The preliminary results for the 2018 Population and housing census reveal an annual intercensal growth rate of 2.9 percent and an overall population growth of 35 percent. “This growth rate is typical of a country with high fertility rate and suggestive of rapid population growth,” says UNFPA.

The results also show about 51 percent of Malawi’s population below 18 years. Further details also show that slightly more than half of the population are females (51 percent) and almost 84 percent of population live in rural communities.

The Government through the National Statistical Office (NSO) conducted the 2018 Population and Housing Census (PHC) from 3rd to 23rd September under the theme: Be Counted—Leave No One Behind.

The Population and Housing Census is a total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analysing, publishing and disseminating demographic, economic, and social data and information of all persons and their living quarters in a country at a particular time.

The NSO conducts censuses in order to generate current and most reliable data for development planning, policy formulation, service delivery and monitoring and evaluation of various development programmes in the country.

The final full report of the census is scheduled to be released in April 2019. This shall be followed by series of analytical reports covering various themes. The preliminary report can be downloaded on the resources page.

The 2018 PHC was supported by various partners including The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Family/Malawi, United Kingdom International Development (UKAid), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Government of Norway, the Irish Government, the German Government, Deutsche Gesellschatt fur Internationale Zusammernabe (GIZ) and the Standard Bank.
For years, Synod Misomali was trying to make money cutting down trees from the hills surrounding Mposa, a small village of Southern Malawi, and burning them to produce charcoal that he’d sell it in the market for a few dollars. But this practice has come to an end.

“When I was younger, the forest around the hills was thick and we had good harvests,” says Misomali. “We reached a point when we were receiving fewer rains every year and we couldn’t harvest enough anymore,” he added.

“When I was younger, the forest around the hills was thick and we had good harvests.”

That’s how the vicious circle started. As villagers like Misomali started cutting down trees, more frequent droughts were hitting them harder. Misomali was harvesting less but cutting more trees to make more charcoal and buy the food he could not produce anymore.

In Mposa, the effects of deforestation were glaring. Water from the hills was washing away crops and fertilizers downstream, land was degraded and couldn’t hold moisture. And Misomali’s family would sleep on empty stomach several days a year.

“Why on earth would I want to burn trees again?”

Since 2016, WFP is supporting the villagers of Mposa to rehabilitate their land. Misomali stopped burning trees, he is now planting them. “We planted over 26,000 tree seedlings around the hills to control water flow. We also dug a 2-kilometre long deep trench at the foot of the hills to harvest water runoff and protect the downstream area from erosion.

As part of an integrated resilience-building package supported by WFP and the United Kingdom, Mposa villagers also began irrigating the dry land using solar powered equipment. They have also developed vegetable gardens where they produce their own organic compost and use fuel-efficient stoves which consume less firewood.

“Why on earth would I want to burn trees again? Last year, I grew tomatoes and green vegetables in the irrigated field. After selling everything, I got 20 times more benefit than I use to make with charcoal”, said Misomali with a wide smile on his face. “I could buy enough food for my family I have used part of the money to buy a sewing machine and a bicycle which my son uses to go to secondary school, a thing I couldn’t afford before,” concludes Misomali.

Malawi is hard-hit by environmental degradation and repeated climatic shocks. In this context, addressing the root causes of food insecurity is key to break the cycle of hunger. WFP’s resilience integrated approach supports 935,000 farmers to gradually enable them to meet their own food and nutrition needs and tackle climate change. WFP provides cash transfers to participants like Misomali to help meet their food needs while they create or rehabilitate assets to diversify agricultural production and protect their environment. In addition, WFP mainstreams an integrated package of risk management strategies which includes climate advisories for farmers, micro-insurance against drought, and community micro-credit schemes.
The Government of Malawi on 8 January 2019, received 220 motorcycles from Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). The motorcycles will be used to support the implementation of two projects (KULIMA and Afikepo) that FAO and UNICEF are supporting the Government of Malawi to implement, with funding from the European Union.

