



Newsletter

January - June 2026

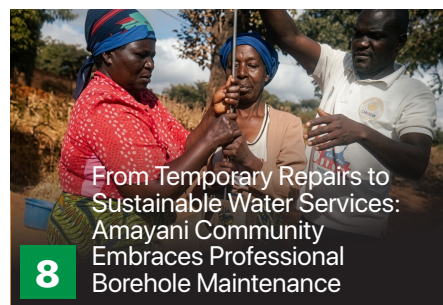


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Editor's Note

Dear readers,

Welcome to the January to June 2026 WESNET Newsletter. This edition comes at a time when Malawi's WASH sector continues to evolve beyond the traditional focus on infrastructure towards a deeper conversation about sustainability, systems strengthening and local ownership. Across the country, organisations are demonstrating that lasting change is achieved not simply by constructing facilities, but by investing in the people, institutions and partnerships that keep those facilities functioning long after projects come to an end.

The stories featured in this edition reflect this important shift. From communities embracing preventive borehole maintenance and schools creating safer learning environments, to health facilities improving maternal care through better WASH services and districts harnessing digital tools for evidence-based decision-making, each story reminds us that sustainable WASH is built on collaboration, accountability and continuous learning.

This edition also highlights the growing role of research and innovation in shaping policy and practice. As a network, WESNET remains committed to creating platforms where evidence is shared, experiences are documented and lessons inspire action across the sector. Knowledge is one of our greatest resources, and when shared, it has the power to transform communities and strengthen institutions.

As you read through these pages, I encourage you to reflect on the collective effort behind every success story. Behind every functioning water point, every improved sanitation facility, every healthier school and every empowered community are dedicated individuals and organisations working tirelessly to ensure that no one is left behind.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to all our member organisations, development partners, government institutions and contributors who made this edition possible by sharing their experiences, innovations and achievements. Your stories not only celebrate progress but also inspire others to continue striving for universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

Happy reading.

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The open well that Bertha fetched water from was contaminated with decomposed materials, discarded items, and even animal waste.

Goodbye smelly water!

By Isaac Msiska.

// Health officials tell us to drink safe water, but where do we get it? We have no choice but to drink water that sometimes smells because chickens or other animals have fallen into it." said Bertha Kwalira, a mother of five from Moffat village, in Traditional Authority (T/A) Chilikumwendo in Dedza District, Malawi.

For Bertha, access to clean drinking water has always been a distant dream.

Since birth, she has never experienced the pleasure of

clean water. Every day, Bertha and her neighbors collect water from an open, unprotected hole near an abandoned shallow well, contaminated with decomposed materials, discarded items, and even animal waste. The only improved water source in the village stopped working in 2018, just a few years after it was built by a politician during an election campaign. But as the population grew, they dug a hole beside the broken well, using ropes and jerrycans to fetch whatever little water seeped through the ground. The water in the hole is barely enough to fill the 40-litre bucket that Bertha normally uses.

Bertha spends several minutes near the hole patiently waiting for the water to rise.

The risks are everywhere, and contamination of the water is worse. Children often throw objects into the water, and waste from animals flows back into the hole.

"There are times when we find dead chickens in the well which causes the water to smell horribly. Sometimes, wastewater from our dirty feet seeps back into the hole," Bertha explained.

The greatest fear, however, is the danger of children falling in. "We have rescued several



children who nearly fell into this hole," Bertha says. "Every time I send my kids to fetch water, I pray they come back safe," she added. Left without options, Bertha and the villagers turned to the Dyamphwi River for drinking water.

When Welthungerhilfe (WHH) visited Moffat village for a needs assessment, Bertha saw a glimmer of hope. She saw the water problems dissipating and a future where she and the rest of her community would live free from fear of waterborne diseases.

"If we get a borehole here, everything will change. We will drink safe water and stop worrying about diseases," she says.

The problem extends beyond Moffat. According to Zeliya Lembetsa, the Area Development Committee (ADC) vice chairperson, the scarcity of boreholes forces people across T/A Chilikumwendo to dig unsafe water wells near their homes.

"Even if water experts told us not to drink this water, it will be very difficult because the boreholes are far apart," she says. "If WHH builds more boreholes, diarrheal cases will reduce, and people will live healthier lives."

The Dedza District Water Development Office reports that only 55 percent of people in T/A Chilikumwendo have access to clean water. The District Council's goal is to increase

that number to 90 percent by 2027. WHH, with funding from charity: water, has committed to constructing additional 56 boreholes in T/A Kaphuka and 20 in T/A Chilikumwendo.

Construction began in December 2024, marking a turning point for the community. Soon, Moffat village will have a borehole with potable water.

For Bertha, the wait is almost over. Soon, for the first time in her life, she will drink safe, clean water not just because health officials recommend it, but because she will finally have access to it.



Prisca Husain and her baby, Ntchisi, Malawi, November 2025.

Dignity delivered, lives saved: The unshakeable business case for water and sanitation in Malawi's health facilities

By Dennis Lupenga

In the central region of Malawi, the journey of motherhood has become a stark indicator of a national crisis. For two women in Kasungu, the joy of bringing life into the world was stolen not by medical complications, but by crumbling concrete and broken pipes.

Estely and Beatrice arrived at their local health centre to give birth. Instead of a haven, they found dilapidated bathrooms and toilets that were unusable. Forced to relieve themselves in the bushes while in labour and during recovery, they did so not

just in physical discomfort, but in profound humiliation.

"The delivery bed was good but once I got outside, everything was bad. In the postnatal ward, there are no beds. We all sleep right on the floor with aged bamboo mats which are not comfortable at all. The mats are also soiled with blood and other bodily liquids. When I was told that bathing water was ready, I was shocked to see bloody plastic papers all over with clogged water that meant that I had to dip my feet inside all the way up to my ankle, exposing me to infections. The water was red-greenish and stinky. I tried

to push that water out with my feet and try to take a bath but soon the water filled the room again due to the clogging of the bathroom water outlet. It pained me knowing that I might get infections before getting back home, but I had no choice." Lamented Beatrice.

She further added that such horrible conditions deprive women, who bring life to this world, of their dignity. This is a sad reality that pushes mothers away from formal healthcare and back towards dangerous home births.

However, just a district away



Prisca Husain and her baby, Ntchisi, Malawi, November 2025.

in Ntchisi, a different story is unfolding. Prisca and Trinity experienced a healthcare system that functioned as intended. Their facility boasted clean bathrooms and working toilets. This seemingly simple infrastructure created an environment of safety.

