BULE CASE STUDY—Malawi

Weather patterns are changing. Less rain is falling. Rivers are polluted. The environment is sending us a message.

People across the world are working together to care for the environment. In countries like Malawi in Africa, communities are taking steps to raise environmental awareness, to reforest bare land and to develop sustainable agriculture.

Bule (Boo-lay) and his son Wesley live in Gamphani village in Malawi. More than half the population of Malawi lives in poverty. The people suffer poor health from waterborne diseases, they have food shortages and their environment is degraded.

Caritas Australia and the people of Bule's community identified the problems the community faced and worked out ways of solving them.

Bule joined a Caritas supported program that aimed to improve food production, to provide access to safe drinking water and to address the problem of environmental degradation.

A village woodlot was established. "I learnt we should avoid cutting down trees carelessly – trees help in rain formation which we depend on for our crops," says Bule. The community planted tree seedlings on bare land. They will use the wood produced for building, for fuel and for medicinal purposes. Having a woodlot means that the forest is left uncut.

Caritas has taught Bule to make an energy-saving stove; this means less fuel, less smoke (and so better health) and quicker cooking times.

Like many people in Malawi, the family suffered stomach pains from drinking unclean water from the local well. Bule and other community members contributed bricks and sand to help construct a community borehole to provide safe drinking water. Bule also learned to construct a kitchen drying rack, rubbish pit, latrine and bathing room so sanitation has improved and waterborne disease has been reduced.

To increase food production the Caritas program lent Bule a goat and seeds that would survive the changing weather. He now grows maize and different vegetables like sweet potato and pumpkins. He uses the goat manure for fertilizer. He makes organic compost and has learned better ways to store the food he has grown. Bule has saved seeds from his new crops to repay the seed loan. He will soon repay the goat loan with the goat's first offspring, which will be handed on to another member in the farmers' group. He is also able to pay Wesley's school fees by selling the extra food he now grows.

"Instead of buying vegetables, we're eating them from our own garden. I can sell some soya and maize and earn up to $6 a day on average - we're eating three meals a day now," Bule explains.