UN MALAWI BULLETIN - OCTOBER 2018

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The United Nations in Malawi on 24th October 2018 presented the stories of ordinary Malawians with extraordinary courage, talent and drive to make a difference in their communities and show the way to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Malawi. This was part of United Nations Day celebrations in Lilongwe.

The contributions of the individuals were documented in an SDG video presented at the celebration (the link to the video will be released without delay). Their actions include promotion of girls’ education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, zero hunger, renewable energy production, inclusive societies and mediation, overcoming poverty and adapting to climate change, among others.

UN Resident Coordinator Maria Jose Torres said there are many individuals and organisations working to advance the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in Malawi as evidenced by significant progress the country has already recorded on some SDGs targets.

She also quoted the Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, to underline that the UN and its staff will not give up on overcoming poverty and supporting Malawi to take development to the next level following the SDG agenda.

“Practical actions of individuals help to put a human face to the SDGs. They show us that achieving SDGs is possible in Malawi,” said Torres. As an example, she mentioned: “Interventions to end malnutrition continue to bear positive fruits.”

She also acknowledged that gender parity in primary education was already achieved, noting that similar success would soon be made in secondary education if the country continues to improve girls’ primary to secondary school transition. To achieve this goal undergoing national efforts to keep girls in school will be boosted.

Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development Goodall Gondwe described development as a process that ought to improve the quality of people’s lives, saying the individuals recognised during UN Day commemoration demonstrated the meaning of development in improvements of their lives and communities.

“Development is not about building a bigger house than that of your neighbour,” said Gondwe. “It is about improving lives of people who do not have access to better quality of life like those living in remote areas who, for example, can’t drink safe water.”

“One chief has said his community no longer suffers from cholera which was their big problem because they now have safe water and good sanitation. That is development,” said the Finance Minister.

He commended the UN for its contributions towards improving lives of Malawians, saying the UN has supported government to reach vulnerable people in farthest areas with development interventions.

During the commemoration, the UN Communications Group displayed existing work under the SDG pillars of peace, poverty, prosperity, partnership and planet. Products from projects supported by UN agencies were also in display.

Salama Africa Singers and Dzaleka Acrobats from Dzaleka Refugee Camp, and Music Crossroads also spiced the commemoration with music and acrobatics performances, so participants could celebrate the 73th anniversary of UN and the over 50 years of engagement with Malawi.
Malawi has advised other African countries that strategic planning and proactive partnerships are key to overcoming social, economic, political and technological challenges that national identification and civil registration processes face.

National Registration Bureau (NRB) Chief Director Harry Kanjewe shared Malawi’s experiences on the registration processes at the 11th SDG 16+ Technical Consultation on Justice in Sierra Leone on 11th October, attended by government, civil society and private sector representatives from 11 African countries such as Nigeria, Namibia and Ghana.

Malawi conducted a six-month mass national registration campaign last year, during which over 9.1 million adult citizens were registered. Continuous national registration is underway. Mass registration of children, aimed at closing the gap, is the next upcoming endeavor being meticulously planned.

Kanjewe said Malawi’s national registration exercise required adequate resources to reach even the remotest parts of the country where connectivity, civic education and electricity are limited.

“Some citizens decided to forego the exercise on the pretext of being preoccupied with other issues, but the government in collaboration with the National Initiative for Civic Education, conducted a robust public awareness campaign throughout the country,” said Kanjewe. “This was particularly possible with the intervention of village-based civic education volunteers who live amongst the communities.”

He also said proximity of national identity cards distribution centres and citizens’ eagerness to possess the cards improved collection of the national IDs, with about 98 percent of the cards collected in many distribution centres.

The national registration system in Malawi has been linked with a digital civil registry, which records a person’s vital events, including birth, death and marriage.

“Given the successful initiation of a birth registration system in Malawi, the Malawi Government complements the civil registry with a death registration system. Though initially centralized, the system is now being decentralised to some district hospitals on a pilot basis. These elements of death registration constitute a pivotal component of the civil registry,” said the Chief Director.

He however noted that creating an interface between the civil and national registration systems requires good connectivity, saying an optic fiber backbone for high-speed internet, which Malawi Government laid in the country, provides a modern channel for data transfer on which government systems including civil and national registration operate.

Meanwhile, Malawi is linking the national ID system to other registration processes and services. For instance, the voter registration exercise for next year’s Tripartite Elections is using national IDs for eligible voters to register to vote.

“The Malawi National Registration Bureau is currently collaborating with various sector players of the economy with an aim of linking up the digital registry to various other systems. These include commercial banks and micro-finance institutions for financial inclusion.

