



PTY MALAWI

SUCCESS STORIES

ABOUT PtY MALAWI

The Power to You(th) programme is a global programme that was conceptualized by the Global consortium of Amref- Health Flying Doctors, Rutgers, and Sonke Gender Justice (Sonke), funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The program is being implemented in 7 countries, namely Malawi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Senegal, and Uganda. This is a 5-year program (2021-2025).

In Malawi, the programme is being implemented by a consortium of 6 organizations. The partners include Centre for Human Rights Rehabilitation (CHRR), Centre for Youth Empowerment and Civic Education (CYECE), Malawi Sexual Reproductive Health Rights Alliance (MWSRHR Alliance), Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre (MHRRC), Youth Wave, and Amref Health Africa. The program is being implemented at the national, district, and community level, particularly in Machinga district in the areas of Traditional Authority Sale, Traditional Authority Mizinga, and Traditional Authority Kapoloma, and in Dedza district in the areas of Traditional Authority Tambala and Traditional Authority Kasumbu.












OVERALL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

To contribute to more Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) from underserved communities being meaningfully included in all decision-making processes regarding ending of harmful practices, SGBV and unintended pregnancies.

 power2youth_malawi
  Power to Youth Malawi
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CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU(TH)

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PATHWAY

1

Young people demand accountability and responsiveness on harmful practices, intended pregnancies, and sexual and gender-based violence.

Youth advocates secure health facility for SRHR services in T/A sale



In the past, young people in Traditional Authority (T/A) Sale faced significant barriers to accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services. The nearest health facility was located many kilometers away, a distance that was often too far for youth to travel, particularly in remote areas. For many young people, the journey was not only physically demanding but also discouraged them from seeking services altogether. As a result, young people were unable to make informed decisions about their health, leaving them vulnerable to preventable health risks such as teenage pregnancy, sex-

ually transmitted infections, and other SRHR-related challenges. The lack of access to appropriate services was compounded by social and cultural barriers that limited open discussion about sexual health issues.

The Malawi SRHR Alliance through the youth-led advocacy model trained Youth advocates on lobbying and Advocacy, Social accountability monitoring human rights-based approach, and how to effectively engage with key stakeholders and articulate the needs of their peers. Youth advocates collected issues that young people face in their respec-



tive communities of which one was the distance to the health facilities. This made the youth advocates engage in lobbying and advocacy efforts targeting local health officials, the District Health Management Team (DHMT), and other district duty bearers through an interface meeting.

The advocacy efforts bore fruit when the District Health Office approved the construction of a new health facility in GVH Kuluma, Njinji Village. The construction of this facility is currently underway, and it is expected to address a critical gap in the availability of SRHR services for young people in the T/A Sale. The new health facility will bring essential SRHR services much closer to the community, making it easier for youth to access reproductive health care, counseling, and education.

The establishment of the health facility in GVH Kuluma will have a long-lasting impact on the health and well-being of young people in the T/A Sale. By making SRHR services more accessible, the community will see a reduction in preventable health issues such as early pregnancies and STIs, which are often exacerbated by limited access to information and health care.

The facility will also serve as a model for other districts in Malawi, demonstrating the power of youth-led advocacy and the importance of local collaboration in addressing critical gaps in public health services. In the long term, this success will contribute to improving the overall health and education outcomes of young people in the region and empower them to become active participants in shaping their communities.

Breaking Barriers: Rashida's Fight for Education



Figure 1. Engagement meeting with Rashida's grandmother.

Rashida, a young girl from Chiluzi Village in Traditional Authority (T/A) Kasumbu, Dedza District, faced immense pressure to abandon her education at just 14 years old. Her mother's family insisted that she drop out of school and marry a man seven years her senior, jeopardizing her future.

Upon learning about the situation, Rashida's father — who was work-

ing in South Africa— immediately reached out to the *Power to Youth (PtY)* program coordinators in Dedza. Having previously heard about PtY's efforts to end child marriages, he sought their intervention to prevent the forced marriage and secure his daughter's right to education.

In response, the PtY district team collaborated with traditional leaders and the *Police Victim Support Unit (VSU)* to address the issue.



Figure 2. Engagement meeting with traditional leaders surrounding Chiluzi.

They engaged Rashida's mother and extended family in discussions about the importance of education, as well as the legal consequences of child marriage. Following this intervention, Rashida's mother and her relatives withdrew all marriage plans and allowed her to return to school.

Rashida expressed her excitement about resuming her education and is now enrolled in **Standard 5 at Nora Dotchery Primary School**. Despite facing stigma and challenges from some of her peers, she remains determined and committed to her studies, working hard to catch up on the lessons she missed.

Her head teacher confirmed her regular attendance and commended the *Power to Youth* program for its impact. He further noted that Rashida has become an inspiration to other students and the wider community, proving that education can triumph over harmful cultural practices.



“Power to You(th) MW, continues to build the capacity of young people, enabling them to raise awareness and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes regarding harmful cultural practices, SGBV, and unintended pregnancies.”

Empowering Youth: Transforming Community Leadership in TA Tambala



Figure 3: Shaibu inspiring his fellow youths.

For years, meaningful youth participation in community decision-making processes has faced significant challenges in Traditional Authority (TA) Tambala, Dedza District. Deep-rooted myths and misconceptions have portrayed young people as rebellious and incapable of leadership, limiting their involvement to labor-intensive tasks without recognition or compensation. However, the Power to Youth program is rewriting this narrative, fostering a new era of youth

leadership and empowerment.

