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UN Resident Coordinator Maria Jose Torres described the UNDAF as a strategic, medium term results framework that provides a collective vision and response of the UN System to national development priorities and results. She said having national priorities at the top of planning efforts will enhance the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which has the overarching theme of leaving no one behind.

“The new UNDAF is grounded on three pillars which include (1) peace, inclusion and effective institutions; (2) human capital and population management; and (3) inclusive and resilient growth. Working jointly and using the integrated approach will help in addressing the root causes of underdevelopment in Malawi,” said Torres.

The implementation of the new UNDAF will enhance the purpose of Delivering Transformation as One among UN Agencies, including at the local level. This encompasses UN Agencies and their partners working together with the government for sustainable development in Malawi.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development Goodall Gondwe expressed his gratitude to the United Nations for the assistance and continued efforts in providing support to the government which has made significant strides in the health, agriculture, education and gender and development sectors.

The minister said: “The UNDAF pillars are well aligned to Malawi’s development objectives as outlined in the third Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS III). I have confidence that if we implement the new UNDAF, it can help Malawi reach its development aspirations.”

The indicative resource envelope for the UNDAF is about US$1.1 billion of which about $347 million is expected to be available, and about $742 million to be mobilised.
Women from diverse backgrounds commemorated the International Day of Peace on Thursday, 20th September 2018, with a call to recognise and enhance women’s contributions in ensuring peace in the country.

Speaking in Lilongwe at the national commemoration, organised by the United Nations in collaboration with Malawi Government and Chancellor College under the theme “The Right to Peace”, United Nations Resident Coordinator Maria Jose Torres said it is important to recognise women as peacemakers and peacebuilders because of their unique contributions.

“Women have a unique perspective in achieving peace,” said Torres. “Women in Malawi have been on the frontline in the battle for human rights, gender equality and individual dignity for a very long time, including rights of future generations to live a dignified life in a peaceful environment.”

Rose Chibambo, Vera Chirwa and Anastasia Msosa were highlighted as some of the female pillars and champions of human rights and sustainable peace in Malawi.

While acknowledging women’s contributions in mediating conflicts and ensuring Malawi’s peaceful transition to democracy, Torres noted that women in the country are still subjected to multiple forms of discrimination and violence, with many having limited space to contribute to decision-making processes aimed at ensuring peaceful co-existence.

The current ranking for Malawi on position 171 out of 189 countries on the 2017 Human Development Index and 148 out of 160 countries on the 2017 Gender Inequality Index, show that inequality is still high in the country.

During the commemoration, the women discussed their roles in ensuring inclusive institutions, justice for all and peaceful coexistence. They also signed the Lilongwe International Peace Day Declaration, which underlined that peace cannot be realised without women’s rights.

In the declaration, the women reaffirmed their commitment to promoting achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16 and 5 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, respectively, through initiatives that enhance peaceful coexistence and gender equality.

“We recognize the importance of contributing to promotion of inclusive societies that are safe and violent-free spaces for women at all levels of society,” reads the declaration in part. “We pledge using our efforts to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions that will contribute to the creation of a safe and inclusive Malawi for sustainable peace, democracy and development.”

Malawi’s First Lady Madame Gertrude Mutharika said to improve on gender equality and empowerment of women, more girls and women need to be educated and participate in different aspects of life, including in decision-making processes.

“There is mounting evidence that women are powerful actors in sustaining peace in their communities,” said Madame Mutharika. “Research has shown that achieving gender equality helps in preventing conflicts.”

Minister of Civic Education, Culture and Community Development Grace Chiumia said government has put in place various laws and policies to address challenges women face when participating in peace and development processes, saying peace is critical for achievement of sustainable development.

The International Day of Peace is observed around the world every year on 21st September, with the aim of strengthening the ideals of peace.

During this year’s commemoration, countries joined hands in celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under the global theme: The Right to Peace – The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70.
Representatives from Government, the private sector, civil society organisations; the international community and traditional authorities in August met in Lilongwe at a roundtable event which challenged them to look at the problems that Malawi is facing and look at possible solutions that would propel the country to achieve SDG 2 by the year 2030.

Leading the team, Chief Secretary to the Government Lloyd Muhara tasked participants to the roundtable to keep in mind that the only acceptable number of hungry Malawians is “ZERO” and that it was important that hunger in Malawi should be eliminated at all cost; food security should be achieved and nutrition improved, and sustainable agriculture promoted if the country is to develop sustainably.