In his remarks, during the handover ceremony, FAO Representative a.i, James Okoth, stated that the donation of the motorcycles to Government of Malawi, with financial support from the European Union, is a response to mobility challenges the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development is facing:

"Mobility of extension workers remains one of the main challenges affecting delivery of advisory services. We are grateful to the European Union for having listened to our plea during the formulation and negotiation process. This consignment of 220 motorcycles being handed over today is the first batch of 450 motorcycles to be procured under the two programmes to facilitate frontline extension workers supporting the two programmes in the 10 districts," remarked Okoth.

The European Union Ambassador to Malawi, Her Excellency Sandra Paesan, stressed the European Union’s commitment to supporting the Government of Malawi to meet its development goals, by working with partners such as United Nations agencies, so that attendant challenges affecting food and nutrition are addressed.

"The European Union has understood the importance to support and improve mobility of government staff to ensure both the coordination role as well as to effectively provide advisory services both for agriculture and nutrition. It is hoped that these motorcycles, in addition to the 14 vehicles handed over last year (June 2018), will significantly improve the mobility conditions for coordination and provision of services related to the two programmes, but also the overall mobility and operations by front line staff in the 10 districts of KULIMA and AFIKEPO. I would like to take this opportunity to thank FAO for having expedited implementation of activities in collaboration with Government departments, and for the rapid acquisition of these motorbikes.”

Agriculture Minister, Joseph Mwanamvekha, thanked the European Union, UNICEF and FAO for the donation of motorcycles.

"We are supposed to have more than 3,000 extension workers but currently we only have 1,500. These motorcycles will go a long way to ease mobility challenges that our extension workers are facing and enable them to cover large areas to provide the needed extension service, including supporting the fight against challenges such as fall armyworm infestation, banana bunchy top disease and cassava mosaic disease that farmers are facing. As Government we are very grateful for this assistance”, said the Minister.

FAO is supporting the Ministry of Agriculture in implementing the project “Revitalising Agricultural Clusters and Ulimi wa M’ndandanda through Farmer Field Schools”, which is within the framework of KULIMA Programme. The specific outcome of the project is sustainable increase of agricultural productivity and diversified production, within the context of a changing climate. The project aims at strengthening agricultural advisory services through a transformative extension methodology – the Farmer Field School (FFS), within the framework of the District Agricultural Extension Services System (DAESS).

FAO and UNICEF are working in collaboration with the Department of Nutrition, HIV and AIDS (DNHA) in implementing the Afikepo Programme. Afikepo, which means “let them (the children) develop to their fullest potential”, specifically seeks to address chronic malnutrition in Malawi. The activities being implemented jointly by FAO and UNICEF are supporting the diversification and intake of safe and nutritious foods to achieve optimal nutrition for women of child bearing age, adolescent girls, infants and young children.

Both KULIMA and AFIKEPO Programmes are being implemented in 10 districts; namely Chitipa, Karonga, Nkhotakota, Salima, Kasungu, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje.
Malawi launches the HPV vaccine

The Ministry of Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization launched the national Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination programme for all girls aged 9 to 14 years old on 10 January.

The launch took place at St Charles Primary School ground in Mangochi and it was graced by the Minister of Health and Population, Mr Atupele Muluzi.

In his speech the Health Minister stated that cervical cancer is the commonest cancer of all cancers among women. “Cervical cancer is the main cause of cancer deaths among women aged 15-49 years in Malawi. Last year, there were over 4,000 new cases diagnosed and close to 3000 died from cervical cancer,” the minister said.

The Minister went on to inform the gathering that the HPV vaccine programme that he was launching would prevent the deaths of women due to cancer of the cervix. The rationale being that almost all the 9-year-old girls who will receive the two doses of HPV vaccine as per schedule, will be immunized against Human Papilloma Virus which causes cervical cancer and other diseases of the reproductive system.

Dr Fabian Ndenzako, who is the acting World Health Organization Representative, assured the audience that the WHO and all partners in the health sector were committed to providing technical support to the government to ensure that the introduction of the HPV vaccine becomes part of a coordinated and comprehensive strategy in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal number 3 which is – attaining good health and wellbeing of the people in Malawi.