“Other linkages include the Malawi Revenue Authority for citizens’ identification in tax registration. Further linkages will be established with Government line ministries of education, agriculture, transport, health and local government,” said Kanjewe.

The national ID is touted as a game-changer in Malawi as it provides an essential tool to enable people’s participation in a modern economy and access to basic rights and services.

The technical consultations in Sierra Leone were part a series of consultations that will feed into next year’s High-level Political Forum (HLPF), a United Nations central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.
The year 2016 was a remarkable year for Malawi and worth celebrating for years to come. With the launch of the national mass registration and identification system campaign, a transformational milestone was achieved, and the positive outcomes went beyond what was anticipated.

With more than 9.2 million Malawians registered for their national identity cards, and an established continuous registration system in all District Councils, this is a story worth sharing across all platforms as one of the best practices in this increasingly digital world.

The campaign successfully contributed to government’s efforts to guarantee the fundamental right to identify, entitlement and enjoyment of the full citizenship of Malawians.

There are many benefits of having a robust national identification system that can be leveraged for several purposes, one of which has been perfectly illustrated in this year’s voter registration for the 2019 Tripartite Elections currently underway in the country.

‘All it takes is less than a minute to register’, has been the frequently used saying in the different public spaces in the country. This is how fast the process of voter registration is taking now that the national identity card is being used as the primary means of identification for eligible voters as compared to the average 15 minutes in the previous years.

This is just one of the many positive outcomes on the linkage that has been established between the voter registration system and the national identity card; creating a ‘One Person, One Identity, One Vote’ system that has made registration easy and has helped lower the cost of the exercise as compared to the previous elections.

As stated by the United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Malawi, Ms. Maria Jose Torres, “The right to identity and nationality is embedded in the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is against this background that development partners including UNDP, DFID, the EU, Irish Aid, Government of Norway and USAID have all come together to support the Government of Malawi to realise this goal for the people of Malawi.”

As we celebrate the milestones achieved however, there is more to be done for the road ahead.

To enhance the effectiveness of the national identity system, more linkages and integration to other service provision institutions is vital, and Malawi has made considerable progress towards linking the national identity card to the different public, financial and social services available in the country.

As the Chairperson for the Malawi Electoral Commission, Dr. Jane Ansa, puts it, “The voters’ roll in the past elections had been a problem. Voters were having transposed photographs, misspelt names, sometimes not found at all at the centre they registered, multiple registrations and the Commission in some cases inadvertently was also registering foreigners or the under-aged due to lack of proper identification system. With the electronic biometric voter registration, these problems will automatically be eliminated”.

The established national identity system has helped to ensure that there is more accurate registration of voters and no multiple entries in the voters’ register in ensuring that every eligible Malawian citizen is able to exercise their right to vote for the upcoming 2019 tripartite elections.
A
t 12 years old, Innocent Katiya might seem a
little young to be an engineer. But the years
he’s spent at Nankhali Primary School have given
him all the qualifications he needs to help design
the school’s new classroom block.

Now in his last year of primary school, Innocent has
taken part in workshops where teachers, students
and community members gave their input in the
design and layout of the new building.

“The designs were great, but we advised the
engineers to add more toilet blocks because the
four that they had originally planned were not going
to be enough,” says Innocent.

“We also asked them to change the location of one
of the classrooms. We asked them to bring it closer
to the existing classroom block,” he adds.

His help will be much appreciated. Because the
school lacks buildings, classes are routinely held
outside under trees.

During summer, it’s very hot and the winds blowing
in from Lake Malawi bring in a lot of dust. During
the wet season, children often miss classes
because everything stops once it starts to rain.

But as part of the classroom building project,
Nankhali will receive new classrooms, a library,
toilets, teacher offices and teacher housing.

The project has been made possible with the
support of UNICEF and the famous German
footballer, Mats Hummels.

Construction of the classrooms is already
underway, and the excited children have been
watching the builders who are hard at work.

Innocent says he is happy to see the designs begin
to take shape on the ground. The foundation work
is almost done and soon the walls and roof will be
constructed.

Innocent is not sure if he will use any of the new
classrooms since he is almost finished primary
school. But he is excited that his younger sister,
Ellen, who goes to the school also and learns under
a tree, will enjoy learning in one of the new
classrooms.

In the meantime, Innocent’s experience helping to
design the new classrooms will no doubt help him

Our days of learning outside are almost over

Innocent outside one of the new blocks under construction

Innocent with his family

as he chases his dream of becoming a banker. “My
neighbour works at the bank. He has his own car. I
want to be just like him.”

