

Monthly Newsletter

ActionAid Malawi

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Project beneficiaries welcoming the Spotlight Initiative delegation in Mzimba

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FOREWORD

Hello and welcome to yet another edition of our monthly newsletter. June was an action-packed month for ActionAid Malawi (AAM)

In the reporting month, we hosted a high-level Spotlight Initiative delegation that toured some of the projects sites in Mzimba where we are implementing two projects aimed at contributing to reduction of gender-based violence in the district. We are implementing a similar project in Ntchisi.

ActionAid Malawi also took advantage of June, being a national budget deliberation month, to engage parliamentary clusters to influence gender-sensitivity in the budgetary allocations. We did that through our key and strategic national governance partners, namely, Civil Society Education Coalition, Malawi Health Equity Network and Nasfam.

The coming in of the Covid-19 third wave also saw us continue with our response initiatives in impact areas where we donated some medical and sanitation supplies. I hope you will have a wonderful engagement with the stories. Remember, Covid-19 is real, stay safe.

Assan Golowa
ActionAid Malawi Executive Director

AAM host high-level Spotlight Initiative Delegation

On 16th June, 2021 ActionAid Malawi (AAM) hosted Spotlight Initiative high-level delegation that included the Speaker of National Assembly, Right Honourable Catherine Gotani Hara, Minister of Gender, Community Development, Children and Social Welfare, Honourable Patricia Kaliati, UN Resident Coordinator, Maria Jose Torres, Acting Head of EU Delegation in Malawi, Aurelie Valtat, Inkosi ya Makosi M'belwa V, M'belwa District Council officials, civil society and the media at Mtende Primary School, Traditional Authority Chindi in Mzimba District.

During the interaction, the delegates appreciated key issues young women and girls discuss during their safe space, which is one of the platforms used to bring out and tackle various forms of gender-based violence (GBV) under the Spotlight Initiative program.

The delegates also heard testimonies from traditional leaders, women forums, male champions, community victim support unit focal persons, Area Development Committee, Health Workers and Office-in-Charge from Mzimba Police on how the program has enhanced stakeholders' coordination in challenging GBV in the district.

Speaking during the interaction, all the delegates commended the various stakeholders for demonstrating strong commitment towards the project. The delegates further encouraged girls to work hard in school to become productive citizens in future.

Jose Torres said the achievements and lessons recorded during their visit will help improve programming of the second phase of the Spotlight Initiative in the country's six districts.

Taking her turn, Honourable Kaliati called upon M'belwa District Council officials to scale up the project to ensure women and girls are free from GBV.

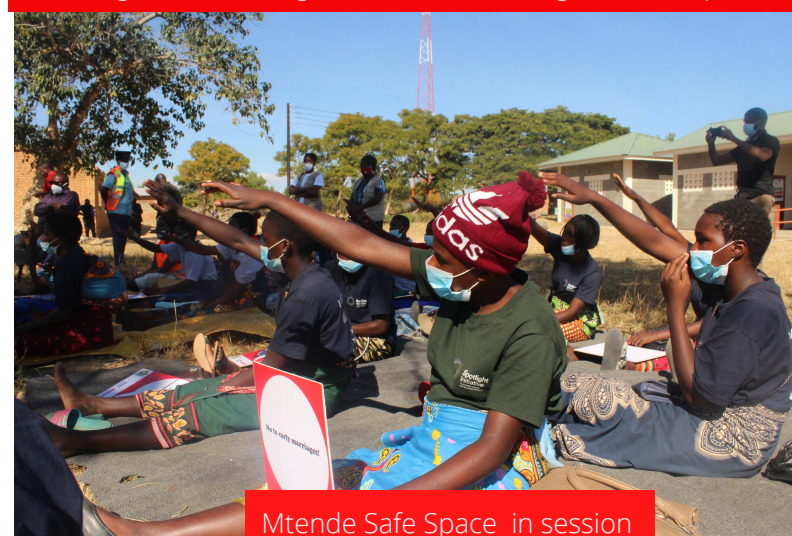
On her part, Speaker Right Honourable Catherine Gotani Hara asked girls to work hard in school as a long term solution to GBV in the country.

