

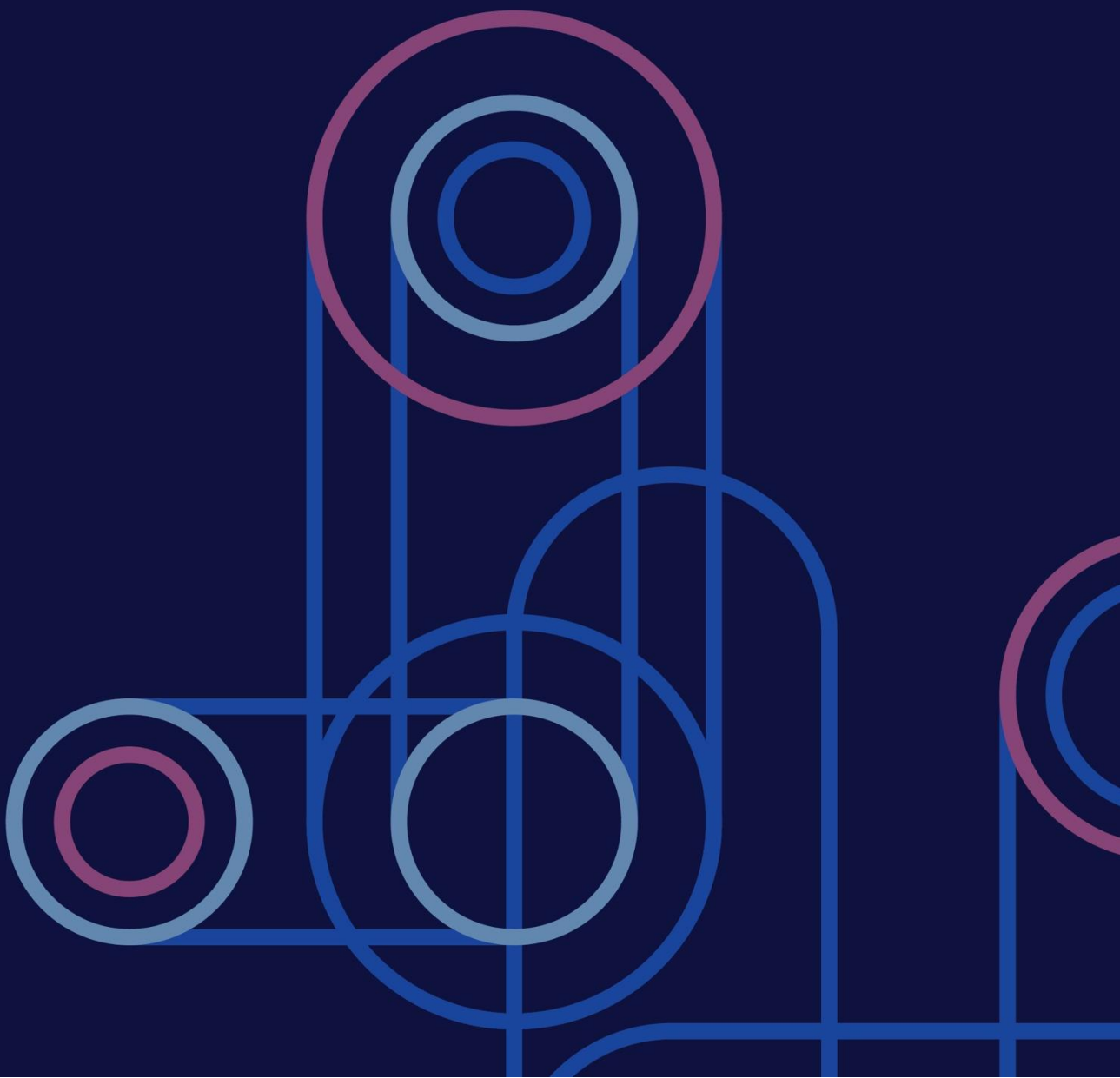


World Health
Organization

CASE STUDY

*From a Dumpsite to a Food Basket, Bembeke
Malawi*

2026



Basic information

WHO Region	AFRO
City or Country	Bembeke, Malawi
Timeline	2019-2021
Type of intervention	Infrastructure; behaviour
Primary level of implementation	Neighbourhood
Primary sectors involved	Food; waste; agriculture; environment
Primary health outcomes or challenges	Food security; environmental contamination; waste; livelihoods