He noted that food insecurity and malnutrition in Malawi have stood in the way of the country’s development as a nation and continue to place Malawi amongst the least performing countries in the world in this respect and challenged everyone to play a part in ensuring an end to hunger.

“As we all know, the obligation to ensure a Malawi free of hunger and malnutrition is a collective responsibility involving the Government, Private Sector, NGO’s, Civil Society, Development Partners and Communities,” said Muhara.

The UN Resident Coordinator Maria Jose Torres stressed that coordinated approaches are needed to achieving Zero Hunger and ending malnutrition in Malawi.

Torres noted that no single institution can end hunger and child malnutrition on its own. This is because food insecurity is a result of multiple factors which require multi-sectoral solutions to deal with both immediate and underlying causes.

The Lead Convener of the Strategic Review, former Vice President of the Republic of Malawi, Dr. Justin Malewezi, urged participants to the national roundtable to critically look at game changers that will enable Malawi catalyse action towards SDG 2 by 2030.

The recommendations that emerge from the deliberations will inform policy initiatives within Malawi to 2030 and beyond to foster action on nutrition and food security, backed by evidence from trend analyses, models, policy reviews, institutional response and consultations.

The Malawi Zero Hunger and Malnutrition Strategic Review (ZHMSR) process will be conducted through 2018 over a period of about one year, with a final set of recommendations to be published by the Advisory Board in the first quarter of 2019.

The review process establishes a hunger baseline, determines gaps in the national food security and nutrition response and identifies priority actions needed to achieve SDG2.

The Zero Hunger and Malnutrition Strategic Review process in Malawi is a government-led, independent, analytical and consultative exercise to identify the key challenges that the country faces in achieving the second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 2), which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture or, in short, to achieve Zero Hunger and Malnutrition by 2030.
Collective and inclusive dialogue platforms are crucial in the prevention and reduction of violence and conflict in societies.

As Malawi prepares for the 2019 Tripartite Elections, such dialogue platforms are key in ensuring sustained peace, democracy and good governance.

While involvement in politics is a critical issue, too often, young people around the world have been affected by intra or inter-party clashes.

The National Peace Architecture Secretariat under the Office of the President and Cabinet - in partnership with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) - saw a great need to introduce the National Youth Peace Forum (NYPF), to among other issues - transform youths from various backgrounds and regions to play a positive role of catalyst of peace building in the country.

Therefore, to ensure that these youths have adequate knowledge and skills to enable them to embark on these peace-building campaigns, a workshop was organised from 3rd to 5th July 2018, by the implementing partners at Victoria Hotel in the commercial city of Blantyre.

The goal was to ensure that the NYPF Executive Committee and the members from the regions were empowered and provided with the necessary skills to start their activities as peace-builders and negotiators in the country.

Providing the crucial knowledge to the youth during the workshop were mentors from the National Peace Architecture (NPA) Secretariat, UNDP representatives, National Youth Council of Malawi (NYCOM), and a representation from the Ministry of Labour, Youth, Sports and Development.

Their presentations were on Conflict Analysis and Management, Early Conflict Warnings and Responses, the Importance of Advocacy and Volunteerism and the Legal and Policy Frameworks of the country.

“During the workshop, we learnt that the country might be deemed peaceful, but that peace can vanish within day. Therefore, as youths, we ought to value and always work to ensure the sustainability of the peaceful environment we have now. I was not aware that as a young person, I had a role to play in contributing to peace,” said one of the youths who attended the workshop.

During the workshop, the youth came up with their plan of activities for the year that is expected to guide them to reach all parts of the country with their messages.

Meanwhile, Malawians are being urged to join hands with the NYPF as it embarks on its journey of sustaining peace in the country.
Malaria is one of the major causes of death among children under the age of five. Globally, it kills a young child every single minute and causes 75 percent of all under five deaths. Malawi experiences more than four million cases of malaria every year.

Against this background, the Malawi National Malaria Control Program is working hard to eliminate malaria. The programme is improving access to malaria prevention and treatment drugs, and leading various prevention activities to control mosquito breeding.

Vector control programmes, which target malaria transmitting mosquitos, have been in use for decades. People use mosquito repellants and sleep under net to prevent bites. The World Health Organization (WHO) says since 2001 and estimated 451 million cases of malaria have been averted through the use of nets.

