



# UN WOMEN

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women



## Malawi

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### Winning with Women

*General elections were held in Malawi on May 21, 2019. UN women supported women's political participation. Following the elections, for the first time in Malawi's history, a woman was elected as the Speaker of Parliament. At the local level, six female mayors and chairpersons in 33 councils were elected, including the first female mayor of Lilongwe, the capital city.*

At the strike of the clock, the quiet chamber comes alive with the sudden opening of the doors. New parliamentarians are entering the parliament chamber, the heart of the legislative branch of government. The parliamentarians are in Lilongwe, attending an orientation on their work in parliament. Out of the 192 legislatures enthusiastically viewing the chamber, 45 are female candidates who were declared winners following elections.

The newly elected 45 women presents a 23% rise from the 2014 elections results, women comprised 16.5 % of winning candidates. This is significant in a country where women's representation and participation in political and leadership positions is low. Notably, 66 women have made it to Local Councils representing 14% compared to 52 (11%) in 2014.

During the orientation, some of the women legislatures reflected on challenges that stand in the way of women participating in politics. A female parliamentarian from Mchinji says that socially driven perceptions that women are not capable leaders, violence towards women and a lack of a women friendly electoral system have discouraged women



from political participation.

Under the Malawi Electoral Cycle Support (MECS) basket fund, UN Women, in collaboration with partners, supported activities aimed at empowering women to run for political office and participate in the electoral process.

Throughout the elections cycle, awareness campaigns were held to increase civic understanding on women's political participation. Communities throughout the country were mobilised to support female candidates through community radio programs. Female candidates were provided capacity support like nomination fees refunds. UN Women also supported prevention and response to Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE) through the Gender Elections Engagement Room (GEER) which was hosted by the Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN) in collaboration with Malawi Police Service to strengthen response. GEER played a big role in creating a safe political space, notably a suspect who had beaten and undressed a female party supporter in early 2019 was arrested and prosecuted.

Excitement ripples through the chamber as the women parliamentarians begin mingling. The three women legislatures from Nsanje district in southern region, which has produced 3 female parliamentarians out of 5 constituencies, talk about the Nsanje port. Across the room, the youngest parliamentarian in the cohort, a 23-year-old woman from Machinga exchanges contacts with a long serving female legislature.



### Beijing +25 Malawi Presents Progress Report Towards Gender Equality

In preparation for the upcoming 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Malawi Government presented its report of progress towards gender equality to UN Women Regional Director for East and Southern Africa, Dr. Izeduwa Derex-Briggs.

The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) presented the report to Derex-Briggs at a ceremony in Lilongwe on June 26. The UN Women Regional Director visited Malawi to appreciate the country's strides in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Speaking at the presentation, Derex-Briggs said the UN will continue to support the Malawi Government to promote gender equality. While applauding recent progress in Malawi, she challenged national authorities to assess whether implemented strategies were addressing root causes, adding that women are still not living up to their fullest potentials.

Deputy Minister of MoGCDSW, Hon. Grace Kwelepeteta, said the Malawi Government is committed to ending gender-based violence (GBV) and ensuring gender equality. She added that there will be a special focus on quality education for girls to expedite progress.

During the report presentation, MoGCDSW provided an overview of Malawi's commitment to the Beijing Declaration and discussed achievements concerning



gender equality since the last report was presented in 2015. It also highlighted progress through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a notable strengthening of the legal and policy framework to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gender equality perspective.

One of the major achievements in Malawi has been the alignment of previously conflicting definitions of a child in the Malawi Constitution with the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act, which resulted in the subsequent development of a National Strategy on Ending Child Marriages (2018-2023).

In addition, MoGCDSW also presented Malawi's progress on women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls (VAWG), and political participation of women.

Despite positive strides, the government noted that ongoing challenges include negative social norms, discriminatory practices, economic inequality, inconsistent political action, and limited responsive planning and budgeting.

The UN Women Malawi Representative, reiterated the continuous support by the UN system in supporting the Malawi Government in its efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.



### Leaving No One Behind in the Garment Business

Every morning Bybeat Mose pays a bicycle taxi operator 400 Kwacha (USD 0.55) to take her on a 30 minute journey from her home to Kambwiri Tailoring Training Centre situated at the heart of Salima boma (town) in central Malawi. Mose was born with a physical disability that has affected her physical mobility.

“I brew and sell local beer so I can get transportation money to go to the training centre”, says the 41-year-old single mother of three. Mose’s 15-year-old daughter has cerebral palsy and her three-year-old child has a physical disability too.

“I work hard so that I can attend classes and make a better future for my children”, says Bybeat Mose. “Before I became a student at the centre, I had no opportunities. Now I am learning how to sew. I know that when I graduate, I will be able to sell the clothes I make and find money for my household needs”.