In the meantime, Innocent’s experience helping to
design the new classrooms will no doubt help him
It’s thirteen degrees Celsius in the commercial capital city of Blantyre. Winter is taking its toll on the city and the hills are covered in fog. Yet the streets still are filled with people moving about, trying to make money to make ends meet. In the north-east of the city lies Ndirande township mosque. Muslims in the area put their business on hold for midday Friday prayers. Sheikh Ahmad Chienda begins Friday prayers by speaking about child marriage. Dressed in a Sheikh’s robe, he confidently addresses the congregation at the Ndirande mosque.

“In Islam, looking after a girl starts with the father. If the father dies, the siblings are meant to look after the girl. They are expected to educate her, protect her and offer her full support,” preaches Sheikh Chienda.

The Sheikh goes onto to speak about the effects of child marriage, which is common in Malawi. “Girls who get married at a young age have difficulties giving birth, which affects their health. This is a major problem that we’re creating in our society and we have to overcome it”, he utters. “Parents should also stop forcing their children to get married when they are still young”.

In Malawi, a recent change to the constitution outlawed marriage to a child under 18 years old, but extreme poverty continues to expose girls to the possibility of being married as their parents struggle to support their children. Child brides are often exchanged for livestock or money.

Laisa Yusuf Kazembe, a Muslim girl, is in her final secondary school class and has always prioritized education as opposed to getting married early. Young girls gathered at Ndirande Mosque were inspired by the Sheikh’s sermon and are adamant that gaining an education is the only way to stop early marriage.

“We always feel that education is for boys only and feel discouraged, and as a result, many girls drop out of school and decide to get married”, says seventeen-year-old Laisa Kazembe. “I am encouraging my fellow girls to go to school and be educated. Education is the key to a brighter future.”

UNICEF Malawi’s Chief of Child Protection Afrooz Kaviani Johnson says every child has the right to be protected from child marriage and their education. “Ending child marriage will help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, by allowing girls and women to participate more fully in society,” he says.

“We want to continue to work closely with religious and traditional leaders to end child marriage so that every child in Malawi can be educated, empowered and allowed to reach their full potential.”

The Muslim community holds regular gatherings with young people to help raise awareness about the issue of child marriage. Sheikh Chienda says, “When we bring young people together at youth camps, we try to tell them to focus on education.”
If the demographic dividend is to be harnessed, then the fundamental civil, political and socioeconomic rights of young people, including young women, must be protected and respected. This was stressed by UNFPA Deputy Executive Director and UN Assistant Secretary-General, Dereje Wordofa, at the continental launch of UNFPA’s flagship report, State of World Population 2018, in partnership with the African Union on 17 October.

“Ensuring these rights, and enabling youth and women to make informed choices, will undoubtedly contribute to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063,” he said.

The report, themed: “The Power of Choice: Reproductive Rights and The Demographic Transition,” calls for countries to enhance sexual and reproductive health and rights and choices, to better manage the demographic transition. It emphasizes that the resulting change in population age structure can help countries realize a demographic dividend, bolstering economic and social development.

The power to choose the number, timing and spacing of children can bolster economic and social development. The global trend towards smaller families is a reflection of people making reproductive choices to have as few or as many children as they want, when they want, it reads.

Family size is closely linked with reproductive rights which, in turn, are tied to many other rights, including the right to adequate health, education and jobs. Where people can exercise their rights, they tend to thrive. Where these rights are stifled, people often fail to achieve their full potential, which impedes economic and social progress.

The demographic transition, particularly the fertility decline, has been much slower on the African continent compared to other less-developed regions. The report emphasizes the need for increased and targeted investments in education and health, including sexual and reproductive health.

Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Ambassador Kwesi Quartey, said the report complements the African Union’s focus on harnessing the demographic dividend. SWOP 2018 will influence decision making and inform responsive development policies and strategies, particularly on issues of health and the well-being of people, migration, urbanization, employment and entrepreneurship, education and skills development, governance and youth empowerment.

Reproductive health and rights have improved substantially around the world since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, according to the SWOP report. People have more information about their reproductive rights and choices, and greater capacity to claim their rights. “The historic transition to lower fertility has emerged through people claiming their right to make choices about their reproductive lives, and to have as few, or as many, children as they want, when they want,” it reads.

Yet, most couples cannot have the number of children they want because they lack either economic and social support to achieve their preferred family size, or the means to control their fertility. The unmet need for modern contraception prevents hundreds of millions of women from choosing smaller families, the report highlights.
Many countries in the Sub Saharan Africa have high rates of child marriage. This is despite existence of laws that prohibit child marriage and set minimum marriage ages, the situation persists in part because of the strong traditional and religious practices which make it difficult to enforce the laws.