At the heart of this transformation is Shaibu Ibrahim, a 30-year-old from Chingo Village in TA Tambala. Before the Power to Youth program, Shaibu and his peers were excluded from critical discussions and only called upon for manual labor or conflict resolution. However, the program's capacity-building initiatives—particularly its training on meaningful youth participation and leadership—changed everything.



Through leadership development and skills training, Shaibu gained the confidence and expertise to become a strong advocate for youth inclusion.

Inspired and equipped by the program, Shaibu took a bold step and successfully ran for the position of Chairperson of the Area Development Committee (ADC)—a role traditionally dominated by older community members. Today, he leads with vision and purpose, ensuring that young voices are heard and valued in decision-making forums. He credits the Power to Youth program for enhancing his communication skills and empowering him to bridge the gap between youth and community leaders.

Under his leadership, young people are no longer on the sidelines. They actively participate in Chiefs' Forums established by the program, where they challenge harmful cultural norms, advocate for gender equality, and push for the eradication of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). Shaibu is not only a trailblazer but also a mentor, inspiring other young people to take on leadership roles and shape the future of their communities.

The Power to Youth program is driving social transformation by empowering young people like Shaibu. It is breaking down harmful stereotypes and proving that, when given the opportunity, youth can lead and inspire meaningful change. In TA Tambala, a new generation of leaders is emerging, paving the way for a brighter future.



“I want to be an ambassador for youth in every space I occupy,” Shaibu says passionately. “We have the power to create positive change, and I am committed to ensuring our voices are always heard.”



Creating Child-Marriage-Free Communities in Rural Malawi:

The Story of Happy Maison

Listening to Happy Maison from Mwitiya Village, Traditional Authority (T/A) Sale in Machinga District, one cannot help but be inspired by his leadership within T/A Sale's **Community Victim Support Unit (CVSU)**. In the past, child marriage and teenage pregnancies were the norm in his area, fueled by deep-rooted cultural practices that encouraged early sexual activity. Contributing factors included parents' eagerness to com-

pete for grandchildren, poverty, the absence of role models, and peer pressure among girls to prove their fertility.

Happy Maison's journey toward advocacy began when he attended a Power to Youth (PtY) training on the **SASA! Behavior Change Toolkit** at Kayuni Primary School. The training aimed to equip young people with the knowledge and skills needed to engage with community stakeholders, raise aware-

ness, and take action against harmful practices, unintended pregnancies, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

He emphasizes that his involvement has strengthened his ability to champion efforts against child marriage and sexual rights violations affecting adolescent girls and young women (AGYWs) in the Sale area.

During the training period, the CVSU was handling a case involving a 14-year-old girl, Alinafe Sanudi, who had been abducted by a 19-year-old young man, Rashid Pillo, both from Mwitiya Village. Her parents reported her missing for three days before the CVSU finally discovered that she had been held indoors near Sale Trading Centre, where she was subjected to sexual abuse.

The CVSU intervened, arresting the perpetrator and handing him over to Nselema Police, while Alinafe was taken to Mkwepere Health Centre—12 kilometers from Sale—for medical examination. The results confirmed the sexual abuse, and the findings are now being used as evidence in court.

A possible conviction of the young man, who showed no remorse for his

actions while being taken to the police, is expected to serve as a strong deterrent to other potential offenders. However, Happy laments the ongoing challenges faced by the CVSU, including the underestimation of its role, community resistance to change, and the continued prevalence of sexual offenses against AGYWs.

He strongly believes that securing a conviction in this case will send a powerful message and help restore justice in the community. He further advocates for the establishment of a Mobile Court as a more effective means of delivering justice while simultaneously raising awareness and deterring future offenders.

Power to You(th) MW continues to build the capacity of young people, enabling them to raise awareness and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes regarding harmful cultural practices, SGBV, and unintended pregnancies. By utilizing the *SASA! Model* for prevention and advocacy, young leaders like Happy Maison are playing a crucial role in transforming their communities and ensuring a safer future for the next generation.



“At first, I never saw myself joining the CVSU,” says Happy. “I thought it was a waste of time, but when I joined, I realized how wrong I was. Being part of the committee has made a real difference in my community, helping to protect young people from forced marriages and other sexual violations.”

PATHWAY

2

CSOs amplify young people's voices to claim, project, and expand civic space.



Amplifying African Voices Through the Africa Disrupt CSW67 and the Lilongwe Declaration

In March 2023, Power to You(th) (PtY) Malawi, in partnership with FEMNET, hosted the historic Africa Disrupt CSW67 Summit in Lilongwe. This groundbreaking event brought together young people, women, girls, civil society organizations (CSOs), and activ-

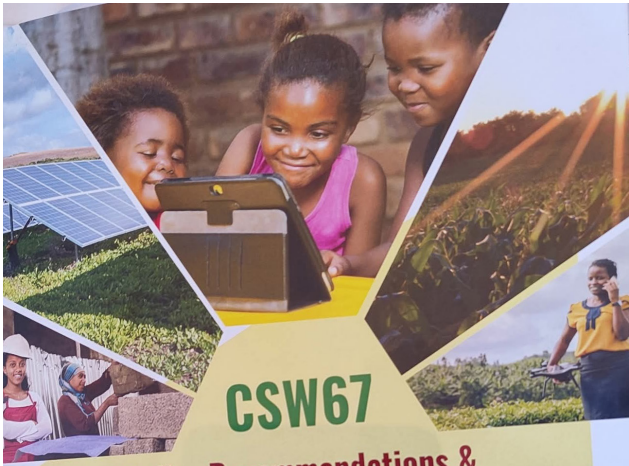
ists from across Malawi and the African continent. The summit was graced by the Honourable Minister of Gender as Guest of Honour—marking a milestone as the first government-endorsed national-level CSW-related engagement in Malawi.