Vector control also works to suppress the mosquito population by targeting places where they breed. Because female mosquitos lay their eggs in water, chemicals can be used control them.

During the rainy season it is difficult to control mosquito breeding sites. However, during the dry season, there are few mosquito breeding sites, which helps to inform vector control programmes.

Drones

The University of Liverpool and Lancaster ran a project that assessed the potential of utilizing images captured by drones in mapping mosquito breeding sites. Using the Humanitarian Drone Corridor, established by the Malawi Government and UNICEF Malawi in 2016, the drones captured images of potential mosquito breeding sites.

Hundreds of images were captured from the drones, which were imported into a powerful computer and stitched together into a single aerial image. The final image was analysed for identification of mosquito breeding sites.

At the same time, an entomological investigation was also conducted the Malawi-Liverpool-Welcome Trust Research Centre. The investigation focused on collecting samples of water for identification of malaria causing mosquito larvae. Geographical coordinates were recorded at all locations where the sampling was conducted.

The coordinates were laid over the drone image, creating a better understanding of what mosquitos' breed areas look like.

In future, it might be possible to identify mosquito breeding sites, simply by using drone imagery. Malawi might also be about to enhance control of malaria by integrating drones into its vector control programs.
Developing countries like Malawi face a lot of challenges. Some of these challenges like sickness prevent people from actively participating in developmental activities and when left unchecked they lead to loss of lives.

Such challenges are like the recent cholera outbreaks that have hit Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia which have resulted in a number of deaths. In Malawi, the infections and deaths were controlled because of the timely response by different players including government departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations like UNICEF.

Apart from the traditional response activities like sensitisation of communities on prevention and treatment of cholera and provision of safe water, UNICEF employed the use of drones in cholera response activities. The drones were used to take aerial imagery of places most likely to be affected by cholera, the images were then printed out on big maps that were used to inform action plans to scale down its spread and impact.

Drones captures aerial photographs of all features on the ground. These aerial photographs are stitched together and maps are produced from such photographs. Bearing in mind that cholera is transmitted through oral faecal ingestion, maps produced from the drone flights highlight hygiene and sanitation features that fuel the spread of the outbreak of cholera.

Such features include public water points (Wells, Kiosks and Boreholes), pit latrines, damp sites, possible areas of open defecation and food sourcing points such as restaurants, fast foods places and butcheries. The maps are then given to communities to analyse and draw action plans to address any issues that may lead to the spread of cholera.

This approach gives UNICEF a chance to predict or tell the likelihood occurrence of a cholera outbreak and the estimated population likely to be affected.

Having such information in advance allows concerned communities, government departments and organisations to plan and prevent the occurrence of cholera outbreaks or plan for activities to reduce the impact in areas where an outbreak has already occurred.
Yetu Community Radio hit the airwaves at Dzaleka Refugee Camp in the central region district of Dowa on 7th August, 2018 becoming the first Community Radio to be set up in a refugee camp in the Southern Africa region.

UNHCR Malawi Representative, Monique Ekoko, said the radio station will enforce information sharing and enhance development activities at Dzaleka Refugee Camp, which has a population of 35,000 as well as the host community surrounding the camp.

The UNHCR Representative added that Yetu Community Radio will also provide jobs to community journalists and mobilizers who will take the lead in running daily activities and empowering young refugees.

“Definitely, the radio will help UNHCR share information among the refugees and the host community because a camp without communication is like a jungle. It will also build rapport with the refugee community through targeted news coverage, in-depth analysis and radio documentaries, phone in programmes, public interest and opinion stories as well as fostering communication and collaboration within the community itself,” Ekoko explained.

She added:“The health center may underwrite public affairs programming and bring awareness to the community of the services they can provide. All partners working in the camp can make announcements of various services they are offering at the community radio.”

The UNHCR Country Representative then appealed to Yetu members of staff who are refugees to adhere to and use broadcasting ethics to keep the radio alive, saying it would be unfortunate for MACRA officials to revoke the hard earned license.

Ekoko’s sentiments were also echoed by an official from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security, Samuel Malowa who made a special appeal to Yetu staff members to exercise professionalism describing radio as “a sensitive medium”.

Malowa said as government, the ministry assures press freedom for the radio to operate in the best interest of Dzaleka refugee camp and Dowa at large.

In his remarks, Group Village Headman Chimtengo from the host community that is also being covered by the radio hailed the initiative, saying the radio will help build co-existence between the refugee and host communities.