Because the guardian shelter had proper sanitation, Prisca, who suffers from epilepsy, was able to stay at the facility for close monitoring. When she collapsed due to a seizure, help was immediate. She was referred to Ntchisi district hospital in good time and delivered successfully.

This outcome is particularly poignant given Prisca's history. In a previous pregnancy, lack of water and sanitation facilities made staying at a guardian shelter impossible. When she suffered an epileptic collapse at home, she reported late to the facility. Her baby did not survive.

The contrast between Estely and Beatrice in Kasungu versus Prisca and Trinity in Ntchisi is not a story of charity. It is a story of return on investment. The \$8.4 Billion Leak in the System

The human cost of dilapidated toilets is catastrophic, but the financial cost is now undeniable.

According to new research conducted by WaterAid in conjunction with the World Bank, healthcare-acquired infections are costing Sub-Saharan Africa \$8.4 billion annually. Malawi is shouldering one of the heaviest burdens in the region. Treating preventable infections acquired in dirty hospitals consumes a staggering 10.9% of Malawi's total annual health budget and erodes 2.92% of the country's GDP (Gross Domestic Product).

To put that into perspective, Malawi is losing nearly 3% of its entire economic output simply because doctors and mothers lack soap and clean water. As the World Bank notes, the Eastern and Southern Africa region is losing an estimated \$170 billion per year, 5% of GDP due to poor WASH services.

The business case for investing in WASH rests on a simple economic principle: prevention is cheaper than treatment.

The WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme reports that 24% of healthcare facilities in Malawi operate without a functional water supply, while 23% lack usable, improved toilets. Perhaps most shockingly, only 3.3% of facilities have toilets that are safe, private, and accessible to women and people with disabilities.

Fixing this is not expensive. Wateraid estimates that providing universal, basic WASH services in every healthcare facility across the 46 least developed countries would require a per capita investment of less than \$1 annually. Compare that \$1 to the 10.9%



Trinity Mbewe washing her hands at Kangolwa Health Centre in Ntchisi

of the health budget currently spent mopping up the mess. This is not an expenditure; it is a saving.

If Malawi halved its healthcare infection rate, the country could save \$4.2 billion in economic losses, funds that could be redirected toward vaccines, nutrition, and closing the chronic infrastructure gap.

The Human Capital Multiplier

Prisca's successful delivery is a macroeconomic indicator. When women survive childbirth and babies are born alive, the workforce expands, and families escape the poverty trap. Conversely, when mothers like Prisca previously lost children, or when nurses spend weeks treating preventable sepsis, the national balance sheet bleeds.

As one Nurse Midwife Technician at Nthondo health

centre lamented, "What pains me most is the pain of that woman who carried that child for nine months and ends up going back home without a baby". That pain has a price tag, and Malawi is paying it in full.

From Emergency Response to Economic Resilience

For too long, WASH has been treated as a charitable add-on or a reactive emergency response to cholera outbreaks. This is economically backwards. Wateraid Malawi's recent political economy analysis urges a shift from reactive, costly interventions toward proactive, long-term, climate-resilient infrastructure.

The success at Kangolwa health center, where solar-powered water tanks and new washrooms led to timely admissions of pregnant women, proves that when you build toilets, you build

trust. As the facility in-charge noted, "home births and enroute deliveries... are a thing of the past ever since we have had functional sanitation facilities and clean running water".

The stories of Estely, Beatrice, Prisca, and Trinity are not isolated anecdotes; they are audited evidence. Every time a mother in Kasungu is forced into the bushes, the Government of Malawi makes a hidden choice to spend 11% of its health budget on treating preventable filth rather than preventing it.

The World Bank and WHO have provided the spreadsheets. The mothers of Ntchisi have provided the proof. The choice is no longer about morality; it is about math. Investing in water, sanitation, and hygiene is the single highest-return investment Malawi can make in its own future.



Members of the Amayani Water Point Committee work alongside a trained area mechanic during routine borehole maintenance.

From Temporary Repairs to Sustainable Water Services: Amayani Community Embraces Professional Borehole Maintenance

By Lebium Katuku

For years, residents of Amayani Village in Traditional Authority Tambala relied on a local “bush mechanic” whenever their community borehole developed faults. While the informal repairs

often restored water temporarily, they rarely addressed the underlying technical problems. As a result, the borehole broke down repeatedly, disrupting access to safe and clean water and increasing maintenance costs for the community.

Determined to find a lasting solution, the Chairperson of the Amayani Water Point Committee, Fiesi Magombo, contacted the Dedza Water Point Area Mechanics Association (DWAMA) Secretariat in May to seek guidance on professional borehole maintenance services.

During the discussion, the Secretariat emphasised the importance of engaging trained and certified area mechanics who follow standard maintenance procedures and promote preventive maintenance rather than temporary repairs.

Acting on this advice, the community engaged Moses Katakwe, a certified area mechanic under DWAMA, to carry out professional maintenance and repairs on the borehole. The water point committee also entered into a preventive maintenance service contract valued at MK 25,000, ensuring that the borehole receives routine inspections and timely servicing before major faults develop.

The results have been encouraging. The borehole is now operating more reliably, faults are diagnosed and repaired professionally and the frequency of breakdowns has

significantly reduced.

The water point committee reports increased confidence in the sustainability of their water supply and now recognises the value of investing in professional maintenance services rather than relying on short-term repairs.

Reflecting on the change, Files Magombo, Chairperson of the Amayani Water Point Committee, said:

"In the past, we only looked for someone to repair the borehole when it stopped working, but the problem would return after a short time. Through DWAMA, we have learned the importance of preventive maintenance and using trained area mechanics. Today, our borehole is more reliable and we have confidence that our community will continue to have access to safe and clean water."

This experience demonstrates

how timely technical guidance, combined with access to skilled area mechanics, can transform community attitudes towards infrastructure maintenance.

By shifting from reactive repairs to preventive maintenance, Amayani community is protecting its investment, reducing long-term maintenance costs and ensuring more reliable access to safe water for households.

The success of Amayani Village also illustrates the important role that the Dedza Water Point Area Mechanics Association plays in strengthening community-based water management systems. As more communities adopt professional maintenance services, the sustainability and functionality of rural water infrastructure are expected to improve, contributing to long-term access to safe and reliable water services across Dedza District.



Reliable access to safe water is transforming daily life for women in the community.



Two new latrine blocks

Improving learning through better WASH Facilities at Kankhombe Primary School in Salima

By AGcare project coordinator.