Research has shown that tradition and religion remain the strongest of all the major causes of child marriage. Other reasons established for the perpetuation of child marriage include poverty, gender discrimination, limited education, lack of economic options, insecurity in the face of conflict, child abduction and forced marriage in conflict situations.

To address this challenge UN Women is engaging traditional and cultural institutions through a series of regional consultations. The first meeting was held in Nairobi and brought together over 30 Traditional Leaders from 17 countries in Africa.

As a result, a regional consultation aimed at galvanizing and amplifying the efforts and strategies implemented by Traditional Leaders to end child marriage, FGM and other harmful practices in East and Southern Africa is being held in Blantyre, Malawi from 30th October to 2nd November 2018 with over 140 traditional leaders in attendance.

Speaking at the event, Hon. Kondwani Nankhumwa, Minister of local government and Rural Development stated that Malawi has extended the age of a child to 18 and thereby prohibiting any marriage for a child.

“Traditional leaders have been very instrumental in fighting child marriage, FGM and other harmful practices. Malawi is also removing all barriers that limit the girls staying in school as well as protecting girls and women from sexual violence. He appreciated chiefs for being very instrumental in the promotion of women’s rights and called for a clear action plan to advocate for change within the community and examine status of laws and how those laws can be implemented across the continent.”

His counterpart Hon. Jean Kalilani, Minister of Gender, Children Disability and Social welfare Malawi, emphasized the negative effects of child marriage stating that “Traditional leaders are the backbone of our communities, they are the symbols of our identity as African, they preserve our culture and historical roots.

This conference provides an opportunity for sharing best practices for ending child marriages. Child early and forced marriages perpetuate human rights violations. This practice hinders boys and girls from obtaining education and ultimately choosing their own destiny.”

Malawi has one of the world’s highest rates of child marriage. Half of girls are married before the age of 18, many because their families are too poor to support them. Teen pregnancies contribute to 20-30 per cent of maternal deaths in the country, and the low share of girls, only about 45 per cent, remaining in school past the 8th grade.

Traditional leaders in Malawi, recognize that under-age marriages and FGM are counter-productive and are at the forefront of dissolving all marriages involving under-age girls in various chiefdoms.

Speaking at the event Dr. Izedyuwa Derex-Briggs the UN Women Regional Director for East and Southern Africa called on governments and traditional leaders to more to end the vice. “Culture should not discriminate against our daughters. Child marriage is illegal in almost every country in the world.

However early marriage laws are rarely enforced, and families and girls are often unaware that these laws exist. The African Union must therefore work closely with its member states to ensure that there is increased awareness and that the laws are enforced.”
Child marriage is a human rights violation that has persisted despite laws against it and the practice remains widespread: Globally, one in every five girls is married, or in union, before reaching age 18. In the least developed countries, that number doubles – 40 per cent of girls are married before age 18, and 12 per cent of girls are married before age 15.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, forced and early marriage denies children their right to protection from harmful practices, abuse and exploitation, and takes away their right to develop to their fullest. Most countries have ratified this convention; however, the age of consent varies and is often below the UN recommended age of 18.

“For us to achieve the development of Africa and for the continent to harness its singular most important resource, we must prioritize investment in girls and the advancement of gender equality.’ Stated Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, African Union Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage.

The continent is however making progress in May 2014, the African Union launched the national campaign to end child marriage, as a critical intervention toward achieving the commitment in agenda 2063.

In 2015, the Africa Common Position on ending child marriage was adopted by the AU Heads of States at a Summit, and the first ever Africa Girls Conference on Ending Child Marriage was held in Maya, Zambia.

UN Women’s Africa Strategic Plan has prioritized protecting the health and well-being of women and girls of Africa by supporting interventions that end Harmful Social Practices, particularly child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation.

UN Women has made a strategic choice of placing the leadership and engagement of traditional authorities central to addressing the cultural norms and practices that promote child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation.
For many years, farmers in Kankhomba village and surrounding communities in Zomba district have faced the rage of the Namilambe river, washing away their crops, houses and property downstream. The result of climate change and severe deforestation in the surrounding communities, this has made the residents of Kankhomba village and neighbouring communities food insecure.

In 2017, with the support of the World Food Programme (WFP) and cooperating partner World Vision Malawi, the communities were taught how to control the flow of water from the hills and harvest it, as well as how to conserve the environment by planting trees on the hills and along the river banks.