Recognizing that global policy spaces like the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) often exclude grassroots voices due to access and resource barriers, this summit created an opportunity for inclusive participation. For the first time, young women, girls, and CSO representatives who would not ordinarily have a platform at CSW in New York were meaningfully involved in shaping the agenda.

To ensure authentic youth participation, young women were intentionally tasked with drafting the Lilongwe Declaration—a bold and visionary document capturing their priorities, lived realities, and policy demands. This process empowered them to lead on articulating feminist advocacy positions and ensured their voices shaped the outcomes of the summit.

The Lilongwe Declaration was then submitted to inform Malawi’s contribution to the CSW67 proceedings in New York. This demonstrated a powerful shift toward democratizing global advocacy processes and elevating African youth and women’s voices on the global stage.

The success of Africa Disrupt CSW67 reflects a transformative approach to feminist advocacy—grounded in accessibility, intergenerational dialogue, and youth-led leadership. It has paved the way for continued engagement of marginalized groups in global gender policy processes and stands as a replicable model for inclusive participation across the continent.



CSW67

Policy Recommendations & Position Statement by African Women & Girls



2023

In March 2023, Power to You(th) (PtY) Malawi, in partnership with FEMNET, hosted the historic Africa Disrupt CSW67 Summit in Lilongwe.



Deborah Mchenga:
One of the top
performing
participants of
YRA Malawi 2024.

The Journey of Deborah Mchenga in 2024

Malawi Youth Researchers Academy

Deborah Mchenga is a 24-year-old young lady from Area 23 in Lilongwe. She is the youngest in a family of five and lives with her father. Deborah holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration and Certificate in Cisco Networking Information Technology from Lilongwe Technical College. Despite her physical and speech disability, Deborah has been one of the top-performing participants in the 2024 Youth Researchers Academy (YRA) Programme. Her story is one of overcoming obstacles and demonstrating the power of inclusive opportunities.

Issues affecting participation of young people with disabilities

Young people, particularly those with disabilities, often face barriers to participate in identifying solutions to challenges affecting adolescents and young people in Malawi. Youth with disabilities face challenges such as limited access to opportunities, societal stereotypes and the absence of supportive environments that hinder their ability to contribute meaningfully in national development. They are often perceived as incapable of participating in developmental activities, such as research. Recognizing these challenges, the Youth Researchers Academy (YRA) planned to promote inclusivity to ensure that young people with disabilities are participating in identifying solutions to the challenges through research.

Youth Researchers Academy as an inclusive opportunity for youth participation

To achieve this, the academy developed strategies to encourage young people

with disabilities to apply. It ensured that the call for application encouraged young people with disabilities to apply for the position. It also ensured that each individual regardless of their capability had equal chance to be shortlisted and recruited. Additionally, it also focused on creating a friendly, empowering and supportive environment to the participants to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability, had the opportunity to excel.

Deborah's journey stands out as one of the YRA's most inspiring success story. Despite her disability, she was driven by her passion for making a difference and applied for the opportunity to participate in YRA Malawi 2024. She took part in interviews and she was selected for the program.

Participation of Deborah in 2024 Youth Researchers Academy

The YRA implemented various key interventions to ensure Deborah's success. These included; inclusive recruitment processes, a supportive environment with accessible resources and capacity



“Youth with disabilities face challenges such as limited access to opportunities, societal stereotypes and the absence of supportive environments that hinder their ability to contribute meaningfully in national development.”

Figure 4: The application call encouraged young people with disabilities to apply for the position.

building activities that allowed her to be fully engaged in all activities.

With the consistent mentorship of the CYECE research team, they helped her to develop her research skills. Furthermore, her relationships with fellow participants provided a sense of belonging that empowered her to succeed. Debora was voted the best participant for 2024 YRA programme and she was team leader for her research group that investigated factors affecting uptake of contraceptives among university students in Lilongwe.

Benefits of the YRA programme to Deborah and other young people with Disabilities.

Through her active involvement in YRA Programme activities, Deborah managed to gain quantitative and qualitative research skills. She demonstrated that young people with disabilities can equally excel when given the right support and opportunity. She participated in all the processes of the programme including training sessions, field data collection, group discussions, and presentations. She contributed to the de-



DEBORAH MCHENGA

Qualification: BSc in Business Administration

Future plan: To be a utility team player in steering and guiding organizations to success by using presently and acquired knowledge to ensure achievement of set goals in both profit and non-profit sectors.

Age: **24** District : Lilongwe

www.cycecmw.org

velopment of both personal and group research proposals, collected and analyzed data through interviews and focus group discussions and played an active role in report writing and presenting research findings to stakeholders.

Her journey inspired other young people particularly those with disabilities, to challenge societal barriers and embrace opportunities in social and economic development spheres. With her new skills, Deborah is now well positioned to advocate for challenges faced by young people in Malawi. “I will continue to challenge every barrier that hinder my meaningful participation to social and economic de-

velopment. I will fight for other young people with disabilities as disability is not inability” Deborah Mchenga during one of research dissemination sessions in Lilongwe.

What factors facilitated the meaningful engagement and participation of Deborah in 2024 YRA programme.

The factors behind Deborah’s success include CYECE’s commitment to providing a supportive and accessible environment, the availability of mentorship sessions, and her own passion and dedication. Her story highlights the importance of creating opportunities for all young people regardless of their circumstances to contribute meaningfully to societal change.



“I will continue to challenge every barrier that hinder my meaningful participation to social and economic development. I will fight for other young people with disabilities as disability is not inability.”



Figure 5: Deborah working with fellow YRA participants to develop research proposals in MACHINGA.



Figure 6: Deborah Mchenga collecting data in Machinga District.