He added that Yetu radio will play a pivotal role in publicizing developmental projects being implemented in the area.

Yetu community radio station has been established after realizing the need for refugees to access accurate information and raising awareness about world events and important commemorations.

Yetu, which means “Ours” is a name derived from Swahili language, common among nationalities at the camp. The launch of Yetu Community Radio has since excited the 35,000 plus refugees and asylum seekers living in the camp as it has enabled them including the host communities surrounding the camp to advertise their various businesses.

The community radio which is broadcasting at a 100 kilometer radius is also allowing refugees and surrounding communities to learn more about the services offered in the camp and other pertinent issues of interest to them.

As part of efforts to promote peaceful co-existence between refugees and the host communities, UNHCR in early 2016 applied to the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) for a Radio Broadcasting Licence. The licence was subsequently issued in November 2016 and this allowed UNHCR to start the setting up of studio rooms for what was to become Yetu Community Radio.

A Radio Frequency was awarded in April 2018 after successfully set up and installation of the radio rooms with the subsequent launch on 7th August 2018.
As a key source of income, the majority of Malawi’s population who live in rural areas, rely on smallholder rain-fed agriculture, which is extremely vulnerable to climate change. Henry Msiska is a 49-year-old Lead Farmer from Mziliwanda village in Nchenachena in the northern district of Rumphi. To Msiska, delayed onset of rains is undoubtedly the biggest challenge in his agri-business.

“I remember some years back, the rainy season used to start in November and last in April or May. But nowadays, the rain would start in December and end even before March,” observes Msiska.

Due to this unpredictability of the present-day rainfall patterns his crops have been subject to new pests and diseases, a development that has drastically been reducing his farm yields. Despite growing more climate-resilient crops, it has still been very difficult for him to put more focus on them (crops) due to the changes in the climatic conditions. Msiska is not alone in this predicament as this phenomenon affects thousands of other farmers across Malawi.

However, with the use of tailored-weather information and advisories, that he and other community members are expected to be receiving through mobile phones, print and radio channels, under the M-CLIMES Project, such challenges are expected to be a thing of the past.

The M-CLIMES Project, which is being implemented with funding from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) aims at increasing the farmers’ adaptive capacity and their decision-making through timely provision of climate-related risks information.

With support from the UNDP, Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) is implementing the Project which is targeting 14 of the country’s food-insecure districts, in collaboration with the Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services (DCCMS), Department of Fisheries (DoF), Department of Water Resources (DWR), Department of Agriculture Extension Services (DAES) and National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM).

178,000 targeted farmers in 14 districts are expected to be reached directly by the Project, and 16,000 Lead Farmers under NASFAM that benefited from the Frontline SMS and 3-2-1 Service.

In collaboration with local information and communication technology service providers - Essoko and Airtel - local farmers will be supported, not only to access climate information, but also crop specific advisories. This is expected to enhance existing platforms used to disseminate agricultural advisories to the farmers.

As one of the activities under the M-CLIMES Project, NASFAM took lead in a profiling exercise of Lead Farmers in Rumphi District, to collect information on the types of technologies the Lead Farmers promote, type of crops they grow and livestock they keep as well as their level of understanding on climate change issues. Lead Farmers are the farmers who have volunteered to deliver the required climate advisories to the other farmers, known as Contact Farmers.

The information collected in the profiling exercise will be analyzed and used to develop climate/weather-related content to be provided to the farmers.

During the interaction with the Lead Farmers, it was acknowledged that the late onset of the rainy season adversely affects their farming. They expressed how farmers are in desperate need of reliable information on climate and farming practice to make the best decisions against the ever-changing weather patterns.

It was also noted that issues of mobility to reach out to their Contact Farmers is one of the main challenges faced by the farmers.

However, despite such challenges, Eldec Msonda (26) one of the Lead Farmers, explained how they all feel proud to help improve the livelihood of their Contact Farmers, by promoting more effective technologies and advising them on various agricultural skills.

“Some families used to be hit by serious food shortage, due to climate change. However, through diversification of crops from our advice, they no longer experience severe food shortage,” said Msonda.
Farmers exposed to markets beyond region

The 15th National Agriculture Fair brought together participants from non-governmental organizations and the public and private sectors under the theme “Access to Finance, Value Addition and Markets – Key to Agri based Industrialization” at Chichiri Trade Fair Grounds Blantyre from 12 to 15 September 2018.