A school sanitation initiative implemented by AG Care with support from Tearfund is transforming hygiene practices and promoting dignity among learners at Kankhombe Primary School in Salima District.

In 2022, AG Care constructed two modern sanitation blocks at the school. One for girls and one for boys as part of efforts to improve Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services in schools. A recent

monitoring visit revealed that the facilities remain in excellent condition, demonstrating the school's strong commitment to maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment.

The sanitation blocks are kept remarkably clean, with learners taking an active role in maintaining them. During the visit, pupils were observed refilling handwashing stations, while a cleaning rota displayed on the wall clearly outlined daily responsibilities for keeping the facilities clean and functional.

Beyond improving sanitation,

the facilities are helping address an issue that often affects girls' education, menstrual hygiene management. The girls' sanitation block includes a dedicated cubicle designed to provide privacy and dignity during menstruation. The facility is also fitted with a SATO pan, further enhancing hygiene standards.

The school has embraced hygiene promotion as part of everyday learning. Educational posters carrying key hygiene messages are displayed on the exterior walls of the sanitation blocks, reinforcing positive



Students perform a drama to break the silence and educate their peers about menstrual hygiene

behaviours among learners and the wider school community.

A particularly inspiring aspect of the initiative is the effort to tackle menstrual health stigma.

During the visit, a group of girls performed a drama before fellow pupils and teachers, illustrating the experiences and challenges associated with a girl's first menstrual period. The performance sparked discussion and awareness among both boys and girls, helping to create a more supportive school environment.

The initiative also extends beyond the school grounds. A local women's group has been equipped with a sewing machine and is producing reusable

sanitary pads for distribution to schoolgirls. This not only supports girls' attendance and participation in school but also provides a sustainable, community-led solution to menstrual hygiene challenges.

The experience at Kankhombe Primary School demonstrates how investments in school WASH infrastructure can deliver benefits that go beyond sanitation. By combining improved facilities, hygiene education, menstrual health support, and community involvement, the initiative is helping create a healthier, safer and more inclusive learning environment for all learners.

As schools across Malawi continue to strengthen WASH



services, Kankhombe stands as an example of how well-maintained infrastructure and active community participation can contribute to better educational outcomes and improved learner wellbeing.



Aggrey celebrates a new water point

Lifting the burden: Tchoba Village's Journey to Better Health and Equality

By Clement Banda

For years, Tchoba village in Traditional Authority (TA) Mkukula, Dowa district had no access to safe water. Women and men in the village recall how relying on unprotected shallow wells became a part of daily life, despite the risks to their health and well-being.

Positioned in the middle of the village, the shallow well posed indescribable health hazards to

the community, often causing various waterborne diseases to expectant mothers and under five children. The open well posed a constant risk, with people and animals vulnerable to falling into it. Yet, despite the danger, it remained the community's most accessible and dependable source of water.

Egily Labani, one of the women in Tchoba village, says, "we have had no source of safe water for over 30 years. Men in the community tried to dig a well to

ease the problem, but still the water was far from safe because the well was neither lined nor covered." Egily adds that, "men made contributions, bought cement and molded a concrete cover to protect the well, but the cover ended up being too heavy to lift even by the men themselves," she laughs.

Levison Kachigwada, one of the men in the community, adds to the voice of the women saying, ". During the rainy season, if the rains came before we had



A burden too heavy: Aggrey shows where she has been drawing water

collected water, the women could not cook because the water became too muddy. Sometimes, we had no choice but to fetch the dirty water, take it home, and wait for the sediment to settle before using it. In addition, from time-to-time children threw objects inside. But conveniently, this was all we had."

Just like the rainy season, the dry season also brought a new challenge. The water level was dropping so low, and it was never sufficient for the whole village. The development increased the waiting time and affected productivity for the community. Sometimes this forced women and girls to travel long distances for alternative water sources.

The case of the Tchoba community is among the

numerous challenges that Dowa district communities face regarding safe water access. From dry holes to water quality issues, the district calls for firm support to help the communities and achieve universal access. To change the situation, Self Help Africa, through Dowa Integrated Water Sanitation and Hygiene (DIWASH) project with funding from charity: water, aligned to the District Strategic Investment Plan (DSIP) to continue to extend its mandate to improve health, gender equality and resilient livelihoods through sustainable and accountable WASH service delivery in communities, Schools and Health Care Facilities

Today, a total population of 280 women, men and children in Tchoba village can manage a smile, obviously enjoying improved health since the new

borehole is providing clean and safe water. Women no longer walk long distances in search for safe water but can now spend their time on productive activities like small scale businesses to earn income, tending to crops as well as taking care of their family.

Fetching water is no longer a difficult task for young girls and boys who have had to skip school because of water related diseases.

With funding from Charity: Water, in the year 2025 a total of 60 water points were drilled and 69 water points rehabilitated and fitted with Afridev pumps, making a total 129 safe water points in the targeted communities in TAs Mkukula, Chiwere and Msakambewa. These water points now provide safe water to 44,961 daily users.



Foster's daughter, Mary, washing her hands using the SATO handwashing facility. In the background is an improved pit latrine constructed using a sanitation loan.

Improving sanitation through data-driven decision-making and household sanitation loans

By Innocent Salima

Water For People, through the FCDO-funded WASH Systems for Health Programme, has successfully implemented an mWater dashboard initiative to strengthen data-driven sanitation decision-making and support household sanitation loans in Lilongwe and Chikwawa Districts. The initiative is helping districts accelerate the shift from basic to safely managed sanitation.

For years, district teams in Malawi have struggled to monitor sanitation progress effectively. Data on household sanitation, often collected separately by Health

Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) and community fund managers, remained fragmented and difficult to compile. Reliance on paper-based tools led to delays, frequent errors, and limited visibility into the true sanitation situation on the ground. Without a unified, reliable system, district authorities found it difficult to identify underserved areas, track progress toward safely managed sanitation, or make timely, evidence-based decisions.

These constraints slowed the country's transition from basic to safely managed sanitation, despite policy ambitions and growing community demand.

Recognising this systemic bottleneck, Water For People partnered with Lilongwe and

Chikwawa District Councils to introduce a digital, integrated approach to sanitation monitoring. The team developed an mWater-based sanitation dashboard tailored to district needs, giving HSAs, fund managers, and district officers the ability to collect, consolidate, and analyse sanitation data in real time. Designed for low-connectivity environments and accessible via smartphone, the platform replaced cumbersome paper registers with digital tools that capture photos, coordinates, and accurate sanitation indicators in a single system.