Malawi plans to introduce the HPV vaccine through the routine immunization program for all girls of 9 – 14 years of age as recommended by the World Health Organization.

In this initial plan 241,000 nine-year-old girls will receive the vaccine this year. The programme will expand the coverage to other age groups as more of the vaccine become available.

Other distinguished guests were Secretary for Health, Dr Dan Namarika, Chief of Health Services, Dr Charles Mwansambo and the District Commissioner for Mangochi Reverend Chimphepo among others.
It is mid-morning in Mangumba village in Zomba, Southern Malawi, and Neverson Nazombe’s day is off to a good start. An hour before, he set up a health clinic under a tree and asked mothers from the surrounding houses to join him with their children, under the age of five. About 20 women came.

First, Neverson, a community health worker, spoke to them about the critical and preventive services that he and other health workers across the country were providing. He then proceeded to hand out a range of treatments - vitamin A, albendazole, vaccines and malnutrition screening.

Done with this group of 20, Neverson moved on to the other side of the village. He does a few house-calls before meeting another group of 20 or so mothers and their children in a central location close to a borehole.

Neverson has been a community health worker for 12 years, providing primary health care to children under the age of five in this community. This week, known as Child Health Days, he has an important task: to reach all children under five in his area with a package of preventive medicines. These include vitamin A supplements to boost immunity and prevent blindness, de-worming tablets to treat intestinal worms and prevent anaemia, routine immunizations, and monitoring for malnutrition.

Child Health Days is a Government of Malawi campaign that UNICEF and partners such as USAID support. It brings critical, life-saving services to children in remote areas. During the Child Health Day campaign last June, health workers across the country reached 2.1 million children.

“For me, every day must be a Child Health Day. It is important for us to provide preventive services and messages to parents and their children because we know that this saves lives,” says Neverson.

Mangumba village is a long way from a health facility and the need here is great. Emily Peter, 33, lives at one of the houses Nazombe called by today. Her one-year-old son Chimwemwe got his shots without having to go to the hospital.

Emily says the fact that a health worker is providing critical services right in the village makes a big difference for families. “It’s better when the health workers come to us. It saves us transport costs to get to the hospital,” says Emily Peter.
Seated on a long table cluttered with pliers, screwdrivers and other electrical tools and equipment, is Diane Mgemezulu Mwanza. Her face concentrated as she works on the equipment in front of her.

She is one of the technicians, working to repair and maintain the Biometric Registration Kits that have been used for the voter registration exercise, and based at the Malawi Electoral Commission Warehouse in Lilongwe.

The Biometric Registration Kits that enabled the use of the National Identity Card as the primary means of identification for the voter registration has been lauded by some, as key to having the cleanest voter register in Malawi’s history.

As an essential component for the electoral processes, the smooth and successful operation of the voter registration exercise, has been dependent on the work of the National Registration Bureau technicians like Diane, who worked diligently in maintaining and repairing the Biometric Registration Kits that were used in all the phases of the exercise.

The story of Daine Mgemezulu as one of the trained technicians, is one of dedication and resilience as she follows her dream in a field that is largely dominated by men.

“I became interested in the field of Computer Sciences when I became aware of the trend that the world was going towards, in terms of technology advancement. This is what drew me to it. I wanted to be part of the group working to help Malawi develop technologically. I did not want to be left behind in my knowledge and passion, so I enrolled for a programme in Information Technology in 2009. From there, I decided to go further and enrolled for a bachelor’s degree programme at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College,” said Diane.

The field of Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, famously known as STEM, has historically carried the stereotype as a field for ‘men and boys’, that is embedded in our society and continues to hinder women’s representation in the field.

The young women technicians trained and oriented by the National Registration Bureau in the aspects of computer sciences and electrical engineering, are an excellent demonstration on how the Electoral Support project has gone far and beyond to challenge gender stereotypes within their workforce in the electoral processes.