In line with this theme, three United Nations agencies, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Food Programme and UN Women teamed up to showcase the support they provide to small holder farmers to make farming a business. Furthermore, under the European Union (EU) banner, FAO took part in presenting farmer field schools as a platform for empowering rural smallholder farmers to increase productivity, value addition and market linkages.

Farmers from seven districts were able to showcase products in which they had added value as well as meet potential buyers or even advisers in agro processing. In addition to gaining agri-business knowledge, participation at the National Agriculture Fair expanded farmers’ access to markets and value addition technologies.

“We no longer throw anything away when it comes to tomatoes, everything has a purpose even the peel is dried and pounded into powder form and used during the period when tomatoes are scarce, this fair has helped us to find new markets” said Doris Nkunika from Champhira Cooperative in Mzimba.

The women thanked the UN agencies for bringing them to Blantyre. For some it was the first time that they participated in such a showcase.

“Through participation in farmer field schools we have increased our yields tremendously and now this fair has opened our group to potential markets and agro technologies, which can benefit us” members of Msambamfumu FFS.

Collectively the farmers expressed that turning their farming into a business has boosted their productivity, which has in turn boosted their individual incomes and made them more self-sufficient.

“Being in the cooperative has taught me many things. I learn a lot from others and sell at a profitable margin,” said Margret Feleza from Bowe Farmers’ Cooperative in Kasungu. “I am now able to comfortably send my children to school and even have extra money to spend at the home. Before school fees were a nightmare and I sometimes had to sell livestock to ensure the children were in school.”

Margret is married with 5 children and 3 grandchildren.

She says because her farming is now a business she does not have to rely on her husband to support the family as he has two other wives.

For Esther Lubani, joining the Lifidzi Cooperative in Salima wasn’t an option but a must, after she saw that other farmers were growing their farming business.

“I saw that at the cooperative we learn a lot and we are able to market our products at a better price that relying on vendors,” she said.

She says because WFP has helped members of her cooperative with a direct link to markets, through the Home Grown School Meals programme – to Lifidzi and Naliomba Primary Schools, this has enabled them to provide for basic necessities for their families and has accorded them a “good life”.

Through the Home Grown School Meals programme WFP links farmers to schools where they supply locally grown food to ensure that students are provided with daily diversified meals.

Members of the cooperative especially women noted that they no longer have to live with the mentality that they need to be supported by men, they are able to buy anything for themselves and they feel empowered, they feel like they can achieve anything.

The UN agencies support greater participation of women farmers in the entire agriculture value chain. This starts from decision making at household and cooperative levels on production, value addition and market access.
Malawi has begun its 2018 Population and Housing Census, using tablets rather than a paper-based questionnaire to collect data, in its first-ever digital census undertaking.

This is Malawi’s sixth census. Themed “Be Counted – Leave No One Behind”, the exercise is being supported by various partners, including UNFPA, and will run for 21 days.

The first census, conducted in 1966, counted 4 million people. Further censuses were carried out in 1977, 1987, 1997 and 2008, collecting demographic, economic and social data and information on all those who live in the country.

“The information generated by a population and housing census is critical for development,” said Young Hong, UNFPA Representative for Malawi. “Without accurate data on the number of people, their distribution and their living conditions, policymakers do not know where to invest in schools, hospitals and roads. Those most in need remain invisible.”

In 2017, the National Statistics Office (NSO) begun preparations for the 2018 Census, which has the largest number of temporary census field staff ever engaged to collect the data. The undertaking involves enumerators, field supervisors, control centre supervisors, and district supervisors.

“I have been counted”

After day one of the enumeration, members of the community have expressed their satisfaction. “I have been counted,” said Cyrus Bengo, commenting on the 2018 Census facebook page.

A census publicity and public education campaign was launched in June and subsequently engaged various groups of people, including community leaders, to mobilize communities to take part in the census.

The 2018 Population and Housing Census has been supported by USAID, UKAID, United Nations in Malawi, GIZ, Government of Norway, People’s Republic of China and Standard Bank of Malawi.
During a week-long mission to Malawi from 2 – 8 September, UN Women Regional Director for East and Southern Africa, Dr Izeduwa DereX-Briggs, visited Malawi with the aim of observing UN Women's operational response at country level and assess how it contributes to the implementation of the country’s national development priorities and plans.

During the mission, the Regional Director had an audience with the Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, Hon. Dr Jean Kalilani MP, Development Partners, the UN Country Team and representatives from Civil Society.

