

# Emergency and Resilience Newsletter

Newsletter July-September, 2019



**ActionAid Malawi donates to ECD centres**



**Staff joins #ClimateStrike**



**VSLA boosts BETTER farming**

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## Message from ActionAid Malawi Executive Director

Welcome to another edition of ActionAid Malawi newsletter. In this edition, we are mainly focusing on key stories of change under the Emergencies and Resilience Thematic Program.

ActionAid Malawi will continue to place great priority on the Emergencies and Resilience program as a way of empowering women and other excluded groups out of poverty and injustice.

So far, under KULIMA-BETTER and International Humanitarian Action and Response Team (IHART) projects ActionAid Malawi is reaching out to over 40 000 smallholder farmers in Chiradzulu and Nkhatabay, while responding to the effects of the Cyclone Idai disaster in Nsanje and Nkhatabay districts.

We, therefore, believe that through documentation of such key events and success stories, we will be able to systematically inform our readers and stakeholders on ActionAid Malawi's role in the country, while sustaining the conversation around the issues.

Enjoy the read.

Assan Golowa

Executive Director



## ActionAid Malawi donates to Cyclone Idai-hit ECDs

ActionAid Malawi through its grassroots partner, Phalombe Women Forum, on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2019 donated fortified flour worth K7 million to Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres affected by Cyclone Idai that hit the country in March this year.

The donation was acquired with support from International Humanitarian Action and Response Team (IHART) an emergency and humanitarian office under ActionAid International.

Speaking during the symbolic donation that took place at

Nkhulambe in traditional authority Nazombe in the district, ActionAid Malawi Executive Director, Assan Golowa, said the gesture is part of the K150 million grant earmarked for relief and resilience for the families reeling from the effects of the Cyclone Idai in Phalombe and Nsanje Districts.

Assan said ActionAid Malawi will work with local partners, especially women-led organisations in championing accountability in disaster response as well as finding sustainable solutions to the natural disaster.

“We decided to make this donation after realizing how ECD lessons have been affected due to inadequate food in most of the community based childcare centres. We also noted that the food shortage issue is mainly due to the fact that most households here were affected by the cyclone Idai disaster,” said Golowa

He appealed to the stakeholders, which included, Phalombe District Council Chairperson, councilors, Area Development Committees, Senior T/A Nazombe, Phalombe District Council Secretariat, Community Based



Organisations and community members to give Phalombe Women Forum all the necessary support during the implementation of disaster-related interventions in the district.

Phalombe District Council Chairperson, Fredson Thomas, thanked ActionAid Malawi for the support and assured the organisation that the council will work closely with women to ensure that the donation reached the intended beneficiaries. He hailed the organisation for complementing council's efforts in areas of education, HIV and Aids, human rights, women empowerment and resilience.

Phalombe Women Forum Chairperson, Catherine Chiwaya said



Members of Phalombe Women Forum posing with the relief items

the support from ActionAid Malawi has motivated them to double their efforts in reaching out to those in need in the district.

MaFAAS excites COWFA, FFS....say forum a great learning and advocacy platform

Coalition of Women Farmers (COWFA) and Farmer Field School (FFS) members who participated at the 2019 Malawi Forum for Agriculture Advisory Services (MaFAAS) conducted from 10th to 11th September, at Malawi Institute of Management, described the forum as an “an important learning platform” for smallholders farmers, especially women in the country. ActionAid Malawi sponsored ten COWFA members and two FFS members to participate at the agricultural conference which was conducted under the theme: **“Acting on farmers’ voices for Agricultural Transformation”**.

Emery Potipher, a COWFA member from Ntchisi said the conference enabled them to showcase what they do under COWFA in Ntchisi, while learning from other



Photipher (back to the camera) explaining to officials during the pavilion inspection

farmers in areas of value addition and marketing.

“As COWFA, we look at the forum as an important and learning advocacy platform for a number of issues we are experiencing. We have been able to showcase our products here, while

also calling upon the government officials who came here to take up the issues we are experiencing. Specifically, we want the government to invest more in extension services and link us to the markets within and outside the country,” she said.



## Youth talk tough on climate change...demand involvement in the fight

The Youth Activista Youth Network, a youth platform under ActionAid Malawi, on 20th September, 2019, joined the Global Climate Strike with a call on the Malawi government and the international community to channel resources towards youth and women most affected by climate change.

