

ACTIVISTA Commemorates 2016**International Youth Day**

Activista joined the rest of the world in commemorating the 2016 International Youth Day, which is commemorated on the 12 of August every year with a call on national and international leaders to “**eradicating poverty and Achieving sustainable production and consumption**”.

The main objective of this celebration was to create a platform for young people in rural and peri urban areas to speak out issues affecting them at both national and international level.

The Lilongwe celebrations were held at Kauma Primary School and some of the major concerns that were brought out were that, parents are still failing to recognise the importance of education to an extent that they involve the youths in household responsibilities like engaging them in small scale businesses hence they are forced to drop out of school as they fend for their families, teenage girls are put into early marriages just to get financial support for their families and in most cases, they are married to older men who have been married before, which expose the girls to HIV/AIDS and most of the youth have little or no exposure to the outside world hence they lack motivation.

In chitipa, the celebrations took place at Nthalire community stadium, but before the start of the function, they visited Nthalire Youth Friendly Health Services Centre to appreciate the role it plays especially on issues dealing with HIV and AIDS. The youths requested for a vocational skills centre for them to be self reliant and called on government to reduce local revenue tariffs for small scale businesses as their tariffs are 9 times higher than those of well established businesses which retards their growth.

In Mzimba, youths bemoaned the increased numbers of girls being involved in early marriages and that those that are withdrawn from marriages are helpless because they lack fees to continue with education. The events had activities like motivational talks, speeches and general youth performances.

Young Mothers in Ntchisi gets a chance to change their future!



Susan Left, Thandi Middle and Mirriam Right

Ntchisi is one of the districts in Malawi with high numbers of early and forced marriages. Being a community with a patrilineal marriage system, girls/ women are considered worthless in their families because the community believes the girls will belong to their husbands and will in no way bring change to their families. As such girls are mostly not supported in education, they are not given land by their parents nor do they inherit wealth from their parents. On the contrary, boys/ men are the ones who are highly regarded as important in a family, They are given the necessary support to get educated, they have access and control over land and can inherit wealth from parents. This behaviour has led to girls miss out on education, and many more being forced into marriage. Ntchisi Women forum estimates that 40% of reported early marriages in the district were forced and that 50% of girls who drop out of school are result of lack of support from parents or relatives.

Bemoaning the behaviour, Ntchisi Women forum with funding from ActionAid embarked on a “bring back the girls to school” campaign where they are going around communities sensitizing them on the importance of education for girls, withdrawing girls from early and forced marriages, counselling parents and community members then enrolling the girls back in school. Since they started the campaign in 2015, 32 girls have been withdrawn from early marriages and 23 of them have gone back to school.

Ntchisi Women Forum has influenced positive change in young girls who were victims of early child marriages. Three girls from Ntchisi district are a living testimony to this: Susan Miziyawo, Miriam Chichitike and Thandie Bangira.

“My name is Susan Miziyawo I am 22 years old and I am a second born child in the family of seven children. I come from Mpanang’ombe village in Ntchisi district. I was married to Chikondi Mphonda whom together we have a child named Lizzie Mphonda who is 5 years old. I got married to Chikondi when I was 16 years old.

I was in school then and I was hard working and used to get good grades I dreamt of becoming a nurse when I finish school. Even though it was difficult for my parents to support me, with school fees and other school needs unlike my brother who was a class below me,



Susan Miziyawo

I was determined to pull through and wanted to prove my community wrong. In our community girls are not usually supported to finish education because the society believes it’s a worst of resources since girls are married off and stay with their husbands family as such their husband family are the ones to benefit. My parents were always complaining when I ask for any school needs and would give my brother all the necessary support he needed in school. I was in form two when one day as I was coming from

School when Chikondi who was my classmate, forced himself on me and raped me. I was so afraid of reporting him and I couldn't even tell my parents because I was scared they wouldn't believe me and would eventually tell me to marry him in fear of me getting pregnant outside the wedlock. I was so scared and never concentrated in class. After 5 months I realised I was pregnant and decided to tell my grand mother who would carry the message to my parents. Very true to my fears, when my parents heard of this, they forced me into marriage with the same person who caused so much pain in my life. We both dropped out of school and became a couple but they were very painful days. My husband never treated me well and he became abusive, he was uncaring, he would go out of the house at around 4:00 am as if going to the farm he was not and then come back late in the evening without leaving money for me buy food. After fighting this kind of behaviour, I saw this as reason to go back to my parent’s and plead them to send me back to school so that I get educated and be self reliant. I stayed in marriage just for a few months and after giving birth I was invited to a girls conference which was organised by Ntchisi women forum. At the conference, we were told of our rights and how to handle violence or any abuses, they also encouraged me to go back to school and realise my dreams. It was very heart breaking to see young girls who came to talk to us, who had finished their education and were working as nurses, teachers, social workers and one of them was a doctor . They spoke to us and encouraged us not to give up on our dreams but pursue them and become productive adults. This was what I needed to hear.

