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Male Editor | December 2019

In partnership with

FOUNDATION



‘CBCCs  
turned  
our lives  
around’

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# ECD programme overview in the eyes of Actionaid Malawi ED

Actionaid Malawi is implementing a 10-year long ECD Program that started in 2011 and will be winding up in 2021.

Currently, there are only 10 districts in the country that are benefitting from the program. These are: Nsanje, Machinga, Phalombe, Neno, Mchinji, Dedza, Lilongwe, Ntchisi, Rumphi and Chitipa.

The program which is being sponsored by Roger Federer Foundation to a tune of US\$13.5 million aims at improving the lives and wellbeing of poor and vulnerable children aged between four and six in these districts through access to quality and sustainable ECD services.

The program which is targeting 150,000 children in 480 ECD centres by 2021, will have improved the quality of early Childhood care and education, so that children develop in all aspects of their lives at the time of its expiry.

At the end of it, the capacity and motivation of caregivers to offer quality comprehensive ECD services in 6 districts would have been enhanced, not to mention chalking an improvement in the health and nutrition status of children.

It is also hoped that at the time the program will be reaching its final line, it would have enhanced smooth transition of children from CBCC to primary schools.

To ensure ownership and sustainability of Model CBCCs in the targeted districts managed by CBCC and parent committees with increased capacity to deliver the services without challenges. The project will also increase policy influencing and political commitment for increased investment in ECD.

Since 2011, it has now been eight years since the programme commenced.



Assan Golowa is ActionAid Malawi Executive Director and he now provides an overview of the programme across the years that it has been running as follows:

## MAJOR IMPACT

The major impact, especially to do with the infrastructure development, is the

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Our hope is that since we are working with Government, and considering that the CBCC are of high quality, Government can replicate. We are happy with the size and quality of the model centres.



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model centres which have been classic example to the country on how a CBCC should look like. The model CBCC have been designed to have a lot of space and ample materials for children.

Our hope is that since we are working with Government, and considering that the CBCC are of high quality, Government can replicate. We are happy with the size and quality of the model centres.

**ON CAREGIVER CAPACITY BUILDING**

We have taken a few steps to train the care givers as one way of building their capacity. We have also introduced revolving fund scheme as a motivational factor. The caregivers are also benefiting from cross learning. They visit some districts and their colleagues from those other districts visit them too, so that there is cross pollination.

**HEALTH OF CHILDREN.**

Looking at the issue of monitoring the health of the children in CBCC, I can say that this is work in progress.

Nutritious food is provided. On medical health, we work with the government. They conduct childhealth and Growth monitoring and growth. While it is happening in other centres, other centres are yet to catch up. It is our wish that health officials in these districts are involved in these activities for all ECD centres.

**GOAT PASS ON SCHEME**

Goat Pass on scheme was going to have a huge impact only if all the caregivers were as disciplined as their colleagues in Rumphu who have successfully implemented the scheme. In Nsanje, it has not worked well. Actionaid won't be in the centres forever. At some point we will have to pass it on to Government. There is suggestion to introduce some honoraria so that they get paid something in line with Government. But in the absence of that this scheme is providing motivation to the caregivers.

**TRANSITION FROM CBCC TO PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

Research has shown that performance of children that pass through CBCC is





The challenge is that most primary schools do not have facilities that can support this transition because they are poorly resourced and this has to a greater extent affected transition.



far much better than those that do not. Early childhood development becomes a challenge when there is a disconnect between the CBCCs and primary schools, which renders the efforts of smooth transition ineffective.

The challenge is that most primary schools do not have facilities that can support this transition because they are poorly resourced and this has to a greater extent affected transition.

We have asked Government to look at the issues of education quality that is accrued when children transit smoothly from CBCC to primary schools.

Otherwise, in short, I can say that transition is better in terms of monitored performance of the children but it is only being challenged by different factors prevalent in other primary schools.

#### MONITORING PERFORMANCE

The other aspect that is not perfect is monitoring. While it is being done in other centres, in other centres it is not happening. We are putting more effort in ensuring that monitoring and tracking of these children is done.

#### COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Communities have been highly involved; you will appreciate that these are the ones providing nutritious food to the CBCCs, communities are contributing volunteers that become caregivers. This also shows that the communities are in total support of the CBCCs, which shows the ownership of these facilities by the communities and its leadership.

#### SUSTAINABILITY AND OWNERSHIP OF ECD CENTRES

Sustainability is work in progress. At the moment, we periodically meet district assemblies to prepare them in this regard. We are building capacities of representatives from the departments of social welfare, education at the district level. We are also doing capacity building at the ADC and VDC levels to ensure that members understand what is involved in sustainability of ECD services.

We hope in time, Government and local structures will take over running and management of these facilities, because they will need some continued funding. We have just engaged the Parliamentary Committee of Social and Community Affairs around the issues of CBCC sustainability.

# Q&A

## Malawi government learns from ECD programme

The Government of Malawi is the custodian of all programmes happening in Malawi. It is for the same reason that the ECD programme is a huge part and parcel of Government policy operations and therefore it is done under the watchful eyes of Government. The ministry responsible for this particular project is Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare. **MCKNIGHT KALANDA** is Director of Children Affairs in the ministry and he is the man who acts as the eyes of Government in the programme. In this Question and Answer interview, he provides an insight of Government's take around the ECD programme. *Excerpts:*

**QUESTION:** What is Government's take in the ECD Programme that Actionaid Malawi has facilitated in implementing?

**KALANDA:** Action Aid is one of the pioneers that were able to show the rest of the partners how the ECD programme can be implemented as a comprehensive package. What we had noted is most of the partners had been implementing parts of the programme. Like some partners will may be, look at construction only, other partners would look the service through the CBCC only. But through the comprehensive ECD programming that has had a lot of impact on the idea of a model centre.

The project was able to deliver 80 model centres which have indicated to the partners what a model ECD centre should look like. While some partners were saying its not easy to construct a model centre, through the modelling, partners now have some idea. And just to show that, that has had a lot of impact, the Government now, through the 'Investing in Early Years Project' is scaling up that idea. Actionaid did 80, Government intends to do 250 across ten districts

**QUESTION:** Is it still going to be in the same districts or you will look at other 10 separate districts?

**KALANDA:** Most of these districts will be different, but one or two are similar, for example Machinga and Rumphu... because of the criteria which we used to select the project districts.

So, the construction component has indeed had some impact. Besides the construction component, there is the component of training for the caregivers.



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We are developing a proposal which we will share with Government on how we can motivate the caregivers through such an initiative.

In all the 80 model centres and 480 satellite centres, the support from Actionaid enabled us to train practically all the caregivers and also members of the centre management committees who are vital to the effective running of the CBCCs.

**QUESTION:** When you are looking at the issues of motivation as part of the whole programme, how has it turned out?

**KALANDA:** On motivation, there is a pilot that Actionaid embarked on, the revolving fund idea.

From the ministry point of view, we see that as something that has a lot of impact and we would like to scale up that one as well through the 'Investing in Early Years Project' and in general, to the implementation of the ECD programme.

We are developing a proposal which we will share with Government on how we can motivate the caregivers through such an initiative. The evidence is there on the ground from the pilot that Actionaid has implemented.

**QUESTION:** What about the goat pass on Scheme?

**KALANDA:** Those are other innovative ideas that we can use to motivate the caregivers apart from the revolving fund.



From the ministry point of view, we see that as something that has a lot of impact and we would like to scale up that one as well through the 'Investing in Early Years Project' and in general, to the implementation of the ECD programme.



We are saying to ourselves; can we look at what other innovative ideas that partners have used on the ground to motivate the caregivers.

The goat-pass-on scheme, if well understood by the beneficiaries, is something that can give them more than even giving them honoraria. Because sometimes the rates of honoraria are so low and often times delayed, so the goat pass on scheme, if properly managed, can help to motivate the caregivers.

**QUESTION:** When you look at the issue of transition that has to be done when the children have finished their CBCC span, how would you rate what has been achieved so far?

**KALANDA:** Under the ongoing support from Roger Federer we were supposed to do transition, but then in terms of the implementation it appeared, initially, that the ideas were not concrete, so we did not make a lot of headway.

But now through another project which Roger Federer Foundation is supporting, we look at that as something that will bring an impact to the programme. Besides just looking at issues of transition, it will also help improve the collaboration between our ministry and the ministry of education, alongside the parents, the teachers and the caregivers. At the moment the collaboration is a bit weak, but I trust once we embark on full implementation of transition project, it will help in that regard.

But apart from that, in terms of the transition, when the children have received access to quality ECD services and they have joined the primary school, they are easier to handle compared to children that have never had access to effective ECD service provision. That has helped in smoothening the transition.

**QUESTION:** When children have transitioned to the primary school is there a system that ministry has put in place to track their performance?