AAM Executive Director, Assan Golowa, said the organisation will remain committed to empowering girls in hard-to-reach areas against GBV and other causes of poverty and social injustice.

ActionAid Malawi is implementing the Spotlight Initiative projects in Mzimba and Ntchisi districts.



Delegates following discussions during the safe space



Mtende Safe Space in session



A mentor at Mtende Safe Space facilitating the discussions and below is part of the gathering at the meeting





Primary school learners in Neno calling for gender-responsive public service through a solidarity march

AAM Takes Tax Justice for GRPS to Ntchisi, Neno

In June, ActionAid Malawi (AAM) under the Tax Justice for Gender Responsive Public Services (GRPS) facilitated a number of engagements and capacity building interventions for community and district stakeholders in Ntchisi and Neno as part of promoting quality, equitable, inclusive public education in the two districts. The two districts are part of the four impact districts where AAM is implementing a NORAD-funded "Breaking the Barriers and Tax Justice for GRPS" project. The other two districts where the project is being implemented are Chitipa and Lilongwe.

The activities included; training of community and district stakeholders in Gender Responsive and Disability Inclusive Budgeting and Monitoring, to ensure that education budgets promote the varied needs and interests of girls and boys, and other categories of the population that are usually side-lined.

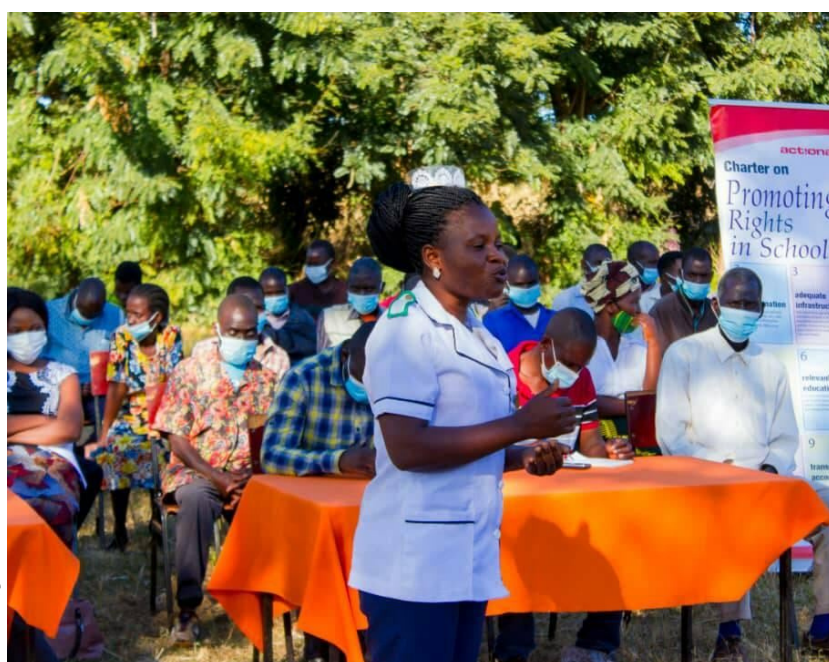
AAM also facilitated interface meetings between girls, community members and duty bearers. The meeting aimed at demanding quality inclusive education in primary schools.

The climax of the activities was the Global Action Week for Education Commemoration where learners had solidarity walks and performances to raise awareness on the need for more funding to address gaps in education.

Learners further requested authorities to provide adequate female teachers, teaching and learning materials, desks, schools school infrastructure and the eradication of violence in and out of schools and unpaid care work burdens which make them have less time for studies.



Don't marry me off, I am still young! Learners in Ntchisi making themselves clear through a solidarity march



A health worker in Ntchisi interacting with the learners and community members during the interface meeting.

SRI project equips mentors, caregivers

ActionAid Malawi (AAM) in June handed over bicycles, umbrellas and tablets worth K8.5 million to 53 mentors and care-givers in Lilongwe, Balaka and Mulanje districts under the six-year School Readiness Initiative (SRI) project being implemented with funding from the Roger Federer Foundation.