Case description

Bembeke is a growing trading centre in Dedza District in central Malawi. As in many urbanizing areas in sub-Saharan Africa, the community has faced environmental health risks linked to unmanaged solid waste, alongside challenges related to food security and declining soil fertility. In Bembeke, a poorly regulated dumpsite near the local market had become the main disposal point for organic waste, including food residues and crop by-products. Informal dumping, odour, pests and contamination affected nearby households and vendors. In parallel, smallholder farmers struggled to access affordable inputs to maintain food production.

Between 2019 and 2021, a locally led initiative set out to address these challenges and transform an environmental hazard into a productive resource. The intervention was implemented by Country Minders for Peoples Development (CMPD) in collaboration with the Environmental Affairs Department of Malawi's Ministry of Natural Resources, Dedza District Council and community leadership structures. Its central objective was to convert organic market waste into fertilizer that could support local farming, while strengthening community participation in waste management and improving environmental conditions around the market area.

A system was established to sort and collect organic waste from the market and process it into fertilizer through a structured composting method. The resulting product was distributed to farmers and used on demonstration plots to support uptake. Alongside these technical processes, the project invested in community engagement. Participatory theatre and public information campaigns were conducted across eight zones, linking



Bembeke's waste initiative supports agricultural production. Bembeke, Malawi: 2021. © Country Minders for Peoples Development.

waste management to food security and promoting the idea of “waste to wealth” as a shared community goal.

Implementation relied on regular coordination between civil society, local authorities and community representatives. Stakeholder meetings at district and community levels brought together market leaders, traditional authorities, farmer groups, women's organizations and government officials to agree on roles, monitor progress and resolve operational challenges. Training was provided to farmers and community members on compost production, soil management and safe handling of waste-derived inputs. To support continuity beyond the initial project period, 300 local trainers were prepared to continue skills transfer within their communities.

Project results indicate improvements across environmental and agricultural domains. More than 1500 farmers and community members received training in waste management and fertilizer production. Crop production increased by 120 per cent, attributed to renewed farming activity supported by locally produced fertilizer. Shortly after implementation began, most informal dumping sites around the market were reported as cleared and air quality improved, with reduced odour from decomposing waste. In parallel, compost production and distribution created new income opportunities for residents.

Important enabling factors included the collaboration between civil society and government agencies, active engagement of community leadership, and alignment with national environmental and agricultural priorities. The direct and rapid visibility of benefits for food production and waste reduction helped sustain local participation. Barriers included limitations in existing waste collection infrastructure, uneven engagement during early project phases, and the need for ongoing technical oversight to maintain compost quality and safety.

The approach has since been reported as replicated in other locations in Malawi, including Lizulu, Jenda, Lunzu and Mtaya. Continued efforts are needed to formalize waste management systems, integrate health and environmental monitoring, and embed the model within district development planning to support longer-term sustainability and scale.

Strategic Highlight

Food security and waste management, as cross-cutting issues with strong political and social salience, can be powerful entry points for strategic action on urban health. In Bembeke, these issues represent interlinked challenges that affect livelihoods, environmental conditions and community wellbeing. Recognizing their connections helped enable coordinated action by residents, local authorities, and sectoral agencies.

The tangibility of benefits is an important factor in the sustainability of strategic action. Here, the transformation of a dumpsite into a source of agricultural inputs produced highly visible and useful outputs. Waste, typically viewed as a burden, became a resource for food production and income generation. This helped mobilize community participation and strengthened the legitimacy of the intervention among local leaders and institutions. Because food and waste are everyday concerns with immediate relevance, they provided a politically and socially resonant platform for dialogue and cooperation across sectors.

Entry points are important gateways to more comprehensive urban health strategies. By demonstrating near-term benefits and building trust among diverse actors, they help establish the relationships, governance mechanisms and shared understanding needed to address more complex and less visible determinants of health over time.

Further Information

- [Case Study: From a Waste Dumpsite into a Food Basket in Bembeke, Dedza, Malawi](#)
- [Promoting sustainable wellbeing in urban food and waste management systems in east and southern Africa](#)