"At first, we were using printed data collection tools, which meant we used a lot of paper. With printed tools, you cannot capture a photo to show the

condition of the toilet. You also cannot capture the coordinates of the pit latrine location. But with mWater, all these are doable. The current platform is up to date, real-time, and user-friendly. It enables you to make corrections and edit information easily when necessary," shares Linnie Kauwa, HSA for Lilongwe District.

The initiative began in nine Village Development Committees (VDCs)—seven in Traditional Authority Chadza in Lilongwe and two in Traditional Authority Maseya in Chikwawa—serving as a practical testing ground for district-wide scale-up. Early implementation involved developing digital data collection tools for frontline workers, training HSAs and sanitation fund managers, and building the capacity of district teams to use and interpret the dashboard. As real-time data started flowing in, district officers were able, for the first time, to identify performance

trends, detect data-quality issues early, and focus attention on VDCs that were stagnating or regressing.

This shift has begun to reshape how districts plan, allocate resources, and coordinate actors within the sanitation system. What started as a digital innovation in a few VDCs is now informing district-wide monitoring processes and aligning local data practices with national sanitation frameworks. Improved visibility of sanitation conditions—supported by stronger capacity and more reliable data—has created a clearer pathway for Malawi's transition from basic to safely managed sanitation.

"Apart from collecting data from shop owners, as a fund manager, we also collect data on pit latrines, both improved and unimproved, including latrines that have collapsed. To achieve this, we are now using mWater together with the HSA to collect

real-time data, including photos showing the status of latrines in our VDC.

This makes it easier for me to report to my seniors, particularly the HSA. There are also times when the HSA delegates data collection to me using my smartphone, since we were trained together by Water For People on how to use the mWater platform," says Masautso Maston, fund manager for sanitation loans in Lilongwe.

Through these efforts, fund managers can also track unimproved latrines, enabling them to market sanitation loans to households that need support to improve their sanitation facilities. Through this approach, Masautso reached Benjamin Foster, who used a sanitation loan to improve his pit latrine.

"Both pit latrines I built over the last decade would collapse, especially during the rainy season, like the month we are in now. But this modern toilet has a strong substructure, as well as solid walls and floor. I first heard about the sanitation loans at a funeral ceremony, where the fund manager responsible for this VDC made an announcement on how people could access the loans.

"I found the loan affordable and relevant, as the toilet is clean and smart; therefore, we cannot have cases of cholera. I took a loan of MK75,000, which I have now fully repaid. I now have a proper toilet and would like to take another loan to construct one for the vendors who visit my compound," says Benjamin Foster.



HSA collecting sanitation data through mWater



Willard Freedom Kaula, WaterAid Malawi PSE facilitating a governance session with WASH Champions-Photo Credit WaterAid/Henry Ngulinga

From Neglect to Ownership: How WASH Champions Are Building Sustainable Change

By Henry Ngulinga

A baby's first cry should be a promise of hope, not a warning of danger. Yet across many healthcare facilities, preventable lapses in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) quietly threaten mothers and newborns. Buildings may rise with the support of government and development partners, but without ownership and accountability, they quickly slide into neglect. Sustainability is not built with bricks; it is built with responsibility.

At Mtunthama Health Centre in Kasungu District, this truth was painfully clear. The Out-Patient Department (OPD) had no waste disposal, pits, and handwashing stations. Toilets got blocked. A single mop was shared between maternity and postnatal rooms. The neonatal resuscitation unit lacked consistent cleanliness, putting new-born lives at risk.

Toilets had no doors, grass grew wild, and the placenta pit lay uncovered. A sink for washing clothes was not available, forcing pregnant women and guardians to wash their clothes at an open space. These were not

failures of resources alone, but of coordination, oversight, and follow-through.

Staff worked tirelessly, but not always together. WASH was often overlooked in planning, treated as secondary rather than essential. The result was a facility that looked functional from the outside but carried hidden risks within.

Then came the WASH Champions who were mobilised and trained through advocacy sessions by WaterAid and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood. By bringing



A newly constructed laundry station-Photo Credit WaterAid/Henry Ngulinga

courage and coordination, they brought more than knowledge. They observed critically, asked the right questions, and engaged leadership constructively.

Moses Chimtembo, the Facility In-Charge, admits that oftentimes WASH had been given less attention in their planning with the Health Centre Management Committee.

"We often missed WASH issues in our planning. The Champions have helped us realize that prioritizing WASH is a proactive way of preventing infections. Working with them adds extra muscle in championing for a better change of our facility"

In December 2025, WASH Champions partnered with the Health Centre Management Committee (HCMC). They assessed WASH gaps at the facility and sparked reflection. By mid-January 2026, findings of the WASH gaps were presented. Instead of blame, there was dialogue. Within a week, the committee regrouped for action. Funds earmarked for a guardian shelter were boldly redirected to urgent WASH needs observed.

Change followed swiftly. A handwashing station and waste disposal pit were installed at the OPD. A laundry station was constructed. Equipment for ground labours such as slashers, hoes, mops, buckets

were purchased. Grounds were maintained. Toilet doors and locks were bought and installed thereby restoring dignity. A bathroom was also renovated. In total, 540,000 Malawi Kwacha was invested. So far, letters went out to partners requesting for mattresses and for construction of a postnatal ward.

Today, Mtunthama Health Centre has improved, and cleanliness is monitored. The committee meets regularly. WASH gaps are identified early and addressed collectively. Improvements are no longer dependent on external supervision. They are sustained by local leadership and accountability.



Chisi: WASH should be included within the ringfenced CDF-Photo Credit WaterAid/Henry Ngulinga

Policy and Advocacy, Chandiwira Chisi applauded the effort by the Mtunthama Healthcare Facility and WASH Champions. He further asked authorities at district level to ensure that within the ring-fenced funds in the Community Development Funds (CDF) for health, WASH in Healthcare Facilities is included.

“The councils should develop a medium-term plan (3 years) to revive all dysfunctional WASH systems and finance using the CDF and support HCFs have sustainability plans that are financed to sustain their functionality. At national level, govt should role out DFF to all facilities. DFF provides fiscal latitude to the HCFs to make decisions per their needs and priorities and finance them.

Esther Banda, Area Development Committee Vice Chairperson and WASH Champion at Mtunthama Health Centre, says their collaboration with the HCMC has started well and gives them hope for positive change. The improvements made so far are encouraging, and plans are underway to address the remaining WASH gaps. They will continue working with the HCMC to advance WASH issues.



