Welcome to our first edition of the UN Malawi newsletter. This newsletter will provide you with updates and stories on some of our strategic interventions and key results achieved with UN support.

The year 2014 marks 50 years of UN presence in Malawi, a period which also coincides with 50 years of the country’s independence. As such, as Malawi reflects over the past 50 years, the UN joins the reflection in noting its contributions along the journey. The year 2014 is also the third year of implementing the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2012-2016 which aims at enhancing our coherence, effectiveness and efficiency.

In the first half of the year, some of our notable achievements include the coordinated support to the first ever Tripartite Elections in which Malawians chose their leaders for the next five years, a process which several observers described as free, fair and credible despite some challenges that the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) encountered. Also, the UN has continued providing humanitarian assistance to over 1.8 million hunger-affected Malawians and supporting over 17,000 refugees living in Malawi with food and non-food assistance.

Besides, the UN has this year also assisted the Government of Malawi to launch the Girls Education Strategy which aims at improving girls' retention in secondary schools and reducing the dropout rate. The strategy is in line with the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) under which the UN and its partners are supporting interventions aimed at accelerating progress towards the attainment of lagging MDGs with the girl child as the entry point. The strategy is also linked to the three year UN and Norway joint project on improving access and quality of education for girls in Malawi, which the Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg launched in Dedza during her recent visit to Malawi.

As the country progresses towards the MDGs end line in 2015, there is an urgent need to invest more to fast-track progress in the achievement of the lagging MDGs while sustaining the gains made on the other promising goals.

At the same time, the new administration in government needs to consider the future that Malawians want as expressed in the post-2015 development agenda by ensuring that future reviews of national development strategies take into account the views expressed in this agenda. This would be consistent with the Common African Position on the Post 2015 Development Agenda which promotes the participatory approach in the post-2015 development agenda formulation process for Africa to present a united and common set of priorities aimed at creating a just and equitable economic order that is free from poverty, inequality, exclusion and human suffering, and respects the limits of the planet earth.

As we enter into the second half of 2014, let me extend my sincere gratitude to all UN staff in Malawi for their hard work and dedication during the first half of the year. I also thank all partners for their unwavering support in this cause.

On this occasion, the UN system also conveys its solidarity with the people of Malawi as they celebrate the 50th anniversary of the country’s independence. Despite prevailing challenges, Malawi has a lot to celebrate. It’s no doubt that the country is on track in achieving some of the MDGs, particularly in the areas of child mortality, HIV/AIDS and promoting global partnerships for development. I therefore take this opportunity to congratulate Government and the people of Malawi for these successes and re-echo our commitment and support towards achieving their aspirations for peace, security and development.

The history of the United Nations is interwoven with elections. The UN’s support to elections worldwide continues to be based on the principle established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that the will of the people, as expressed through periodic and genuine elections, shall be the basis of government authority.

Elections have therefore been a vital part of democratic consolidation around the globe, and the UN has played a major role in providing international assistance through these important processes of change.

On 20th May this year, Malawi held her first ever Tripartite Elections in history, enabling her citizens to choose their leaders for the next five years. It is pleasing to note that over 70 percent of Malawians who registered to vote, actually turned out for polling to choose their President, Members of Parliament (MPs) and ward councillors at the same time.

The elections were organised, led and managed by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) with significant financial assistance and technical support from the UN and several development partners. The key concern of partners is to support a credible process led by national institutions that gives voice to a country’s citizenry to choose their leaders.

The assistance to the 2014 Malawi elections was part of the coordinated support which development partners including DFID, EU,....
Coordination can maximise gains from resilience efforts

J ust as in many countries, millions of small-scale farmers in Malawi are equally vulnerable to climate change impacts. Food insecurity has been a recurring issue in Malawi over the last four to five years. This has led to decreased crop production which has partly been caused by dry spells as well as flooding.

The situation is further compounded by faltering macro-economic conditions, worsening poverty and seemingly dysfunctional markets. In 2013/14 season alone, food insecurity affected over 1.8 million Malawians and several households are again projected to face hunger in the current 2014/15 season.

