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IYBA WE4A
Investing in Young Businesses in Africa
Women Entrepreneurship for Africa

# RESILIENCE IN ACTION:
## BUILDING AND GROWING THROUGH MALAWI'S ECONOMIC SHIFTS

Implemented by

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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# ABOUT THIS KNOWLEDGE BRIEF

This knowledge brief documents practice-based learning on business resilience among women-led enterprises in Malawi under the IYBA WE4A programme. It translates entrepreneurial experience into practical insights for women entrepreneurs, trainers, and development practitioners supporting MSME resilience in shock-prone environments.

The brief draws on experiential learning shared during programme engagements and is intended as a practical resource rather than academic research.

# BUSINESS UNUSUAL:
## WHY BUILDING RESILIENCE MATTERS

Running a business in Malawi requires more than passion, technical skill, or ambition. In Malawi, entrepreneurs operate in an environment shaped by economic uncertainty, environmental shocks, and structural constraints that require continuous adaptation and innovation. Those who endure are not defined by the size of their capital or connections, but by their discipline to adjust and build resilience over time.

Economically, rising inflation, fuel shortages, foreign exchange constraints, and high interest rates affect production costs, pricing, and access to finance. Climate-related shocks further complicate the business landscape with floods, cyclones, and prolonged dry spells disrupting supply chains, damaging infrastructure, and threatening agricultural productivity. At the same time, women entrepreneurs face structural barriers such as limited access to capital, markets, networks, and decision-making power, while balancing business responsibilities with family and community roles.

# CASE STUDY:
## TREASER MCHACHA
### RESILIENCE IN PRACTICE

The GIZ IYBA WE4A Bridging Event gathered women entrepreneurs to connect, learn, and reflect on how to grow resilient businesses in Malawi's shifting economy. One story stood out – Treaser Mchacha's.

Treaser Mchacha, co- founder and Managing Director of GTFG Holdings Limited, shared her journey through the highs and lows of building a business while trying to support her family. Her story shows what resilience looks like in real life, a lived experience shaped by courage, discipline, consistency, leadership and practical action.

Treaser, together with her co-founder Ferdinand Mchacha, leads a fast-growing poultry enterprise in Blantyre with MWK 660,000 (USD 380) in daily egg sales alone, processing organic manure, manufacturing poultry feed, and working with 110 smallholder farmers through an integrated value chain. Her business also supports 4 women and 6 youth by providing eggs on credit to start retail businesses, alongside free training in sales and management.

# GROWING THROUGH DISCOMFORT

Before venturing into entrepreneurship, Treaser held a well-paying job in Lilongwe while her family was based in Blantyre, requiring her to travel every weekend. In 2017, while pregnant, she made the deliberate decision to leave the security of formal employment and start a business from scratch in Blantyre, closer to her family.

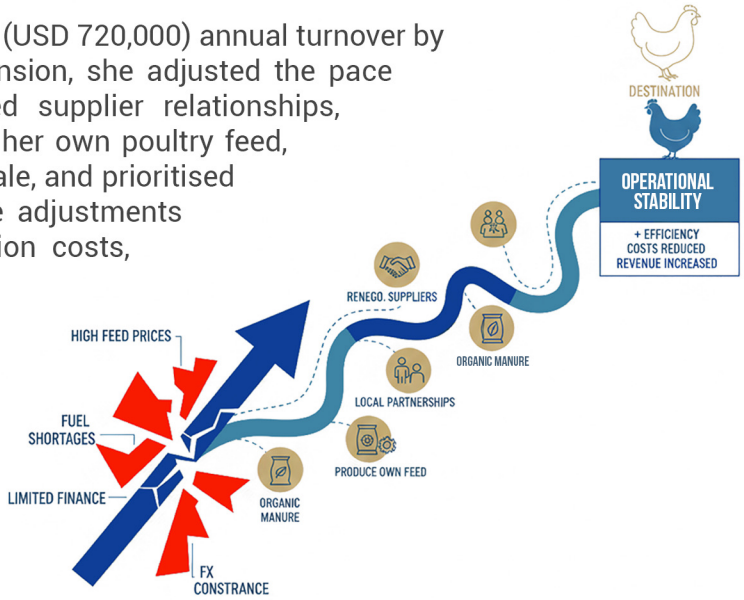
She began with 200 chickens in her backyard, producing an estimated annual turnover of MWK 3.6 million (USD 2,072) supported only by a garden worker and his wife. The work was exhausting, mistakes were common, and her record keeping was chaotic. Treaser, however, chose to keep learning rather than quit. She enrolled in business development programmes, sought mentorship, hired expertise where possible - including an accountant - and gradually improved her systems. She learned through trial, error, and persistence.

# ADAPTING TO A HOSTILE ECONOMY

As the business expanded, Malawi's economic conditions became increasingly challenging. Feed prices rose sharply, fuel shortages drove up transport costs, and foreign exchange constraints disrupted imports, making access to finance both limited and expensive.

Treaser's original growth target of MWK 1.26 billion (USD 720,000) annual turnover by 2025 became unrealistic. Instead of forcing expansion, she adjusted the pace without abandoning the vision. She renegotiated supplier relationships, strengthened local partnerships, began producing her own poultry feed, converted chicken waste into organic manure for sale, and prioritised operational stability over rapid expansion. These adjustments improved operational efficiency, reduced production costs, and ultimately increased revenue.