The youth made the call at a press conference held at ActionAid Malawi office in Lilongwe. Activista youth coordinator, Stanly Mazani said the fight against climate change cannot be won if the youth in the hardest hit countries like Malawi are pushed on the sidelines.

Mazani said Malawi Government needs to set up a youth fund to spearhead the fight against the man-made catastrophe.

“The time has come for the youth to start playing a meaningful role in the fight against climate change. However, this can only be possible if there is political will on the part of government and the international community to set aside resources for the youth to champion interventions against climate change,” he said.

On her part, Hannah Chidaya a member of youth activista network who was also one of the panelists at the press conference, said it is critical also to build the resilience of women in disaster areas. She said climate change has disrupted social lives such as education and health for girls, hence the need for more resources to target women and girls.

Apart from the press conference, the youth activista also had a live panel radio discussion on Trans-World Radio to increase the voice on climate change. The two-hour program allowed the listeners, mostly youth, to provide their in-



Members of the youth activista during the press conference on Climate Change



The Youth Activistas during the live radio panel discussion on Trans-World Radio

put on how best they can play a role in climate change fight.

However, the greatest platform for the youth to raise their voices on climate was the second **National Youth Conference on Climate Change (NYCC)** held from 24th to 26th September at Crossroads Hotel, Lilongwe. Conducted under the theme: “**Enhancing Youth Leadership and Movement in Tackling Climate**

**Change in Malawi,**” the conference attracted participants from academic institutions, Non-governmental Organisations (NGO) sector as well as rural areas where there are youthful farmers. The conference exposed the participants to a wide range of presentations around climate change. One of the presenters at the conference, Chikondi Chabvuta, who is also ActionAid Inter-



**From page 4 Malawi youth calls for their involvement in climate change**

national Humanitarian Advisor for Southern Africa,

In her presentation on Agro-ecology, Chabvuta made a compelling case for farmers to invest in conservation agriculture, as opposed to climate smart agriculture, which she fears, has a damaging effect on soil.

She said organic manure is the best for sustainable agriculture for smallholder farmers in Malawi, as it ensures that the soil remains fertile for many farming seasons.

Also making a presentation at the conference was Dr. Blessings Chinsinga who urged the youth to keep influencing policy formulation in agriculture if their voices on climate change is to have meaningful effect. Dr. Chinsinga said the youth can use available policy spaces such as pre-national budget consultations and others to tilt the policy formulation in their favour. One of the participants, Spiwe Banda, a farmer



**Chikondi Chabvuta emphasizing a point during her presentation**

from Dowa, said the conference could be a turning point for the youth's advocacy in climate change if most of the key resolutions are implemented. Daniel Namwini, a member of youth activist network in Malawi, who is

also a journalist at Malawi News Agency said the conference has equipped him with relevant information on climate and would be able to report on the matter with an informed knowledge.



**All eyes and ears: A cross section of participants at the conference**

The fresh, green and lively maize crop on an August afternoon gives a 42-year-old Walipa Phiri a breath of hope in farming. Without the help of her husband, who died six years ago, Phiri is now confident of taking care of her six children through farming.

“I can’t wait for the harvesting period,” she says, beaming with a smile. “The crop is promising better yields than in the previous seasons and I am sure I will have enough maize for my family and able to sell the surplus to renovate my house”

Phiri, of Chipolopolo Village, Traditional Authority Fuka Mapili, proudly says her family is no longer regarded as one of the hunger-stricken households.

However, the good tidings in maize farming, have not come by chance for her. She attributes the change in fortune in her maize farming to the knowledge and practices she gained from Chikulunkhulimbikira Farmer Field School (FFS) under the KULIMA-BETTER project taking place in Nkhatabay District.

KULIMA-BETTER, an acronym for Kutukula Ulimi m’Malawi and Better Extension Training Transforming Economic Returns, is a European Union-funded project implemented by ActionAid Malawi in Nkhatabay and Chiradzulu districts.

The five-year project is implemented in a consortium of five non-governmental organisations led by Self Help Africa. Seeking to attain resilience; food, nutrition and income security for smallholder farmers, the project is being implemented using the FFS, a unique approach of bringing the



Smiling against hunger: Phiri in her maize field in Tukombo EPA,

agriculture extension services closer to smallholder farmers.