Mose started learning how to sew at Kambwiri Tailoring Training Centre in August, 2018. The centre was set up with the aim of economically empowering women and youth with disabilities by teaching them how to manufacture garments. The Malawi Council for the Handicapped Lilongwe Vocational Training Centre (MACOHA-LVTC) runs the centre with support from UN Women and the Norwegian Government. There are two training centres in Salima with 48 trainees, 37 of whom are women. Women and young mothers with disabled children are also enrolled at the centres so that they can become self-reliant.

“We noted that many women with disabilities, or mothers of children with disabilities were suffering as they were financially dependent on men. Many women would beg to survive, therefore falling victim to sexual abuse and gender-based violence. The centres have provided an opportunity for women to learn new skills and be able to enhance their

livelihoods.” says McRobert Manjale, the MACOHA-LVTC manager.

MACOHA and the Salima District Council, identified women and youth to be enrolled in the textile and garment manufacturing vocational course. Textile and design trainers instruct students on how to design garments, operate machines, manufacture garments and maintain machinery. Training tools and equipment were sourced and are maintained by trainees.

A range of products such as uniforms, casual wear, bags, hats, textile umbrellas, jewellery and shoes have been produced and sold to various customers. Kambwiri Tailoring Training Centre has signed contracts with primary schools in Salima to supply school uniforms.

“I have learnt how to sew trousers, dresses and fabric chair covers. My favourite item to sew is school uniforms- I have sold a few uniforms so far, even before we have completed the one-year training that we are enrolled in now” Mose says proudly. Manjale hopes that the business management and entrepreneurship skills the women and youth have acquired will not only provide them with an income but more self-esteem. He adds that “the centre will graduate into a cooperative for sustainable livelihoods for women and youth with disabilities with requisite skills”.

Mose plans to open a tailoring business at her home in July 2019, “After participating in the UN Women supported trainings, I have learnt many business management and entrepreneurship skills – how to keep track of expenditures and profits, how to present the business and how to attract markets.”

UN Women is supporting partners such as MACOHA in economically empowering women and girls, including those with disabilities to ensure that no one is left behind in the spirit of achieving the 2030 agenda.



### Women Mushroom Farmers Create Value Addition for their Community

Tisange Mushroom Association is a group of twenty members; fifteen female and seven male led growing Oyster mushroom businesses in the local community of Northern Malawi. The cooperatives are community initiatives meant to foster partnership and maximize production and marketing. The mushrooms are harvested and processed into three products: dried, powdered and fresh mushrooms. However, their produce has limited reach to their local communities because they lack the knowledge, capacity and skills to produce hygienic and nutritious mushroom products at a larger scale. Production at a larger scale will improve the volume and quality of locally produced mushrooms for exports and will empower small scale businesswomen financially. In addition, it will reduce vulnerabilities as a number of households are female headed as well as provide jobs for the unemployed women and youth in their communities.

To strengthen the viability, visibility and branding of small-scale women led businesses, UN Women in collaboration with mHub, a local NGO, conducted a series of entrepreneurial trainings through business boot-camps in targeted districts throughout Malawi that equipped different cooperatives with skills to maneuver their business environment and build sustainable business models. The boot-camp sessions provided practical tools and models for marketing analysis, branding and financial management.



Joyce Mtawali, female chairperson of Tisange Mushroom Association was one of the targeted beneficiaries of the boot camp. Mtawali said "I have learnt a lot through the entrepreneurship training such as visibility and how to do swot analysis. I did my swot analysis and discovered that there are opportunities in working with youth to grow the business. Youth helped us set up Facebook and WhatsApp and now people can hear and know what I am doing by using social media. So far, there is now a young lady developing our website to go global."

On attending the entrepreneurship trainings, Joyce learnt a few tricks that helped navigate her company's reach from individual to corporate supermarket chain stores. The association opened a Facebook page (Tisange Mushrooms) that attracted new customers as far as urban Lilongwe and expanded their reach by 6%. They are now able to send their produce to urban locations such as Lilongwe.

In addition to branding support, Ms. Joyce Mtawali used the skills learnt from the pitch competition to impressively pitch to a panel of clients including Shoprite, a large African chain of supermarkets. The panel was so impressed by the group's value added product that they formed a partnership to supply Shoprite in Mzuzu. So far, the group's profits have increased by 40% since acquiring sales through partnerships. Due to the increase in demand and production of mushroom products, there has been a 4.5% increase in the Tisange staff.



Photo: UN Women/Limbani Msiska

## Steering in a New Culture of Community Activism Against Early Child Marriage

*HeforShe is a global solidarity movement initiated by UN Women to engage men and boys, as agents of change to take action for gender equality. UN Women Malawi launched the HeforShe Campaign in 2017 with the aim of working with boys and men to achieve much needed equality and empowerment of girls and women. In Malawi, 47 percent of girls are married before the age of 18 (Malawi Demographic Health Survey 2015-15). Engagement with traditional and religious leaders as custodians of culture has played a pivotal role in ending early child marriages and promoting girls' education.*

"I didn't want to fade away in the village like countless other girls who married young have, I never wanted to be a child wife, a child mothering a baby with no hope, no opportunities, no way out. And yet that became my reality. When I had just turned 18, I found a boyfriend. A few months later I had to leave school because I became pregnant. I was forced to marry the boy. I spent two years living a pointless, difficult life. He would abuse me and all I wanted to do was leave that marriage and go back to school. Most mornings I would make sure that I was sweeping outside the house around 6:45am so that I could covertly enviously watch girls my age in school uniforms walking to school. When the chief and mother group heard about my situation, they came to see me. They told me about the benefits of school and encouraged me to return to school. With the support of my parents and after sessions with the mother group, I finally had the courage to tell

husband that I was leaving him and going back to school.