She also visited thematic programmes in the field and took part in a UN Women Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) meeting, convened by Centre for Multiparty Democracy (CMD) on the engagement of political parties on enhancing the participation of women in politics, in preparation for the 2019 Presidential Tripartite elections. Dr Izeduwa DereX-Briggs remarked “For women, it is their right too to participate in politics. There is also need to seriously address Violence against Women in politics and elections so that women participate in a violence-free environment”.

The Regional Director conducted three field visits. The first visit was on a project for persons with Albinism where she went to see how UN Women is promoting the human rights agenda through the One UN Human Rights Window – Protection of Persons with Albinism project, with support from UK AID in collaboration with the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM).

The Regional Director also visited a project promoting girls rights under the Joint Programme on Girls Education (JPGE) HeForShe initiative, targeting girls rescued from early marriages, with the aim of learning from their experiences and how traditional leaders and communities are working together to end child marriage and other harmful practices in close collaboration with the Ministry of Gender.

The third field visit was with the Women Economic Empowerment program and aimed at appreciating how UN Women is promoting the economic empowerment of girls and women with disabilities. She visited a Honey Production, textile and garment making Cooperatives, who work in collaboration with the Department of Agricultural Extensions Services (DAES) and Malawi Council for the Handicapped (MACOHA).

During her visit to Malawi, the Regional Director emphasized the importance of transformative gender programming in decision making positions, political participation as well as women's economic empowerment in the country.

At the end of her trip, the Regional Director reiterated that UN Women will continue to work closely with the government and traditional leaders in ending child marriages through advocacy, lobbying and capacity building of traditional and religious leaders as custodians of culture on gender related laws and behavior change interventions.
Behind the Bwananyambi mountains in southern Malawi, stands a proud building filled with children. It is a cold morning but the warmth from the children’s care-givers comforts and surrounds them.

In one of the rooms, the chants of adult and children voices are saying, “Well done. Well done. We are proud of you. You are great at this!” as children are being congratulated for correctly reciting their vowels.

It’s another normal, albeit, exciting day at Tigwirizane early childhood development (ECD) center. ECD is an educational technique that uses stimulation to help the brains of young children develop. In poor communities such as this one, many young children are left idle as parents go out to work and don’t have books or toys to engage them.

The name of the center, “Tigwirizane” means “let’s unite” and reflects the spirit of the people of nearby Kuluwe village in ensuring a bright future for their children through education.

The chief of the village, Danger Maulidi, known as Village Headman Kuruwe, said when the school first opened in 2008 children were taking lessons sitting under a tree as they didn’t have any classrooms.

Maulidi said village elders decided to construct a grass thatched building to provide shade. He said the thatched structure was not adequate when it was cold or during the rainy season.

“We had been asking for support to build a school from the village development committee, and other community-based organizations,” says Maulidi.

He says he wanted to build a classroom block to serve as an ECD center. Then one day he got a call from an organization called the Namwera AIDS Coordinating Committee (NACC).

“They told us to start making bricks for a building. We moulded 140,000 bricks in two months.”

The NACC is a local organization which works to promote people’s wellbeing and economic empowerment.

Through its work on ECD, it partnered with UNICEF in 2017 to promote services in the district. One of the focus areas under the partnership is supporting communities build ECD centres.

Jasiya Alick, ECD project officer from NAC, said they selected Kuluwe village for the project because it needed a center and because people seemed ready to help.

“The local people had already molded bricks and were determined to improve ECD education by building a new structure and provide a better learning space,” says Alick. UNICEF supported the project with cement, wood, iron sheets, sand, bricks and paint and the building was completed last May.

To ensure the building is maintained properly, NAC has established a technical working group to oversee the management of the school and bring together all the necessary services.

“I am so happy because what I was looking for has now been found. Children can now learn in a good structure. I urge other villages to take after us,” says the chief.

Agness Maida, a mother of two children at the school, said the new structure was helping children get an education and could eventually help them find jobs.

“This school can help us build our community as our children will go to primary school having learned almost everything they need to know,” says Maida.
A 10-minute walk on a rocky pathway past streams up a hill, takes us to a clearing with one house sitting on it with cassava vines growing in the surroundings, resembling a log cabin out in the woods. In this pathway, Audney Nkhata, a Government Health Surveillance Assistant (HSA) for Kachere Health Centre, in the Nkhatabay district is leading the team visiting different households to share messages on best nutrition practices.