**KALANDA:** Yes, there was an attempt at tracking the performance on the children. That's one thing that the ministry is very keen on following up. So, what we are saying is we must have a system which should be put in place, that will help us to track the performance of these students. In the education sector they have a cohort tracking system.

What we would like trying to propose is that when we are enrolling our children, when they are five years old, as they transit to primary if they can be assigned a unique identification number, which could be linked to the cohort tracking system of the education sector. At a later stage when you are tracking the performance of that child, they will use that number.

So, if we agree on the system to say, anyone who has passed through an ECD facility would be identified in this manner, when they go to primary for enrolment the head teachers will know that they went through an ECD facility. Even after five years, it will be easy, so we need that system. And

that's one of the things that has to be done under the transitional project which the Roger Federer foundation is supporting.

**QUESTION:** What about the issues of the communities taking up ownership of these CBCCs, even perhaps long after the partners would have left?

**KALANDA:** Earlier on, I mentioned about the training of members of parent committee and the centre management committee. When these committees are not provided the necessary training you have issues, but when you train them, part of the training touches on the issues of ownership and how they can contribute in the effectiveness of the programmes that take place in the CBCCs.

What we have seen when you look at what is happening in the satellite centres, 90 percent of the work is done by the community. The community is just given a design of a centre, but they are encouraged to build from scratch and Actionaid was only providing the ironsheets for roofing and cement, window frames and door frames for refurbishing the building.

So, from that perspective, combined with the training, you see a lot of ownership. They are not solely dependent on Actionaid. When you look at the satellite centres that have been solely established compared to some of the centres established by communities themselves.

Where you haven't provided the training, the centre looks different so in terms of ownership there was that deliberate effort to strengthen that spirit of ownership.

Even during the construction of model centres, the communities were given a role in the construction so that they indeed own the facility. Otherwise when you just construct, you build and hand over, sometimes its difficult for the communities to appreciate. So, the philosophy of saying, this is your facility but in terms of ownership, it should be a, b, c, d.

And also, through the training of the parents, quite a good number of parents in the centres that are being supported by Actionaid are now actively supporting their children's stimulation and earlier learning at home and the CBCCs. When the project started, this was around 30 percent, now as I speak, we are talking of 70 percent of the parents supporting actively, their children's simulation and early learning,

And also, one thing that I have noted, is that, in most of the centres, they are able to provide regular nutritious meals for the CBCCs, this is mostly done by the village communities themselves, without Actionaid, necessarily providing the inputs.

**QUESTION:** What would you say about Child Health and Growth monitoring at the CBCC?

**KALANDA:** By design, we would like to have



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that happening. But what we noted that in some areas, depending on who is working in the area, the Health Surveillance Assistants are able to do growth monitoring, deworming and other services for the children, whilst in other areas the services are not provided. But as a ministry, we really would love to see communities providing such service to their children.

So, we hope as we continue with the interventions, more especially as we are implementing the investing in early years [project] which has taken on some of the positive learnings from Actionaid implemented projects we should be able to close the gap. We really need to support the children in issues of nutrition, growth monitoring, their health status in general, ensuring that they have potable water.

**QUESTION:** One area that came out from several districts where the programme is being implemented is that the caregivers would like to have a fixed and steady motivational income of some kind like is the case with Adult Literacy Instructors. Do have any plans?

**KALANDA:** When Government was approving the current policy in November 2017, we made that presentation and we called it the major policy shift because currently the caregivers are volunteering, so we suggested to Government that the caregivers needed to be paid some honoraria and others needed to be on the Government payroll. At that time Government was thinking of 2018 Population and Housing Census and 2019 tripartite elections.

We gave them a budget, but they were saying if we give the caregivers K10,000 honoraria for example, which translates into K4.2 billion for 35,000 caregivers. If we were to pay them say, K15,000, it will translate to K6.3 billion. If we were to pay them the current minimum wage which is

K35,000, so if for example we paid them K30,000 it means Government must provide an extra 16.8 billion per year. This is for 35,000 caregivers. But the system based on the number of children that are benefitting need 100,000 caregivers. So, if you are talking of 100,000 caregivers, paying them at K30,000, government has to provide over K50 billion kwacha, annually.

That's where now Government, through cabinet, said 'we cannot sustain that kind of support'. Then Government asked to be innovative and think outside the box and come up with some interventions that can be sustained. That's where the idea of revolving fund comes in. Because if you raise the same amount, for example K4.2 billion, and use it as a revolving fund like what Actionaid is doing where a model centre is given about a 1,000 Dollars which is about K700,000, a satellite centre is given about K300,000 at the end of one year this money is producing some profit of over K2 million, depending on the kind of Income Generating Activities the caregivers are doing. So, with K4.2 billion, and if you give a K1million to a centre it can go a long way.

We find this one more sustainable than the honoraria one. Like for the adult literacy instructors, it was approved but up to now they are not receiving. There are some challenges. And also, the numbers of the adult literacy instructors are quite low compared to the ECD caregivers. I was talking of a 100,000 that's the requirement with 2 million children required to attend CBCCs.

Besides that, we are also in the process of negotiating with Government through the office of the president and cabinet and the treasury on recruitment of some of our caregivers so that they are on the Government payroll.

The size of the ECD programme is slightly bigger than primary education programme. There are more younger children under the CBCC than the primary education programme in terms of the number of centres. Primary schools are around 5500 whilst there are 12,000 CBCCs and more are still required.



we hope as we continue with the interventions, more especially as we are implementing the investing in early years [project] which has taken on some of the positive learnings from Actionaid implemented projects we should be able to close the gap.





# 3-Big-Questions to the Roger Federer Foundation



The Roger Federer Foundation is supporting the ECD Programme in Malawi with funds amounting to US\$13.5 million for over 10 years. The project which started in 2011 has been running for the past eight years now. We turned to the Roger Federer Foundation to see if they are satisfied with what has been done so far in this three-Big-questions querying.

## **What is your Overview about the ECD programme in Malawi?**

Malawi recognises the need for improving access to ECD services as evidenced by good policies, guidelines, tools that have been developed to promote ECD programmes in the country. Though enrolment of children in CBCC has been increasing in the country over the past years, over 50 % of children do not have access to early learning which is fundamental for their success in education and career. This coupled with over 50 % untrained caregivers, the quality of ECD services being provided through CBCCs is compromised. The need for increased access to quality ECD services for children aged 3 to 8 in order for them to have a good start in education is still great. However, the landscape can improve with increased investment in quality ECD services across the country by both Government and developmental partners.

## **Do you have any idea of the impact on the country that your contributions towards the ECD Programme in Malawi has brought?**



Malawi recognises the need for improving access to ECD services as evidenced by good policies, guidelines, tools that have been developed to promote ECD programmes in the country.



When we rolled out the 10-year Comprehensive ECD Initiative, the target was to increase access of the vulnerable children to quality ECD services, strengthening the sector on a national level, enhancing the capacity and retention of Caregivers and CBCC committees and increase involvement of community and parents in feeding programme and infrastructure improvements amongst other interventions. The project has significantly contributing to raising the profile of ECD in the country which has resulted in a first public budget followed by an increased investment in the sector. 480 CBCCs are offering quality early learning service due to an improved infrastructure and enhanced competences of caregivers. More than 90'000 children who have successfully transitioned into primary school and an observation of a sample has shown that they are performing above average.

## **What are your future plans for Malawi?**

We are building on the gains and lessons learnt of our current Comprehensive ECD Programme to develop a School Readiness Initiative that will commence in May 2020. This new programme is aligned to Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 and aims at helping children to be ready for school and schools ready for children while ensuring smooth transition. It will be implemented within 6 years in 2500 CBCCs in 17 Districts throughout Malawi.

# ‘CBCCs turned our lives around’

“We are now happy that CBCC is laying a solid foundation for our education”

When Emelida’s parents took her to Chikwawa CBCC ten years ago, little did she know that this will be her turning point in her life.

Now at 13, Emelida Mkandawire is in standard eight at Chikwawa Primary School in Rumphu where ever since she started standard one, she has always scored the top position.

“I would like to be a bank manager one day,” she says conceding that she is very good at humanities but only good at sciences and mathematics. “I will work very hard to achieve this.”

She recalls that at the CBCC caregivers used to train them on how to live with others. This she says opened her mind.

“I learnt a lot as a result of different method adopted to teach us about different things,” she remembers.

And when she started her primary school education, many things were no brainer because she was already equipped at the CBCC.

Her younger sister is currently at the CBCC and now she encourages her a lot, where during weekends she also teaches her what she can remember from her CBCC days.

“I have my other brother who is in lower primary school classes and I also help him a lot with his school work,” she says.

## FATHER’S TESTIMONY

Emelida’s father Lewis says when Emelida started at the CBCC, she became clever and always interested to know a lot and very inquisitive. No wonder when she started primary school, her performance has always been unbelievable.

Lewis jokes that during their days, starting school was difficult because to integrate into the school system was not easy due to several factors.