Speaking during the symbolic handover ceremony at Nsalu in Lilongwe, AAM Head of Business Development, Grant Management and Communication, Yandura Chipeta, said the donation is expected to ease mobility and monitoring of the lessons in the supported community-based childcare centres (CBCCs) in the three districts.

Chipeta said the donation will also help strengthen linkages among different players in the communities to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the project.

Speaking on behalf of government, Lilongwe District Council Chairperson, Luciano Botoman hailed AAM for the support towards the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector and urged other organisations to come in with additional support to complement's government's limited resources.

The SRI project, a successor of the Comprehensive ECD program, aims at promoting smooth transition of learners from CBCCs to Primary Schools by ensuring that "children are ready for schools and the schools are ready for children



Chipeta (2nd left and Luciano (2nd Right) symbolically handing over the donation to one of the mentors



Mentors and caregivers in Lilongwe posing with their items



Chipeta addressing the media after the event

Arming the health sector against the third wave



Golowa (Left) handing over some of the donated items to Bandawe

ActionAid Malawi (AAM) with funding from International Humanitarian Action and Response Team (IHART) on 17th June, donated Covid-19 equipment worth MK22 million to the country's eight districts where the organisation is carrying out various anti-poverty interventions.

The donation includes oxygen cylinder bottles, flow metres, oxygen bottles, N95 masks, gloves and sanitizers which was delivered in the district hospitals of Chitipa, Rumphi, Mzimba, Mchinji, Dedza, Machinga, Phalombe and Nsanje.

Speaking after making a symbolic donation of the equipment at Mzimba District Hospital, AAM Executive Director, Assan Golowa, said the organisation decided to make such a donation as contribution to the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic which he said has negatively affected various interventions the organisation is implementing in the country.

"We are however, grateful to Malawi government for making the Covid-19 vaccine available to the country's citizens. We hope the vaccine will go a long way in preventing further spread of the virus," said Golowa.

Receiving the donation on behalf of district hospitals, Mzimba District Health Officer Ted Bandawe commended AAM for the support, saying the donation has come at the time the third wave of the pandemic is looming.

"This gesture demonstrates ActionAid's commitment to combatting Covid-19. The equipment donated today will also help us in treating other chronic illnesses such as tuberculosis," he said.

By the time we went to press, Malawi had recoded a total of 47 000 cases of Covid-19 and 1450 deaths.

Fostering hope for food and income security in Nkhatabay and Chiradzulu

In the reporting month, ActionAid Malawi (AAM) handed over 115 push bikes and 56 treadle pumps to village agents and farmer field schools, respectively in Chiradzulu and Nkhatabay district. The activity is part of the European Union-funded KULIMA-BETTER project ActionAid Malawi is implementing in the district through an NGO-consortium led by Self-Help Africa.

AAM Executive Director, Assan Golowa, who presided over the handover ceremony, said the push bikes will ease mobility challenges for the village agents who are key in linking village and savings groups under the project to financial institutions.

On the treadle pumps, Golowa said the farming tools would enable smallholder farmers under FFS cultivate all year round and on scale as part of the broader goal of attaining food, nutritional and income security at a household level.

AAM has been implementing the KULIMA-BETTER project since 2018 with a goal to attain food, income and nutritional security and climate resilience among 44000 smallholder farmers in both Nkhatabay and Chiradzulu districts.



Golowa, 5th right, standing with village agents after handing over the bicycles in Chiradzulu



Golowa demonstrating how the treadle pumps operate



Golowa (3rd left) handing over the treadle pumps in Nkhatabay



Golowa making a speech after the donation ceremony in Chiradzulu

AAM, partners challenge parliament on key sector budgets

In the month of June, ActionAid Malawi (AAM) supported its governance partners to engage key clusters and committees of parliament on the 2021/2022 national budget. The engagements were aimed at sharing analysis reports on the budget and influence equitable budgetary allocations with emphasis on gender sensitivity.