Women forum members came home to speak to my parents on my wish to going back to school. At first my parents were resistant and told women forum members that they don't have money for my fees and for support to my child as well but after a few visits my parents felt encouraged to send me back to school. I am now back at school at Kayoyo Secondary School. I passed my Junior Certificate and I have sat for the Malawi School Certification of Education exams. I am very thankful to Women Forum and ActionAid for enlightening our community on the importance of girls education. As I speak now, many girls have been with drawn from forced marriages and are back in school. I have been empowered with all the teachings by women forum and now champion this task of getting more girls back to school. I encourage and share my own experience to other girls facing the same challenges I had.



Miriam Chichitike

Miriam Chichitike, 23, of Kafukula village in Ntchisi district was married to Jonas Sivelo whom together they have a child named Hopeson Jonas . Has a similar story of being forced into marriage after she got pregnant, likely Mirriam was with drawn from marriage by Women forum and enrolled back in school. She awaits her Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations results and had to say

“ I cannot emphasis more on what ActionAid through Women Forum has managed to change the future of girls in Ntchisi, I believe in a a few years to come we will have more girls educated and the behaviour of forcing girls into marriage put to an end,”.



Thandi Bangira with her son Kelvin

Thandi Bangira, 20, comes from Md'akulenga village in Ntchisi district. She can see a future very bright and she says “ I was withdrawn from marriage at the age of 16 by women forum members and now I cannot thank them enough for saving me a future full of hope. I would like to become a secondary school teacher and prevent as many girls as possible from rushing into early marriage. Until parents stop forcing girls into early marriages, our community will have no educated women, “.



Salima Women Network for Gender SAWEG with funding from ActionAid, has positively influenced change lives in the district and this has brought about change in a lot of women's lives and their households. We focus on one of the women who has benefited from the awareness campaigns held by SAWEG.

Loveness Matola is a 39 year old lady from kumilala village T/A Kambwiri in salima. She is a single mother of three and has been able to sponsor her children academically and sustain her household through farming and rearing animals. Loveness was chased out of her husbands house in the year 2001 after she had gone against her husbands wishes and went for an HIV test where she was found positive. She was forced to leave the house with literally nothing but her children. She settled at her grandmother's place where she started farming on a piece of land she had inherited from her late mother, but later the land was taken away from her by the then local chief and she could not get it back because she knew no one who would help her. She then cleared another idle land which belonged to her late mother all alone because her kids were very young then. Fortunately she attended an awareness meeting which was organised by SAWEG, and she then learnt that what had been happening to her was violence, and she met one of the facilitators of the meeting who helped her know her rights and gave her a possible solution to her problem. It was a little too late as her husband had passed on the previous year, and when she went to his relatives she was told that at the time of the death, she had already been divorced by the husband so the only help she could get for her children was Nsima (pulp) when the children visit the relatives. As a result of the awareness meetings she had attended, she took the issue to the district commissioner who gave her the mandate to take over the only remaining property which she now uses as her home made beverage store. Loveness now has a decent house, goats, maize and chickens which she use for both commercial and subsistence purposes.

"SAWEG has influenced me positively as I now know my rights, I know what to do and where to go when something is not being done right. I am a person who put what I learn into practice, as a result I am now able to help my fellow women and even other men when they face issues about violence, and many other issues that concern our day to day living. I remember there was a time when we were to be vacated from our village, but because of what I had learned, I mobilized the community and we fought back, won the battle and we are still living on our land and have somewhere to rear our animals and grow our crops. I am a proud single mother as my children do not lack anything and their school is going on well. Without SAWEG and if I had not put into practice what I learn, I would not have been alive today".

Loveness has attended Positive Living, Treatment Literacy, Business Management, and Paralegal Trainings like those that deal with community victim support unit which were all organized by SAWEG. The trainings have also positively influenced households by helping them adjust from some of the harmful culture beliefs like those that hindered girls from attaining education. Currently, both girls and boys are allowed to go to school and women are able to advise their male children, unlike before when male children could not be advised as they were regarded as the heads of the house.