PATHWAY

3

Societal actors to support and promote youth rights and progressive social norms.

A Bold Sermon for Change – TA Mizinga Mosque Breaks Silence on GBV and Child Marriage

 On 24 May 2024, a historic milestone was recorded in the community of TA Mizinga, Machinga District. In an unprecedented move, the Mufti of TA Mizinga Mosque, in partnership with Power to Youth (PtY) Malawi and MenEngage Alliance (MEA) Malawi, held a powerful awareness campaign on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), child marriage, and harmful practices — during Friday prayers inside the mosque.

Friday prayer, or *Jumu'ah*, is the most sacred weekly gathering for Muslims, typically reserved for spiritual reflection and scriptural teachings. It is extremely rare, and often culturally discouraged, to use this platform for public awareness or social campaigns—especially on sensitive topics such as SGBV and harmful traditional practices. Yet, the Mufti made a bold and symbolic choice: to use the pulpit to break the silence and confront the social issues undermining the dignity, safety, and rights of women and girls in his community.

His decision reflects a growing movement of religious leaders who are step-

ping into their moral authority and influence to challenge harmful norms and promote gender justice. By integrating messaging on gender equality, child protection, and GBV prevention into his sermon, the Mufti not only educated his congregation but also modeled the kind of courageous leadership necessary for long-term social transformation.

This intervention aligns with Pathway 3 of the PtY Malawi Theory of Change, which focuses on transforming social norms by engaging traditional and religious leaders. The Mufti's action is a clear demonstration of commitment—using religious spaces as platforms for advocacy and as safe environments where community members, especially men and boys, can begin to question and abandon harmful practices.

Through this collaboration, the Mufti has set a powerful precedent for other religious leaders across Malawi and the region. His example affirms that faith and gender justice can coexist, and that religious institutions can play a central role in advancing the rights and well-being of women and girls.

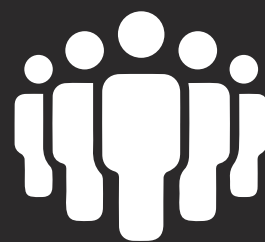
Power to You(th) Spurs Community Action to Return 177 Children to School in T/A Tambala

In T/A Tambala, Dedza District, a powerful wave of community-led change has seen 177 children (106 boys and 71 girls) readmitted to school after previously dropping out due to early marriages, poverty, child labour, and other social challenges.

This success is rooted in the Power to Youth (PtY) program, which has strengthened collaboration among traditional leaders, community structures, and education stakeholders. The initiative brought together key actors including Chiefs, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), Mother Groups, Community-based Educators (CBEs), and Youth Advocates, who are now united in their commitment to safeguarding children's rights—especially the right to education.

This readmission exercise is the result of support from the PtY program, which has invigorated community leadership and coordination across various stakeholders. The readmission campaign followed a linking and learning meeting facilitated by PtY, which brought together traditional leaders from Machinga and Dedza districts. The meeting aimed to share knowledge and build capacity on critical issues such as child protection, ending harmful practices, the role of community leadership in safeguarding young people's wellbeing, and upholding their right to education.

177
children



106
boys



71
girls





“

“The training we received from PtY opened our eyes. It helped us understand the urgency of protecting our children and the importance of working together as community leaders. Since then, there has been stronger collaboration among chiefs and all community leaders. We are now united in ensuring every child is in school and safe.”

Senior Group Village Head Tambala, who participated in the meeting and has since taken a leading role in the campaign to bring children back to school, remarked:

“The shared purpose among community leaders have proven to be a game-changer in tackling school dropout and harmful cultural practices. What began as a targeted intervention has grown into a community-wide movement — one that is restoring hope, empowering families, and giving children a second chance at a brighter future.”

The success in T/A Tambala stands as a powerful example of how inclusive leadership and community collaboration — strengthened through Power to You(th) — can transform lives and protect the rights of the most vulnerable.

Communities in T/A Kapoloma Unite to Keep Children in School

In Traditional Authority Kapoloma, Machinga District, an alarming trend was unfolding — children were increasingly being pulled out of school by community distractions such as video show centers and informal Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). These activities, though seemingly harmless, were leading to absenteeism, increased exposure to harmful behavior, and ultimately school dropouts.

But the community refused to stand by and watch the future of their children fade. Through Power to Youth (PtY) initiative, a coalition was mobilized — bringing together Youth Advocates, the Chief's Forum, Community Policing Committees, School Management and Committees, Community Based Educators (CBEs), and the Mother Group (MG). These groups, trained and empowered through PtY, took decisive action to protect children's right to education.

As a result of their efforts, 6 VSLAs that were engaging school-going children were dismantled. These VSLAs were encouraging learners — especially adolescents — to miss school for short-term financial activities. In parallel, a crackdown on video show centers operating during school hours led to 32 children being caught and held accountable by their parents.



“We reached a point where we had to act,” said Prisca Masika, a CBE from the area. “These VSLAs and video shows were slowly destroying our children’s focus. With support from PtY, we joined hands as community leaders, and now, we are seeing learners back in class where they belong.”

6

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32

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Parents of the 32 children found in video shows were summoned by the Chief's Forum and the Community Policing Committee, where they were warned, penalized, and counseled on their responsibilities. The message was clear: communities must take charge in safeguarding children's futures.

Meanwhile, Group Village Head Mwenyekaka acknowledged the unity and discipline now taking root in the area:

This community-led intervention has become a blueprint for how collective effort can address deep-rooted social challenges.

By dismantling the systems pulling children away from education, T/A Kapoloma is writing a new story—one where every child is given the chance to learn, grow, and thrive.