“We are now happy that CBCC is laying a solid foundation for our education,” hailed Mkandawire who said with results like those, demonstrated by her daughter, parents are really keen to send children to CBCCs once they are of age.

“We are getting involved in all the works that happen in CBCC because of this reason,” said Mkandawire.

## THE AUNT OF EDESI

Twonge Samson, a mother of three who has an 18-year-old girl doing community development course at Lilongwe Technical College and a 16-year old boy at Chinkhuti Community Day Secondary School has a similar feeling.



When her sister left for south Africa for greener pastures, she left behind a daughter Edesi who started living with her when she was only two years old.

Upon reaching the age 3, she sent Edesi to Chinsapo Model CBCC, and from the start it was clear that the CBCC care givers were very serious with children compared to the experience her children had under went when she had sent them to a nursery school here in town.

For Edesi, now 8 and in standard four at Chinsapo LEA Primary school in Lilongwe, when she started going to the CBCC, every time she knocked off, she would attempt to write on her own.

She also used to carry herself and behave like a grown child.

“In terms of intelligible stuff that she would utter, it was clear she was being modelled into something at the CBCC,” said the aunt.

Ever since she started standard one, Edesi’s progress has been tremendous, always taking the first position in class.

“We have observed that children that are not sent to CBCCs are dull to an extent. There is also an aspect of not responding to counsel. Its difficult in the urban settings to force all the parents to send their young ones to CBCCs,” said Samson

## EXPERIENCE OF A NON-CBCC GRADUATE

Rashid Banda who is of Emelida’s age but in standard 6 at Chinsapo LEA Primary School said he came straight from home and enrolled in Standard one.

He says he can still clearly remember that he





The teacher would ask me to stand up and attempt to respond to her question but my efforts to do so would only send the whole class into laughter



used to meet a lot of problems.

“To begin with, I had never handled any writing material and being taught to start there and then was a huge task,” he said. “Interacting with a bunch of total strangers was also not easy for me.”

Rashid also recalls that doing oral exercises that each learner was tasked to do was a nightmare for him.

“The teacher would ask me to stand up and attempt to respond to her question but my efforts to do so would only send the whole class into laughter, this would in turn make me cry for being laughed at by the class,” recalled Rashid.

He said come the next school day, he would really be very reluctant to return and would find endless excuse to abscond.

#### ANOTHER SMOOTH RIDER



The story is different for Rashid’s classmate Alinafe Mwale who is 10.

She recalls that it was easy for her because she was already able to read and write as she had already passed through such exercises at the CBCC.

“I was also familiar with interacting with my fellow learners,” she says.

At the CBCC, Alinafe says they used to eat porridge which was no longer available in Primary school, but since her mind had already been prepared, it was also easy to handle it.

“I only got a second position in second term of my standard one, otherwise I have always taken the first position to date, thanks to my CBCC exposure,” she said.

Just like Emelida, Alinafe says she is ready to take her future head on as she gets ready to become a medical doctor.



# 'ECD goats' that changed caregivers

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We have been highly motivated by this scheme

At least all caregivers that took part in the goat-passing-on scheme are testifying that this has helped entrench the ECD activities. Not only has it helped on motivation, retention and attendance of caregivers, but it has also improved their livelihoods.

Take one Asima Yard, a mentor and caregiver at Namisewe Model CBCC in Machinga for example.

He says it all started when four of the 10 caregivers at the CBCC, were the first to get four goats in February of 2017.

By 2018, all the four goats had kids which were passed on to the other four caregivers. Early this year, two more goats have been given to the remaining two caregivers. The other two goats will be given to the CBCC management committee.

“We have been highly motivated by this scheme,” attests Yard.

He says the goats have helped him to hire labour for his gardens, buy fertilisers and groceries for his household.

“Before the goats, we used to lack a lot,” he recalls and says this used to disturb the caregivers a lot in their delivery here at the CBCC.

“Our minds would be at other things, like how we could provide for our families,” he says.

Since 2011 when Yard started volunteering as a caregiver, he says he has faced numerous problems because he lacked money to buy himself and his children food, clothes and other basic needs. “In simple words,” he says “it was impossible for me to fend for my family.”



At the moment, he has three goats. He believes this will take care of education expenses for his children.

Another caregiver for the same institution, Chinsisi Kananji says it is for everyone else to appreciate that she has been a caregiver for the last 19 years but all this time it is only when she accessed a goat through the scheme that she started living.

“My goat has now reproduced and I now have six goats,” she says.

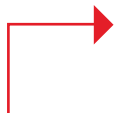
She has sombre memory of what it used to be like before the goats came. She would report for her voluntary work at the CBCC with dirty clothes because she could not afford a cheap tablet washing soap.

“Sometimes I could come hungry and imagine what kind of delivery would be expected from such a person. It was a total disservice to the children,” explains Kananji.

Now she is able to buy fertiliser for her garden. She has also bought iron sheets that would be used to roof her house.

“At the moment I am using the proceeds from the goats to pay for my children’s education,” she says.





Before the goats, she says she used to miss classes a lot as she would go out there doing any piecework that will come her way that would help her take care of her family.

“Now I am here at the CBCC all the time, teaching and playing with these children,” she says.

Joshua Saini Luhana who is Rumph District Social Welfare Officer where this scheme has also made wonderous transformation in the welfare of caregivers says the goat pass on initiative has almost made each and every caregiver a proud goat owner.



# Dealing with volunteer fatigue of caregivers

Caregivers who manage community-based child care centres (CBCC) that provide Early Childhood Development services in Malawi on voluntary basis seems to be saying 'they have had enough'.

It is understandable because volunteers can become run down after providing such service for a long period of time, they suffer volunteer burnout.

Anastanzia Gondwe, 41-year-old mentor and caregiver at Chikwawa Model CBCC says the biggest challenge is that the cost of living changes daily.

"What used to obtain when we were starting is no longer the same," she says mostly it is the issue of money which is one thing that destabilising them.

She warns that if not carefully, managed it might be more detrimental to the progress of ECD.

Gondwe says Government should be proactive on this aspect because after so many years, people are now discouraging caregivers from being volunteers forever.

"Even some of the spouses for the caregivers have their patience running thin," she says.

For someone who has now worked close to more than a decade she says while they might contain it, sometimes they come face to face with it when carrying out supervision activities where other caregivers who are not doing their lesson plans for example, will challenge them, 'saying you cannot take stock of their work as if they are under a payroll of anyone'.

Gondwe says Actionaid has done its part and now Government needs to take it up and start

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“Even some of the spouses for the caregivers have their patience running thin”

ensuring that CBCC do not close down as a result of volunteer fatigue.

"Government needs to make a plan to ensure retention of caregivers, if they are able to pay adult literacy teachers, what about us who are helping in laying the education foundation for the nation through CBCC," argues Gondwe.

Annie Mfune, a caregiver at Chikwawa CBCC observes that their biggest challenge is that this being voluntary work, others laugh at them saying they leave real work to come and do this voluntary work because they are lazy.

Chikwawa CBCC Vice Chair for the management Committee, Lexa Mvalo concedes that amongst their challenges is the persistent complaints from caregivers about lack of resources since this is voluntary work.

Chinsisi Kananji, a former mentor and caregiver at Namisewe Model CBCC in Machinga District says after working as a caregiver for the last 19 years, it is only recently that she got a goat through the goat passing on scheme that she can confidently express her relief.

"Government should shift their attention from paying adult literacy teachers to paying caregivers for CBCCs," she says before declaring:







“We are the first bridge the children cross from their homes to the future.”

From Government side, Rumph District Social Welfare Officer Joshua Saini Luhana says indeed there is need to shift policy direction on the Government side so that the caregivers can start getting salaries.

“Government and partners need to come up with a lasting initiative because it will lift ECD to

another level,” he says.

Meanwhile Luhana suggests that there is need to continue supporting ECD with Income Generating Activities because it is clear that ECD is the way to go.

“We have tried it in Rumph. It is working. All that is needed to be done is to improve it,” he says.





# Hardships of the under-a-tree CBCC

The history of most of the country's CBCCs is that they offered their first lesson under a tree shade.

Although the intention came from a good side of the hearts of these ECD pioneers, learning under trees had its hardships which were felt more by the children targeted to benefit from such efforts. It qualified that old saying that says 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions.'

Imagine, where Chikwawa Model CBCC stands today were just trees back in 2000 when former first lady Patricia Shanil Dzimbiri visited.

The CBCC's Anastanzia Gondwe who is its mentor and caregiver, was around at the time up to the point when Actionaid found them in

2009.

Wilson Maonga who is Namisewe Model CBCC Management Committee Chairperson in Machinga also says they started ECD activities in the area back in 2000 under a tree.

"I was involved from the onset and I remember that children were learning under a tree," he says. Regardless he says by 2001 they had 75 children and this forced them to construct a shack which they were using as a classroom. Unperturbed by lack of proper infrastructure, by 2002, the enrolment even increased to 145.

