

# COMMUNITY IMPACT AROUND MAJETE WILD RESERVE

## Time to celebrate

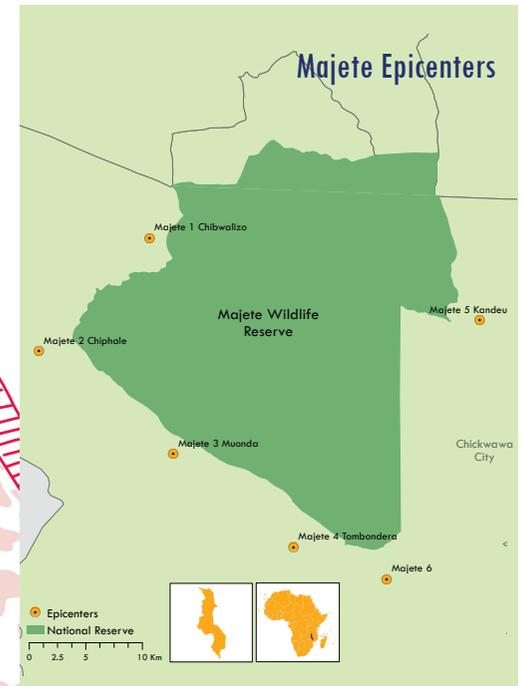
On the western border of the Majete Wild Reserve, a 700 km<sup>2</sup> park in southwest Malawi, a proud community named Chibwalizo will celebrate the achievement of its self-made end to hunger on the 1st of July 2019. In 2011 this community with around 4500 inhabitants was stuck in poverty, poaching and dependency. Now they have managed to create an active, local hub amidst their villages where people can meet their very basic needs: health care, education, water, food storage and financial services. Poaching has come to an end and the park is flourishing. As facilitators of this remarkable change-in-a-decade The Hunger Project and African Parks jointly celebrate the self-reliance of Chibwalizo.

## How it began

Sixteen years ago, Majete was an empty forest. Most of Majete's animals were hunted out. Elephants, rhinos, lions, leopards, and buffalos had vanished, and only a few antelope persisted within the reserve's perimeter. Trees were felled for charcoal. Tourism was non-existent. Not a single tourist visited the park between 2000 to 2003, which in turn meant that Majete generated no income. In 2003, thanks to the Malawi Department of National Parks and Wildlife, African Parks signed a 25-year management agreement to manage the reserve and change its trajectory.

The revitalization of Majete led to a remarkable return of rhinos, elephants, tourists and jobs. However, the surrounding communities – an estimated 70,000 people – who used to live from this land and its natural resources, had to find alternative livelihoods. Despite worthwhile investments in education and community development, by 2010 the villages around Majete were still poverty-struck. African Parks realized that for people to value the park communities must benefit from it in a real and meaningful way.

One of African Parks' early donors, Dioraphte Foundation, pointed at The Hunger Project as a possible partner. The Hunger Project was experienced in creating community-led change in other parts of Malawi and other African countries. At the request of Dioraphte, The Hunger Project started working through its 'epicenter strategy' in the Majete communities in 2011. In Chibwalizo to begin with, but with the ambition to encircle the entire park within fifteen years. Currently The Hunger Project is working in six epicenters around Majete, all financed by Dioraphte Foundation. Chibwalizo is the first to reach self-reliance.



## Epicenter strategy

The Epicenter Strategy of The Hunger Project has at its foundation three essential pillars:

- Start by empowering women as key change agents
- Mobilizing entire communities into self-reliant action
- Fostering effective partnerships to engage local government

This area-based strategy sets off with uplifting village meetings that inspire people to envision a shared goal for their community. Then they lay out the actions they will take to achieve that goal – step by step, over a period of five to ten years.

Local volunteers are recruited and trained in nine thematic areas that align with government interventions and the Sustainable Development Goals: 1) leadership & governance, 2) gender equality, 3) water & sanitation, 4) literacy & education, 5) nutrition & food security, 6) health, 7) income generation, 8) productive agriculture and 9) climate resilience. These volunteers become local experts on a specific theme and pass on their knowledge during home-visits, village gatherings and by being a role model.

As a symbol of their self-reliance, the community builds a physical infrastructure that hosts a clinic, food bank, library/computer room, meeting hall, microfinance office, skills center and demonstration garden. The primary resources for the epicenter strategy come from the people themselves and by making local government resources more effective. When the epicenter has achieved self-reliance, it no longer needs support from The Hunger Project. The community is ready to run itself.