“For a long time, these distractions were normalized. But with the awareness raised through PtY, and the action of CBEs, MGs, and policing teams, we now have order. Children are returning to school, and parents know they must be accountable. The collaboration has extended to the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and local school leadership, who are now working closely with community structures to track attendance and respond swiftly when learners go missing from school.”

Breaking the cycle of child labour in T/A Mizinga, Machinga

For years, Traditional Authority (T/A) Mizinga in Malawi has grappled with the persistent issue of child labor. Due to its proximity to the Mozambique border, it became common practice for children — some as young as 10 — to be sent across the border to work in farms, households, or informal businesses. Education was often sacrificed in favor of short-term income, and the community had come to view this as a norm.

But that norm is now shifting.

Thanks to a series of trainings on child protection and rights conducted by the Power to Youth (PtY) team, and delivered in partnership with the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and the Chief's Forum, community leaders in T/A Mizinga have begun to take action against child labor.

One notable case involved three boys aged between 11 and 14, all learners at Nakungwi Primary School, who had been sent to Mozambique to work. Following the trainings, leaders from the Chief's Forum and PTA mobilized quickly, traced the children, and facilitated their safe return home. The boys have since been re-enrolled at school and are receiving support as they rebuild their futures through education.

The intervention has ignited a wider movement in the area. Chiefs are working hand-in-hand with schools and parents to raise awareness, monitor vulnerable children, penalize parents who send children to work and ensure that no child is left behind. In T/A Mizinga, the cycle of child labor is beginning to break, and in its place, a new culture of protection and education is taking root.

Speaking on the progress, Group Village Head Kadoloso, Chairperson of the Chief's Forum, shared:



“Child labor was very common in our area because of how close we are to the Mozambique border. Children were being taken away to work, sometimes for months, and it was becoming normal. But since we started receiving a series of trainings through Power to Youth, there has been a big change. Chiefs, teachers, parents and even the youth now understand that these children deserve to be in school, not in the fields or homes of strangers.”

Kasumbu Chiefs Take a Bold Stand for Children's Rights

In T/A Kasumbu, Dedza, cultural obligations collided with schooling schedules, and communities lacked the enforcement power to protect children's rights. For generations, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, and underage initiations into Gule wa Mkulu were quietly accepted as part of life. Girls were pulled out of school to become wives. Boys disappeared from classrooms to undergo cultural rites before they were emotionally or physically ready. These practices, deeply rooted in tradition, were costing children their futures.

With support from the Power to You(th) (PtY) program, the area has taken a bold stand. Through a series of community-driven consultations, new by-laws have been established — laws that are reshaping the way families, chiefs, and entire community think about culture and responsibility.

These by-laws are not just guidelines — they are enforceable rules with strict punishments for anyone involved in harmful practices. Parents who force their children into marriage now face serious consequences. Chiefs who allow underage initiations are held accountable. And community members are encouraged — and empowered — to report violations.

Perhaps the most visible change is this: initiation ceremonies are now only allowed during school holidays and weekends, and only for children of the right age. It's a simple but powerful shift. It means children no longer have to choose between culture and education — they can have both, without harm.



“These laws ensure that children remain in school and are protected from harmful practices. We have found a balance where children can engage in cultural practices during holidays and still focus on their education during the school term. Through the enforcement of these laws, we have been able to end seven marriages of underage children who have been enrolled in school at the moment.”



Senior Chief Kanyenda, who has been at the forefront of this transformation, proudly shared:

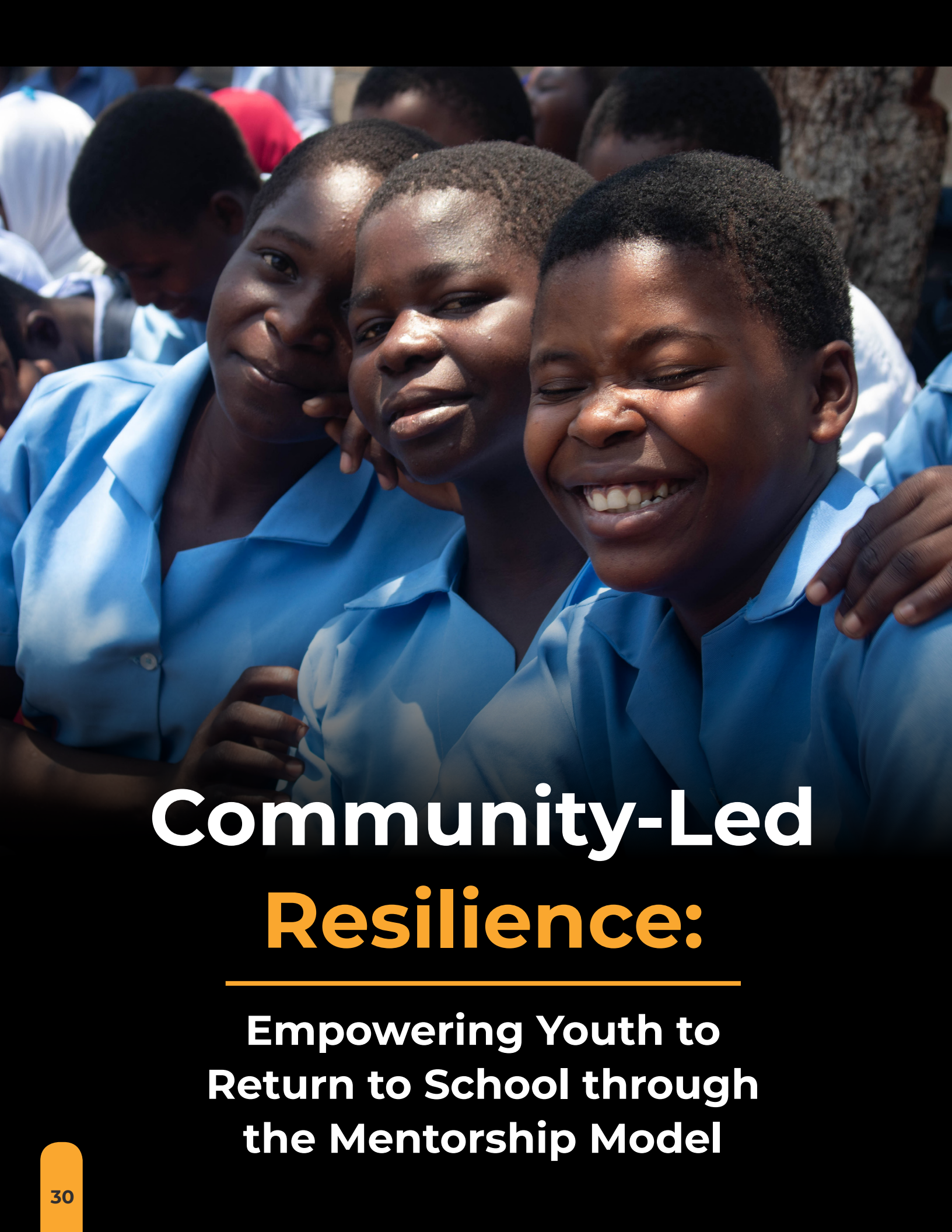
“These laws ensure that children remain in school and are protected from harmful practices. We have found a balance where children can engage in cultural practices during holidays and still focus on their education during the school term. Through the enforcement of these laws, we have been able to end seven marriages of underage children who have been enrolled in school at the moment.”