Banda: The trainings Improved our collaboration with the HCMC-Photo Credit WaterAid/Henry Ngulinga

Two critical gaps remain: restoring running water in the postnatal ward. Broken taps and missing pipes which require nearly 600,000 Malawi Kwacha. The committee awaits Direct Facility Financing (DFF), but unlike before, they are not waiting passively. The beds at the maternity ward are also inadequate, worn out, and uncovered. These issues are documented, prioritized, and actively pursued by the HCMC

and WASH Champions.

Change should start closer to the point of need. Planning at facility level should integrate WASH as a priority and not an afterthought. Each facility should have a lifecycle costing for its WASH system to know how much it would cost to sustain the existing systems and deliberately allocate funds from DFF.

WaterAid Malawi’s Head of

Advocacy training changed something fundamental. It built a bridge between staff, community representatives, and leadership. It transformed WASH from a checklist into a shared responsibility. It proved that sustainability is not about external support, but it is about systems strengthening, ownership, and action.



Focus group discussion with adolescents

Building Healthier Schools: Baseline Study Sets the Stage for Improving Adolescent WASH in Malawi

By WASHTED Team

Schools are more than places of learning, they are environments where children and adolescents should feel safe, healthy and supported to reach their full potential.

However, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities continue to affect the health, dignity and wellbeing of many learners, particularly adolescent girls.

To help address these challenges, the NIHR Global Health Research Group on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing in Malawi has

successfully completed baseline data collection for a school WASH feasibility study in Blantyre and Mchinji districts, marking an important milestone in the journey towards creating healthier and more inclusive learning environments.

The study forms part of a five-year research programme funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and implemented through a partnership between the University of Strathclyde, Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHeS), and the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS).

The programme brings together

researchers, policymakers, communities, and young people to co-design practical solutions that improve adolescent health and wellbeing across Malawi.

The recently completed baseline assessment examined sanitation and hygiene conditions in participating schools and established critical evidence that will guide the implementation and evaluation of school-based sanitation and hand hygiene interventions scheduled to begin in September 2026. By documenting the current situation, the study provides a benchmark against which future improvements can be measured.

The planned interventions seek



Focus group discussion with teachers

to create school environments where learners have access to safe sanitation facilities, practise good hygiene behaviours, and enjoy healthier conditions that support regular attendance, dignity and improved educational outcomes.

According to the research team, the project is about much more than infrastructure.

"By generating high-quality evidence on effective school WASH interventions, the study aims to contribute to healthier school environments where adolescents can thrive while providing practical lessons to inform future policy and programming in Malawi," he

The findings from the feasibility study are expected to inform future investments in school WASH programmes and provide valuable evidence for policymakers, education authorities, and development partners working to improve adolescent health and wellbeing across the country.

As implementation moves into the next phase, the project demonstrates the importance of combining research, community engagement, and partnerships to develop evidence-based solutions that can be scaled up to benefit more schools and learners throughout Malawi.



Interview with adolescent



Interview with adolescent

From Community Voice to National Plans: The Missing Link in Malawi's Decentralised Planning

Drawing on evidence from BASIN, this brief demonstrates how the district council can ensure Malawi's development plans reflect local priorities, by making two specific adjustments:

1. Institutionalise inclusive, annual priority-setting exercises to ensure VAPs genuinely reflect community needs -particularly among women, youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities
2. Create structured feedback mechanisms and interface forums so communities know how their priorities are used -and why some are left out

The challenge

Malawi's decentralised planning system is designed to ensure that community priorities drive local development through participatory processes. The development of Village Action Plans (VAPs) through participatory action planning and the subsequent formulation of District Development Plans (DDPs) demonstrates clear intention to prioritise community priorities. Despite this clarity in process, evidence shows that the system is not functioning as intended.

Research highlights that only a small proportion of district councils in Malawi effectively integrate VAPs into DDPs and Socio-Economic Profiles (Hussein 2019). While the bottom-up process from VDCs to District Councils is intended to align community priorities with national goals, in most districts, local development planning often remains more of a myth than a reality (Hussein, 2019).

What BASIN evidence shows

Findings from BASIN research in Ntondeza, Songwe, and Roben reveal that many community members are unaware of existing VAPs and Village Development Plans (VDPs). But meaningful participation among women, youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities is limited. This undermines the intended inclusivity of the planning process, with the resulting VAPs failing to reflect genuine community needs. Further evidence indicates that community priorities are often diluted or overridden during consolidation at area and district levels. Communities are rarely informed about which of their priorities are incorporated into DDPs, or the reasons for exclusion. This lack of transparency weakens community ownership, undermines accountability, and reduces incentives for participation in future planning processes. While some interface platforms exist, such as meetings between VDCs, ADCs, and district officials, these are not designed to facilitate systematic dialogue on development priorities or provide feedback on VAPs. Extension workers and local structures play intermediary roles but are often overstretched and under-resourced, leaving critical gaps in communication.

Opportunities

Following the September 2025 elections, Water Witness convened a multi-stakeholder orientation under the Climate Just Communities Project, bringing together VDCs, ADCs, councillors, Members of Parliament, and district officials. The meeting strengthened understanding of the planning process, clarified how district priorities are formulated, and explored ways to better represent community voices. Participants identified significant capacity gaps among VDCs and ADCs in developing planning documents. A key outcome of this engagement was the development of Ntondeza ADC's first workplan, co-produced with communities, councillors and politicians, demonstrating what inclusive, well-structured platforms can achieve. Participants strongly recommended institutionalising multi-stakeholder engagements to improve coordination, transparency, and accountability across the planning cycle.

Two asks for the district council

While Malawi's decentralised planning framework provides a solid structure for locally-led development, significant gaps in participation and accountability prevent community priorities from meaningfully shaping district plans or national strategies. To bridge this gap and ensure Village Action Plans become genuine drivers of locally led climate adaptation, we propose two recommendations:

Improve community participation in VAP formulation

- Institutionalise annual participatory priority-setting exercises using tools such as the Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (CVCA) to ensure broader and more inclusive input.
- Train VDC and ADC members on participatory planning, feedback, advocacy and social accountability and monitoring.

Improve community participation in VAP formulation

- Provide clear and timely feedback to communities on how their priorities were incorporated (or not) into district plans, showing what was proposed, what was adopted, and why.
- Create formal quarterly interface forums between VDCs, ADCs, and district technical teams dedicated to development planning and climate adaptation. Include community representatives to improve two-way communication and social accountability and monitoring.