When Tukombo FFS was established in December 2017, Walipa Phiri was among the first to join. Phiri couldn’t be more grateful to the project.

“Being a smallholder farmer, the project came at the right time for me. Throughout my farming life, I have had challenges in realizing better yields. For instance, despite practicing winter maize farming every season, the harvest hasn’t been as expected.

“I would only manage six 50 kilograms bags of maize from this half a hector piece of land. This means I had to rely on other activities such as piece-work to make ends meet for my family,” she says.

However, says Phiri, the coming in of KULIMA-BETTER project has opened her eyes to good and high yielding agriculture practices on the farm on her farm. She says through the project, she planted one maize seed per planting station using the 25cm

by 75cm measurement, which was a change from the planting four to five seeds per plant station.

“I learnt that the one-seed-per-planting station leads to a healthy crop as there is no competition for nutrients. This results in better harvests,” she narrates.

Apart from maize, Phiri is also growing vegetables such as tomatoes, Chinese cabbage, lettuce using the same practices. She says the vegetables are enabling her family to have a nutritious diet and sell the surplus to increase household income.

Timothy Banda, the project’s master trainer at Nkhatabay District Agriculture Development Office says Phiri’s story mirrors so many others under the project in the district. He says KULIMA-BETTER project is already empowering the smallholder farmers to maximize production in the field.

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regular project activities such as open field days and capacity building trainings are proving vital in imparting necessary extension services among the target smallholder farmers.

So far, the project is working with 330 FFS in Nkhatabay, reaching out to a target of 18 000 beneficiaries.

ActionAid Malawi KULIMA BET-

TER project coordinator, Greshan Kamnyamata, says it is inspiring to note that the project is quickly taking root in the district. He reckons that the challenge will now remains to ensure that the gains the project is producing spread beyond the target beneficiaries.

“Having built the project’s foundation through establishment and training of farmer field schools, community-based facilitators and master trainers, it is pleasing to

note that every stakeholder is now playing their rightful role to ensure that the project delivers on its mandate,” says Kamnyamata.

Kamnyamata says that as a project, they will continue working closely with the office of the DA-DOs in both Nkhatabay and Chiradzulu to ensure sustainability and upscaling of the project’s interventions.

## Saving initiative boosts BETTER farming

In an era of rising costs of farm inputs, farming has become costly, especially for subsistence and smallscale farmers. As a result, most smallholder farmers barely profit from farming which is regarded as the main source of income for the majority of Malawians.

To counter the challenge, ActionAid Malawi (AAM) through the KULIMA-BETTER project is integrating the village savings and loans association (VSLA) initiative among the farmer field (FFS) schools. KULIMA-BETTER is a European Union-funded five-year project implemented through a consortium of five non-governmental organisations, led by Self Help Africa.

AAM is implementing the project in Chiradzulu and Nkhatabay districts, working with 450 and 330 FFS, respectively. Each FFS is running a VSLA initiative, with the expectation that the proceeds realized from the initiative should help members buy farm inputs for their farming.

Ida George, a member of Tipindule VSLA under Tilimbike FFS in Mwineya Village of traditional

authority Nkalo in Chiradzulu District, sees a bright future in the saving initiative.

“As a farmer, I need money to buy fertilizer and seeds for farming, including winter cropping which I am doing now. However, I was not sure about where and how to get such money since most lending institutions have prohibitive conditions.

“After joining the Tipindule VSLA in January, 2019, I borrowed MK20 000 which I used to buy two piglets. Once the pig reproduces, I will be able to sell some to find income to buy farm inputs,

while using the dung as manure for my backyard vegetable garden” says Idah, a single mother of four children.

George’s story is not unusual.

Anne Ndalama, another member of Tipindule VSLA is on cloud nine over how the initiative is fast transforming her economic fortunes. With MK30 000 from the group, Ndalama bought four pigs in January and the pigs are now well grown up.

Feeding her pigs in the kraal, Ndalama, 41, shares how

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Ida George after attending to her pig in the Kraal

her livelihood was almost on the verge before the initiative came.

“My family members thought I was wasting time by participating in the project,” she says. “However, the village savings and loan initiative has actually motivated me and others to remain committed to the project. It’s encouraging to note that, while learning how to improve our farming practices, we are able to generate income for farming and our family through the village savings and loans initiative”

Graciano Mafukeni, a community development assistant in Chiradzulu says though the initiative started late September, it has received overwhelming membership from people, including non-FFS members.