He says it was only until around 2012 to 2013 when a certain community-based organisation of their area linked them with





**Learn-  
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a tree,  
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protected  
from  
wind and  
sunlight”**

Actionaid that they were able to build the current infrastructure.

“Year in year out since that time our average enrolment hovers around 275 children,” he explains.

Maonga recalls that when lessons were under a tree there were only three caregivers, but with the coming in of Actionaid, they were asked to increase to 10.

“During rainy season lessons were erratic. Even the environment which the children were taking their porridge was unhygienic since it was just an open ground under a tree.”

Lilongwe’s Majingo Satellite CBCC Management Committee Chair Ishmael Malizwe has the same tale but it sounds more interesting.

They got the ECD concept from Unicef and villagers were asked to send small children to the traditional leader’s area where lessons started under a tree.

After sometime Unicef through CRS asked the community to mould and burn bricks that would be used for a school building.

“Right after we had gathered all the materials and we were waiting for the project to commence, Unicef came to us and said they had changed their policies and that priority was now at training caregivers not building infrastructures,” recalls Malizwe.

He said the, decided to put up a shack as opposed to under a tree.

Next, they approached Actionaid which asked them to mould and burn more bricks, which resulted into the current infrastructure.

“Learning under a tree, meant that children were not protected from wind and sunlight,” says Malizwe. “The hygiene and sanitation of the place was also hard to maintain.”

He said whereas the children were also supposed to be separated by age, under a tree, they were unable to do so and therefore compromised the delivery of lessons.

Malizwe also pointed out that since the tree under where the children were taking instructions is closer to the road, children would run after their parents who would be passing by, thereby disturbing lessons for the whole class.

“With two caregivers, it was overwhelming,” he recalls.

James Howard a head caregiver at the same CBCC also adds that when children were learning under a tree, they had no place to hang teaching materials like letters, signs and drawings.

Village Headman Masasa of the area also remembers that at this time very few parents would send their children. But the moment this school was constructed the numbers increased.

Malizwe says now they can testify that quality of education within the area has tremendously improved and with the classrooms, teaching and learning has now become easy.



# How CBCC in church failed ECD

Our committee is responsible of coming up with toys and play materials made from local materials and ensuring that the buildings are well looked after,

Thirty-eight-year-old Regina Mfune does not have fond memories of working as a caregiver at a CBCC that was operating in a church in the area of Lundu in Rumphi district.

Mfune who is now a caregiver and mentor for Lundu Model CBCC in the district,remiscent that whenever the church had any activity then the schooling would also stop until everyone had dispersed.

It all started in 2003 when a field officer for one of the NGOs that were working with orphans in the area organised a meeting for widows. Upon hearing different experiences from them, he suggested that the community needed to set up a children's school that would be running on a voluntary basis.

"The three of us that emerged as

volunteers,also went ahead to beg officials for Lundu Catholic Church to allow us use the church as a CBCC," she recalls.

When the church gave them the green light, the school started with 40 children and before long,they were approached by Association of Pre-School Playgroups in Malawi (APPM) who offered them some basic training.

When Actionaid came 12 years later through the social welfare office, willing and offering them an opportunity to get help to improve their ECD delivery, they did not hesitate to take up the opportunity.

From there on, many things changed for the better. Actionaid told them to increase the number of caregivers to 10.All those selected were later taken through care givers' training.

Actionaid further explained that there





was need for a proper infrastructure and came and explained this to the traditional leaders who were convinced and mobilised their subjects to mould and burn bricks for the construction of a CBCC.

Contractor came to start work in 2016 and the following year, construction of the infrastructure was complete and the school moved in.

“When we had no school, all the children used to be taught using the same class, now with the infrastructure we have three classrooms, one for 3-year olds, followed by those that are 4 while the last class comprises of the 5-year olds,” she explained.

With the classrooms, they now teach them even during the rainy season, because this never used to be the case as no parent would send forth their children to learn during the season.

The CBCC which now has 146 learners

has a lot of playing materials, which was not ideal to accumulate and keep when they were using the church.

Evans Sikalumbi, Chairperson for Lundu Model CBCC management committee says the infrastructure is attracting children to come and attend CBCC.

“Our committee is responsible of coming up with toys and play materials made from local materials and ensuring that the buildings are well looked after,” he said.

Chairperson for Parent Committee at the CBCC, Shira Mfunu, says they take care of the environment of the CBCC by slashing overgrown grass, repairing and fixing broken things and the general environment of the CBCC.

“We work hand in hand with the management committee to take care of the school,” she said.



# Leading children in the dark before caregiver training

When three-year-old children leave their homes to start lives away from their parents at CBCCs, it is only fair to find people that will guide them into the light of knowledge and realisation.

This was however not the case for all the caregivers that started volunteering in the CBCCs before Actionaid came on the scene.

This was the case for Regina Mfuno, 38-year-old caregiver and mentor at Lundu Model CBCC in Rumphi. She started teaching 40 children in a Church when she knew nothing about ECD. Not even the training offered by Association of Pre-School Playgroups in Malawi (APPM) was basic enough to open her eyes.

## CAPACITY BUILDING IN COMPREHENSIVE ECD

It was only after in 2015 when Actionaid took her and her colleagues to a comprehensive ECD training that things fell into place.

“We were taken through a training on how we can take care of children. Soon after the training we graduated with certificates,” she said.

Annie Mfuno, a caregiver who also went for the training confessed that indeed at first, they did not know anything about ECD.

“We were just teaching them anything according to our experiences but after the training, we are now equipped with skills on how to teach the children according to their developmental stages that we learnt during the training,” she said.

Anastazia Gondwe 41, is also a mentor and caregiver at Chikwawa Model CBCC and she concedes that the training benefitted them a lot.

Those that were to be caregivers at the Model CBCC underwent an intensive training that involved two weeks each of practical and theory and another week that dealt with nutrition education. Caregivers for the satellite, only underwent a two weeks long basic training.

## CAREGIVERS' CHANGE IN THE



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We were just teaching children anything according to our experiences

## DELIVERY OF ECD

Gondwe said the training changed their approach which in turn improved their delivery.

“We learnt how to handle children. We now know that for 3-year-olds the ratio between caregiver and the learners is 1:10, 4 years 1:15 and 5 years 1:20.”

Mfuno said they also learnt that children have six stages of growth called the six domains and they undergo eight learning areas.

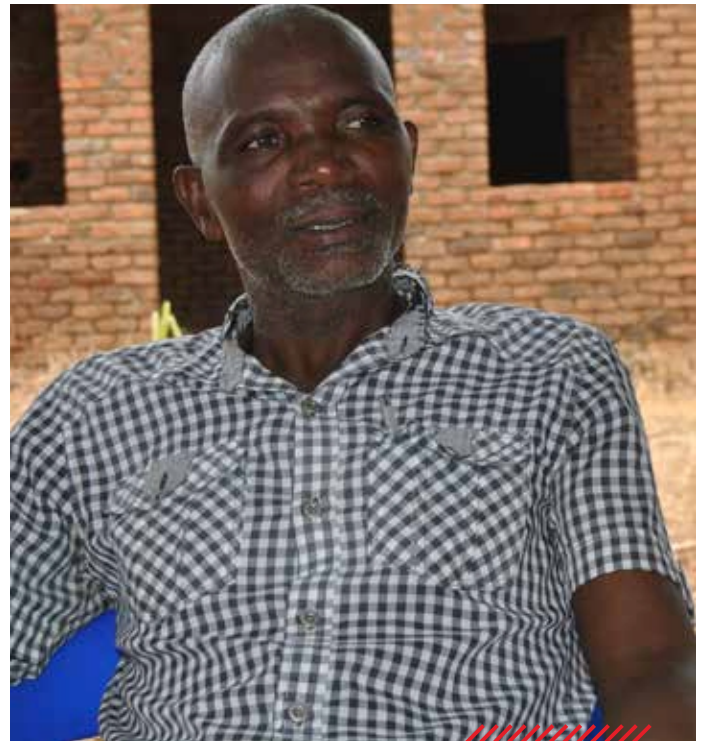
“When we had no school, all the children used to be taught using the same class, now with the infrastructure we have three classrooms, one for 3-year olds, followed by those that are 4 while

the last class comprises of the 5-year olds,” explained Mfuno who appreciates that this arrangement helps in their

delivery.

Vice Chairperson for the management Committee for Chikwawa CBCC, Lexa Mvalo, says they found the caregivers training very important since they gained





knowledge in ECD which has also helped in shaping the children.

“The children can now communicate properly about their ages, numbers or even offering prayers in English,” said Mvalo.

She says it was a motivation to the caregivers to attend the training.

VDC Chairperson, Moses Chirambo, under whose jurisdiction falls Chirambo Model CBCC said one aspect that should always be remembered is that most of

the caregivers were people that had no purpose in life.