## Chibwalizo taking the lead

In Chibwalizo, The Hunger Project measured progress towards the self-defined goals at three moments in time: in 2012, 2015 and 2018. Household hunger and poverty both have spectacularly decreased. The table shows that the goals were ambitious - and not all have been met. The people of Chibwalizo themselves however are confident that they are capable to achieve these goals in due time. Coordination will be in the hands of the newly launched MACODO – Majete Community Development Organization, led by women and men from the 21 villages that make up Chibwalizo epicenter. MACODO functions as a social enterprise: it generates income by renting out the community hall and furniture, operating the maize mill and collecting entry fees for large-screen football matches. The clinic is finally fully staffed with one midwife, two nurses, two HIV counselors and one medical assistant. There still is a lot to be done, but the spirit of change has taken root. Chibwalizo has become an example for the other communities around the park.

Farmers who took part in The Hunger Project's food security training programs show higher yields compared to prior years. They apply new farming technologies and act as lead farmers in their community. One farmer said: "Our heavy reliance on one crop, maize, contributed to us being dependent and food insecure. The most important thing I learned is to diversify my crops so my family has enough to eat".

The greatest asset of the microfinance program is the economic freedom it provided for women. In Majete 1 area we observe an increase in small businesses run by both men and women such as grocery shops, motor-taxis, tailors, beekeepers and house renovation shops.

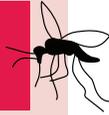
The opening of the Majete 1 health facility is one of the developments ranked as most meaningful by the community. Giving birth has become much safer now. People also see that the presence of the health facility attracts other organizations to run activities in this area: an unanticipated spin-off that is warmly welcomed.

Walking distances to water points have greatly decreased, which also has a positive effect on women's time, safety and economic empowerment. Diarrhea prevalence has never been so low – keeping more children fit for school.

	Indicator	Baseline 2012*	Midline 2015	End evaluation 2018	Goal
	Community leadership % population who believe community leaders can successfully address community problems	38	77	78	85
	Hunger % households with moderate or severe hunger	44	27	14	15
	Poverty % households below poverty line (<1,50 USD/day)	72	73	62	37
	Education % households with at least one literate person	23	83	91	90
	Health % population seeking health services during illness	68	95	98	98
	Water % population who have improved access to clean drinking water	71	86	91	95

\*based on averages and secondary sources

## Flourishing wildlife, supportive communities



African Parks began to revive the park through a series of species reintroductions: rhinos in 2003, elephants in 2006, lions in 2012, and giraffes in 2018. More than 2,900 animals of 15 different species were brought back. In 2018 African Parks conducted a reserve-wide aerial census finding 201 elephants, 1,548 buffalos, and 1,110 waterbucks. In total, approximately 12,000 animals, including the 'Big Five' now live in Majete. Majete continues to be a safe haven for high-value species. African Parks maintained its remarkable track record of not having lost a single rhino or elephant to poaching since their respective reintroductions in 2003 and 2006. Some former poachers now provide intelligence for park management.

Effective park management should lead to an improved way of life. The African Park model ensures community representation on each park Board so they can participate in management decisions. African Parks builds schools, covers teacher salaries, deploys healthcare services, and invests in alternative and sustainable livelihoods. Around Majete park we now see that community programs have helped thousands of children attend school, and offered villagers business opportunities, from producing and selling honey to planting seedlings to offset pressure on the reserve.

Majete has been so successful, it now contains a 'source population' that helps repopulate other Malawian regions in need of wildlife, providing elephants, lions and game species. Malawian nationals make up 50% of the tourists who are coming to the reserve every year, showing that there is now a national constituency who have bought in to conservation, which perhaps is the greatest hope of all.

## Majete Malaria Project

In 2014 a state-of-the-art malaria research and prevention center was established in Majete with the goal of reducing malaria by 80 percent in surrounding communities by 2018. The Majete Malaria Control Project – largely funded by Dioraphte Foundation – was a joint mission of the Universities of Malawi, Amsterdam, Wageningen and Liverpool with African Parks and The Hunger Project. Results show that a combination of community mobilization through local health animators (volunteers), correct bednet use and house improvement significantly reduces cases of malaria. It is expected that by integrating the malaria preventive measures in The Hunger Project's community health animator approach, malaria can be held under control.