The more Malawian farmers depend directly on rainfall, the higher their vulnerability as many of them live on marginal lands. These conditions are compounded by poor access to markets. With little or no savings, they have few alternatives when the crops fail or livestock die. In this context, there is need to build resilience among vulnerable populations to a wide range of shocks of which price of food insecurity.

With support from the UN, Malawi is implementing different interventions to help build resilience, there is realisation that more work needs to be put in ensuring that there are better linkages and synergies among the interventions to maximise on impact.

To address coordination gaps on resilience, the UN system is supporting a government-led initiative to link various programmes like social protection programme with nutrition and agricultural programmes such as Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) and further extend the linkages to include humanitarian interventions such as food aid and emergency agricultural programmes.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Representative in Malawi, Florence Rolle, says coordination can maximise gains from resilience efforts.

The capacity building component is crucial to effectively support equitable and sustainable economic growth and food security. Under Cluster One, the UN aims to ensure national policies, local and national institutions effectively support equitable and sustainable economic growth and food security.

Malawians in Chikwawa, one of the districts most vulnerable to droughts, filling in the ox-cart with maize production surplus to sell at the market.

Malawian conducts second national child labour survey

C hild labour is widely recognised as a major hindrance to reach the Education For All (EFA) goals, with agriculture remaining by far the most important sector where child labourers can still be found, although the problems are not negligible in services and industry – mostly in the informal sector.

Arguably, Malawi has made meaningful efforts to combat child labour, but limited availability of reliable data and research prevents the country from designing effective policies and programmes to eliminate some forms of child labour. The first and last National Child Labour Survey for Malawi was conducted in 2002. Since then, Malawi has had no reliable statistics at national level to determine the extent of child labour in the country despite such surveys expected to be conducted every five years.

In Malawi, the survey’s objectives include (a) conducting research through surveys to collect data on working children and measuring child labour in hazardous work at national level; and (b) building capacity of National Statistical Office (NSO) to conduct research and analyse data on child labour.

The capacity building component is crucial to enabling government conduct child labour surveys frequently and strengthening its capacity to address child labour in a more sustainable way as the project will also carry out country policy appraisals that will include in-depth analysis of survey data, reviews of existing policy and programmatic efforts to combat child labour, and suggested actions to advance the elimination of exploitative child labour in the short and medium terms.

“What we also want is that the issue of child labour should be mainstreamed in the regular government service. All labour inspection tools should be sensitive to child labour. For example, if you are looking at figures about farmers or fishermen, we should be able to know how many of them are children,” says Hassan.

ILO has committed $350 000 to the survey from July with support from international technical experts, saying results of the survey will be out between November and December this year.

The survey is supported by two ILO conventions: (a) Convention 182, which calls for prohibition and elimination of worst forms of child labour, as a matter of urgency, and (b) Convention 138, which stipulates that the minimum age for admission to employment or work shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and further prohibits children’s exposure to hazardous work.

Hassan says NSO is expected to conduct the survey from July with support from international technical experts, saying results of the survey will be out between November and December this year.

The survey is supported by two ILO conventions: (a) Convention 182, which calls for prohibition and elimination of worst forms of child labour, as a matter of urgency, and (b) Convention 138, which stipulates that the minimum age for admission to employment or work shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and further prohibits children’s exposure to hazardous work.

UN’s interventions to address child labour

The UN in Malawi supports several interventions that have seen over 5 000 children, including girls, withdrawn from child labour and provided with rehabilitation services in the past two years.

ILO is supporting the Government of Malawi and several NGOs to implement projects such as the Achieving Reduction of Child Labour In Supporting Education (ARISE) which, among others, aims to promote children’s access to quality education and economic empowerment in tobacco-growing communities in districts like Lilongwe.

Through the ARISE project, the UN is enabling child labour-affected children to go back to school and also access other social services like health care services. Those who are unable to return to school are assisted to obtain skills in fields like carpentry, welding and bricklaying to support their livelihood.
Among several interventions in the social and protection services sector, the UN system is continuing to enhance health facilities in Malawi through procurement and adequate supply of essential medicines, building human capacity, and providing technical resources to ensure delivery of critical social services throughout the country with a focus on underserved areas.