He laughed at me and said I would never be able to finish school.

On my first day back to school my heart was filled with happiness because I knew that I was about to restart a journey for a brighter future for myself and my daughter.

I worked hard at school, during break time I would go to quiet places to study in peace, fellow students would harass me about having been married and a mother, but I didn't care, I just worked harder than girls who didn't have children. More than anything, I wanted to go to college and one day successfully run my own business.

Unfortunately, after writing my end of secondary school exams I was not selected to go to college. I refused to let this setback kill my dreams. I thought hard about what I could do to succeed in life, I had a talent and knew that if I didn't do anything to make money, I would end up going backwards to marriage in desperation.

Many girls who marry early and do not go back to school tend to just stay and not do anything. I left the marriage and school equipped me with tools to be independent. Importantly, school gave me the belief that I could make something of my life.

I did ganyu (piece work) and started a hair dressing business with MK10,000. Mathematics I learnt at school helps me manage my business better. I can calculate costs of commodities and pricing and save money to reinvest and grow my business. I saved enough money that I now have a saloon at the trading centre. When I first started this business a year and a half year ago, I would make about MK7,000 a week. Now I get up to MK23,000 a week. I can feed, dress and pay fees for my child alone. The difference in my life is not only the skills I learnt but the confidence, belief and sheer determination that I can run my own business and thrive, so I will.

*Thoko Nkhuku owns a hairdressing saloon in Dedza East in central Malawi. Her marriage was annulled as part of the HeForShe initiative.*



## Combating Sexual Violence in the Aftermath of Cyclone Idai

In Traditional Authority Mlolo situated in Nsanje, southern Malawi Fatima Police Unit child protection officer, Hanneck Migala, says incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) are a common phenomenon in camps for Cyclone Idai flood victims as well as internally displaced persons (IDP) in the district.

“This is no longer strange news to us. We register many cases of SGBV cases both in and outside flood victims’ camps in the district. However, our biggest challenge has been the lack of resources to respond with necessary support to the victims and arrest perpetrators,” Migala narrates.

More than 922,900 people were affected by the Tropical Cyclone Idai in Malawi from March 14, 2019. Fifty-six deaths were registered with 577 injuries. Nsanje was one of the districts worst hit with heavy rains and flooding. Around 81,000 people and 18,000 households were affected in Nsanje with 17,402 individuals being displaced.

Nsanje district is also considered the poorest district among all 28 districts in the country with the poverty rate at 81.2 percent and the ultra-poverty rate of 56 percent.

High poverty levels in Nsanje put women and girls at the mercy of SGBV incidences largely due to socio-cultural beliefs that condone such violence. The humanitarian emergency emanating from the floods exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls. Consequently, girls’ and women’s vulnerability to both SGBV and HIV and AIDS are severely at risk. In the chaos following the disaster, security can be difficult to establish and opportunities for abuse and

exploitation increase. There has been inadequate gender-specific protection measures in the humanitarian response in spite of SGBV pervasiveness and women’s and girls’ vulnerability.

In response to this, UN Women mobilised 200 bicycles and other security equipment and materials, which were delivered to Nsanje and Phalombe, another district badly hit by the floods.

UN Women National Programme Officer Pamela Mkwamba-Matumbi says “The intervention is aimed to improve the capacity of the security personnel in the two districts to better combat the vice. Thus, we have delivered supplies and materials to Community Policing Forums in the two districts in an effort to strengthen and equip community structures with protection and life-saving devices in order to prevent SGBV in host communities and relocation sites for flood victims and affected by Cyclone Idai”.

A representative of the Malawi Department of Disaster Management Affairs, Madalitso Mwale stressed the importance of equipping community-based structures in reducing occurrences of SGBV. “I believe that the donation of security equipment comprising bicycles, reflector vests, whistles, solar-powered torches and raincoats will play a critical role in strengthening security systems in flood-prone areas in Nsanje and Phalombe,” he says.

Security equipment was given to 151 community policing forums in the two districts. “I am a member of a community policing forum of 10 women, we help women and girls who are being abused which often happens in the night. The torches, reflectors and whistles we have received will make it easier for us to do our work. I am so happy because we will feel safer as we carry out our night patrols now”, says Beatrice, Kondole a 45-year-old member of Fombe community policing forum.

*UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.*

**We are supported by:**



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