



PHOTOGRAPH: PRECIOUS KUMBANI

Fpam engages communities in teen pregnancies fight

PRECIOUS KUMBANI
STAFF REPORTER

Appalled by increasing reports of teenage pregnancies, Family Planning Association of Malawi (Fpam) has rolled out a door-to-door campaign to encourage the youth to use contraceptives.

The campaign started on November 18 and is being carried out in four districts of Mangochi, Chikwawa, Kasungu and Nkhata Bay.

Speaking on Friday during the campaign in Chikwawa, Fpam project officer Esther Moyo said they are involving key community, religious and traditional leaders to reach out to the youth and other new users of family planning and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services.

She said they expect to see an increase in uptake of and improved access to contraceptives and SRHR services.

Said Moyo: "If more youths had

access to contraceptives, there would be a decrease in teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions and other challenges like fistula."

There has been a spike in teen pregnancies this year particularly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with a Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Community Service survey revealing that 20 000 girls got pregnant during the five-month Covid-19 school break from March to August this year.

At a similar event at Mpamba

in Nkhata Bay on Thursday, Fpam district manager for Mzimba and Nkhata Bay Alinafe Chasowa said teenage pregnancies have reached worrisome levels.

He said: "Many girls are dropping out of school due to early pregnancies. We are, therefore, empowering traditional leaders to advocate for youth access to contraceptives."

The campaign is being funded by UNFPA and if successful, it will extend to other districts. ■

Minister touts irrigation project

ESMIE KOMWA
STAFF REPORTER

Minister of Agriculture Lobin Lowe has assured Shire Valley communities that the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP) will materialise and improve agricultural production in the country.

The minister said this on Sunday when he and his deputy Agnes Nkusankhoma toured construction site of the irrigation canal to appreciate its progress.

He said: "As a ministry, we will ensure that this should not be a white elephant. We are aware that there have been programmes of this nature which ended up being white elephants. As a ministry, we need to have key performance indicators that will help us monitor progress at each level."

Lowe further called for collaborative efforts from other ministries involved in the project, saying the SVTP is in line with government's agenda of transforming farming from subsistence to commercial, thereby transforming the country into a producing and exporting country which will in turn increase forex and employment.

"We need key performance indicators to monitor progress at each level. There are other departments concerned and we



PHOTOGRAPH: ESMIE KOMWA

Chizalema (L) briefs Lowe(R) on the project's progress

are just taking the lead. I am happy that there will be others to manage the irrigation scheme; hence, it will not just be a government entity," he said.

He hailed the construction of a canal on the river which will enable gravity-fed as opposed to Escom or grid-fed irrigation, which was too expensive for farmers.

On his part, SVTP coordinator Engineer Martin Chizalema said construction works at the scheme are progressing well as all excavations of the canal have been completed.

"At the moment 2.5 kilometres

of the canal is excavated and is drainage works are going on," he said, adding that construction works at the scheme is at 20 percent.

Chizalema said the works would have been at 26 percent completion by now but there were delays due to Covid-19 which forced them to suspend activities for three weeks.

"Hopefully the contractor will be able to catch up quickly and by 2024 the first phase of construction of intakes in the first six kilometres [km] will be done and we will remain with 45 km.

"In total, 13 drainage works have

been concreted and hopefully by 2024 people within the first 6km in the first phase will be able to draw water from the facility while we proceed with the remaining 45km," he said.

The SVTP is expected to cost \$563 million (about K430 billion) and it is being constructed by Conduril Construction Company whose site manager Joao Costa said Covid-19 and theft of project materials are affecting progress of the project. He said to rectify the problem, they are working with the police to sensitise surrounding communities. ■

Committee blames youths on Abortion Bill

MARTHA CHIRAMBO
STAFF REPORTER

Parliamentary Committee on Health chairperson Matthews Ngwale says youths are not doing enough to lobby for the Termination of Pregnancy Bill to pass when presented in Parliament in February 2021.

Speaking in Mzuzu at a Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Youth Conference on Thursday, he said the youth are waiting for non-governmental organisations to fight for them.

Said Ngwale: "Just like other sectors have petitioned Parliament on the same, the youth should as well follow suit if they really need the Bill to pass, but currently, they are cold."

Youth activist Chimwenwe Banda admitted that youths have not been doing enough to lobby for the Bill because of the challenges they are facing in their respective communities.

She said: "We need to clear the information gap in communities for the youth to have a united voice. We are now mobilising ourselves to present our issue to MPs, starting with MPs in our constituencies."

The Bill was supposed to be presented in the last Parliament sitting but was postponed to February as most MPs did not understand it, according to Ngwale.

The Penal Code criminalises abortion, only permitting it as a remedy to save the life of the mother.

A 2008 Ministry of Health Magnitude Study shows that over 100 000 women and girls undergo abortion every year and 33 000 of these develop serious complications. ■

Misa Malawi trains journalists on election reporting

JONATHAN PASUNGWI
STAFF REPORTER

Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) Malawi Chapter has trained 10 journalists from various media houses in voter-centred election reporting.

The three-day training, which was conducted in partnership with DW Akademie of Germany, started on Thursday at Mtolankhani House in Lilongwe.

Participants were drilled by two journalism trainers Gregory Gondwe and Anderson Fumulani on various techniques to develop balanced voter-centred stories for their media outlets.

In an interview after the training, Misa-Malawi chairperson Tereza Ndanga observed that in election reporting, most journalists focus only on the aspirants.

Said Ndanga: "Journalists should focus on the voters

throughout the process. Right now, we can look back at what politicians promised during the campaign and what they are delivering on. That serves the voter and gives them a voice."

Thomas Kachere, a Times Group journalist, said the training helped him appreciate areas journalists can focus on in elections.

This was the third training of that nature by Misa-Malawi. ■



PHOTOGRAPH: NANTON

Ndanga: There is need to serve the voter