A group of health animators point at the newly attached wire gauze that prevents mosquitos from getting into the house



## CHALLENGES

### Climate change and land degradation

Communities around Majete face huge environmental challenges. Poverty and hunger are aggravated by effects of climate change. The area is vulnerable to both dry spells and flooding, resulting in loss of harvests. Deforestation and cultivation on steep hillside slopes and along river banks have led to increased soil loss, land degradation and sedimentation of rivers. As a result of this, food production is not keeping pace with the population's needs. People around the reserve regularly experience food shortages between harvests. This means that people may turn to other sources for survival such as charcoal selling or poaching. Climate resilient farming will be of major importance for both the survival of communities and the reserve. Initiatives such as reforestation projects, crop diversification and environmental awareness raising are integrated into the work of African Parks and The Hunger Project.



Photo: Marcus Westberg



Photo: Maria Thundu

### Access to energy

Getting Chibwalizo connected to the national electricity grid has been a major challenge. Partially because it is in a remote countryside area. And also due to a total overhaul of the national institutional electricity set-up. This meant that Chibwalizo epicenter could not run its planned income generating activities – such as a mechanic maize mill. It also undermined the quality of health service delivery.

Off-grid renewable energy sources have been explored and experimented with. As income levels rise, more people can now afford mobile solar tablets to charge phones and use a household lamp. However, large-scale solar solutions are not yet feasible in this area. Being connected to the national grid also means being seen and served by the government, which is a goal worth pushing for. It is expected that power will be on by self-reliance day, 1st of July. Two other epicenters around Majete have already been connected to the national grid.

## SUCCESS FACTORS

### Community leadership is key

An external evaluation into the effectiveness of The Hunger Project around Majete showed that the epicenter strategy and the mantra of "together we can end hunger" is an effective method to begin the end of hunger and poverty in this region. The motivational village meetings, the well-trained volunteer committees and the visible, long-term presence of the Hunger Project team contribute to this – states the report. African Parks also emphasizes the great importance of community leadership. Close collaboration with local chiefs has encouraged communities to contribute to preservation and restoration of nature and wildlife.



Photo: Maria Thundu



## Space for entrepreneurship

African Parks and The Hunger Project have jointly stimulated small-scale entrepreneurship and skills training, including carpentry, tailoring, beekeeping, craft making, moringa growing and vegetable growing. To spark business spirit and resilience Chibwalizo epicenter hosts an independent rural bank that provides financial services to more than 300 active clients.



Photo: Naude Heunis

## Government on board

To guarantee the sustainability of the results the government has been on board every step of the way. They run the public health facility in Chibwalizo, they provide facilitators for thematic trainings, they manage (although sometimes poorly) the community's access to water, energy and other basic services. These linkages are the result of persistent networking of both African Parks and The Hunger Project. Now The Hunger Project exits Chibwalizo, the MACODO steering committee – trained in advocacy skills – will continue to voice the community's needs and concerns vis a vis the local government.

## IMPACT STORIES

**Allan Wyson:** "I used to be a skilled poacher. But I knew it wasn't right in the long run. Even then it was difficult to make ends meet. Through the Hunger Project I took part in agricultural training in 2016. We learned to plant one seed per station to avoid competition and to keep small distances between the seed stations. We also experimented with crops other than maize, such as cassava and pigeon peas. Today I have 95 bags of maize in stock: twice as much as last year. I even donated four bags to my sister. You could well say I run my own little foodbank here. We could afford to buy a second-hand motorcycle for my son, who now makes money with his taxi rides up and down to the nearest business center.

As a lead farmer, I show the younger ones that they can make a living with farming when they make some effort. We don't need The Hunger Project anymore. What they can do, I can also do myself."



Allan Wyson (second from the right) with his family in front of his house.



**Libine Zembe:** "I did my tailor training with The Hunger Project in 2016. I got into this class because someone else dropped out. It was a lucky shot. After two years I managed to buy a second sewing machine. I try and train my sons, so that they can help me out when it gets busy. When a wedding is coming up, I want to be able to accommodate all requests. Clients know how to find me, although I would prefer an even better location, nearby the road to school.

Times have changed. Buying things like soap and salt are no problem anymore. My husband used to travel to Mozambique for seasonal work and I never knew whether he would be home. He now does his part in the farming. I think a combination of tailoring and farming is really good. When we harvest, we can eat. When we have no harvest, we can buy food. I no longer feel stressed."