“They would be just loafing around and living aimlessly within the villages but when they were taken for training and are now teaching children, it’s clear that their lives have now been given a purpose,” he argued.

Gondwe agrees with Chirambo saying the training gave them some authority and earned them respect.





# Primary schools way of embracing CBCC graduates

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“When they have graduates, they send the list of their names so that we know who will be continuing with their education at this primary school,”

Imagine what happens when lights go off at night. It takes time for eyes to adjust and all activities that were happening to continue. Although this might sound extreme when compared to change that occurs when children are leaving CBCCs to start primary school education, but it manages to implicitly offer an idea.

It is upon this realisation that primary schools work together with CBCCs to ensure that the days that children who graduated from CBCCs do not feel like they have landed on planet Mars from Earth on their first day is standard one.

## STEPS TAKEN TO ENSURE SMOOTH TRANSITION

An infant teacher who teaches standard one at Chinsapo LEA Primary School in Lilongwe says they have endless collaboration with CBCCs to help prepare the way for the children when their time to move comes.

“Children from the CBCC are brought

to the primary school on a tour that include inspecting their would-be classroom and teachers,” said the teacher, Emma Kabambe.

The first time they are in class she says they handle them in the same manner that they were used to at the CBCCs so that the transition is seamless.

“For example,” she says “we still have printed letters on the classroom walls as is the case in the CBCCs, the same with play materials.”

The other arrangement Kabambe said is that sometimes the caregivers are allowed to attend and observe standard one learning sessions so that they have an idea what is in store for the CBCC learners, in order to be able to prepare them.

## WORKING RELATIONSHIP OF CBCCS AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Head teacher at Chinsapo LEA Primary School, Lucy Chigwadala says there is





strong collaboration between her primary school and surrounding CBCCs.

They have a joint programme that involves various activities.

“When they have graduates, they send the list of their names so that we know who will be continuing with their education at this primary school,” she says before adding:

“Our agreement is also in line with government policies. For example, we expect the CBCCs to send us children that are six years old for Standard one.”

Funde Lungu who is the headteacher for Chikwawa Primary School in Rumphu says the working relationship between caregivers and teachers is smooth.

Lungu agrees with his Chinsapo counterpart saying CBCCs that properly follow age of children for a specific stage make their collaboration with less difficulties because by the time children are six years old they would have been sent to start their primary education.

They also meet with CBCC caregivers all the time, more so when there is graduation.

“We do not miss it, as we go where it is taking place in order to support the children,” he said.

Lungu also disclosed that there are joint programmes that primary schools do

with CBCCs.

He explained: “We do general cleaning together and this helps the children to understand the different life at primary school. We also do share resources.”

The headteacher also said when writing in progress books and registers, they mark out learners that are from CBCCs, as this makes it easy to track their performance.

#### PROBLEMS OF MISHANDLING TRANSITION

Lungu also pointed out that there is a danger when transition process from CBCC to primary schools is not planned properly or soundly facilitated as the new primary learners might lose interest.

“They need the same classroom and playground environment they were familiar with at the CBCCs,” he said.

Although porridge is one feature that they will miss once they move, he said during familiarisation visits, they talk about this in order to prepare them by explaining that now they are grown ups who would not necessarily depend on porridge to learn.



“We expect the CBCCs to send us children that are six years old for Standard one”



# Primary schools way of embracing CBCC graduates

FROM PAGE 23

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CBCC GRADUATE AND NON CBCC GRADUATE

Lungu also explained that look at issues of familiarisation and social mixture as well as talking to teachers, clearly shows that learners from CBCC do not really need a special introduction to the class set up on their first days in class one.

Unlike the children that have come from CBCCs, he said those that come from homes are filled with fear and shyness.

“Others even reach the extent of wetting their pants, while others will go out for the first break and head home right away,” said Lungu who impressed upon this observation to declare that this clearly shows that children from CBCCs are well organised as they also take good care of playing materials, like toys etc while those from homes continuously break them.

The other huge difference observed is that grasping newly introduced lessons for CBCC graduates is quicker and easily responsive as compared to the others who require extensive orientation before they can start following.

Kabambe also agrees on this huge difference between children that are coming straight from their homes, compared to those that come straight from CBCCs.

“Those from homes will isolate themselves from their colleagues while their colleagues from CBCCs will mingle freely,” she observed.

The CBCC graduates are not taught on how to use pencils and exercise books because they already dealt with it at CBCC, she added.

Another Standard one teacher at Chikwawa, Lydia Mwanjasi said those from homes shy away from answering questions.

“Those from CBCC know a lot,” she said “Those from homes will desert



classes during break time, long before knocking off time, because they just do not understand what is happening.”

She said that at her school they are lucky that out of 164 standard one learners that they have, 105 of them came through CBCC.

Tracking performance of CBCCs graduates

Considering that learners that came straight from homes cause more problems while in contrast those that pass through CBCC dominate in all positive aspects of learning, Chigwadala explained that for the sake of tracking, they have specific class for those children that are coming from CBCCs.

Chigwadala said the track records prove this. “Their attendance is very consistent; absenteeism rate for learners that passed through CBCC is almost zero compared to those that came straight from home.”

She said this is the case because while the CBCC graduates have already developed interest in school, these ones are forced and threatened in order to

“Their attendance is very consistent; absenteeism rate for learners that passed through CBCC is almost zero compared to those that came straight from home.”





attend school.

She said they decided to separate them because they have enough resources to enable them to do so.

Chinsapo Primary School has six streams of classrooms, so according to her, it is easy for them to allow CBCC graduates have their own classroom from standard one to senior level.

“It is easy to track performance,” she said. “The advantage is that as they go up, it is clear how top their performance is.”

Regina Mfune, a caregiver and mentor at Lundu Model CBCC says for those in class of 5-year olds, they undergo vigorous tests to appreciate their readiness to start Standard one before they are dispatched to primary schools.

This assessment does not stop according to Mfune, because once they are in primary schools, they follow up on their progress.

“The good news is that those that pass through CBCC are performing

wonderfully as compared to their colleagues that just come from home,” she said.

Traditional leader in Rumphi Principal Group Village Headman Chakoma reminisces that before, once children were born, it was more years later that they could start their primary school education.

As a result, he says their progress was pathetic but they didn’t realise this then, until ECD came and showed them how this ought to happen.

“The way children would also grasp the art of speech, bathing, putting on clothes and even eating was very difficult, unlike now when they pass through CBCC before transiting,” he said.

CBCC has now prepared the children and once they are done at ECD level, they are not only starting primary school education at a good age but they quickly and ably grasp whatever they are taught. Once they go to primary schools, they succeed with tremendous speed, he said.

“The good news is that those that pass through CBCC are performing wonderfully as compared to their colleagues that just come from home”

# When volunteer caregivers get a pay check

One bitterest enemy of the ECD services has been the characteristic of voluntary services that is rendered to CBCC by the teachers who are referred to as caregivers.

Most of caregivers come from within the community and are in way below Malawi's poverty threshold. Stories emerging from the caregivers show how much ECD suffered when they were trying to strike a balance between fending for their families and attending to the needs of the CBCCs.

Charity Mwandira who is Bolero CBCC Management Committee Chairperson says it was only after Actionaid initiated Village Savings and Loans schemes within the CBCC establishments that life changed.

Each CBCC got K700,000 as seed money for a revolving fund which also became an income generating activity component for the ECD centres.

Mwandira said from the interests that the fund was able to make, they invested it in small businesses whose profits they have been using to manage and ran the CBCC.

After 2 years of getting K700,000 they made K5.4 million.

Out of this money, she says they returned in full the money they got from Actionaid while K260,000 went to the caregivers.

For maintenance work at the CBCC, they spent K40,000 while K21,000 was given to the security guard and K168,000 for food stuffs for the CBCC. K42,000 took care of water connectivity and K33,000 bought kitchen utensils for the Center. K40,000 was used to pay garden rent while the remainder was left in the fund.

Mwandira explained that at the moment they have K4m.

The revolving fund has helped them a lot because the food provisions at the CBCC is now constant unlike before where they were struggling to carter for the children.

She said the current cycle will be ready for sharing come August next year.

Fifty-one-year-old Maggie Botha who is head caregiver at the CBCC said there has been a huge difference between now and the time that she first started as a volunteer.

The revolving fund programme that started together almost at the same time with goat pass on programme completely overhauled her life.

"My husband died in 2016 and I am a person living with AIDS which means my needs are more demanding than someone who is not," she said.

Botha who is a mother of five children says her first-born son is 32 and now a police officer while her second and fourth born daughters are both married. Her fifth born son is a teacher.

"It's unfortunate that both my girls dropped out of school at the time that my family had been heavily hit by poverty and there were no resources for their education," she said.

She took her chance when the money came and took a loan of K50,000 from where she started various businesses including a grocery store, piggery and selling vegetables and legumes.

