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AAM and ACB officials pose with the youth at the official launch of the MoU in Lilongwe

## AAM, ACB engage youth in fighting corruption

In an effort to intensify the fight against rising corruption in Malawi, Action Aid Malawi (AAM) and the country's graft-busting body, the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that will see the youth taking an active role in the fight against corruption.

Among other things, the initiative will see AAM and ACB reach out to youth, both in and out of school, with awareness raising and capacity building training programs. The initiative seeks to create the youth of integrity "that will make corruption the most hated vice in Malawi".

Speaking in Lilongwe at the official signing of the MOU on 6th October, AAM Head of Programs and Policy, Peter Pangani, said youth participation in the fight against corruption is important to the development of Malawi, considering that the youth comprise a greater percentage of the country's population.

"You may recall that we had the National Anti-Corruption Conference this year organized by the Anti-Corruption Bureau and one of the key things that were asked during the conference was the absence of the youth at the conference and even the lack of participation and involvement in the fight against corruption," he said

"This partnership therefore answers the concern raised as well as marking as the first step to involving the youth in the fight against corruption."

Pangani cited massive human rights violations in sectors such as health, education, employment and access to justice which vic-

timize various groups including the youth in the country.

He said the youth's role in fighting corruption is also in line with AU agenda 2063 call upon the youth take active and leading in the development processes.

Taking her turn, ACB Director of Public Education Charity Temwachi Mphande said the partnership has come at the right time saying since 1998 the country has spent a lot of energies and resources in targeting adults in corruption fight forgetting the youth are equally victimised by corruption.

One of the youth leaders at the function, Stanly Mazani, said corruption is stealing a lot from the youth's future, hence the need for them to wake up and start championing the fight against the vice. He said the youth will also be exploring how to use the emerging technology such as new media to fight



Seated: Pangani (L) and Mphande signing the MoU, as the youth witness

# Stakeholders tip AAM on next strategy

Stakeholders have asked ActionAid Malawi (AAM) to focus more on strengthening partnership with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) if the organization has to maximize its impact in the country.



AAM Women Rights Theme Manager Chikumbutso Ngosi making a presentation during the meeting

The remarks were made on 7th October in Lilongwe during the one-day National Stakeholders Consultative Workshop organized by AAM to solicit stakeholders' input and recommendations on the organization's fifth Country Strategy Paper (CSP) which will span the period from 2018 to 2023. The forthcoming CSP is expected to replace the 2012-2017 CSP.

While acknowledging the organisation's commendable efforts registered under the fourth CSP, the stakeholders stressed that AAM now needs to prioritize building the capacity of more local NGOs and government institutions to ensure sustainability of its interventions.

The workshop, that drew par-

ticipants from government and NGO sector, further asked AAM to improve on its partners and stakeholders' engagement and information sharing on the interventions it is implementing in the country.

In addition, stakeholders encouraged the organization to keep empowering women, saying the women are still lagging behind in enjoyment of their rights, such as economic empowerment.

AAM has also been asked to invest more in the girl child education, youth and small-holder farmers.

Speaking during the workshop, AAM Head of Programs and Policy, Peter Pangani, thanked the stakeholders for their constructive feedback

during the consultations and promised them that their input will find

their way in the final 5thCSP . He said the CSP will likely be launched in the first quarter of 2018 and AAM will conduct national and regional dissemination conference on the same.

AAM started its operations in Malawi in 1991 and is now in 12 districts, namely Chitipa, Rumphi and Mzimba in the North, Lilongwe peri-urban, Ntchisi, Mchinji, Dedza in the Central Region, Machinga, Chiradzulu, Phalombe, Neno and Nsanje in the South. AAM thematic areas include Gender and Women Empowerment, HIV/AIDs, climate change, Education and Governance .

## **giz Impressed with ActionAid Global Fund work in Lilongwe**

The giz Technical Advisor for Malawi-German Health Programme, Han Marcel Kok, has expressed his satisfaction with the work that ActionAid is doing in Lilongwe on Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) through Plan International under the Global Fund Programme.

Mr. Kok said this after visiting out-of-school girls' clubs from Mtandire and Area 23. Among other things, girls from both groups displayed some of the activities they do when they meet, expressed their challenges and opportunities, but also their desires.

Mr. Kok said he was impressed with the way out of school girls and young women displayed their skills but also their zeal to come together to share knowledge and encourage each other.

"I was impressed to see urban adolescent girls and young women with income generation activities and cultural expressions. I particularly liked the approach by ActionAid and Plan Malawi where they are impacting knowledge in a humorous and respectful way," said Kok.