For instance, essential medicines for primary healthcare interventions have been provided to over 600 health facilities in the past two years. The UN is also continuing its support towards the Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) programme focusing on the first 1000 days (starting from pregnancy of mothers until the child is two years old) to sustainably improve all forms of malnutrition which includes stunting, wasting, low birth weight and micronutrient deficiencies; plus the School Feeding Programme (SFP) aimed at retaining pupils in schools and improve their nutritional levels, with the UN providing over 800 000 pupils with a school meal over the past two years.

Among several achievements, the above mentioned interventions have supported the reduction in child mortality levels in Malawi.

Under Cluster Two, the UN aims to ensure effective and equitable delivery of quality basic social and protection services for the population of Malawi.

Examples of Support to the Social Sector

To determine the extent of progress in reaching specific targets on the goals, the United Nations in Malawi has been supporting government to conduct regular assessments, the latest being the Malawi MDG Endline Survey (MES) carried out in all 28 districts, data gathering was undertaken during the last quarter of 2013 and first quarter of 2014. In this survey, the UN has supported the National Statistical Office (NSO) to generate up-to-date information on indicators for monitoring progress on the attainment of the MDGs.

The data from the survey will also be used to update the country’s socio-economic database for policy and research considerations. Apart from the survey on MDGs, the UN in Malawi has also supported government to conduct another national survey on Violence Against Children (VAC) to understand the magnitude and nature of sexual, physical and emotional violence against children.

“The UN has supported various surveys in Malawi, including the above two, to assess the results achieved by the Government of Malawi and its partners,” says UNICEF Chief of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation, Koorosh Raffii. The preliminary report for VAC was released in June 2014 while the preliminary report for the survey on MDGs is expected to be out by end of July this year.

Assessment of Results in the Social Sector

Malawi conducts surveys on MDGs, Violence Against Children (VAC)

To determine the extent of progress in reaching specific targets on the goals, the United Nations in Malawi has been supporting government to conduct regular assessments, the latest being the Malawi MDG Endline Survey (MES) carried out in all 28 districts, data gathering was undertaken during the last quarter of 2013 and first quarter of 2014. In this survey, the UN has supported the National Statistical Office (NSO) to generate up-to-date information on indicators for monitoring progress on the attainment of the MDGs.

The data from the survey will also be used to update the country’s socio-economic database for policy and research considerations. Apart from the survey on MDGs, the UN in Malawi has also supported government to conduct another national survey on Violence Against Children (VAC) to understand the magnitude and nature of sexual, physical and emotional violence against children.

“The UN has supported various surveys in Malawi, including the above two, to assess the results achieved by the Government of Malawi and its partners,” says UNICEF Chief of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation, Koorosh Raffii. The preliminary report for VAC was released in June 2014 while the preliminary report for the survey on MDGs is expected to be out by end of July this year.

CLUSTER 2: SOCIAL AND PROTECTION SERVICES

Under Cluster Two, the UN aims to ensure effective and equitable delivery of quality basic social and protection services for the population of Malawi.
Malawi launches network of adolescents and young people living with HIV

The Young, the future and the forgotten

A
fter years of planning and strategising on how to reach out to adolescents and young people living with HIV, Malawi finally launched a network of adolescents and young people living with HIV (YPLHIV) on Friday, 2nd May 2014 under the theme: Making the Three Zeros Work for Young People Living with HIV. The official launch was conducted by the Minister of Trade and Industry on behalf of the then State President Her Excellency Mrs. Joyce Banda at a function held at Kabudula Primary School ground in Lilongwe Rural West. The necessity to create a network of adolescents and young people living with HIV comes from the realisation that this special group was normally left behind in the HIV and AIDS response.