“People just have to learn that they need to eat healthy. In Nkhatabay there is food in abundance; fish, cassava, yams, potatoes, groundnuts, bananas, beans, maize and pears. When we meet the people in their households we teach them how to cook the different types of foods so they can improve their nutrition and how to prepare nutritious foods they never thought of,” says Audney.

Despite its scenic beauty, Nkhatabay district suffers from poor nutrition indicators. Being perched on the shore of Lake Malawi on one side, with rolling ever green hills on the other, the district’s stunting rate still stands at 33 percent despite the area being well resourced with water and land for growing of nutritious foods. Across the country, and particularly here, chronic malnutrition, is greatly attributed to cultural practices and lack of knowledge of the right kinds of food to eat.

After a 10 minutes’ walk, Audney reaches the home of Rizzie Mwale, a teen mom (18) who benefitted from nutrition support provided at Kachere Health Centre during her pregnancy. “I felt weak and tired all the time and when they checked my weight, which I was told was very low, I was immediately given nutritious foods,” said Rizzie.

Rizzie believes she could have lost her life. “It is always hard to find the right foods and eat healthy when you are pregnant out of wedlock. The health workers are constantly paying visits to us, teaching us how to make alternative healthy meals and also ensuring that we properly prepare the porridge prepared with nutritious food, that we receive from the health centre. If it weren’t for that support I would have died,” she said.

The nutritious food Rizzie is mentioning is highly fortified blended food through WFP’s Supplementary Feeding programme thanks to the support of Irish Aid. With this support, WFP is treating moderate acute malnutrition among pregnant women, new mothers and young children, all of whom are particularly vulnerable to the long-term effects of undernutrition.

Rizzie dropped out of school after getting pregnant but she dreams of becoming a teacher one day. Although she stopped school in Standard 5 she wants to go back and eventually become a primary school teacher. “I want to teach other girls and boys from my community and be independent,” she says, determined.

WFP has been supporting the Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) and Nutrition Care Support and Treatment (NCST) programmes in Dedza and Nkhata Bay districts with support from Irish Aid since 2012. WFP’s support covers the treatment of acute malnutrition, micronutrient supplementation and social behaviour change communication. The programme continues to achieve remarkable results, with the cure rate being at 89.2 percent; mortality rate at 0.5 percent, and the default rate at 5.8 percent.
Community outreach groups enable participants to carry out simulation sessions that expose them to the various hands-on aspects embedded in the Farmer Field School (FFS) methodology for subsequent application on their own farms.

One such group is Limbanazo FFS which was established by Master Trainer (MT) Lostina Banda as an agricultural behaviour change communication platform.

The FFS is located in Kachonga village, Kavuzi Extension Planning Area in Nkhatabay district, under the Mzuzu Agriculture Development Division (ADD).

Before the establishment of Limbanazo FFS, farmers were struggling to grow crops on steep slopes of the land, which led to a lot of run-off and loss of soil fertility. Crop diversification was non-existent as only maize was grown in the area season long. However, since the establishment of the FFS, crop diversification and soil conservation have been made possible through construction of bench terraces.

“The Master Trainer course at Mzuzu Residential Training Centre, under KULIMA Project, has opened my eyes wider as I have learnt new and simple technologies that I am sharing with members of this Farmer Field School. Together, we have established the terraces and study plots on which we are now growing and studying various crops such as tomatoes, Chinese cabbage, carrots, green pepper, and onion. In this area it is indeed better to grow crops on terraces rather than ridges as the terrain is so steep. We also save time as we don’t have to dig out ridges each time we plant, but simply apply manure and turn over the soil”, shares MT Lostina, who is the Agriculture Extension Development Officer (AEDO) in the area.

The name Limbanazo itself literally testifies to the struggles the group has gone through to get this far. As farmers get more knowledge, change attitudes, and understand the whole system of field ecological interactions through observation, analysis and decision making, they are able to reduce the negative impact of pests and diseases.

Through the study plots on the terraces, farmers are learning improved management practices of various vegetables and pulses by conducting Agro-Eco-System Analysis (AESA).

“We now understand that the health of a plant is determined by its environment, which includes presence of factors such as pests, diseases, weeds, the sun, rain, and soil nutrients. Quite interesting is the fact that we now know that there are insects which are beneficial to our crops in other words we call them friends and natural enemies which promote or affect survival of our crops”, says happily FFS member, Louis Ndao.

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