"It would be great if you include competitive element in the activities under this AGYW Module. For instance, exchange visits, sports, theatre, music and literature so that the girls are kept attracted to the clubs," he proposed.

However, Mr. Kok requested ActionAid and Plan Malawi to do much more in preventing teenage pregnancy and HIV in adolescents after noting that some of the club members he visited have babies even at young age. "It would be important to involve boys and young men so that they can take up their responsibility in also protecting the girls and young women," he continued.

He later advised ActionAid to accelerate its implementation under the AGYW module considering that it started late and has huge tasks within a short period of time. "But as you are accelerating the implementation, quality assurance is crucial to ensure that everything is in order," he advised.

Thoko Njovu is one of the members of Sambeta Out-of-School Girls' Club in Area 23 in Lilongwe where Mr. Kok visited. She joined the group in June 2017 after some of her relations informed her of the club and its benefits.

Thoko is now 21. She wrote her Malawi School Certificate of Examinations (MSCE) in 2015 but did not do well. She wanted to write the examinations again so that she could fulfil her dream of becoming a Front Desk Officer one day; a job that she feels makes one active as they meet different types of people.

However, her parents could not afford paying her school fees again because of the huge responsibility they have to look after six other biological children and one from their relation.

But as Thoko said joining Sambeta out-of-school Girls' Club was the best decision. "Through this club, I meet with different peers and together we teach each other how to cook, knit, saw dance, dramatize, but most especially, we encourage each other to abstain from sexual related activities so that we can prevent HIV and stay health," she said.

ActionAid started is implementing AGYW Project in Lilongwe through Plan Malawi in April, 2017. According to the Joint TB/HIV Global Fund Programmes Manager, Dalitso Kuphanga, the project was supposed to start in January, 2016 but a few hiccups delayed the kick-off. However, acceleration plans were put in place.

So far, the AGYW project under Global Fund in Lilongwe has managed to establish 600 out of against a target of 1326 out of school girls' clubs while on the other hand, it has achieved its target of opening 84 in-school girls' clubs.

The AGYW module seeks to reduce HIV incidences amongst adolescent girls and young women aged 10-24. The module targets adolescent girls and young women because they are vulnerable due to low literacy levels, harmful cultural practices, high poverty levels, high school dropout, and poor access to HIV and services.



## Reclaiming land rights from the jaws of patriarchy

When Maggie Botha lost her loving and supportive husband in 2006, she saw the whole world crumbling right before her tearful eyes. She had to face a blank future with her five children, alone.

In 2007, an elder brother to her late husband, Mwachilimba, asked her to surrender over half the land she was cultivating to him. Failure to do so would spell trouble for her, including being chased from her matrimonial home in Group Village Mwachilima, in Rumph District to her home of origin in Mzimba District.



Maggie recounting the ordeal outside her house

Choiceless, voiceless and powerless, she yielded to his demands. Like many other women in her plight in the area, Maggie lost part of her land she was cultivating, without any recourse mechanism. Destitution loomed.

In the usual version of Maggie's story, a woman becomes the forgotten out-cast of deep-seated cultural norms and practices that pamper patriarchy and render women as second class citizens.

Little regard, apparently, is being paid to the fact that such a suppressive culture is a slap in the face of the Constitution of Malawi, the supreme law of the land. Section 24 (1)(ii) of the Constitution of Malawi which says women have right "to acquire and maintain rights in property, independently or in association with others, regardless of their marital status".

Thus, the long living discord between culture in many districts of Malawi and the Constitution of Malawi has left women like Maggie at the receiving end.

But Maggie's story does not end in hopelessness. While still grappling with the land-grabbing issue, she, in 2007, decided to join a women group, Wongani REFLECT Action Group, that discusses and tackles various issues affecting them.

The groups, with the facilitation of ActionAid Malawi, were established in Traditional Authority (TA) Chikulamayembe in Rumph District in 2006, upon noticing increased cases of violence such as land grabbing among widowed



Maggie (hand up) appears to be raising her issue with Wongani REFLECT group in her area

and divorced women. With time, the initiative spilled to neighbouring T/A Mwankhunikira within the district. To date, there are a total of 75 REFLECT Action groups in two T/As of Chikulamayembe and Mwankhunikira. The groups offer women safe spaces to mobilise themselves against repressive norms, practices, policies and laws. Each group has membership of 25 to 30.

Maggie used her group as a platform to raise her land issue

Wongani REFLECT Group, with the help of the umbrella body Chikulamayembe Women Forum, took Maggie's case as a serious violation of women rights to own property. The group helped Maggie get back her land

"Getting back the land was a huge relief for me," says Maggie. "I am now able to cultivate on the land and sell part of the yields to advance the well-being of my children."