The farmers, who call themselves ‘Community Champions’, dug deep trenches, built dams and planted vetiver grass - a type of hedge with strong roots that prevents erosion of the land - to control the water speed and stop it from flooding their fields.

Pilirani’s hard work used to be washed away by the river. Now he digs trenches to control the speed of water at the foot of the hills.

“I had always struggled to raise money to buy maize seeds and fertilizers for my garden. It pained me every year when water from the hills washed away my hard work. Thus, I did manual labour almost every day to buy food for my family,” says Pilirani Machemba, a resident of Kankhomba village, married with four children.

“Last year, I harvested only four bags of maize, however, this year (2017/2018 growing season) the crops did really well because my seeds and fertilizers never got washed away. I thus harvested 15 bags of maize,” adds Pilirani excitedly.

“Although we had little rains this year, I used the water we harvested in the deep trenches to irrigate my crop field and vegetable gardens,” says Pilirani.

Six other families have also benefited similarly from the project, doubling their yields in the 2017/2018 growing season. The communities were also trained on how to make compost manure for their fields.

“I made compost manure which I applied to complement fertilizers. This helped me to reduce by half the amount of money I was spending to buy fertilizers. At the same time, the compost manure retains moisture, so that even though we did not have adequate rains this year, my crops did not wilt,” explains Pilirani.

To address deforestation and its impact, WFP supported the ‘Community Champions’ with 25,000 seedlings which they planted around Ulumba hills and along Namilambe river. The trees will in the long-term help reduce siltation on the Namilambe riverbed.

For Pilirani and fellow members of ‘Community Champions’, the skills they have learned through the project will stay with them for the rest of their lives and will be passed on to future generations, thus improving their children’s livelihoods.

“Even if WFP and its partners now leave our community, they have given us a lifetime of skills— they will always be with us, helping to improve our livelihoods forever,” concludes Pilirani.

In 2017, nearly 724,000 people created community-owned productive assets through WFP Malawi’s Food For Assets (FFA). The communities constructed fish ponds, planted trees and sold vegetables from their backyard gardens. These activities helped families to diversify their diet, while allowing them to build resilience for future climatic shocks.
Zero hunger means working together to ensure that everyone, everywhere, has access to the safe, healthy and nutritious food that they need.” This was the spirit of the day on 23 October, at the World Food Day 2018 commemoration in Nkhotakota district, Central Region, Malawi.

This event was organized by the Government of Malawi’s Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and other partners including those from the private and non-governmental sectors.

Presided over by the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, Honourable Joseph Mwanamvekha MP, the event was held under the theme, “Our Actions are the Future: A #ZeroHunger World by 2030 is possible.”

In his speech, the minister highlighted actions which the government of Malawi is taking to ensure food security for all, as well as actions, which communities can take to ensure sustainable food supply for households.

“Smallholder farmers need to adopt new and sustainable agricultural methods to assist in increasing productivity and income whilst also ensuring resilience through approaches that are responsive to the environment.

Planting a diverse selection of crops can help to maintain healthy soils, regulate pests and diseases, improve pollination and reduce the impact of climate change.

Farmers should use seeds that are more resistant to drought and disease, breed livestock that are suited to local temperatures and plant trees that are heat and drought-tolerant,” he said.

This World Food Day event included field visits, which provided an opportunity for guests and community members to appreciate activities that are contributing to the reduction of hunger within Nkhotakota district.

A visit to Chilimbikitso club in Kalusa Village highlighted how this group, comprising 40 farmers, is benefiting from commercial pineapple farming.

“From pineapple farming we are able to support other farming practices, where we rear livestock and grow crops such as sweet potato, rice, cassava and maize for food. Our families have enough to eat thanks to pineapple farming,” said chairperson of the club Mr. Alfred Mang’ango.

Speaking at the event, FAO Representative ad interim, James Okoth, said, “FAO and the UN community in general recognize the Government of Malawi’s steadfast commitment to develop the agriculture sector and address attendant challenges affecting food and nutrition.

In particular, we commend the special attention given to the sector under the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 2017 – 2022 (MGDS III) and the National Resilience Strategy; the recently launched National Agriculture Investment Plan 2017/18 – 2022/23 and Malawi’s National Multi-Sectorial Nutrition Policy 2018 – 2022.”

The World Food Day commemoration included a visit to Bua Rice Irrigation Scheme; a value addition centre processing rice for sale; viewing of pavilions where various partners including farmers showcased the initiatives being implemented to combat hunger and malnutrition; dances; and speeches.
Continuing with the World Food Day 2018 commemorations, the European Union Delegation in Malawi funded a World Food Day debate, at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) on 26th October.