The Sustainable Development Goal 5, calls for achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. And similarly, the Gender Equality Act that was enacted in 2013 in the country, calls for enhancing women’s equal rights including access to economic resources through education opportunities and employment opportunities in public service.

However, although women’s participation in all areas of society is important to make lasting change for themselves and for the nation, in many ways women and girls lag behind.

UNDP Malawi is working with other partners in promoting the participation of women and youth in the electoral processes, as Malawi prepares for the 2019 Tripartite Elections.

As UNDP Acting Resident Representative, Ms. Claire Medina states: “We have a lot of young women who were either previously hired during the Mass Registration Campaign, and some that are new recruits, operating the Biometric Registration Kits. All those hired have also mentioned that this work exposure was precious experience they could take forward into a future career.”
Diane explains that the knowledge and skills gained from her work, both as the Registration Officer for the National Registration Campaign and now as a technician, responsible for maintaining the Biometric Kits that were used for the voter registration will help her grow her career.

“Even though this is quite a short contract, I have still managed to learn a few important things to help grow my career in this field. The training we were given was a bit more theory, so this practical work has been enlightening and exciting to do the actual work," she said.

Promoting women empowerment is one of the crucial roles that UNDP in partnership with the UNWomen Malawi continue to advance, including in its work for the Electoral Support Basket Fund Project, that is financed by the EU, DFID UK, Ireland, Norway, USAID, and UNDP itself.

“To make sustainable development work for all, we need effective and inclusive governance institutions that embrace excluded groups. We must therefore ensure that women and other excluded groups participate in elections processes," said Medina.

Diane has nothing but praise for the other technicians and officers working to support the electoral processes.

“Unlike some of my previous experiences, working for this assignment that has a lot more men than women, has been easier than I expected. They treat us equally and we work together, regardless of our gender," she said.

To help other women in advancing their careers, Diane is using her experience in a field that has traditionally been associated as 'more suited for men' to reach out to other women to stay in school and follow their dreams.

“My message to the women out there struggling and being excluded simply because of their gender. Let us stand up and demand to be treated as equal human beings. There is no such thing as a field that is more suited for men than women. Find what you are passionate about, get the required skills and education and follow your dreams," she said.
Women in Malawi rarely use banking services to manage the finances of their business. Considering the role that women play in providing food, education, health and other important household needs, increasing their access to finance would not only benefit their households but the whole country.

One key challenge facing women entrepreneurs in Malawi is their inability to access the credit needed to procure means of production. The challenge stems from the fact that macro and micro financial programmes are largely designed, crafted and implemented with the male head of household as the intended client and fail to recognize that women are active, productive and engaged economic agents with their own financial needs and constraints.

The 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) took place in March 2018 focusing on a theme titled ‘Challenges and Opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.” The theme was considered particularly pertinent given the manifestation of rising gender inequalities and the impacts of climate change that are evident in the lives of rural women in various countries including Malawi.

The meeting considered a wide range of challenges and opportunities to rural women’s empowerment as well as the relevance and importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to rural women’s human rights in three domains namely: land and other resources; food sovereignty for nutritional empowerment; and an adequate standard of living and social protection.

As part of the implementation of the resolutions from CSW62 and preparations for CSW63 which will take place in March 2019, UN Women, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare and the Department of Agricultural Extension Services facilitated an interface meeting on 30th January 2019 in Lilongwe. Women farmers and women entrepreneurs living in rural areas all over Malawi held discussions with micro and macro financial institutions on promoting financial inclusion of women. Beneficiaries of Village Savings and Lending, small scale business women and stakeholders that have been supporting them also participated.

The main objectives of the interface meeting were to lobby the financial Institutions to develop specific products, and procedures to promote women’s access to credits and provide a conducive environment for women to access finance; and to identify additional activities and realistic action plans by all stakeholders to improve rural women access to finance, thereby directly implementing CSW 62 resolutions and informing preparatory work for CSW 63.

In her opening remarks, the Minister of Gender, Hon. Cecila Chazama, remarked that it was important to engage all women to ensure financial inclusion. She called upon financial institutions to provide financial products and policies to support enhancement of businesses owned or managed by women.