**She adjusted the path—without losing sight of the destination.**



# BUILDING SYSTEMS THAT OUTLAST THE FOUNDER

At the same time, Treaser recognized that long-term resilience could not depend solely on her personal effort. She formalised the enterprise into a limited liability company (LLC) with a functional board of directors, clarified staff roles, documented procedures, introduced strict record keeping, and recruited professional support. The business began to operate on systems rather than stamina.

Trust-based relationships with retail outlets — built through consistency and transparency — resulted in zero default rates, reinforcing predictable cash flow. Beyond her own enterprise, Treaser mobilized 75 women into a registered poultry cooperative, working toward a shared feed mill that would further reduce costs and risk across the value chain.

**Resilience is not only emotional strength but operational discipline.**

**"A BUSINESS THAT DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON THE FOUNDER'S ENERGY IS FRAGILE; A BUSINESS BUILT ON SYSTEMS CAN SURVIVE AND THRIVE THROUGH ANYTHING"**

# PURPOSE BEYOND PROFIT

Treaser nearly quit twice. Once after losing 2,000 chickens to disease, and again when feed prices doubled, leaving her working simply to break even. During these periods, the business generated little to no personal income, yet salaries still had to be paid and operations sustained.

What kept her going was not immediate profit, but responsibility to employees who depended on the business for income, to smallholder farmers supplying inputs, and to the households whose livelihoods were tied to the enterprise. Closing the business would have meant more than a personal loss; it would have disrupted an entire network of dependents. Instead of shutting down, she responded by strengthening her biosecurity and production management and rethinking her cost structure and gradually invested in producing her own poultry feed. This shift reduced her dependence on volatile market prices, stabilized production costs, and transformed a major threat into a long-term growth opportunity.

Today, GTFG Holdings records an annual turnover of MWK 477 million (US$274,588), supporting employees, smallholder farmers, and a growing number of women and youth entrepreneurs across its value chain.

Purpose carried the business through the seasons when profit could not. When your business solves real problems, it can weather even the hardest storms.

## KEY INSIGHTS FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN SHOCK-PRONE ECONOMIES

1. Adjusting the pace of growth is not failure - it is strategic resilience.
2. Vertical integration can reduce exposure to volatile input markets.
3. Governance structures and systems increase enterprise durability.
4. Purpose and stakeholder responsibility can sustain businesses during non-profitable periods.

**2017**

**K3,600,000 (US$2,072)**
ANNUAL TURNOVER

**2025**

**K477,000,000 (US$274,588)**
ANNUAL TURNOVER

**132X GROWTH**

# WHAT WE LEARN FROM TREASER'S STORY:
## PRACTICAL STEPS FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE

**R**

**RISK AWARENESS**
Understand your risks before they become crises. Track costs, monitor economic trends, prepare for environmental shocks, and build buffers where possible. Risk awareness protects stability.

**E**

**ELASTICITY**
Be flexible without losing direction. Adjust plans, renegotiate terms, innovate creatively, slow growth if needed—but keep moving forward. Elastic businesses bend without breaking.

**S**

**SUSTAINABILITY**
Focus on long-term strength, not short-term gains. Build trust, reduce inefficiencies, adopt climate-smart practices, and protect your reputation. Sustainability anchors businesses during turbulence.

**I**

**INTENTIONAL GROWTH**
Grow with purpose. Set clear goals and values, track performance, review progress regularly, and scale at a pace your systems can support.

**L**

**LEARN CONTINUOUSLY**
Every challenge carries a lesson. Reflect honestly on mistakes, adapt strategies, and use setbacks as data for better decisions.

**I**

**INVEST BACK**
Reinvest in systems, people, and skills. Strengthening operations today reduces vulnerability tomorrow.

**E**

**EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY**
Reduce dependence on single products, suppliers, or markets. Diversification spreads risk and increases resilience.

**N**

**NETWORK**
It is often said that ***"your network is your net worth."***
Strong businesses are built through relationships. Networks provide information, support, opportunities, and resilience during difficult times.

**C**

**CONTINUITY**
Document processes, train others, and ensure the business can operate even in your absence. Continuity planning protects against disruption.

**E**

**EMBRACE CHANGE**
Change is inevitable. Entrepreneurs who adapt quickly innovate faster and remain competitive.

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# FINAL REFLECTIONS

In Malawi's context, resilience is not optional. It is a strategic capability that enables women entrepreneurs to transform uncertainty into opportunity and build enterprises that sustain families, communities, and local economies. Treaser Mchacha's journey demonstrates that resilience is built daily—through discipline, systems, relationships, and purpose-driven leadership. When women entrepreneurs plan for risk, adapt strategically, reinvest wisely, and collaborate boldly, they build businesses that withstand shocks and create lasting impact.

***Resilience is not about returning to where you previously were before the challenges came, rather, it is about rising stronger than before. It is about learning to fall forward when setbacks come and choosing to grow and progress no matter what stands in your way.***

## Contact

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