"My son who is a teacher benefitted from this business because it paid for his school fees. But of course, when he was selected for a course at the University of Malawi, I could not afford then and I asked him to have his place reserved," explained Botha.

She recalls that before she embarked on this business, she was very malnourished because of lack of food which was compounded by her condition.

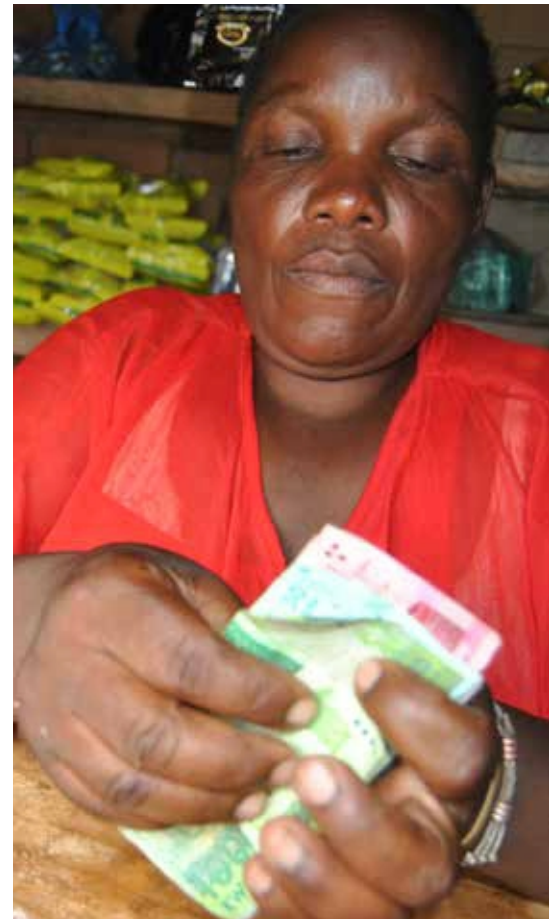
"Now I eat well balanced diet food," she said.

She says she rarely used to come to the CBCC to teach because she had no peace of mind.



"Now I take good care of the children here at the CBCC because I am financially stable and able to take care of my children"





“Now I take good care of the children here at the CBCC because I am financially stable and able to take care of my children,” she said.

Another caregiver, forty-eight-year-old Effa Kachali who also has five children says she was not excited when the fund was introduced because she has always been afraid to take loans because in all her life, she had been told that borrowing is a bad thing for a good person.

“When the fund was introduced, I was watching from the fences before I was however advised properly how this particular loan works,” she says.

She hesitantly got a loan of K30,000. but kept it for 3 days without touching it.

“I was debating whether or not to take it back,” she says.

Finally, she went out and bought a goat and that was the beginning of a business of selling roasted goat meat which made her a huge profit right from the beginning.

“After a few turnovers she was able to pay back the loan and got K60,000 loan,” she said.

Owing to the profits that she made from the business she moulded and burnt bricks and started construction of a 4-bedroomed

house.

“Since my husband loves his bottle there is not much that he does and therefore he is surviving because of the business,” she said.

Out of the business she also bought two sewing machines which her daughter and husband have made good use of by designing and sewing for business.

As one way of demonstrating to her husband that regardless of the society’s tendency to look down upon women, she has stood out, she gave her husband a capital which he used to start his tailoring business with.

“He is now in a business of sewing turbans which has a huge market across the border in Zambia as well as locally which is now thriving,” she said.

Kachali says before, she used to stay home a lot because many things were going on in her mind.

“I could not even concentrate on teaching children at the CBCC when my family was wallowing in poverty. I was also unable to do farming,” she says.

Now she is able to hire manual labour for her farming ventures, not to mention how she has also managed to have a herd of livestock thanks to this opportunity to access this loan.



# ECDs have transformed Rumphu district

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“Now we have experienced a complete transformation with the coming up of 12 model CBCCs and 54 satellite CBCCs”



In a world where there were no children, Malawi’s northern district of Rumphu, which borders with Zambia in the west, would not have been transformed.

This is in the words of the district’s Social Welfare Officer Joshua Saini Luhana, who thinks this has been possible because the district has embraced early childhood development (ECD) services.

The district is one of the 10 where since 2011, Actionaid has been implementing a 10-year Program that ends in 2021 with a goal of improving the lives and wellbeing of poor and vulnerable children aged between four to six through access to quality and sustainable ECD services.

The program, whose budget is US13.5 million, and is being bankrolled by Roger Federer Foundation, has seen many improvements in the district.

Before Actionaid came to Rumphu, ECD coverage was at 34 percent, now it has increased to a point where 74 percent of children in the district are attending ECD.

“At that time, we had few trained caregivers who were only 34. Now we have 1200 trained caregivers,” says Luhana.

He also says the district had very few ECD infrastructures and most of ECD activities were being carried out in borrowed spaces like churches and sometimes under trees.

“Now we have experienced a complete transformation with the coming up of 12 model CBCCs and 54 satellite CBCCs,” he says.

Luhana says where Actionaid is in operation and where it is not, there is a visible and tangible difference.





# Male caregivers changes ECD perception

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“We have also shared responsibilities equally, without having to see our gender difference”.

Culturally, people in Malawi believe that taking care of children is a woman's job. It is for this belief that the work of James Howard, the head caregiver at Majingo CBCC in Lilongwe raised eyebrows in the community when he started working as a caregiver back in 2009.

He says his dedication to duty, led to his being invited by officials from Unicef and Catholic Relief Service, at the time implementing ECD programmes in the area, to be part of a new CBCC that was in the offing at Majingo, in 2011.

“I was in fact, the first caregiver for the centre,” he recalls.

He says taking care of children has always been in his nature and when this path led him to becoming a caregiver at the CBCC, he didn't even think twice, but to jump into it.

Ironically, he says ever since he started his work, colleagues have been lady caregivers. These, he says, have provided huge support

to him.

“We have also shared responsibilities equally, without having to see our gender difference as a criterion for job division within the facility,” he says.

Howard says the work that he does at the centre has also made a lot of men in his community to depart from the belief that taking care of children is only for the women.

“I take care of my children at home and I now see a lot of men also taking care of their children in their homes,” he says.

Howard believes that it is in the same spirit that many men come to make playing materials for children at the CBCC.

“Men take part in all activities even when there are issues involving processing of food for the CBCC,” he says.

A fellow caregiver at the centre, Livines Kachigwada, who has been working for close to five years now, says men are not willing to do volunteer work as they are expected to fend for their families.

She however says, much as this is the case, it also goes down to accepting that the responsibility of taking care of children is not for women only.

Over the years she says Howard has demonstrated that he is even better with children than some of the ladies.

“Other children also prefer to be assisted by him to us since he represents that father figure that children want to calm down sometimes,” she said.

# The art of fighting bad health in CBCC

Before Chirambo Model CBCC opened its doors, under five children used to frequent health facilities with cases of numerous health related afflictions.

The area's Health Surveillance Assistant (HSA), Cosmas Mwafulirwa, says ever since the world mastered the art of dealing with illnesses prone in children under the age of five, replicating the same in the CBCC has helped them fight bad health.

He says they work with the young children to monitor their growth taking advantage of the fact that under-five children gather at the CBCC already. They conduct under five clinic every month.

"This is to ensure that their health is not compromised when they are attending CBCC," he says.

He says this is a collaborative initiative that also involves the caregivers and parents with one aim, which is ensuring that the health of the children is enhanced.

## MONITORING THE GROWTH OF THE CHILDREN

During the monthly under-five clinic sessions, the team weighs the children to monitor their growth. Quarterly they measure their height and thinness or otherwise.

"After every three months we compare their age, height and weight to ascertain if they are stunted or not," he said adding that they measure growth by measuring and comparing in several different ways.

The HSA said they rely on weight not only because it is the most reliable indicator of growth in young children but because a healthy child's weight can be detected every month whereas measuring growth is done by comparing a child's weight gain over time, and then they classify the child's weight for his or her age. Comparing this measurement to a standard weight for children of the same age tells them what they want to know.

Mwafulirwa also explained that the reason they carry out height measurement every three months is because height increases more slowly than weight in young children.

The height that is measured is compared with the height-for-age and height-for-weight. Height-for-age helps to tell them about the past



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Arm circumference can help us detect children who are currently malnourished, or wasted.



nutrition status of a child.

The verdict is that stunted children or those that are tiny or shorter than normal children their age, have probably been chronically undernourished.

The health official also explained of another measurement which they conduct around the circumference of the middle of the upper arm because children that are healthy will have their arm circumference remaining fairly constant between one and five years, while those who are malnourished, will have a reduced arm circumference.

"Arm circumference can help us detect children who are currently malnourished, or wasted," explained Mwafulirwa.

Where they have established that the child is in a bad state of health, they ask the caregivers to direct them to their parents whom they pay a visit to establish the contributing factors.