“Modern farming is the way out of poverty”



For the past two years, the country has recorded the worst food shortage crisis in this decade due to the erratic rains. It has been estimated that more than 2.5 Million people will have no food in the lean months of 2016/2017. This has necessitated government to plan for food rationing to the affected families. However this is just a temporary measure that is not sustainable and will not ensure food security. ActionAid through its different arms has been working with farmers in its catchment area to find sustainable solutions to the food shortage. ActionAid has training farmers on new modern technologies which help farmers cultivate more even with the erratic rains. One such technology is called mulching where farmers are encouraged to cover the ground after planting their crops so that they reduce evaporation of water when the rains are very minimal. The technologies helps the soil to hold water for a long time and provide moisture to the plants. In Ntchisi farmers are singing praises to the technology. Emily Potiphar of Kakonkhwe village T/A Malenga in Ntchisi district; is one farmer who has seen the benefits of this technology. She is the Coalition of Women Farmers District Cordinator. A married woman with two children, a boy and a girl (Misheck and Mishalina), Emily is 38 years old and is married to Potiphar Mazoko who is 49 years old.

“ I rely on farming together with my husband which helps us to find food and earn income. We grow different crops which include: Soya beans, groundnuts, beans, maize and tobacco and together we own 4 hectares of land. I thank AAM for the Introduction of “Ulimi wa Ntaya Khasu” (mulching) because it has brought positive change in harvesting of crops. Last year we harvested 63 bags of maize, 13 bails of tobacco, 26 bags of soya beans, 1 bag of groundnuts and 10 bags of beans, but this



year regardless of the climate change due to “Ulimi wa Ntaya Khasu” we have managed to harvest 130 bags of maize, 20 bails of tobacco, 40 bags of soya beans, 2 bags of groundnuts and 7 bags of beans, “

Mrs Potiphar also says that it is not only her and her family who have benefited from this conservation agriculture farming practice, but also many other people in her village who are also doing this farming practice. She also said that those people who were not using this farming practice, are now interested to do so this coming farming season because they have seen how the other have benefited from it.

“ Even when the rains were not coming as required due to climate change, people who practiced Ntaya Khasu including me and my family; their crops did not wither but remained green, because this kind of farming also helps to keep water in the soil, so this attracted other people and made them interested to try “Ulimi wa Ntaya Khasu”, she said.

However Potiphar said that the major challenge that is remaining for women is ownership of land and the money that comes after selling the harvested crops. She says, women are being denied their rights, they are the one who put in much effort when farming but they do not enjoy the outcomes of their hard work. This she says is largely due cultural practices where woman do not inherit land from their parents but only . ***“A woman follows her husband when they get married and is told to cultivate on her husbands land which gives more power to men. What hurts most is that, during farming time the land is for both, but when all the crops have been harvested, now it becomes the man’s property, what to do with the crops, how many to sell and what the money should be spent. As a leader I am encouraging women to be involved in Village Savings and Loans and use this opportunity to let out plots and grow crops which they can have control on the proceeds and this is winning,”***

ActionAid Holds 2016 Girls Conference In Lilongwe



ActionAid held a 3 days girls conference in Lilongwe under the theme “empowering girls to make right choices and become achievers”. The conference started on 24 August through 26 August and was held at Msamba Catholic Centre. The conference aim was to mould and motivate girls to believe in themselves and know that they can do it on their own, by sensitizing them on their rights.

The three days had different areas of focus including visits to Kamuzu International Airport, Parliament Building, Meteorological Service Department and The Umodzi park. This was done to enlighten the girls and show them a different part of the world which is not open to them as most of these girls are from rural or Peri Urban areas. They also had motivational speeches from different women who posed as role models, and some of them were Ms Racheal Sibande who is the founder of M-Hub, Dr Jessie Kabwira who is a parliamentarian, Dr Martha Sineta the District Education Manager, ActionAid Malawi’s Executive Director Martha Khonje and other young females like ActionAid interns.

The girls were thoroughly taught their rights with emphasis on right to Education, self esteem and sexual reproductive health as it affects them both socially and academically as they grow. The representative of the girls who attended the conference Memory Banda, thanked ActionAid for organising such a conference and asked for more of these conferences. She further said they would share what they learnt at the conference with their friends back home as a way of appreciation and helping ActionAid’s aim of reaching out to girls come to pass.