This event called for action from young people, urging them to join in the fight against hunger and malnutrition. Similarly, this event was also held under the World Food Day 2018 theme, “Our Actions are Our Future: A #ZeroHunger world by 2030 is possible”.

The function provided an opportunity for FAO to interact with students regarding the ongoing collaboration between FAO and EU on climate change, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and strengthening extension delivery through farmer field schools, providing insights into how these contribute to the fight against hunger and malnutrition.

The World Food Day debate invited young people, mostly students at LUANAR, to take action and be a part of the fight against hunger in Malawi. This was in recognition of the fact that the youth of Malawi as custodians of the future, should harness the skills and knowledge gained through their education and experience, and join in the fight to achieve zero hunger.

The EU Ambassador particularly cited those young people with studies focusing on agriculture and nutrition, as being central to the advancement of the zero hunger goal.

“It is you agronomists, agricultural engineers who can make a change in the zero hunger fight. It is your generation that is tasked with achieving this goal of zero hunger,” the European Union Ambassador to Malawi, Sandra Paesan said in her speech.

Tasked with this, young people got involved in a lively debate that brought together nutritionists and agriculture extension experts on a discussion of whether or not the goal of zero hunger by 2030 is a real possibility in Malawi.

The event was a vibrant platform that drove home the message that Malawi’s youth should and can be part of the solution if the country is to achieve zero hunger.
Chifundo Mmane is a local farmer who has seen her income grow having ventured in horticulture business. She is among 20 women farmers singing songs of joy from Chinkwende Village in Traditional Authority Bvumbwe, Thyolo.

Through the smallholder irrigation initiative set up in the area by the Roseberry Farms, a private sector operator in the horticulture industry, their story has completely changed. Just a few years ago, these women could not contribute much towards the economic development of the country, let alone their households.

"Previously, this area was underdeveloped and most of the houses were grass thatched. Today, we can proudly say that every member has earned enough from the horticulture business to buy iron-sheets to roof their house," says Mmane. "Every member of the group has greatly benefited."

Women in this area, like many other areas of Malawi, are left behind with their main preoccupation being doing domestic chores while main strive to provide for their families.

Roseberry Farms’ manager, Ruth Kalima said through horticulture business, each member of the out-growers is now earning between MK100,000 ($137) and MK150,000 ($206) a month, compared to the MK30,000 ($41) they earned before per month.

"The rationale behind this business model is to develop women and disadvantaged people and to establish Malawi as a net exporter of horticulture products," said Kalima. "There is still need for more investment to include more women and underprivileged people to further attain the goal of turning Malawi into a high value horticulture exporting nation."

The project that is being implemented by Roseberry Farms involves establishing a dual supply chain which produces high value vegetables for the retail market directly aimed at import substitution.

While the anchor farm will produce various high-quality horticulture products using greenhouse technology, the smallholder supply chain will produce the remainder using a combination of open land and drip irrigation. The initiative is currently utilising retail outlets such as Peoples and Shoprite to sell its vegetables.

The company is able to procure on average 100 Metric Tons of vegetables per month from the out-grower farmers. Initially, before the company installed drip irrigation infrastructure on the land, farmers would only harvest 80 tons per annum.

UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Operations, Kasia Wawiernia is happy with the impact the project is having on the vegetable supply chain.

"Strengthening the out-grower program by providing the farmers with targeted technical backstopping, access to inputs and the creation of an irrigation scheme will enable the company (Roseberry Farms) to build partnerships with the contracted farmers. This is good news," says Wawiernia. "UNDP and partners are looking forward to seeing this model being successfully replicated across the district and the region."

The project is supported through the Malawi Innovation Challenge Fund (MICF) – a US$21 million competitive, transparent mechanism that provides matching-grant finance for innovative projects proposed by the private sector active in Malawi’s agricultural, manufacturing and logistics sectors.

Supported by the United Nations Development Programme, UK Aid and KFW, the MICF is designed to be a quick, responsive mechanism that is not overly bureaucratic and one that understands the needs of the private sector.
On a hot and windy day in Kasungu, a drone operator prepares his flying machine for an important project. Joined by officers from the government’s Department of Agriculture and staff from three United Nations agencies, the operator steers the drone high into the clear blue sky. From its vantage point, the drone captures dozens of images of local crop fields.

After returning to the ground, the images are compared with data (ground truth data) which is collected in the crop fields by the agriculture officers using computer tablets. This activity called ground truthing. With ground truthing, the agriculture officers assess the performance of crops by comparing ground truth data to that of the images being taken by the drones. The information is then extrapolated to satellite imagery.