"It might be issues of food, how it is stored and even issues of hygiene," he says.

As health officials, he says they also ensure that the child is fed food with balanced levels of salts, irons etc.

"Where the stunted condition is dire, we refer such children to hospitals," says Mwafulirwa before adding that in the past, they had many problems in terms of the health of children.





## ENRICHING THE FOOD AT CBCC

The CBCC establishment has a farm where they produce food for the children.

Ndindancy Chirambo, who is a Caregiver at Chirambo Model CBCC, said the porridge that the children eat is mixed with either soya, groundnuts or other vegetables, depending on what is available in a particular week.

“When we went for the caregiver training, one of the things that we learnt was on how to make balanced diet food for the children,” she said.

Besides being taught how to prepare this kind of food, Chirambo also said they were also taught on how to take care of kitchen utensils.

“We are part and parcel of the health department in monitoring the growth of the children,” she said.

Vaida Chirambo, Parent Committee Treasurer for Chirambo Model CBCC explained that they buy groundnuts, soya and vegetables as well usipa fish which is added to the porridge that they prepare for the children.

“This is how we make the porridge nutritious for the children,” she said.

She also said they have observed over time that this is working because they do not have cases of malnourishment.

Vaida said back in 2013, they asked the traditional leaders for a piece of land which they have turned into a garden where they cultivate sweet potatoes, maize and soya.

“Each and every traditional leader in this community has storage facilities for farm produce and the CBCC benefits from this,” she said.

There are ten committee members who work in pairs to prepare food for the children every

week day during school time.

## CHANGE IN NUTRITION STATUS OF THE CHILDREN

Mwafurirwa explained that malnutrition cases were a huge referral cases to hospitals before, however the coming up of CBCCs has improved the healthy status of children in the community. a

“There are no more feeding programmes that used to target malnourished children,” he said.

He said they always guide CBCCs in how they can prepare balanced food, suitable for the healthy growth of children.

The health department also encourage communities on the aspect of hygiene practices like training the children to always wash their hands before and after eating as well as after visiting the toilet.

“This message is not only reserved for the CBCCs but parents in the communities are also told the same so that the children have balanced worlds both in school and their homes when it comes to their personal hygiene,” he said.

As parents committee, Chirambo says they make follows ups in homes just to ensure that there is hygiene where ever these children live, be it at school, homes or churches.

For those parents that do not comply with their ask, they refer them to the traditional leadership.

Chirambo said before, children used to get sick regularly, but now, they are rarely sick.

“We also encourage parents to ensure that children are sleeping in mosquito nets unlike before when children used to suffer from malaria,” she said.





# Total sanitation approach boosted ECD centres



In a place with young children, there is need to have a proper and clean water system



People of Nsimbwe area almost turned down an offer of an ECD centre because they said they had no water source that would help them manage what has now become Naphine Satellite CBCC.

Group Village Headman Mpwata says because they lacked water, diarrhoea and cholera was the everyday occurrence, not to mention malaria, coughing, eye problems.

“We were a mixed bag of all sorts of diseases due to lack of water,” said the chief.

He said even the quality of education in this area at that time was backward, all thanks to scarcity of water.

But things changed after Actionaid facilitated the drilling of a bore at the CBCC which has revealed to them the importance of water and handwashing because all their challenges related to the scarcity of water are now history.

Just to emphasise the crucial role that water plays in the operations of CBCCs, Chikwawa CBCCmanagement Committee

Vice Chair Lexa Mvalo pick scarcity of portable water as their biggest problem at the centre.

“In a place with young children, there is need to have a proper and clean water system,” she explained.

Realising that Bolero CBCC will face difficulties without water the management committee chairperson Charity Mwandira said after getting K700,000 from Actionaid as seed money for their Village Savings and Loans scheme, they resolved their water challenges through the interests accrued.

“What we were able to make, we invested in small businesses whose profits have been used to manage and ran the CBCC,” she said.

Mwandira said the revolving fund has helped them a lot because now they have piped water which means they no longer travel long distances to fetch water.

She said children are trained to wash their hands after using toilets and before eating.





“This has reduced waterborne diseases that kept occurring when water was a problem at the centre,” she said.

Health Surveillance Assistant for Machinga District Hospital Rashid Kangomba said they work hand in hand with CBCCs on issues to do with water and sanitation.

“We provide health education to the caregivers as well as during community

meetings,” he said.

Kangomba also said they meet parents whom they encourage to see to it that children wash their hands after using the toilet or every time they want to eat anything.

“And being fruit season, we encourage them a lot to not only wash hands but the fruits they are about to eat as well,” he said.

For every household he said they also encourage people to install tip-taps near every exit of their toilets.

“In the past,” he said “waterborne diseases like diarrhoea and cholera used to be the biggest problem but ever since the establishment of the CBCCs the situation has improved.”

The area has an open defecation free programme which calls upon each and every household to construct a toilet.

“We work with traditional leaders in this aspect and I can declare without fear of contradiction that each and every household in this area has a toilet,” he said.

He said they believe that when children are healthy, the education objectives are easily achieved.



# Traditional laws that kept children in CBCCs

Borrowing the words of Village Headman Masasa of Machinga, 'Human beings are difficult species and we sometimes fail to understand each other merely because of differing in perception.'

The village headman said this in an interview at Majingo Satellite CBCC which is in his area when he was trying to express his frustration over a tendency by some villagers not to take heed to calls to send their children to ECD centres.

"You find that those that appreciate ECD will come running, while those that do not won't do anything and these are the ones that we push," he said.

The chief said they encourage people to send children to CBCCs but if they do not comply, they summon them in order to offer their counsel.

"If the problem persists, we make them pay a fine of a chicken. If the problem is beyond us, we refer the matter to the senior traditional leaders," he said.

It seems like many communities have local laws that have been designed to enhance attendance and enrolment at CBCCs.

Communities around Lundu CBCC in Rumphi district are expected to also follow local laws.

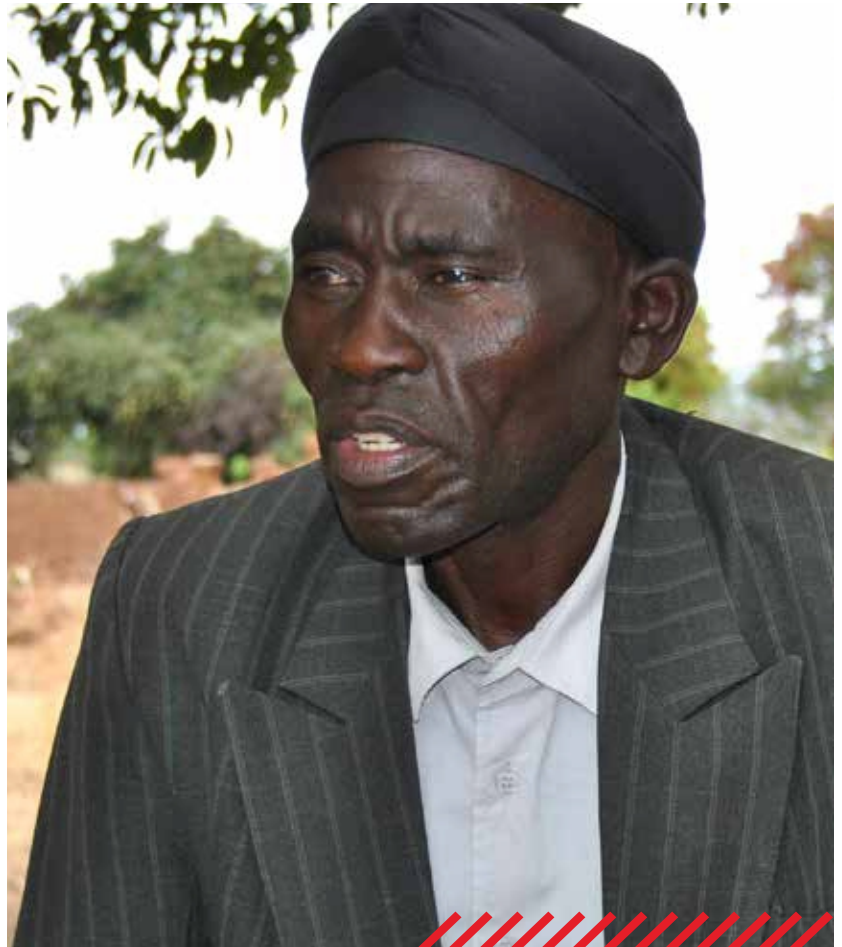
Principal Group Village Headman Chakoma of the area, said much as the communities have now come a long way to appreciate the importance of CBCCs, they still have local laws in place to ensure that they do not slacken.

The area has three CBCCs in total which are serving an enrolment of over 600.

"At the moment, we are vigorously encouraging parents to their young ones to these CBCCs and all the parents are compliant, I am sure this is the case because we have warned that it will be against the by-laws of the area not to do so."