In 2013, noticing the lack of young people’s involvement in the AIDS response and the high level of stigma and discrimination faced by YPLHIV, UNAIDS along with the Malawi Network of People Living with HIV (MANET+) and other NGOs, such as Southern AIDS Trust (SAT), Global Hope Mobilisation (GLOHOMO), among others, formed a Steering Committee to support the establishment of the national association of YPLHIV. In order to understand the real needs and challenges faced by the YPLHIV, consultations were conducted with District Executive Committee (DEC) and District Aids Coordinating Committee (DACC) members and representatives of YPLHIV in all districts. During the launch, the UNAIDS Country Director Amakobe Sande pledged to provide the necessary technical and financial support to ensure that the association is up and running effectively and efficiently which will be a joint effort between UNICEF, UNFPA and UNAIDS.

UNAIDS states that despite the unprecedented progress made in the AIDS response in recent years, emerging evidence clearly suggests that adolescents are falling behind as a result of not receiving the attention and services they require. AIDS-related mortality among adolescents has reportedly increased by 50% over the past seven years, but fell for all other age groups, according to UNAIDS estimates. Two out of three people aged 0–14 lack access to HIV treatment worldwide, and recent data collected from sub-Saharan Africa indicates that only 10 percent of young men and 15 percent of young women (15–24 years) are aware of their HIV status.

There was therefore an urgent need to ensure that adolescents living with HIV become aware of their status and have access to effective HIV treatment and quality care programmes.

Furthermore, many adolescents living with HIV express lack of support regarding how, when and with whom to disclose their HIV status. This can lead to anxiety and depression. For members of young key populations, the situation is even more difficult, as they often face discrimination on account of the behaviour that makes them vulnerable to HIV, such as sex workers, young Men who have Sex with Men.

Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) including HIV services which are catered to the unique needs of adolescents living with HIV is missing from most school and health-care settings globally, a situation that is also mirrored in Malawi. Many adolescents living with HIV are therefore left to deal with sexuality and relationships entirely on their own, leaving them isolated and fearful of sex and sexuality, while others lack sexual and reproductive health information and skills around safe sex.

UNFPA saw this gap and had already been implementing programmes with adolescents living with HIV way back in 2011. UNFPA has been supporting these interventions through Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM). FPAM organised the adolescents into clubs called Nzotheka which provided SRH/HIV services and information to adolescents and young people living with HIV. At the launch, UNFPA coordinated a UN pavilion which was very popular with adolescents and young people as evidenced by the large numbers that patronised the pavilion.

The key message that all the dignitaries to the ceremony passed on was that with the formation of this association, there is a real opportunity for YPLHIV to be more involved in decision making processes which should address their common slogan: “Nothing for us without us!”: We cannot achieve zero new HIV infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero discrimination if we don’t focus our efforts in addressing the unique HIV prevention, care and treatment needs of adolescents and young people living with HIV.

Malawi’s First National HIV Prevention Symposium - towards ‘Zero’ New HIV Infections

The UNAIDS Getting to ‘Zero’ Strategy – zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS related deaths - continues to build momentum in Malawi and accelerate progress towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

Committed to business unusual, Malawi hosted its first National HIV Prevention Symposium from June 30th to July 2nd at the Bingu International Conference Centre in Lilongwe. The symposium convened local, regional and international prevention experts and implementing partners who infused perspectives, trends and best practices in HIV prevention programming to provoke reflection and discussion among key national stakeholders. Themes of the symposium included: key populations; condom programming; gender dynamics in the HIV response; socio and economic vulnerability; and treatment as prevention. Findings from community dialogues and testimonies from representatives from key and vulnerable populations ignited the prevention discussions. Gaps and critical emerging issues within the national HIV response were identified and explored to derive the best way forward. Approximately, 150 HIV stakeholders attended each day, a demonstration of the quality of information and discussion generated. The symposium too sets Malawi trailblazing as a first step in the roll out of the re-invigoration of HIV sexual transmission agenda for the East and Southern Africa region.