The activity being conducted at Kanyenda Irrigation crop field is part of a joint United Nations (UN) project on Using Satellite and UAV image analysis to map crops in Malawi. The UN agencies involved in the project are UNICEF, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

“Malawi is a country prone to drought and the effects of climate change. This project is very important because it gives us accurate estimates of crop yield and crop health in the country”, says UNICEF Information Management Specialist Magda Biesada. “The technology being used in this project will provide the government with early warning signs that threaten food production. If we determine that crop production is going to be poor, we can put mitigate measures in place that will benefit farmers and hopefully improve the nutritional status of the local population, especially children.” About 85% of Malawi’s population live in the rural areas in poverty conditions. The majority rely on food from their own production.

Crop estimates for better planning

Friday Mwankhako, a government agricultural officer in Kasungu says mapping crop production helps farmers anticipate how much food they can expect to produce. “This new technology can help farmers plan ahead. They can be encouraged to engage in small businesses when they produce surpluses. In cases when their production hasn’t been so good, they can decide on a way forward,” says Mwankhako.

On top of using drones to map crop estimates, local people are using irrigation to mitigate against drought. Irrigation farming is more dependable than regular farming because it doesn’t require steady rainfall. Agriculture officers at Kanyenda crop field also offer advice to communities on farming a broader range, which prevents reliance on one crop and increases diet diversification.

Mother of eight children, Dorothy Ntonga, is a local farmer and a member of the Kanyenda Irrigation Scheme committee. She is benefiting from the work being done at Kanyenda crop field and says learning about irrigation farming has been an eye-opener. “We have been taught to farm different crops such as tomatoes, various types of vegetables and maize. Now we have enough food to eat and we are able to sell maize and use the money for school fees."

The UN working together as one

Malawi’s UN Resident Coordinator (RC) Maria Jose Torres says the use of satellite and drone images to map crop yields is a good example of how UN agencies are working together to benefit communities effected by unpredicted weather patterns.

“This project is all about changing lives for the better and the UN in Malawi is very invested in the agenda on leaving no one behind. Getting to farmers is one of our priorities,” says Torres. “We are trying to ensure that data is available for farmers so that they know whether or not to continue some of their farming practices, or if they require intervention. The project is also important to prepare for disasters so we can prevent rather than respond to emergencies.”
The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Malawi during the month of October assisted 2,603 Mozambique asylum seekers who were being hosted at Luwani Refugee Camp with a voluntary return to their native country.

The voluntary repatriation occurred through spontaneous returns starting mid-September until the end of October when the last family left the camp.

The Mozambican asylum seekers had expressed interest to voluntarily return home more than a year ago after peace returned in the areas from where they fled. They later expressed a strong and urgent need to return home so that they can tend to their farms and plant before the rainy season which is expected to commence between November and December.

The delayed conclusion of the Tripartite Agreement between the governments of Mozambique and Malawi, and UNHCR, which has been pending since 2017, did not deter the determination of the Mozambicans to return home, a development which led to unsurmountable pressure on UNHCR to respect their inalienable rights to go back to their homeland as requested.

The returning asylum seekers were only being registered and assisted with transportation costs and a return package from UNHCR.

Mozambican asylum seekers fled into Malawi in early 2016 after a conflict erupted between the opposition Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) whose leader late Alfonso Dhlakama had threatened to seize power in six provinces of Manica, Sofala, Tete, Zambezia, Nampula and Niassa.

The asylum seekers entered Malawi through the bordering Kapise village which is located in the south eastern Mwanza district of Malawi while others entered through the lower shire district of Nsanje.

UNHCR Malawi then transferred the nearly 10,000 Mozambican asylum-seekers from Kapise village through a 72 kilometre journey to Luwani Refugee Camp located in Neno district which was earlier closed in 2007.

Luwani Camp previously hosted over one million Mozambican refugees who fled from their country’s 16 year civil war between 1977 and 1992 but was finally closed in 2007.

The camp has more than 160 hectares of land and asylum-seekers have facilities and services which include quality health, education, water, protection and some involve themselves in livelihoods activities such as agriculture and entrepreneurship.

Malawi currently hosts some 36, 205 refugees and asylum seekers who are being hosted at Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Dowa district located some 50 kilometres from the administration capital of Lilongwe.

UNHCR has three major durable solutions for refugees and asylum seekers with the first and most desired one being voluntary repatriation to their home countries after peace has returned. The second durable solution is local integration where refugees and asylum seekers are locally integrated into host communities. Alternately, the third durable solution is resettlement to a third country.