The community is already seeing results. Chiefs and other community leaders are taking an active role in monitoring their villages. Parents are also learning the value of education — not just for their children, but for the entire community’s future.

Power to You(th) continues to work alongside these community structures — training leaders, supporting youth, and making sure that children’s rights are not just spoken about, but enforced. In T/A Kasumbu, tradition is no longer a barrier to progress. It has become part of the solution.



These by-laws are not just guidelines — they are enforceable rules with strict punishments for anyone involved in harmful practices.



Community-Led Resilience:

Empowering Youth to
Return to School through
the Mentorship Model

C ommunity-Led Resilience: Empowering Youth to Return to School through the Mentorship Model

In the heart of Malawi, the Power to You(th) initiative has been transforming lives through its innovative teacher-mentor model, specifically targeting young people who had dropped out of school or were at risk of doing so. This approach has yielded remarkable success stories, one of which is that of seventeen-year-old Davie Gomani.

Davie was enrolled in Mkotamo Primary School but had dropped out in Standard 7. Teacher-mentors learned about his situation and made several visits to his home. Through persistent discussions with Davie and his parents, the mentors emphasized the importance of education and the opportunities it could unlock for his future. Their dedication and support, which included

providing essential learning materials, ultimately convinced Davie to return to school and re-enroll in Standard 7.

A similar success story is that of Samiyatu Mauzeni, who also dropped out in Standard 7 due to a lack of learning materials and money for examinations. Upon hearing about her case, the teacher-mentors visited her to counsel her and her parents on the significance of education. They assured Samiyatu's parents that she would be provided with the necessary learning materials to continue her studies. With this support, Samiyatu was able to return to school.

These stories exemplify the profound impact of the teacher-mentor model. By addressing the individual needs of students and rallying community resources, Power to You(th) is empowering youth to overcome obstacles and reclaim their right to education. It further emphasizes the youth adult partnerships.



“This document reflects the collective aspirations of the county government and its people, setting a clear roadmap for achieving universal WASH access.”

Role models and headteachers from Chitundu Zone

The Persistent Efforts of the Teacher-Mentor Model

In a small village in Machinga, Suzen Sayesi's life took an unexpected turn when she found out she was pregnant while in form two. Despite this challenge, Suzen was determined to continue her education. She courageously sat for her Junior Certificate Examination (JCE) while pregnant, showing immense strength and dedication.

As she navigated the complexities of teenage pregnancy, Suzen faced another critical decision. Influenced by societal pressures and familial expectations, she chose to get married, despite the relentless efforts of her teacher mentors who discouraged this path. They knew that Suzen's potential could be fully realized only if she continued her education.

Despite the marriage, the teacher mentors never gave up on Suzen. They continued to provide her with counseling and support, understanding the importance of education in transforming her life. Through their unwavering guidance, Suzen made the difficult decision to break free from the marriage and focus on her future.

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When the JCE results were released, Suzen had passed. However, she faced another internal struggle and initially refused to return to school, preferring instead to remain in the marriage. Understanding her situation, the dedicated team of teacher mentors visited her again, offering support and emphasizing the long-term benefits of education for both her and her child's future.

Their persistent efforts and heartfelt conversations eventually persuaded Suzen to end her marriage completely and return to school. She re-enrolled and is now a student in form three. Suzen's journey

back to education is a testament to her resilience and the power of supportive mentorship.

Today, Suzen is a hard-working and well-behaved student, determined to build a better future for herself and her child. Her story is an inspiring example of how determination, coupled with the right support, can overcome even the most challenging circumstances. Suzen's journey from a young, pregnant school-girl to a dedicated student highlights the importance of education and the profound impact of mentorship and support in transforming lives.

Reclaiming Childhood: How the Mizinga MenEngage Community Network Fought Child Labour and GBV along Lake Chilwa

In October 2023, the Mizinga MenEngage Community Network in Machinga made a significant breakthrough in the fight against child labour and gender-based violence (GBV) along the shores of Lake Chilwa. Through their consistent community engagement work, the network observed that despite ongoing awareness campaigns, cases

of child exploitation and GBV remained rampant in the area.