2014 is a critical time in Malawi’s HIV and AIDS response with both a mid-term review and extension of the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan and the formulation of the next Prevention Strategy underway. The development of the Global Fund concept note under the new funding model is also underway. The Government of Malawi through the National AIDS Commission (NAC) and the Department of Nutrition, HIV and AIDS with the support of the UN Joint Team on HIV and AIDS and development partners are driving these interlinked processes with dedication, seizing the opportunity to incorporate cutting edge, evidence based and cost effective thinking to inform both strategies and re-invigorate prevention efforts in Malawi towards ending AIDS by 2030.

UNAIDS Country Director, Amakobe Sande, heralds the symposium as a great milestone in re-invigorating Malawi’s HIV Prevention efforts: “There is evidence about what works and where the obstacles remain, more than ever before, there is research-backed belief that ending AIDS is possible by 2030. However, a business-as-usual approach cannot end the epidemic. We must use the available evidence to accelerate the HIV scale-up by 2020 and drive Malawi towards ‘zero new infections.’"
UN Supports Malawi’s Tripartite Elections

Some of the registered voters who turned out for polling on May 20, 2014 to choose their leaders for the next five years.

...Norway, Ireland, Japan and UNDP, are providing to MEC through a UNDP managed Basket Fund. The support rendered was in line with an agreement reached in June 2013 between the Government of Malawi and Development Partners that Government would fund 60 percent of the elections-related costs and development partners up to 40 percent of the budget for the Tripartite Elections.

The support under the Basket Fund was earmarked for procurement of sensitive materials including ballot boxes, indelible ink and printing of the almost 24 million ballot papers. The UN supported a competitive process for procurement of the election materials after MEC sign-off of the specifications. All the materials were delivered on schedule ahead of the elections, and with a surplus amount and assurance of quality.

From the Basket Fund, Development Partners further agreed to support payment of honoraria for most polling staff through electronic bank transfers after MEC certification of work done.

As part of the same basket-fund support programme to the MEC, the UN also supported the development of a results management system (RMS) to process results from the elections. The auditable system was developed with capacity to identify disparities and combat any attempted election fraud. During the vote tallying process, MEC said the computer system effectively worked in terms of error and disparities in figures.

In addition, the UN also provided technical advice to the MEC through a team of five technical advisers against 20 advisers in the 2009 elections, with the Commission—as a sovereign and independent institution—having the choice of taking the advice or not. The technical support was given in-line with both national and international expectations of progressively less international financial and technical support.

Clearly, the stakes of the May 2014 Tripartite Elections were high with pre-election projections quite uncertain due to the unprecedented level of competition in the elections. With 12 candidates vying for the presidency, 1 709 candidates contesting for 192 parliamentary seats and 2 988 candidates competing for 462 local government wards, the elections were bound to pose some real logistical challenges.

Despite some challenges faced in the poll and tallying processes, the MEC, on the overall, undertook a transparent electoral process and provided its determination of results of the elections as guided by law.

Apart from the high voter turnout that would be the envy of most democracies, the elections also presented many gains for democracy such as party conventions, candidate primaries, special measures for female candidates, considerable media openness, an auditable tally process, an accessible and responsive complaint process, and a decline in null and void votes.

At this stage, the UN finds the current momentum for electoral reforms encouraging and urges authorities to seize the opportunity to undertake broad and open consultations with all political actors and civil society representatives to resolve all concerns around elections. Calls for legislative reform and perhaps constitutional review appear valid and crucial to ensuring improved delivery in future elections and reinforcing the electoral architecture in Malawi. So far, present discussions have presented thoughts and concerns on the approach to voter registration, conducting parliamentary delimitation, MEC institutional restructuring and electoral system reform.

While such reflection and dialogue is occurring across a range of interested stakeholders in the post-election environment, Malawi must not only consolidate these concerns into an agenda of reform that is calibrated to an envisioned outcome, but unlike past processes, the country must work to ensure concrete and tangible actions are taken in this regard.

Momentum for the reforms should not be lost. Response to this momentum will constitute the most credible test to Malawians, of the willingness and ability of their leaders to draw all the lessons from the past elections and take necessary measures to enhance conditions conducive for sustaining holding of peaceful and credible elections in future.

