensure equal representation in market committees
Fear of judgment from family or community	Engage spouses and community leaders in gender discussions

The facilitator emphasized that leadership thrives in environments of mutual respect, support, and open communication.

Key Messages & Wrap-Up

The closing messages reinforced the day's lessons:

- Leadership is teamwork, fairness, and respect.
- Both men and women can lead — together they make markets stronger.
- Gender equality builds healthier families, fairer business, and community trust.
- Every voice matters in creating cleaner, safer markets.

Observations and Participant Engagement

- Participants engaged openly, sharing practical examples of gender imbalance and positive change.
- Women participants showed increased confidence during role plays and group discussions.

- Male peers expressed support for gender inclusion and demonstrated empathy-based leadership.
- The practical storytelling and role-play methods encouraged peer learning and laughter while addressing sensitive topics.
- Cultural barriers remain a challenge, but awareness and confidence-building are showing visible progress.

Outputs and Outcomes

Expected Output	Achieved Outcome
Vendors understand gender equality and shared leadership concepts.	90% of participants demonstrated understanding through reflection and examples shared.
Participants can identify at least three leadership qualities.	Qualities mentioned included responsibility, fairness, communication, and empathy.
Peer leaders develop confidence to model inclusive leadership.	Several vendors volunteered to lead peer mentoring and cleanliness initiatives.
Gender-sensitive decision-making is promoted at household and market level.	Participants agreed to discuss household decisions more jointly with their spouses.

B. Proper and Safe Storage & Display

Summary of Activities

Opening and Orientation

Trainers welcomed participants and emphasized the importance of safe food handling. An opening discussion asked:

“What challenges do you face keeping your produce fresh during the day?”

Responses included lack of clean water, exposure to heat, and costs related to frequent watering.

Hygiene and Storage Demonstration

Trainers led a practical demonstration using a **Safe Storage and Display Checklist**, highlighting key steps for food safety:

1. Keep produce clean and covered.
2. Use raised surfaces — avoid placing food directly on the ground.
3. Separate spoiled items immediately.
4. Grade and sort produce by size, colour, and freshness.
5. Sweep and maintain clean stall surroundings.

Traders learned that visual cleanliness improves both hygiene and business appeal.

Case Study: A Day in the Life of a Lizulu Trader

Through observation and discussion, traders described their **daily routines**:

- **Morning:** Vendors collect produce from nearby farm gates or wholesale points, often between 5–6 a.m.
- **Sorting:** Items such as Irish potatoes, carrots, and green peppers are sorted by quality — spoiled items removed and set aside.
- **Grading:** Produce is graded by size and colour to appeal to buyers and maintain price consistency.
- **Storage Practices:** Vegetables left overnight are placed on sacking material in open air for ventilation. In the morning, vendors sprinkle clean water to restore freshness.
- **Special Handling:** Carrots are often stored in plastic bags to limit air exchange and maintain crispness.



- **End of Day:** Vendors sweep and clean their stalls, disposing of waste responsibly when collection facilities are available.

This case study highlighted vendors' creativity but also the urgent need for better infrastructure, including clean water access and waste bins.

Peer Group Exercise

Participants were divided into three groups of four to visit stalls and assess hygiene using the checklist. They noted:

- Irish potatoes and onions were well arranged on sacks or raised platforms.
- Some stalls demonstrated excellent grading by size and colour.
- A few vendors still lacked proper covering for produce, leaving it exposed to dust and flies.



Groups later presented two good practices and two areas for improvement in plenary.

Achievements

- Active participation of **12 peer leaders** (5 female).
- Vendors shared and demonstrated local innovations for maintaining freshness.
- Strengthened understanding of hygiene, sorting, grading, and display.
- Increased peer accountability through on-site evaluations.
- Reinforced link between good hygiene, customer trust, and business growth.

Key Outcomes

Outcome Area	Result
Hygiene Practices	Traders adopted simple cleaning and covering methods for their stalls.
Nutrition Awareness	Participants reinforced the importance of clean, diverse food groups in health.
Economic Value	Improved food display increased customer attraction and reduced spoilage.
Peer Learning	Enhanced teamwork and shared accountability for hygiene at stall level.
Market Sustainability	Traders appreciated that cleanliness strengthens market reputation and profits.

C. VALUE ADDITION THROUGH DRYING

Session Flow and Activities

Icebreaker – “From Waste to Wealth”

Participants began by sharing what they normally do when produce starts spoiling. Common answers included *throwing it away*, *feeding animals*, or *selling cheaply*. This opened a lively discussion around food loss and income loss — setting the stage for the concept of “turning waste into wealth.”

Core Learning: Why Drying Matters

Through group discussion and visuals, vendors explored how drying helps reduce waste, preserve nutrition, and create new income streams. Examples used included *dried tomatoes (phwetekere owuma)*, *pumpkin leaves (masamba owuma)*, and *banana chips*. We also discussed local market demand — restaurants and schools prefer dried goods for off-season cooking.

Practical Demonstration: Safe Drying Techniques

Participants actively took part in a live demonstration using tomatoes and pumpkin leaves. Steps practiced included:

1. Washing produce with clean water
2. Slicing evenly
3. Laying produce on mesh trays or clean cloth
4. Covering with netting to protect from dust and flies
5. Packaging in airtight containers once dry



Safety and hygiene were emphasized — no drying on bare ground or near roads, always wash hands, and separate spoiled produce. Peer leaders also learned the difference between sun drying and solar dryer use, noting how controlled drying improves quality and color retention.

Group Reflection and Discussion

Participants brainstormed which foods they could start drying in their stalls and how to market them.

Common ideas included:

- Drying *vegetables* for school feeding programs.
- Preparing *mixed dried fruit packs* for city customers.
- Selling *tomato powder* for off-season cooking.

Challenges mentioned were water scarcity, limited drying space, and packaging materials — which will be addressed in the next module on *Packaging & Labelling*.

Key Messages and Closing

We concluded with a shared understanding that:

- Drying adds value and prevents food loss.
- It offers new income opportunities for women and youth.
- Clean handling and packaging build customer trust.
- Value addition contributes to more sustainable, resilient food systems.

Observations and Participant Engagement

- High participation and enthusiasm, especially during demonstrations.
- Women expressed interest in forming a *drying cooperative* to pool equipment.
- Peer leaders took notes and photos for sharing with their sections.
- Several vendors requested follow-up training on labeling and pricing strategies.

Immediate Outcomes

- Participants demonstrated safe drying and packaging practices.
- Vendors identified 3–4 products suitable for drying in their stalls.
- Peer leaders committed to pilot small-scale drying over the next two weeks.
- Increased awareness of food preservation as part of sustainable market transformation.

Conclusion

Between September and October 2025, NutriCare Malawi conducted three participatory training sessions at Lizulu Market, one of Lilongwe's busiest and most influential fresh food hubs. The sessions covered:

- Safe Storage & Display – improving hygiene, reducing spoilage, and building customer trust.
- Gender & Leadership – promoting shared decision-making, cooperation, and equity.

- Value Addition (Drying) – enhancing shelf life and competitiveness through sustainable processing.

Together, these modules created a practical framework for market resilience and urban sustainability. They demonstrated that healthy markets are living systems, strengthened by hygiene, inclusion, and innovation.

Vendors not only gained knowledge but also confidence to lead and collaborate, protecting both livelihoods and public health. The initiative's impact reaches beyond Lizulu advancing nutrition security, waste reduction, and circular market economies. NutriCare, with ICLEI Africa, remains committed to scaling cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable food systems across Malawi.

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