Recognizing that awareness alone was not enough, the MenEngage Network partnered with traditional leaders to take decisive action. Together, they established Child Labour and GBV Prevention Committees across the lakeshore communities. These committees were





“MenEngage community networks engage fishermen along Lake Chilwa to raise awareness and take action against gender-based violence and child labour, fostering safer and more inclusive communities.”

tasked with monitoring, reporting, and responding to incidents of child labour and GBV, ensuring that cases were addressed at the grassroots level and community accountability was strengthened.

As these committees became operational, they uncovered that many children working along Lake Chilwa were not only from Machinga but from other districts as well. Some had been trafficked or sent by their families to engage in fishing and related activities. In response, the MenEngage Network collaborated with the District Social Welfare Office to safely repatriate these children to their home districts. This intervention marked a vital turning point in restoring the rights and dignity of children affected by exploitation.

Moreover, community leaders and parents began taking collective responsibility. Encouraged by the efforts of the Network, families in TA Mizinga stopped sending their children to work along the lake. For the first time, traditional and community leadership united with civil society to uphold children's rights and protect them from harm.

This initiative spearheaded with support from PtY Malawi has significantly contributed to reducing both child labour and gender-based violence (GBV) in the region. More importantly, it has laid a strong foundation for sustainable community-led protection mechanisms. By leveraging local leadership, trust, and collaboration, the initiative illustrates how youth-led, gender-transformative advocacy can drive meaningful and



Mobilizing for change: Community leaders, fishermen, and activists gather to map out local strategies for addressing child labour and GBV. Through the MenEngage approach, these dialogues empower communities to take ownership of prevention efforts and ensure safer, more inclusive spaces for all.

lasting change. It stands as a compelling example of how community-anchored solutions can protect vulnerable populations and foster resilience through inclusive and rights-based approaches.

Community dialogue in action: MenEngage community facilitators en-

gage fishermen in an open discussion on gender-based violence (GBV) and child labour prevention along the Lake Chilwa shoreline. These conversations are shifting norms and encouraging shared responsibility among men and women in protecting children and promoting gender equality.

PATHWAY

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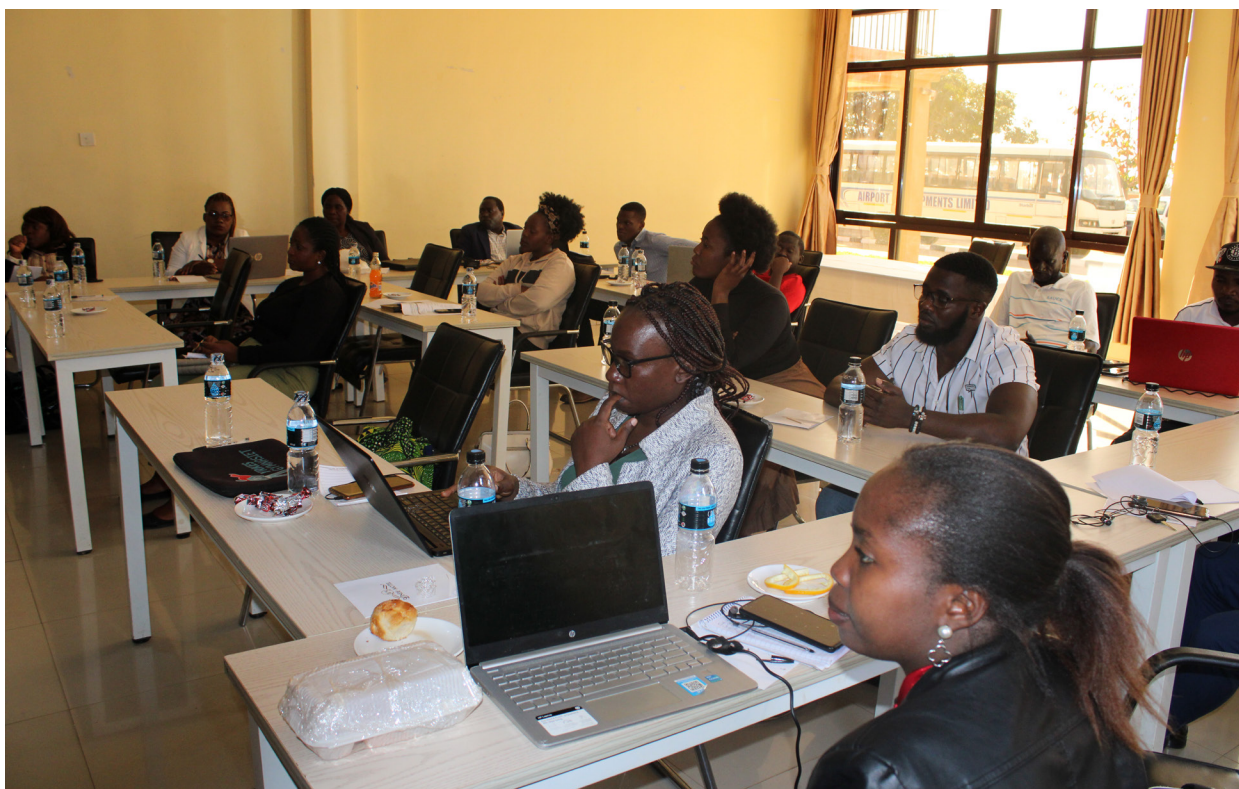
Stage actors improve policy making, budgeting, and implementation of harmful practices, SGBV, and unintended pregnancies.