Also important is the need to examine the political contract that is established between voters and those that are voted into power considering the fact that only 53 Members of Parliament (MPs) retained their seats; only 18 out of 57 registered political parties presented candidates; and, following a growing trend, the largest number of MPs who made it to the National Assembly did so on independent tickets.

As the UN, we will continue to support consolidation of democracy in Malawi by supporting different institutions including the MEC through the Malawi Electoral Cycle Support Project, and promoting transparency and accountability as core principles underpinning electoral administration. Together, our goal should be to respond to the need for building long term institutional and human resources capacity in order to organise credible elections in the context of a highly competitive political landscape.
As people around the world have been taking to the streets demanding the rescue of over 200 schoolgirls abducted by the terror group Boko Haram in Nigeria’s Chibok area, government, civil society and activists in Malawi have joined the protests appealing for the return of the girls and calls for more protection of the girls’ right to education.

Led by UN Women, the United Nations in Malawi has jointly supported mobilisation of the movement to add pressure on authorities to step up efforts to find the girls and issued statements describing the abduction as horrific act which offends humanity and demands global outrage and action.

On May 15th this year, the UN, government, civil society and activists held a joint press conference in Lilongwe as part of the movement calling for action and bringing back of the kidnapped girls. The event had two messages: ‘Bring Back Our Girls’ and ‘Keep Girls in School in Africa and Malawi’.

On June 5th, the UN Resident Coordinato- tor Ms. Mia Seppo also joined the Nigerian High Commissioner, the Second Lady of Ma- lawi, the American Ambassador, representa- tives of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and other 150 mem- bers of civil society, media and the general public at another public gathering and press conference at the National Library in Lilongwe where she said education and child marriage were critical issues needing increased focus in Africa and Malawi in particular to protect the rights of girls.

“These girls were kidnapped because some people believe that girls should not go to school, they should rather be married. Every girl and boy has the right to go to school. On education, the Government of Malawi has just launched the ‘Girls Education Strategy which aims at improving girls’ retention and reducing the dropout from school. It is our responsibility to ensure this strategy is implemented.

In Malawi, both boys and girls are doing poorly in terms of accessing and graduating from school with girls struggling more. Overall dropout is high at 21 percent, but disparities start to emerge from Standard 5 where there is a much higher dropout among girls compared to boys. Only 35 percent of girls stay on to Standard 8, but the percentage is low for boys as well at 41 percent,” said Seppo.

She said socio-economic factors adversely affect the life of girls in Malawi, with girls aged 10 to 19 among the most vulnerable as victims of harmful cultural practices, early child marriages and ultimately HIV/AIDS infection.

“Case reports indicate that at least 68 per- cent of girls compared to 35 percent boys are likely to be victims of abuse and sexual vio- lence. Malawi has one of the highest rates of child marriages in the world. On average, one out of two girls will be married before their 18th birthday. In 2010, half of the women of 20 to 24 years of age were married before age 18 and data shows little to no change since 2000.

“This is a plea to work together and take all efforts to fight and eliminate child marriages. Among the different interventions, one of our priorities should be to pass the Marriage, Di- vorce and Family Relations Bill which raises the age of marriage to 18 and has been pend- ing for several years.

We cannot allow our girls to be married when they are still young and should be in school. We cannot allow our girls to die of child birth because their bodies are still not fully de- veloped to bear a delivery,” said Seppo.

The UN system in Malawi is continuing to work with several partners and government through Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare to stop human rights violations for girls and raise voices to ensure the Nigerian girls are brought back home and girls stay in school.

In Malawi, the United Nations contributes to the Gov- ernment of Malawi’s development objectives by sup- porting investment in Malawi’s primary asset, her people, and by strengthening the management and accountability systems that are needed to ensure that growth benefits every citizen, including women, chil- dren, the very poor and the most vulnerable. Through the United Nations Development Assistance Frame- work (UNDAF) — a common plan of 21 UN agencies, funds and programmes in Malawi — the UN supports achievement of international development goals, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), national development priorities which are consistent with the MDGs, and the realisation of international human rights in the country, including the right to humanitarian assistance for refugees.