Through farming, Maggie has been able to educate her children. The other two since finished school and are employed with the Malawi Police Services and

Ministry of Education as a police officer and teacher, respectively. The third born child is at Bolero Community Day Secondary School while the younger two are still in primary schools.

Tiwonge Gondwe, Director of Chikulamayembe Women Forum remarks that through the established and empowered REFLECT Action groups, they have helped about 2800 women own land in T/A Chikulamayembe alone, something unthinkable before 2006.

Taking his turn, paramount chief Chikulamayembe says time has come for the society to discard cultural practices that subjugate women on various issues including women.

But for all the efforts in ensuring that women enjoy access and control over land, women face real fears in owning land for cultivation. Government's cherished projects such as G8 New Alliance and the Green Belt Initiative (GBI) may end up concentrating most of the economically valuable 5.3 million hectors of land in the hands of a small number of ac-



Fruits of empowerment: Maggie cultivating the land she lost to her in-laws.

tors and private entities, excluding many of the poorest, particularly women. Under the G8 Alliance, Malawi in 2013 promised to set aside 200,000 hectares of prime land for commercial investors, while GBI is said to consume about 100 000 hectors of fertile land.

Countering such fears that come with such major agricultural investments will leave a lasting smile on women like Maggie Botha whose land has become a viable tool for socio-economic empowerment.

# Making girl education a reality in Malawi

On 11<sup>th</sup> October, the world commemorated the International Day of the Girl Child (IDGC) under the theme: *The power of the Adolescent Girl: Vision for 2030*. This year's theme places much emphasis on ending early marriages. What a timely theme, especially for Malawi where cases of early and forced marriages remain stubbornly high.

According to Human Rights Watch, roughly half of all girls marry before the age 18 in Malawi. The world's rights body further says between 2010 and 2013, 27 612 girls in primary and 4, 053 in secondary schools dropped out due to marriage. During the same period, another 14 051 primary school girls and 5597 secondary school girls dropped out because they were pregnant.

These grim statistics are mainly driven by factors such as poverty, lack of education opportunities, inaccessibility of sexual reproductive health services, cultural practices such as 'Kupimbira' 'Mbilingha' 'fisi', 'Joni culture', 'chinkhoswe cha usiku' and 'kutomera'.

In 2016, for instance, the world woke up to disturbing news of an anti-girl child education Malawian cultural practice that all but buried the girls' future. According to the story by the BBC, a man was paid to have sex with over 100 women and girls in Malawi's southern region district of Nsanje. All this was done in fulfilment of the society's fidelity to culture.

It's recorded girls were or are forced to have sex with hyena within three days after completing

their first menstruation period or else a misfortune would strike their families or community. The hyena issue could simply be a tip of iceberg that rolls back efforts in empowering the girl child.

This is, however, despite a number of interventions championed by government non-governmental organisations against such retrogressive, yet highly cherished cultural practices. Actually, most of the community members and chiefs who tenaciously hold onto such practices would denounce it in public but still practice the same in their own dark places.

Rather than ending the practices, one would be rightly tempted to argue, the interventions by government and NGOs, have only succeeded in pushing the practic-

Rather than ending the practices, one would be rightly tempted to argue, the interventions by government and NGOs, have only succeeded in pushing the practices to deeper underground.

es to deeper underground. Girls' education future still remains at a greater risk. Actually denying the girl child her right to education poses a serious draw-back on the realization of 8 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs.)

Even more disconcerting is that some of the girls falling prey to teenage pregnancies and early marriages are getting bursary support from various partners with a stake in girl education.

This obviously calls for the need to shift from the needs-based to human rights based approach to girl child education initiative will promote active participation and empowerment for the girls, parents, local leaders and the entire community membership.

The needs-based approach where girls are targeted with assorted incentives has proved costly, ineffective, and unsustainable. Even the by-laws being formulated by traditional authorities to encourage girl education should not just be imposed on the community members.

Rather, they ought to result from an honest, participatory and meaningful discussion with the key participants groups, including girls themselves.

Furthermore, there is need for government to intensify implementation of education policies that encourage enrolment of teen mothers. As recommended by Human Rights Watch, African governments should reverse harmful policies and practices that stigmatize girls, including forced pregnancy testing and regulations that allow for the expulsion of pregnant and married girls.

Of significant concern is the failure by Malawi's education curriculum to provide comprehensive lessons on sexual and reproductive health rights to enable the girl child make informed decisions.

For sure, time has come for stakeholders in the country to start using human rights based approaches in offsetting challenges that keeping choking girl education .