Speaking at the event, Clara Anyangwe, the UN Women Malawi Representative emphasized the importance of coordinated efforts in empowering women through financial inclusion. “Financial Institutions have to ensure that financial products are tailored to the needs and situation of women living in rural areas”.

During the meeting, women farmers and entrepreneurs stipulated that the conditions put forward by microfinance institutions are not conducive for women. Women farmers and entrepreneurs shared some of the opportunities and challenges they face including difficulties in accessing credit to grow their business and produce their products.

Some women cited high transactional costs, lack of tangible assets for women and inadequate information on existing opportunities as barriers in financial inclusion they face. Best practices that can be replicated and sustained were also shared. One best practice cited was that some financial institutions provide capacity building before issuing loans.

By the end of the meeting, microfinance institutions made strategic resolutions to improve financial inclusion for women.
As a field officer for an agency dedicated to empowering women and children, Phillipina Nkota is passionate about teaching young people how to stand up to violence and abuse.

Every week Nkota and her colleagues, who work for Ujamaa Pamodzi Africa, a non-government organization, visit primary schools in Mangochi.

“When we go to the schools we teach the children verbal skills and physical skills to defend themselves against violence,” says Nkota.

“Usually physical skills are the last resort. We mostly emphasize to them to use their voice and scream, and we encourage them to speak out and report abuse.”

Phillipina has been working with children for 4 years now. She works on the IMPower project delivered by Ujamaa Pamodzi Africa, as part of the UNICEF-supported Safe Schools Programme. The aim of the Safe Schools Programme is to make schools, homes and communities safer for children.

Ujamaa field officers and volunteers work with school teachers and mother groups to help children live a life free from violence and abuse while they learn in a safe and supportive environment.

The collaboration with mother groups has been critical. Group members are regularly invited to participate in the IMPower programme classes that Ujamaa field officers and volunteers hold. “Now we have a collective effort. Ujamaa, ourselves and chiefs, work together to ensure that the right action is taken when a child reports abuse,” says Harriet Bell, a mother group member in the Mkumba village area.

“We have seen a decline in cases lately. The good thing is that children, especially girls, are no longer shy to tell us if they have experienced abuse.”

The impact of the programme has been being felt in communities as children tell their parents what they’re learning in the IMPower programme. Ujamaa volunteers like Nancy Thunga acknowledge that communities are being informed about violence and abuse through children who tell their parents what they’re learning in the IMPower programme.

“Through our work, children are now able to enlighten their parents about abuse, because sometimes parents are the main perpetrators of violence in homes”, Nancy says. “Before these children enrolled in the IMPower programme they really didn’t know much about violence and abuse. Now if you ask them questions on that subject, they are able to answer easily, they even open up to you about their experiences. It shows they are learning a lot from the programme”.

At Masuku Primary school the girls and boys now know their rights and are respectful of each other.

Nkota and her team are kept updated by school teachers who let them know when students are participating in class and are improving in their studies.

“So far the impact in schools has been great. Absenteeism was previously high, students lacked confidence and were shy, and their performance was often poor.”

Tadala Pilingu, a 14-year-old student that Nkota has mentored, said people think she is crazy when they see her practicing some of the skills she has learnt.

“Sometimes when I am walking I scream ‘No, No!’. This is what they teach us in the classes. We’re also taught other skills like twisting a perpetrators finger or arm,” explains Tadala. “I joined the IMPower project because I wanted to know how to protect myself from violence, and Ujamaa officers have taught me that”, she adds.

UNICEF has been working with Ujamaa Pamodzi Africa since 2014 to implement in the Safe Schools Project in Salima, Dedza, and Mangochi districts, and have so far trained 12,000 girls and boys.

“Through the Safe Schools Programme girls are able to attend school and learn without fear or anxiety,” says Afroz Kaviani Johnson, UNICEF’s chief of child protection.

“The programme has been proven to reduce sexual violence victimization and increase self-defence-related knowledge among girls.”