For Village Action Plans to drive meaningful climate adaptation and national development, they must become genuine platforms for community voice, feedback, and accountability. The BASIN evidence from Ntondeza, Songwe, and Roben clearly shows that without stronger participation, transparent feedback, and functional interface platforms, VAPs will continue to have limited legitimacy and impact. These targeted reforms can transform VAPs into powerful community driven tools to drive inclusive climate resilience. Without them, Malawi's decentralized planning system will continue to generate plans that lack community trust and ownership.

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Kate Harawa posing with local leaders under GVH Joseph, TA, TA Makhuwira, Chikwawa

Professionalised Management of Rural Water Supply Through Performance Based Incentives

By Innocent Salima

Management of rural water services has often been characterised by voluntary and often insufficient support from the community through water point committees (WPCs) and water user associations (WUAs), resulting in the prevalence of non-functionality, especially for handpumps.

It is against this background that Water For People, with funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) through the



Area pump mechanic fixing a handpump (Chikwawa, Daniel Community)

WASH for Health Systems, implemented a programme that successfully strengthened rural water service delivery by implementing incentive based

contracts across more than 480 borehole handpumps. The programme saw uptime increased from 72% to 96%, benefiting over 120,000 people



Functional borehole serviced through service contact. In the picture Chisomo Kabu (WMA) and Martha Phiri Borehole Committee member and beneficiary

with more sustainable access to safe drinking water.

At the core are district councils strengthened regulatory oversight through systematic reviews and validation processes—an important step in the absence of an independent water regulator for rural services. At the community level, local leadership has been key to the success of the model being tested.

“Local leaders’ commitment to ensuring zero non-functionality has encouraged WAU to enter service contracts with area pump mechanics. Together with WUA, professionalisation of rural water a success that has surpassed our expectation” shared Kate Harawa, director of influence and share at Water For People, during a field visit in TA

Makhuwira, Chikwawa

Incentive based payment mechanisms were introduced for all three service providers (BASEDA, SHA and BW) who are working in the pilot districts of Chikwawa, Dowa and Kasungu. Quarterly assessments informed payment decisions and created strong performance incentives. This approach led to notable gains, including improved Borehole Hand-Pump functionality—from 72% to 96% in a period of six months (two cycles of monitoring) allowing over 120,000 people in Chikwawa, Dowa and Kasungu to have uninterrupted water service delivery.

Water For People facilitated training for District Coordination Teams (DCTs) to build their

capacity in their regulatory functions by reviewing reports, conducting field verifications, and producing validation reports. Collaboration with WaterAid further supported improvements in district monitoring systems, particularly in Kasungu.

Service providers self reported performance against agreed KPIs to Water For People, DCTs, and Uptime Global. Following desk data verification which is done by Uptime global, and Field validation which is done by the District Coordinating Team, Water For People disbursed US\$50 per fully compliant water point. This equates to approximately US\$1 per person per year to maintain uninterrupted water services.



Protecting Young Lives: Research Paves the Way for Safer Hygiene in Early Childhood Development Centres

By WASHTED Team

Every day, thousands of young children attend Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs) across Malawi to learn, play, and grow. Yet many of these centres face persistent water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) challenges that increase children's exposure to preventable diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera.

To help address these challenges, the Centre for Water, Sanitation, Hygiene

and Appropriate Technology Development (WASHTED) has successfully completed an important phase of research aimed at strengthening hygiene practices in ECDCs across Blantyre District.

The study is part of a project funded by the Reckitt Global Hygiene Institute (RGHI) and implemented in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the University of Strathclyde. Building on previous research that identified gaps in handwashing, food

hygiene, and environmental cleanliness, the project seeks to generate evidence that will inform practical interventions to improve hygiene and safeguard children's health.

Between 25 May and 25 June 2026, the research team visited 15 Early Childhood Development Centres across Blantyre District, collecting samples from children's and caregivers' hands, eating utensils, food preparation surfaces, cleaning water and other high-contact areas. The samples are now being analysed at the Kamuzu University of



Health Sciences (KUHeS) laboratory to identify *Escherichia coli* and other disease-causing pathogens commonly associated with poor hygiene.

The fieldwork also benefited from international technical support provided by Dr. Kelly Baker, Associate Professor of Epidemiology and Environmental Health at the State University of New York at Buffalo, who supported the research team in microbiological sampling techniques and data interpretation.

While the laboratory analysis is still underway, the research marks an important milestone towards improving hygiene standards in early childhood development centres. The evidence generated will guide the design of targeted, practical interventions that help reduce disease transmission and create healthier learning environments for young children.

As one of Malawi's leading WASH research institutions, WASHTED believes that protecting children begins with understanding the risks they

face every day.

"By identifying where and how hygiene-related contamination occurs, this study will help develop practical, evidence-based interventions that better protect young children and improve hygiene practices in Early Childhood Development Centres across Malawi," said team leader, Kondwani Chiziwitsano.

The project demonstrates the value of research in shaping policies and programmes that improve lives. By generating reliable scientific evidence, it will support Government, development partners, and implementing organizations to strengthen WASH interventions that give children a healthier start in life.

What's Next?

The laboratory analysis will identify key contamination pathways and inform the development of evidence-based hygiene interventions that can be tested, refined and potentially scaled up to ECDs across Malawi.





Trained AMs in Thyolo district, TA Ngolongoliwa.

From Broken Boreholes to Reliable Water: How Area Mechanics Are Changing Lives in Thyolo

By Chapter Banda

For many rural communities in Malawi, a broken borehole often means long walks to unsafe water sources while families wait days or even weeks for repairs. The shortage of skilled technicians and limited access to spare parts have contributed to the premature failure of many rural water systems, threatening reliable access to safe drinking water.

Recognising that sustainable water access depends not only on infrastructure but also on the people who maintain it, Habitat for Humanity Malawi, with support from the Foundation of

German Lions, has invested in developing a new generation of skilled area mechanics in Traditional Authority Ngolongoliwa in Thyolo District.

Working closely with the Thyolo District Council and Inter Aide, the project trained seven area mechanics and equipped them with professional toolkits, bicycles, protective clothing and essential maintenance equipment to enable them to provide timely repair and preventive maintenance services within their communities. The results have been remarkable.