Story 1: The 2024 – 2030 Malawi National Gender policy

The PtY Malawi program achieved a milestone in advancing gender equality through its active involvement in the development of the 2024–2030 National Gender Policy. In July 2024, the Gender Management Team endorsed the policy making it a key document for Malawi’s journey toward gender equity and inclusive development. The policy revision process,

led by the Ministry of Gender in collaboration with other government entities (MDAs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) involved a comprehensive review of the 2016–2021 National Gender Policy to identify gaps and add new priority areas. PtY Malawi played a role during this process, presenting innovative priorities that were successfully integrated into the amended policy. These priorities include: Gender in Governance, Laws, and Human Rights, Peace and Security, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Gender and Social Protection and Gender in Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change.



In addition the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) was endorsed as one of the key strategies for implementing the policy. This strategy ensures sustainable change by addressing the root causes of gender inequality and shifting societal norms and practices. The policy has been endorsed by the Ministry of Gender. This shows PtY Malawi's commitment to advocating for gender equality and supporting evidence-based approaches to bring transformative change to communities in Malawi.

Story 2: **Driving Legal Reform for Child Protection and Gender Equality**

The PtY programme has made advancements in shaping legislative frameworks to safeguard children and promote gender equality. With support from Amref the program has actively contributed to the development of amendment bills that address critical gaps in existing laws.



“New interventions are added in the New Strategy i.e. parenting programs, constitutional social protection programs. These efforts tackle root causes that cause such as harmful social norms.”



► **Child Care Protection and Justice Act (Amendment) Bill 2022:** The PtY program played a crucial role in supporting the drafting workshop for the amendment bill. Its principal objective was to redefine a child as a person under the age of eighteen aligning the law with constitutional amendments to section 23. The bill strengthens penalties against offenders when children are victims. This legislative progress reflects a big step toward ensuring justice and protection for vulnerable children in Malawi.

► **Gender Equality (Amendment) Bill 2022:** The PtY program through Amref contributed to the development of amendment to the Gender Equality Act. This updated bill seeks to extend the application of quotas in employment to include the private sector, fostering gen-

der balance across various industries. It introduces a schedule of harmful practices to ensure these cultural norms are addressed.

Story 3: **Malawi's National Strategy to End Child Marriages 2024-2030**

In July 2024 the Ministry of Gender, Community Development, and Social Welfare supported by Amref Health Africa's and SRHR Alliance Power to Youth Program finalized the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriages 2024-2030 that has been launched. New interventions are added in the New Strategy i.e. parenting programs, constitutional social protection programs. These efforts tackle root causes such as harmful social norms.

The Journey of Malawi 2023-2028 National Youth Policy



Young people from Machinga and Dedza implementation areas attending the launch with the Machinga District Youth Officer.

The launch of Malawi's Revised National Youth Policy is nothing short of a milestone. It's a moment resonating with hope and change, where young people take the lead in a new era of possibilities. In a world filled with complex challenges, this policy revision stands as a testament to the power of youth voices and their commitment to confronting social, cultural, economic, and political obstacles head-on. What makes this policy revision particularly striking is the central role played by young people themselves.

Their active engagement during the review process ensured that their perspectives, needs, and dreams found a place in the heart of the new policy. This isn't just about listening to their voices; it's a resounding commitment to harness

their boundless potential for a brighter Malawian future, aligned with the ambitious development goals of MW2063. The new youth policy adeptly acknowledges the issues affecting young people in Malawi, beginning with demographics. It reveals that young people aged 10-35 constitute a significant 50% of the population. This statistic underscores the importance of focusing on their unique needs and challenges.

The policy also recognizes that, despite their substantial numbers, young people have often been excluded from decision-making in national and local governance structures. The revised policy aims to empower youth, granting them a more prominent role in shaping policies and development that affect them. Furthermore, the economic empowerment

50%

Young people aged 10-35 constitute a significant 50% of the population. This statistic underscores the importance of focusing on their unique needs and challenges.



aspect of youth development, which has been underrepresented in previous policies, is now emphasized. The policy highlights the challenges young people face when entering the job market, including limited experience, skills, high investment costs, and inadequate business support services. It strives to create opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship, fostering self-sustainability and economic growth among the youth. In addition, the new youth policy exposes the fact that young people still often drop out before completing their primary education and have limited access to secondary and tertiary education due to various challenges.

The education sector continues to grapple with issues such as a shortage of trained teachers, poor learning infrastructure, and curricula misaligned with market needs. Education reforms are a priority to overcome these hurdles. Despite substantial investments in health-care, young people still face limited ac-

cess to youthfriendly and mental health services. This has led to issues like substance abuse, HIV infections, Young people from Machinga and Dedza implementation areas attending the launch with the Machinga District Youth Officer unintended pregnancies, child marriages, and gender-based violence.

The policy is committed to improving access to essential health services. The policy also acknowledges the minimal participation of young people in environmental management programs, a critical element for sustainable development. It seeks to engage youth in environmental initiatives and climate change efforts. To ensure the effective implementation of the new revised policy, it recognizes the critical role of various stakeholders. Responsibilities are clearly defined in the policy, with a strong emphasis on youth-led organizations taking the lead in implementation. This underscores the government's dedication to actively engaging young people and ensuring their central role in the policy's success.

The launch of the revised National Youth Policy was a grand affair, attended by a diverse range of stakeholders, including young people, chiefs, non-government organizations, and government representatives. The highlight of the event was the presence of the President of the Republic of Malawi, HE DR Lazarus Chakwera, who presided over the launch.



“The policy also recognizes that, despite their substantial numbers, young people have often been excluded from decision-making in national and local governance structures.”

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