

By Lisa Kadango Malango, USA

First Lady praised for promoting girls' rights

President and Chief Executive Officer of Plan International Canada, Lindsay Glassco, has hailed First Lady Monica Chakwera for the work she is doing in promoting girls' education and ending early marriages in Malawi.

Glassco said this in New York during a meeting the two had, where they discussed several issues on girls' rights.

She said Chakwera's efforts cannot go unnoticed and that they need to be supported.

Glassco said Plan International Canada is keen on promoting girls' education and ending early marriages and that the meeting touched on the work of Shaping our Future Foundation (SFF), a non-profit organisation founded by Chakwera.

"We zeroed in on the critical strategic

partnerships to drive the change we want to see every girl child in Malawi accessing quality education," she said.

Chakwera asked Plan International Canada to support Malawi's efforts of keeping girls, especially those in rural areas, in school.

Later, Chakwera visited Urban Promise International where she met Malawian youths studying in different fields.

The first lady commended the institution for providing quality education to young people who, she said, will contribute positively to Malawi's development.

Margaret Sikwese, 33, who is doing her studies at the institution, said, once she completes her schoolwork, she will help government in developing programmes for improving girls' menstrual hygiene.

Urban Promise International, whose mission is to prepare emerging leaders to initiate, develop and sustain Christianity-based youth development organisations, is funding young men and women from Malawi who are undergoing training in various programmes.

The institution invited Chakwera in her capacity as champion of girls' education in her country. —Mama



ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP—Chakwera (left) presents a gift to Glassco—Picture by Lisa Kadango Malango

Blantyre Prison's taps run dry

By Isaac Salima

Water woes have hit Blantyre Prison, commonly known as Chichiri Prison, as the correctional facility has gone for two days without the commodity running down its taps.

Blantyre Prison Officer-in-Charge Thomas Damba yesterday confirmed the development, saying the problem has come about as the institution is failing to pay outstanding bills it has with Blantyre Water Board (BWB).

"BWB recently installed a prepaid meter at the facility and because of bills accumulated in the previous post-paid paying system, BWB has been deducting 80 percent of any prepaid purchase of volumes of water. As a result, we remain with 20 percent of purchased water, which only takes us through a few days," Damba said.

He said the development has paralysed the institution's operations as it is struggling to prepare food for prisoners, with sanitation challenges also getting worse.

"We are keeping almost 2,400 prisoners and for them to eat or take a bath on daily basis, we require huge amounts of water," Damba said.

He did not disclose how much the facility owes the water supplier but inside sources said the amount is in excess of K300 million.

BWB spokesperson Evelyn Khonje asked for more time to get information on the issue.

Blantyre Prison spends about K12 million on water bills on monthly basis. By the time we went to press yesterday, the problem had not been addressed.

By Eric Msikiti

Diesel shortage threatens mega irrigation project

Works to redesign and reconstruct structures in the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP), that were damaged by floods in January this year, will take longer due to fuel shortage.

At least 80 of the 750 meters syphon structure and the intake dam were damaged by floods induced by Tropical Storm Ana.

But there is no activity taking place on the site due to what officials say is shortage of fuel, especially diesel, in the country.

While insisting that SVTP has already engaged a consultant and a contractor to redesign and reconstruct the damaged structures, irrigation engineer for the programme Martin Chizalema said limited supply of diesel could affect the works.

"We have engaged the Ministry of Energy which has expressed commitment to ensure that special arrangements are made to supply us with



TOURED THE PROJECT—Chaola Mdoko—Picture by Eric Msikiti

diesel," Chizalema said. According to Chizalema, works to redesign the damaged structures are expected to be completed by December this year while reconstruction could take as long as up to 2024.

SVTP is also

constructing a new intake coffer barrage to protect Kapichira Dam which is used by the Energy Generation Company of Malawi to produce electricity at Kapichira Hydropower Station.

The power station is currently out of

operation after floods damaged a dam early this year, taking about 130 megawatts of electricity off the national grid.

During a tour of the project recently, Deputy Minister of Transport Nancy Chaola Mdoko said she would report

what she had observed to Minister of Transport Jacob Hara for action.

"This project is very important to Malawi; so, I will brief the minister on the observations here so that we can assist in coming up with solutions to the challenges," Chaola Mdoko said.

SVTP is one of the biggest irrigation projects in Africa, covering about 135 kilometres on 43,370 hectares of land in Chikwawa and Nsanje districts.

The World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Global Environment Facility and the Malawi Government are financing the venture to the tune of \$223 million (approximately K229 billion).

The project will see water from Shire River flowing by gravity through canals to provide irrigation water to 223,000 subsistence farmers in the area with the intention of transforming them into commercial farmers.