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established on 14 December 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The UN Refugee Agency as it is referred to is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees including a mandate to help stateless people.
The now deserted Luwani Refugee Camp

A family ready to depart for Mozambique

The Masamba family getting set to depart for Mozambique

Asylum seekers wait for their turn to receive return package

Young asylum seekers in ecstatic mood
Malawi has launched a Free to Shine initiative to fight HIV and AIDS through increased reduction of mother-to-child HIV transmission.

Malawi’s First Lady Prof. Gertrude Mutharika launched the initiative in Lilongwe on 31 October 2018, saying the initiative will help the country reduce its mother-to-child HIV transmissions to less than four percent before end of 2019.

“We have a collective responsibility to make sure that our girls and boys shine by giving them an HIV-free life,” said Mutharika. “Our children must shine through provision of paediatric AIDS treatment, care and support.”

She commended Development Partners, the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and UNAIDS for supporting the national HIV and AIDS response.

Mutharika said she was pleased to note that over 80 percent of people living with HIV in Malawi are on treatment and that the country is on track to reach UNAIDS’ 90:90:90 fast-track targets, which aim to ensure that 90 percent of people living with HIV know their HIV status, 90 percent of people with diagnosed HIV infection are on treatment, and 90 percent of people on treatment have viral suppression by 2020.

United Nations Resident Coordinator Maria Jose Torres said the initiative aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as its vision of ending childhood AIDS in Africa by 2030 and keep mothers alive on treatment, mirrors that of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“Ending mother to child transmission of HIV, and ensuring all pregnant women living with HIV and all children living with HIV are active on treatment will push Malawi forward toward achieving SDG 3 on Good Health and Wellbeing,” said Torres.

“Ensuring that all girls and young women have access to quality reproductive health education and services, including HIV prevention services will also be key to achieving SDG 5 on Gender Equality.”

Torres said Malawi has been a role model in the global HIV and AIDS response as it was the first country to pilot the Option B+ strategy to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission, which has now become a best practice globally.

The initiative in Malawi is built on partnerships between the First Lady, Organisation of African First Ladies Against HIV and AIDS (OAFLA), the African Union, the UN, the Civil Society and the private sector.

The initiative is part of OAFLA’s efforts to end paediatric AIDS in Africa by 2020. This initiative was established on the side-lines of the African Union Summit in January 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

At the event to launch the initiative, two key documents were also launched. The first document, a Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) Joint Review Synthesis Report, provides detailed analysis of the challenges that Malawi needs to address to ensure effective reproductive and maternal health programmes, and reduce maternal and infant mortality rates.

The second document, Roadmap for Accelerating Children and Adolescent HIV and Sexual Reproductive Health Services in Malawi - 2018-2022, provides guidance on critical interventions for an AIDS free generation in Malawi.
As part of celebrating the United Nations Day, which falls on 24th October, the UN family in Malawi held an SDG Olympics at Bingu Stadium on 19th October 2018 in Lilongwe, where staff competed for trophies.

The games at the SDG Olympics included football, basketball, netball, volleyball, tug-of-war and relay race as well as a dancing competition, which kept everyone engaged. The games were organised around the five Ps of SDGs: People, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership and Planet, with staff competing across the Ps.

UNAIDS Country Director Thérèse Poirier said the games were meant to keep UN staff healthy and fit to continue their contributions to Malawi’s development.

“Within the UN system, good health is of paramount value,” said Poirier. “This is because an un-healthy staff member cannot effectively and efficiently contribute to the attainment of UN goals of supporting government development initiatives and the resilience of the people of Malawi.”

One of the core values of the United Nations is Working as One. This was reflected during the SDG Olympics as staff from different agencies came together and worked in teams.

“The importance of what this symbolizes cannot be underestimated and I hope that you all will consider how these team games can translate to foster a joint working environment between UN agencies in Malawi, especially now as we begin to plan for the approaching UNDAF,” said Poirier.

The motto of Working as One resonated with the day’s theme: Time is now: Fostering peace, human rights and sustainable development needs collective action.

Besides, in Blantyre, UN staff, based in the Southern region, were also engaged in an outreach activity at Chichiri Secondary School, where they painted two Form 4 classrooms and fixed their broken ceilings. The event engaged staff in giving a service to the local community.

The SDG Olympics was organised by UN Cares.
SDG Olympics: In Pictures

Ladies getting ready for Tug-of-war

Soccer kept the men busy

Ladies playing netball

Enjoying the dancing competition

Partnership team celebrates their achievements

Peace Team celebrating their victory