The first engagement meeting targeted parliamentary cluster on health. The engagement was led by Malawi Health Equity Network, (MEHN) an AAM partner under the Partnership for Social Accountability Alliance (PSA-Alliance) project which focusses on strengthening oversight and social accountability in the Health and Agriculture sectors in Malawi.

An analysis report presented at the meeting showed that for the past three financial years, the sexual and reproductive health rights sector had only been allocated around MK730 million which was only about 49 percent of the required K1.5 billion as stipulated in the country's health sector strategic plan.

Delegates at the meeting bemoaned the trend, saying it denies country's citizens, especially the youth right to reproductive health services.

Speaking at the meeting, Chief of Health Services in the Ministry of Health, Dr. Queen Dube said Health is one of the pillars on Malawi's Agenda2063 and that attainment of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is key.

"UHC is about quality, Equity and Affordability. The Ministry of Health needs more resources to ensure the country is within the spirit of leaving no one behind," she says.

The event was followed by another engagement with parliamentary cluster on Agriculture. The meeting was led by NASFAM, another ActionAid Malawi partner under the PSA-Alliance project.

Beatrice Makwenda, Head of Policy at NASFAM highlighted that the 2021/22 national budget had serious under-allocations towards sectors such as irrigation farming and agriculture marketing. She called for equitable allocations within the Agriculture Budget, with special consideration towards, Market Development, Research and Extension.

Lastly, AAM, through its partner, Civil Society Education Coalition dated parliamentary committee on Education to present key findings on the national budget pertaining to the Education sector. AAM was represented by Executive Director, Assan Golowa, and in his solidarity remarks at the meeting, he pointed out that Malawi loses approximately \$78 Million per year in revenue to multinational companies.

"We must raise fair tax specifically from multinational companies to adequately offer gender responsive education. Quality gender responsive public education can only be provided if government has adequate funds allocated to the public sectors," said Golowa,



Parliamentary Health Committee Chairperson Mathews Ngwale addressing the participants during the engagement meeting



Beatrice Makwenda (Right) flanked by ActionAid Malawi officials, presenting an analysis of the Agriculture Budget before the Agriculture Parliamentary Cluster



ActionAid Malawi Executive Director, Assan Golowa, offering solidarity remarks during the engagement meeting with parliamentary Cluster on Education



Women farmers advocate, Ellen Matupi, speaks truth to power on land law reforms

Ellen Matupi, Chairperson of Coalition of Women Farmer, a partner under ActionAid Malawi (AAM) has asked Malawi's Vice President Dr. Saulos Chilima to ensure government put smallholder women farmers at the centre of agriculture sector as one way of ending hunger and poverty in the country.

Matupi made the remarks on 1st June in Lilongwe during Chilima's pavilion inspection as part of the two-day Malawi National Agriculture Policy Conference organised by MwAPATA Institute in partnership with the National Planning Commission (NPC), the Ministry of Agriculture, the Center for Agricultural Research and Development (CARD) of the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), Donor Committee in Agriculture and Food Security (DCAFS) and Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI).

Organised under the theme: "Supporting Agriculture Transformation in Malawi: Beyond Research to Implementation," the conference's objective was to create a platform for strategic dialogue and evidence based policy guidance and implementation support for agricultural transformation.

On the second day of Malawi Annual Agricultural Policy Conference, Matupi was one of the panelists reflecting on policy responses and practical solutions on 2016 land-related laws in the country. Matupi highlighted the need for women in the country to own and have control over customary land to enable them to actively contribute to the development of their families and country at large.

"Let women own and have control over land to enable them contribute to food security at household level and sell the surplus to advance the well-being of their families," she said.



Matupi addressing Vice President, Right Honourable Dr. Saulos Chilima on the implication of land law reforms on women empowerment



Matupi addressing delegates during the the MwAPATA conference

Overcoming oppressive patriarchy through economic empowerment: The story of Rahema Lifa



Rahema Lifa is now a village agent in her area, supervising 17 VSLA and inspiring members into economic empowerment

The first part of a 51-year-old Rahema Lifa's story is not uncommon in Chikuse Village in Dedza District. After 26 years of marriage, her husband abandoned her in 2017 and went to South Africa where he married a young wife.