Principal Group Village Headman Pyolamzimbi whose area Chirambo Model CBCC is said as traditional leaders they encourage parents to send children to CBCCs.

"During our monthly meetings we get reports on parents that are not sending



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We do not want any child to be at home when his or her colleagues are in school.

their children to CBCC," he said. The local chief said their by-laws state that such parents are supposed to pay a penalty of a chicken or K5000.

"We do not want any child to be at home when his or her colleagues are in school," he said.

Ever since they started the CBCC in 2011 he said they have never had parents that failed to comply with this provision.

"The paramount chief was directly involved in the establishment of ECD in his area and this cleared the way for us under him," he said.

Now every parent understands that CBCC are excellent initiatives to shape the future of their children from an early stage and do comply.





# Tapping into public funds for ECD development

Through the ADC we got money to buy materials for the construction of one ECD centre and also managed to roof three satellite ECD centres of Vyeyu, Luwinga and Chiku



Actionaid Malawi's target is to reach 150,000 children in 480 ECD centers by 2021 which is at the expiry of the US\$13.5 10-year-long project. The project is being sponsored by Roger Federer Foundation.

According to records so far, close to over 92,000 children have accessed quality ECD services while there are now 80 model ECD centers with the last six under construction.

Ever since the project started a total of 3,300 caregivers and committees in 330 CBCCs have been trained.

In a poor country like Malawi, it already overwhelming that 2.8 million of its population are under five, at least according to the National Statistics Office (NSO) report of 2013. This represents 18 per cent of the country's population which is close to 18 million.

With more teenage mothers delivering 143 babies, born per 1000 mothers, aged 15-19 there is need for concerted efforts in order to tap into more resources, including the public resource facilities if indeed more ECD centers will be established.

The management of Chirambo Model CBCC has already demonstrated how it has managed to tap into public funds.

Chirambo Model CBCC management committee chair Gilbert Chipofya, said using resources availed through the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) which is a World Bank loan to Malawi, communities moulded

thousands of bricks which they have been using for construction of ECD centres.

Another example is the one that the Bolero ADC Chairperson, Lameck Chipofya talked about. They used the Committee to tap into Constituency Development Funds (CDF).

CDF is public money that is disbursed through the national budget. Parliament created CDF in 2006 with the aim of even distribution of development across the country.

"Through the ADC we got money to buy materials for the construction of one ECD centre and also managed to roof three satellite ECD centres of Vyeyu, Luwinga and Chiku," he explained.

He said the best means of tapping into other resources is when ADCs write strategic plans which can also look at public and private organisations that can assist in specific areas based on the needs of the people they represent.

Quarterly, the constituency gets K7.5m from the CDF which goes to all directions to meet different development needs. Rumph West has four ADCs which all get a share of the same money.

"Our plans are to build more satellite CBCCs to minimise the distance that children cover in order to access ECD services," Chipofya said.



## We now own these CBCCs

There are plans that communities should eventually take over the running of CBCCs. However, most members of communities claim that they have already demonstrated enough, that they are now owners of these ECD centres.

Evans Sikalumbi, Chairperson of Lundu CBCC management committee says much as this indication cannot be in words but their actions already speak volumes of their commitment to manage the CBCCs.

He says they make toys and playing materials made from local materials that the children use.

“Children relate well to the local materials because they see them every day and on top of that they are easy to find and maintain, there is no need for us to get expensive toys for the children when we can make some from local materials,” he said.

He says this has two meaning; one is that the communities have taken over ownership of the CBCCs and secondly it means even without the opportunity of resources that can be procured from hardware shops, its clear that they can manage running the CBCCs with locally available resources.

Chairperson for Parent Committee for the CBCC, Shira Mfuno, one of the seven women in the ten-member committee said they look after playing materials and cultivate food for the children in the CBCC owned gardens.



Because they are the owners of the CBCCs they support caregivers who are busy with their children.

“We support them by helping them in their fields since they are busy imparting knowledge to our kids,” she said

Mfuno also said they take care of the environment of the CBCC by slashing overgrown grass, repairing and fixing broken things and the general environment of the place.



Children relate well to the local materials because they see them every day and on top of that they are easy to find and maintain.







Principal GVH Chakoma of Lundu CBCC also said the locals have appreciated the importance of CBCCs.

“We show great dedication by moulding and burning bricks as well as collecting and transporting sand to the building site for the construction of these schools,” said the chief who said now they have three CBCCs that include Lundu, Buyu and Lubwabwa with a combined enrolment of over 600.

Parent Committee Chair for Chirambo CBCC, Anna Mwanza says Government has encouraged them to establish CBCCs to ensure that children should have solid education foundation.

“We take a central role in the running of the facility. We provide fuel in form of firewood as parents, which is used for the cooking of food that our children consume while they are attending school. We are also involved in the farming in the school garden,” she said.

Mwanza said they are also responsible for the sanitation and hygiene of the school.

“We clean the place by clearing any unneeded vegetative growth, sweeping the ground and mopping the classes, just to make sure that the environment is conducive for learning,” said Mwanza who also said they also help to cook food for the children.

As parents, she says, they also make dolls and other playing materials for children, like balls that are used for different sports disciplines.

Moses Chirambo who is a Village

Development Committee Chairperson in Chirambo in Rumphi district, says there is no other way to demonstrate ownership of these facilities than what the communities are doing right now.

“We have numerous roles but one big one is that of ensuring that all committees charged to work for the CBCCs are doing their work. We have three committees namely; CBCC Management, Parent and caregivers Association as well as IGA,” he said.

Parents through traditional leaders and the VDCs also ensure that the community is providing food to the CBCCs.

“When a committee lacks capacity for a specific task, we jump in to make things move. CBCCs have changed this area a lot,” he said.

Before, he said ECD was only meant for cities but now this a totally changed narrative.

“One other thing is that the infrastructures that have been built as CBCCs have improved the faces of the areas. Before, where these schools are standing were just bushes” he said.

To buttress on this fact that they now own these facilities, Chirambo says they have formulated an action plan in readiness of the departure of their donors.

The traditional leadership of the area has put up a plan which includes making contributions towards food, materials and a token of appreciation for the caregivers.



“One other thing is that the infrastructures that have been built as CBCCs have improved the faces of the areas”.



# Saved by the children: The story of Naphini area

Water is life. A community without proper source of water is as good as doomed. This was the real-life story for the Naphini community a few years ago. The area's only source of water was a mire which was about 6 kilometers away.

The swamp served a large community and it hardly satisfied the needs of the people.

Women would wake up as early as midnight to walk the distance to fetch the water. In most cases they would only return home after 9am, sometimes without the water.

The issue of water-borne diseases was the order of the day.

Diarrhea and Cholera as well as coughing, eye problems and malaria were endlessly prevalent for most residents whose root cause was lack of a safe source of water.

And then came Actionaid Malawi (AAM) with the proposal to construct and set up an Early Childhood Development Centre.

"When they told us their intentions to build CBCC, we told them that our only misgiving was lack of water source. We told them that the school and lack of water would not go hand in hand if any good has to come from the initiative," said Group Village Headman Mpwata of the area.

He said he and his subjects took the AAM officials to their only source of water—a swamp—which was so many kilometers away and not very reliable.

"It was only after we took them to the swamp that the officials appreciated the magnitude of our problem," said the traditional leader.

He said the officials immediately promised assistance.

"We thought it was a joke that they would actually help us with a proper source of water just because of a school they wanted to construct for our children. We believed it only when we saw them come and map the water source," said GVH Mpwata.

Funny Amos, 60, recalls difficulties they encountered before having a proper source of water.

"We never used to have proper sleep.



We would wake up at 2am to fetch water and return around 10am. And sometimes we would come back without the water," she said.

Amos added that many families broke down because suspicion rose among some husbands who were selfish enough and failed to appreciate the situation.

"Instead of appreciating the sacrifices the women were giving, some husbands thought their wives were pursuing illicit affairs," she said.

Amos said on top of it all they used to suffer swollen feet due to long travels in pursuit of water.

"We were going through difficult times. We fought over the little water available. It was survival of the fittest," she said.

However, after AAM drilled a borehole at the CBCC all this changed.

"We have stopped covering over 20 kilometers just to fetch water. And the biggest thing now is that we are able to take care of our children," said Amos.

The borehole for the CBCC is benefiting hundreds of households covering a

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It was only after we took them to the swamp that the officials appreciated the magnitude of our problem.







distance of 8 kilometers radius.

GVH Mpwata says since the borehole was drilled even the quality of education has gone up.

“Before the water source, children would be forced back from school because of non-availability of water. Now we have improved quality of education. Now several children have graduated into primary school and currently their performance is excellent,” he added.

GVH Mpwata further said life in the community in general has improved.

He said: “The community never used to attend development meetings even the ones meant to plan the running of the school because half the time they were running after water. Now parents have more time to attend to these meetings and help improve the running of their children’s education.”







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