

THE NATION  
COMMENT

Investment in irrigation critical, long overdue

In recent years, the effects of climate change have made rain-fed agriculture less reliable while, in a way, putting up a strong case for investment in irrigation.

Due to climate change, Malawi has been exposed to erratic or excess rains or indeed drought in some cases. Normal rainfall, a key requirement for most crops, has been elusive.

Ironically, over the years Malawi has been investing billions of kwacha in subsidising rain-fed agriculture at the expense of investment in irrigation infrastructure. This trend has seen the country investing in subsidies only to put more money in purchase of relief food for the same beneficiaries of subsidies after their crops fail mostly due to adverse weather.

It is a big relief that the Shire Valley Transformation Programme, a \$563 million (about K430 billion) project whose first phase is due to be ready in 2024, is taking shape and expected to improve agricultural production in the country.

However, the project comes against a background of scores of small and medium scale irrigation schemes abandoned nationwide. We also acknowledge that few others have been resuscitated, but the pace is rather slow.

It is against this background that we urge the Ministry of Agriculture and its partners to ensure that the Shire Valley Transformation Project comes to fruition and does not become a white elephant like other similar projects before it.

If the country's agriculture sector is to be transformed, meaningful investment in irrigation infrastructure is critical as it will ensure sustainable production of both food and cash crops.

For a country whose economy is largely dependent on agriculture, overreliance on rain-fed agriculture does not reflect seriousness. It is like a shopkeeper who opens their shop for three to four months in a year and hoping for maximum returns. Surely, it cannot work.

With irrigation, some crops such as maize can be grown two to three times a year, thereby ensuring food security and even foreign exchange through export. Besides, the value chain could also be enhanced and enable processing of several products than is the case now.

Malawi has paid heavily for focusing less on irrigation. Time has come to turn the tables and invest meaningfully in irrigation. ■

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complaining about the alleged attempts by the three to interfere in the deals.

In her letter dated November 16 2020, Buluma, who was recently acted as CEO for the State-owned oil company, named Minister of Energy Newton

Chakwera justifies Blair team

Kambala, Chakwera's adviser on strategy Chris Chaima Banda and Alliance for Democracy (Aford) president Chakufwa Chihana.

But Kampondeni said yesterday Chakwera would

not comment since the matter was presented to the ACB.

He said: "The matter has been reported to ACB. So, once the inquiry is concluded and a report is presented to the President

with facts, then he will determine what course of action to take, if any."

Kampondeni, who is also State House director of communication, observed

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Chilima pledges K2.5m for BT-LL tourism walkers

CLEMENT CHINOKO  
STAFF REPORTER

Vice-President Saulos Chilima has pledged K2.5 million towards a fundraiser aimed at training 100 tour guides to boost the country's tourism.

A 10-member team undertook a 10-day walk from Blantyre to Lilongwe to raise K7 million towards the training of the tour guides, but upon reaching Lilongwe yesterday, they had raised K7.5 million.

The Vice-President, who alongside Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Culture Michael Usi joined the walkers at Bunda Turn-Off for the last 13.4 kilometre (km) stretch to Gateway Mall through the Bypass Road, pledged his contribution to the cause.

Said Chilima: "I will contribute K2.5 million by this Friday so that we reach K10 million. This is a cause that deserves our support."



PHOTOGRAPH: LISA KADANGO, MANA

Chilima joins the walkers heading towards the finish line at Gateway Mall

He dismissed those addressing him as guest of honour for the event, saying the walkers were more deserving of that honour.

"The guests of honour are the people that walked from Blantyre to Lilongwe. They have proved that we can all do something to contribute to the development of the

country," he said.

The Vice-President said tourism is a sector that can contribute to the growth of the country's economy.

"This is why we need well-trained tour guides to tell Malawi's good stories to tourists," he said.

On his part, the fundraisers leader Yangairo

Yangairo said they were impressed with the support they have received.

"It was not an easy thing but we just had to do it. People from all walks of life rallied behind us," he said.

Yangairo said they will ensure that the funds fulfil the objective of boosting tourism through nurturing skilled tour guides.

TNM plc was the official sponsors of the big walk having donated K2 million and T-shirts. The company's chief channels officer Phyllis Manguluti said they were impressed with the team's commitment to finish the mission.

Besides Yangairo, other walkers were Thandiwe Likhao, Thoko Liwimba and Kay Da Silva (female) as well as Chipi Gombwa, Charles Chokani, Madassir Anjum, Ipyana Mkgangama and Innocent Kaliati.

They started the 314-km journey on November 21 and were averaging 34 kilometres a day. ■

DPP's Nankhumwa, Mpinganjira contradict

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the two have contradicted on the outcome.

Through its appointed spokesperson Brown Mpinganjira, the former governing party yesterday issued a statement suggesting that following the meeting held at Mutharika's beachside residence in Mangochi, Nankhumwa accepted to relinquish the position of Leader of Opposition in Parliament.

But Nankhumwa, who is Mulanje Central legislator that Mpinganjira's statement did not reflect



PHOTOGRAPH: NATION

Met the party leaders: Mutharika

others, said in an interview that Mpinganjira's statement did not reflect

what transpired at the meeting.

In the statement, Mpinganjira said: "Hon. Kondwani Nankhumwa has agreed to relinquish the position of Leader of Opposition and to respect the choice made by the party of [Nsanje Central legislator] Hon Francis Kasaila as Leader of Opposition."

"In view of the fact that there is a court case, Hon Kondwani Nankhumwa has undertaken to direct his legal team to seek an indefinite adjournment of the case to pave the way for the resolution of the matter

by the parties to the case through mediation using the existing structures for dispute resolution within the party."

But while confirming the meeting took place on Sunday, Nankhumwa issued a statement dismissing the party's claims which he described as "false and shameful fabrication".

He said: "There were many issues that we discussed, but we did not reach a consensus on most of them and agreed that talks must continue until we conclusively resolve the issues."

"The two parties agreed

that a date would be appointed in due course to continue discussions and that where a consensus shall be reached, the two parties shall issue a joint press statement."

Nankhumwa, secretary general Grezelder Jeffrey, treasurer general Jappie Mhango and Mulanje West legislator Yusuf Nthenda were fired from DPP on October 2 2020 for upstaging Kasaila's choice.

The quartet obtained an injunction against their expulsion and Nankhumwa said their focus was on the case whose hearing is scheduled to continue

today in Lilongwe.

Put to him that Nankhumwa had disputed his statement as a fabrication, Mpinganjira said he communicated the outcome of the meeting as briefed by people he trusted, notably Mutharika, Goodall Gondwe and Samuel Tembenu.

He said: "I really cannot explain the apparent confusion and refusal. I would have thought that there was consensus on the way forward. However, since I was not at the meeting, I cannot insist,

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