Lifa had to shoulder the burden of taking care of five children single-handedly. In the usual version of such tales, women are condemned to abject poverty. But Lifa's story does not end that way.

The same year, 2017, Lifa joined Chikondi Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) group where she learned a saving culture and business skills.

Lifa's life got a major turning point in 2020, when ActionAid Malawi, through Tilimbike project, selected her as one of the village agents to supervise VSL groups in the area.

Tilimbike is one of the projects under FARMSE, an acronym for Financial Access for Rural Markets Stallholder and Enterprises, which is a development program financed by the Malawi Government and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). ActionAid Malawi's Tilimbike project seeks to, among others, improve rural financial access for 37500 poor and vulnerable people in Machinga and Dedza districts by 2022.

"As part of the job, I underwent a training organised by ActionAid Malawi(AAM) to enable me effectively supervise the VSL groups including Chikondi in my area. So far, I supervise 17 groups which were revamped under the Tilimbike project," she says.

Apart from supervising VSL groups, Lifa is still a member of her Chikondi VSL group which helps her borrow money to boost her tomatoe, irish potato and donought business.

"Since 2018, I have been building a house at slow pace, but the Tilimbike project has helped me speed up my house construction project as it is now easy to borrow money from the group to run my businesses whose part of the profits go the house project. I can now easily feed my children; I no longer need a husband to survive," she says.

Lifa is one of the 75 village agents trained under Tilimbike project in both Dedza and Machinga where AAM is implementing the project.



Lifa(Right) during her Chikondi VSLA meetig



Lifa with Tilimbike Project Facilitator in Dedza, Pamela Likoswe



Lifa standing at her house she is constructing with proceeds from VSLA

Malawi journalists shine at SADC Social Accountability Awards

The month of June was special for Malawi's media fraternity as all the three awards in 2021 SOUTHERN AFRICA MEDIA AWARD IN SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING went to Malawian journalists

The 3rd prize went to Innocent Kumchedwa from Maziko Radio Station in Malawi for a story shedding light on corruption and negligence in the maternity wards and public healthcare system. With multiple data sources, this story highlighted the critical role that journalism can play in promoting social accountability, especially relating to public resources.

Read the full [STORY](#)

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The 2nd prize went to Winston Mwale from The AfricaBrief publication in Malawi as well. Winston's winning story investigates and exposes how mismanagement of maternity wards resources has led to precarious conditions for pregnant women and infants at Mkanda Health Centre, Mchinji. Winston Mwale also received a social accountability award in 2018

Read the full [STORY](#)

The 1st prize went to Josephine Chinele from Africa In Fact publication in Malawi. Josephine effectively used data journalism to highlight a surge in teen pregnancies and child marriages during the time schools were closed due to Covid 19 pandemic. Using investigative reporting skills, Josephine thought to amplify different voices on pursuing solutions to the problem.

Read the full [STORY](#)

The three awardees are part the team of investigative journalists ActionAid Malawi (AAM) is working with on our project:

"Strengthening Social Accountability and oversight in health and agriculture"

AAM, is also working with parliament, issue-based civil society organisations, community-based organisations and community radios in implementing the regional Partnership for Social Accountability Alliance (PSA-Alliance) project with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC.)

And speaking when ActionAid Malawi hosted the winners to breakfast in Lilongwe, AAM Executive Director, Assan Golowa said his organisation will keep working with the media in the country to strengthen social accountability in the country.

"We work with the media not just to expose government but for it's for greater good of our Agriculture and Health sector," he said

Chairperson of Parliamentary Committee on Health, Mathews Ngwale hailed the three journalists for triumphing against all odds. He called upon the media to continue providing indepth coverage of sexual and reproductive health issues in the country.



1st winner, Josephine Chinele "Teenage Pregnancies are already a big issue in Malawi but Covid-19 made it even worse,"



2nd winner, Winston Mwale: "The empowered communities at Mkanda were key in ensuring that I document a powerful story "



3rd winner, Innocent Kumchedwa: I first heard the story from a victim in a minibus. That raised my curiosity to follow it up



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