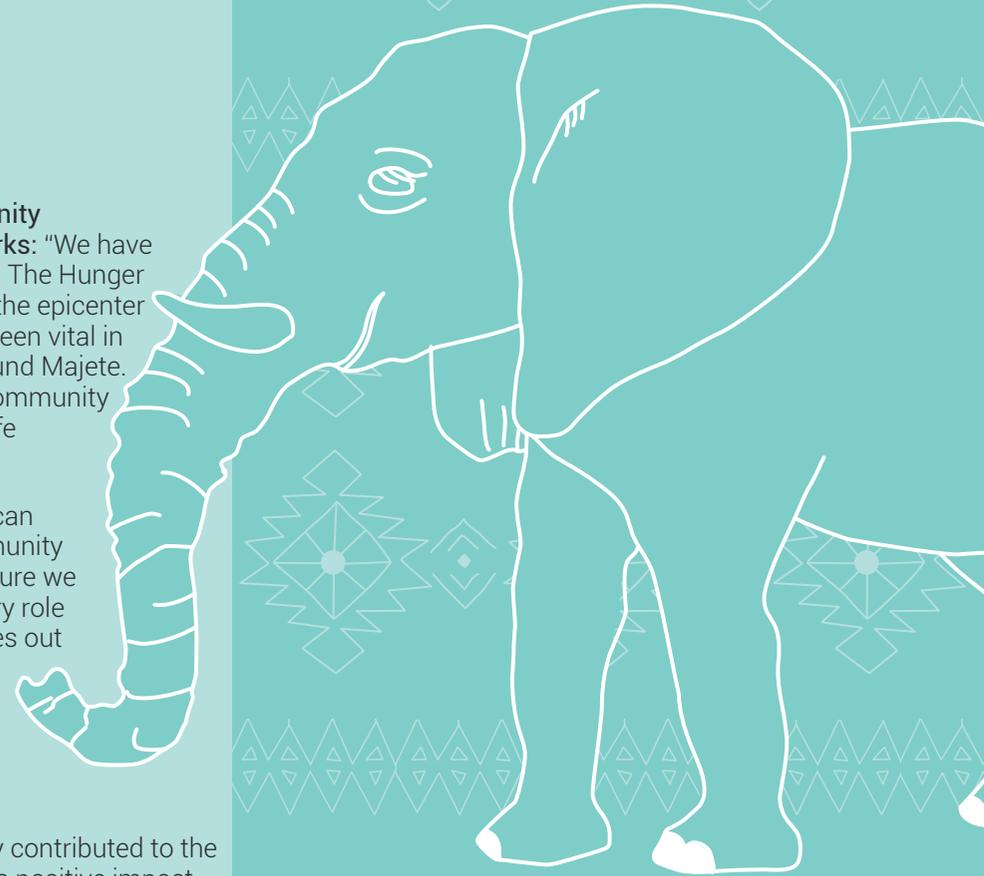
**Mackenzie Nkapala, Head of Programs, The Hunger Project Malawi:** "I learned a lot from African Parks during our partnership. Working with them has really sparked my passion for wildlife. I have come to value the assets of the park for the communities and our country. Also I got to know more about livelihood alternatives that do not harm nature or animals, such as beekeeping. I believe this partnership is really complementary. Our expertise is community mobilization and theirs is park management. We need each other."



**Dixie Makwale, Majete Community Extension Manager, African Parks:** "We have been working hand in hand with The Hunger Project from the start. I believe the epicenter approach to conservation has been vital in transforming peoples' lives around Majete. The mindset trainings helped community members to start viewing wildlife conservation differently."

The Hunger Project trained African Parks' Extension Team in community mobilization skills, as to make sure we are equipped to fulfill an advisory role when The Hunger Project phases out after self-reliance. Their exit worries me sometimes: will the epicenters really be able to manage itself?

Yet I have seen that the coming of The Hunger Project has really contributed to the improvement of livelihoods. This positive impact has helped African Parks buy in community support and lowered poaching levels. It is an approach that Majete will cherish forever."



[www.africanparks.org](http://www.africanparks.org)



[www.dioraphte.nl](http://www.dioraphte.nl)



[www.thehungerproject.nl](http://www.thehungerproject.nl)