At the beginning of the project, TA Ngolongoliwa had only one

area mechanic responsible for maintaining 145 Afridev hand pumps, resulting in a borehole functionality rate of just 70 percent. Today, following the training of six additional area mechanics, the team has repaired 35 previously non-functional or partially functional boreholes, increasing the number of operational water points from 101 to 136 and raising overall functionality to 94 percent.

Beyond improving access to safe water, the initiative has created a sustainable maintenance system that places communities at the centre of service delivery. Area mechanics now work directly with water point committees



A team of trained Area Mechanics conducting pump installation at a rehabilitated borehole.

through service agreements that encourage routine preventive maintenance instead of waiting for costly breakdowns.

The project has also strengthened the local rural economy by establishing a borehole spare parts retail shop within the catchment area and training the business owner in supply chain management.

This ensures that essential spare parts are readily available locally, reducing repair times and improving service reliability.

According to the project's wash officer Gracium Munthali investing in Area Mechanics goes far beyond repairing

pumps, it is an investment in human capital and community resilience.

He said: "By investing in this human infrastructure, we are transforming rural water management from reactive and expensive repairs to proactive, cost-effective and community-owned maintenance. Area Mechanics are not just repairing boreholes; they are protecting investments, strengthening communities and ensuring reliable access to safe water."

The initiative is already changing perceptions within communities.

Rather than viewing area mechanics as volunteers who respond only after a breakdown,

communities are increasingly recognising them as skilled professionals who play a critical role in safeguarding water infrastructure and ensuring continuous access to safe drinking water.

As Malawi continues its journey towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6, the experience from Thyolo demonstrates that sustainable water services require more than drilling new boreholes.

They require investing in people with the knowledge, tools and support needed to keep those water systems functioning for years to come.



A group photo captured at the event

WASH Stakeholders Unite to Reimagine Sector Financing at the 2026 JSR

By Angella Phiri

Government, Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Water Boards, academia, the private sector and local government representatives reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening financing, governance and partnerships in Malawi's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector during the opening of the 2026 WASH Joint Sector Review (JSR) in Lilongwe.

Held under the theme "Reimagining WASH Financing: Ensuring Inclusive, Gender-Sensitive Services for All," the two-day review brought together sector stakeholders to reflect on progress made during the 2025-26 financial year, assess challenges affecting service delivery, and agree on

strategic priorities for the coming year in pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 6 and the aspirations of Malawi 2063.

Officially opening the review, the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, Honourable Roza Fatch Mbilizi, MP, described the Joint Sector Review as an important platform for reflection, learning and collective action towards improving WASH service delivery across the country.

She reminded delegates that access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene remains central to Malawi's socio-economic development.

"Access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene is not a luxury; it is a fundamental human right and a critical determinant of public health, economic productivity, and human dignity," she said.

While acknowledging progress made in expanding access to WASH services, the Minister cautioned that Malawi remains off track to achieve universal access by 2030. She noted that limited financing, rapid population growth, urbanisation, climate change and ageing infrastructure continue to constrain progress.

The Minister further observed that the WASH sector's share of the national budget declined from 3.35 percent to 1.97 percent during the 2025/26 financial year, underscoring the need for innovative and sustainable financing mechanisms. She explained that this reality inspired this year's theme and called upon all stakeholders to work together in mobilizing resources and improving service delivery.

She also reaffirmed



A snapshot of some of the participants

Government's commitment to implementing the Presidential WASH Compact, describing it as a landmark initiative that will strengthen institutional coordination, mobilize resources, and accelerate progress towards universal access to WASH services. She appealed to all sector partners to support both its official launch and implementation.

Speaking on behalf of Civil Society Organizations, WESNET Board Chairperson Chandiwire Chisi highlighted the significant contribution that civil society continues to make towards Malawi's WASH agenda.

Drawing from the 2025 WASH CSO Performance Report, he noted that 25 Civil Society Organizations collectively invested over MWK 40 billion in WASH interventions across 27 districts, supporting water supply infrastructure, sanitation

and hygiene promotion, emergency response, research, innovation and systems strengthening initiatives.

Chisi commended Government, Development Partners, communities and implementing organisations for these achievements while calling on CSOs to strengthen reporting and accountability.

He said: "The annual CSO Performance Report continues to demonstrate the significant contribution that civil society is making towards national WASH goals. However, many organisations implementing WASH activities are still not consistently reporting their interventions and investments. This limits our ability to accurately measure sector progress, strengthen coordination, and effectively advocate for increased financing."

The WESNET Board Chair also expressed concern over declining investments in WASH despite growing demand for services.

"Financing is the foundation upon which every other sector achievement depends. Without adequate financing, infrastructure cannot be expanded, existing systems cannot be maintained, climate resilience cannot be strengthened, and universal access cannot be achieved," said Chisi.

He further welcomed the advancement of the Presidential WASH Compact, describing it as a unique opportunity to elevate WASH from a sector concern to a national development priority.

However, he emphasised that the success of the Compact would depend on sustained



Described JSR as an important platform for reflection – Mbilizi

political commitment, adequate financing, effective coordination, strong monitoring systems and meaningful participation by communities and civil society.

Representing development partners, UNICEF representative Dr. Penelope Campbell reaffirmed the commitment of development partners to supporting Government in strengthening sustainable, inclusive and climate-resilient WASH services.

She observed that while Malawi has made encouraging progress in expanding WASH infrastructure, the focus must now shift towards ensuring that investments result in services that are reliable, resilient, and

sustainable.

She said: "Our task is no longer only to build more infrastructure. It is to ensure that every investment translates into services that last, services that are safe, inclusive, gender-sensitive, climate-resilient, well-managed and accountable to the people they are intended to serve."

Campbell further emphasised that addressing Malawi's WASH financing gap requires not only increased investment but also improved efficiency, stronger coordination and financing that is aligned with national priorities.

She said: "Closing the WASH gap will require not only more

financing, but also better financing, financing that is predictable, coordinated, efficiently used and aligned behind national priorities."

She also welcomed the approval of the Presidential WASH Compact and Executive Order No. 2 on Sanitation and Hygiene, describing both as significant milestones that will strengthen sector governance, improve accountability and accelerate progress towards achieving universal access to WASH services.

The first day of the Joint Sector Review featured presentations on sector performance, financing trends, policy reforms and institutional performance, providing stakeholders with an opportunity to reflect on achievements, identify implementation bottlenecks, and propose solutions for strengthening service delivery.

The review continues with technical discussions and validation of sector priorities, culminating in a set of undertakings that will guide implementation during the 2026/27 financial year.