To ensure that the VSLA groups are effective, Mafukeni says his office is working closely with the AAM project facilitators in the district in mentoring groups in key areas such as book and record keeping, sharing and the general management of the loans scheme.

Patrick Chiwaya, Chiradzulu KULIMA-BETTER project facilitator, says the VSLA initiative is key in realizing income security for farmers, as spelt out by the goal of the project. He asks VS&L members to remain united and patient, saying the initiative promises good economic returns for FFS members.

## Vegetable farming transforms Kalawa’s fortunes

The story of Beston Kalawa’s farming is a perfect fit for a rags-to-riches one. Hailing from Ndalama Village, T/A Chitela in Chiradzulu District, Kawala has been a farmer for almost two decades but has barely benefitted from it. He would only cultivate maize, whose yields only lasted up to somewhere in October.

This left him at the mercy of piece works and hardouts for him to feed his family his family of six until the next harvesting season.

“I almost gave up on farming and started planning do something else, including going to South Africa to find some employment,” says the 46-year-old. “Every season of farming produced little harvest. This was made worse by the high costs of farm inputs.”

Kalawa’s fortunes, however, changed after ActionAid Malawi (AAM) introduced the European Union funded KULIMA-BETTER project in the district. Among the interventions advanced by the project to attain nutrition security

is the cultivation of vegetables. Kalawa, a member of Chiyambi FSS used knowledge he acquired on vegetable cultivation to apply on his idle garden along the stream.

During the 2018/2019 season, cultivated vegetables such as chinise cabbage, lettuce, and tomatoe on the garden by following all the methods advanced by the project.

“I was glad to note that the yield was bigger than expected. I managed to use some vegetables to supplement the dietary needs for my family while selling the surplus to the market,” he says.

Kawala says he is able to make almost K200 000 in a season through the selling of the vegetables. Kawala says the proceeds from vegetable farming will help him renovate his house.

“I am now focused on vegetable farming because that’s where my fortune lies. I plan to start supplying vegetables to bigger markets in Blantyre,” he says.



Enough reason to be hopeful: Kawala appreciating his vegetable crops



## CZ, NB farmers find relief in food diversification



**Unreliable rains? No problem! Members of the Tidziwe FFS in Chiradzulu in their cassava study field**

The hide-and-seek game the rains have been playing in most parts of the country have not spared smallholder farmers in Chiradzulu and Nkhatabay districts. While Nkhatabay was relatively better off in terms of the rainfall pattern, Chiradzulu was at the receiving end of the poor rainfall pattern and climate-change related hazard during the 2018/2019 season.

Early this year, the district was affected by heavy rains, resulting in flooding of most of the crop farms. This resulted in poor harvest for most of the farmers in the district. A 52-year-old Dorothy Mphoze of John Lulanga Village recalls bitterly how the floods affected her maize crop, washing away all her source of livelihood, as a consequence.

“Without, the flooding, I would

have had a better harvest because I applied the agriculture methods I learnt from the Tidziwe FFS,” says Mphoze, a widow with four children.

In light of the disaster, Mphoze opted to plant cassava as part of the crop diversification advanced by the KULIMA-BETTER project in the district.

“I decided to plant cassava in March despite the rainy season coming to an end due to my knowledge the cassava does not require much water. I am sure one day I will have something to feed the family, rather than relying on maize alone, she says.

Up north, almost 600 kilometres from Chiradzulu, the KULIMA-BETTER project’s crop diversification message is fast striking chords with Nkhatabay smallholder farmers. For many seasons,

farmers regarded cassava as their stable food.

However, through the project, farmers have realised that hard porridge made from cassava flour is low in nutrients.

“The project has opened our eyes; most people have started cultivating maize in addition to cassava. This is to ensure that we have a variety of food in order to achieve food security at household level,” says George Maunda, a member of Chikulunkhulimbikira FSS, under Tukombo Extension Planning Area, in Nkhatabay district.

Timothy Banda, a KULIMA-BETTER project master trainer in Nkhatabay says in light of the unreliable rainfall pattern, he, together with the AAM project team are reaching out to farmers to consider cultivating more crops.



