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Fish ponds are helping in the fight against AIDS[Get article background](#)

LIFE for Agnes Kanyema is looking up. The retired teacher and her husband are caring for four of their grandchildren, whose parents have all died of AIDS. Their meagre pension is not enough, so they rely on farming to eat and make ends meet. Now, with the help of WorldFish Centre, a non-profit outfit based in Malaysia, Mrs Kanyema also runs a fish pond, which not only provides extra cash and protein but also helps her grow maize and vegetables on her small plot of less than a hectare (2.47 acres). Her pond provides water for crops during droughts and she uses the sediment as fertiliser. The fish and vegetables help feed her family, and she sells the surplus at the local market.

The WorldFish Centre has helped 1,200 families who have lost breadwinners to AIDS to dig and run fish ponds in southern Malawi's Zomba district. The small landlocked southern African country relies heavily on subsistence farming. But HIV/AIDS, erratic rains, overpopulation and soil erosion are taking a big toll, making it hard for farmers on tiny plots to survive. With Malawi's main lake overfished, people are losing a big source of protein. In the 1970s they ate 14 kilos of fish per person a year; now they consume just four kilos.

The ponds, which are easy to maintain, cost only \$200 to make and \$10 to stock with fish. They are filled from the water table or by nearby streams; rain keeps them going. The fish are fed from farm waste and by-products, such as chicken manure and maize bran. According to WorldFish, families with fish ponds have doubled their income and now eat 150% more fresh fish. Malnutrition among children under five has apparently dropped from 45% to 15% in three years. Mrs Kanyema passes on the training she has received on fish-breeding and on how to use her pond for agriculture to her neighbours.

Pond owners sell most of their fish and vegetables locally, where there is enough demand to keep everything fresh. But they are also being taught to smoke fish, which keeps it for two weeks. Daniel Jamu, WorldFish's regional director, says that the next step is to help farmers club together to market their produce in the towns, where prices are higher.

Many poor farmers are starting to view aquaculture as easier and cheaper than raising cattle. WorldFish is expanding the project to reach another 26,000 families in neighbouring Mozambique and Zambia, as well as Malawi.

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