As the national umbrella body for Civil Society Organizations working in the WASH sector, WESNET remains committed to promoting evidence-based advocacy, strengthening accountability, supporting knowledge sharing and fostering partnerships that contribute to sustainable, equitable and climate-resilient WASH services for every Malawian.



Maintenance works underway

Ambition is not a Maintenance Plan

By Muthi Nhlema

I have been in the water space for several years – an unlikely path, as anyone who knows my backstory will tell you – and every once in a while I get into spirited debates where I am called the cheerleader-supreme of the lowly handpump, an archaic technology that's holding Malawi back.

The discussion rarely provides space for me to clarify that I actually (partly) agree – it is an old technology, but the conversation I want to have is less about the handpump and more about maintenance. Or rather, the philosophy around maintenance, which matters all the more given the fervent excitement about solar-powered piped water supply systems across Malawi.

The data agrees with me.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, one in every three rural handpumps is estimated to be non-functional at any given time. More recent evidence across nine countries found that newer water points perform well, but functionality drops significantly as systems age, highlighting that the challenge is not only construction, but also long-term maintenance (Murray et al, 2024).

To me, this points to a maintenance problem more than a technology problem. This isn't new.

But I have often wondered whether the fundamental issue lies in the philosophy that guides how we design rural water systems. Too often, we begin with, and get excited by, the

technology we aspire to build, and only afterwards ask how it will be maintained. Maintenance becomes an operational detail rather than the design constraint. An afterthought.

I believe we should reverse that thinking. It should be obvious, yet it isn't.

We often assume maintenance will somehow take care of itself. Too often, it does not. Before selecting a technology, we should ask whether the institutions or communities responsible for maintaining it have the technical skills, financing, asset management systems, supply chains, and governance needed to keep it working. Those realities should shape the technical design.

This does not mean we should lower our ambitions.

Acknowledging these realities isn't being "archaic," as I've heard some say. It's just prudence, plain and simple.

Personally, I find it uncomfortable that we continue to accept communal handpumps as the long-term solution for rural communities. Many families still walk hundreds of metres, sometimes kilometres, to collect water that they carry on their heads back home.

Meanwhile, those of us designing these systems enjoy water piped directly into our homes. Rural communities deserve that same level of dignity and convenience.

We should absolutely aspire to piped water systems and higher levels of service. But in low-income contexts like Malawi, aspiration is not enough. Ambition is not a maintenance plan! If we want more sophisticated

infrastructure, we have to invest just as heavily in what sustains it: technical capacity, local institutions, financing mechanisms, spare parts, asset management systems.

It's a lot. But it deserves the same attention as the infrastructure itself. If we cannot provide that, then we might as well stick with the lowly handpump, a simpler technology that some technical professionals hate with a passion, but one which many rural communities continue to use because it is a proven and familiar technology suited to their lived circumstances.

Believe it or not, I once came across a rural community that begged our local government partner to rip out the sophisticated solar-powered piped water system in their community and replace it with a handpump. Yes, that handpump! The reason? They weren't ready for it.

The technology meant to ease their lives had become just another burden. Another white elephant.

And there are a growing number of those around, aren't there?

After all I have said, what do I - an engineer who disappointed his parents for pursuing theatre once upon a time (long story!) - have to say about maintenance? My philosophy is this: our technology choices should reflect the maintenance capacity we have, not the one we hope will emerge.

Or put another way, technology should match maintenance capacity before it matches engineering ambition. Until we have the maintenance capacity in place for more sophisticated systems, I will stay here in this cheerleading line-up. Guess what? We have a spot for you.



The infamous Afidev handpump

Moments that Mattered

Strengthening Collaboration Through Learning

WESNET Central Region Chapter members came together for a Learning and Planning Meeting, providing a platform to exchange experiences, share lessons from the field, discuss implementation challenges, and explore opportunities for collaboration.

The meeting reaffirmed the value of peer learning and partnership in strengthening the WASH sector. By bringing organisations together to reflect, learn, and plan collectively, WESNET continues to foster stronger coordination and a shared commitment to improving water, sanitation, and hygiene services across Malawi. Together, we learn. Together, we collaborate. Together, we strengthen the WASH sector.



Turning Policy into Action for Improved Sanitation

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation officially launched the Implementation Plan for Executive Order No. 2 of 2026 on Sanitation and Hygiene, marking an important milestone in strengthening sanitation and hygiene across Malawi.

The Executive Order requires the provision and maintenance of sanitation and waste disposal facilities in public spaces including schools, health facilities, markets, and workplaces, reinforcing the right of every Malawian to access safe, clean and dignified sanitation services.

For WESNET, the launch represents more than a policy milestone; it is a call for collective action. Achieving meaningful change will require adequate financing,

effective coordination, strong enforcement and shared responsibility among government, local authorities, institutions, civil society and communities.

As implementation begins, WESNET remains committed to supporting advocacy, promoting accountability and working with partners to ensure that policy commitments translate into improved sanitation and hygiene services for all.



Celebrating World Water Day 2026

WESNET joined Government, development partners, and communities in Liwonde, Machinga District, to commemorate World Water Day 2026 under the theme "Water and Gender."

The commemoration highlighted the unequal burden that inadequate access to safe water places on women and girls, who often spend hours each day collecting water, limiting opportunities for education, livelihoods, and personal wellbeing.

A key highlight of the event was the launch of the Balaka–Liwonde Water Supply Project, an initiative expected to expand piped water coverage from approximately 45 percent to universal access in the two towns, bringing safe and reliable water services closer to households.

Representing WESNET, Central Region Chapter Vice Chairperson Phillip Chidawati called for greater investment in gender-responsive WASH services, emphasising that equitable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene is essential for improving health, restoring dignity, and empowering communities.

The event served as a timely reminder that achieving universal access to water requires inclusive policies, sustained investment, and collective action to ensure that no one is left behind.



Strengthening Advocacy for a Stronger WASH Sector

Members of the WESNET Policy and Advocacy Thematic Working Group convened to review progress made under the 2025 Advocacy Plan and set strategic priorities for 2026.

Discussions reaffirmed the importance of sustained advocacy on WASH financing and sector accountability, recognising that adequate investment, effective governance, and transparent oversight are fundamental to achieving equitable and sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene services across Malawi.

The meeting reinforced WESNET's commitment to amplifying the voice of civil society and working collaboratively with government, development partners, and other stakeholders to influence policies and investments that strengthen the WASH sector.

Strong advocacy. Strong partnerships. Stronger WASH services.





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