Development feature

Chikwawa embraces physical development plans

By **Gospel Mwalwanda**

Senior Group Village Headwoman (SGVH) Mafale of Traditional Authority Lundu in Chikwawa is all ears, eyes fixed on a simple village layout plan under discussion.

The chief and some of her subjects listen attentively in the sweltering Chikwawa heat as a civil servant explains the layout plan, stressing the need to put up structures in an orderly manner.

"Make sure the place you are developing is connected to a road," Lydia Mlose, a physical planning technician in the Department of Physical Planning, Ministry of Lands, tells the chief and her subjects.

SGVH Mafale, her Village Development Committee (VDC) and Customary Land Committee (CLC) are being trained how to develop and make use of layout plans for their area.

"This canal is, without doubt, going to bring us many good things," the 76-year-old chief later remarks, referring to the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP).

The Mafale training of VDC and CLC members has a bearing on the SVTP, Malawi's flagship irrigation project which is constructing a canal from Kapichira Dam in Chikwawa to Bangula in Nsanje.

The Ministry of Agriculture, through the Department of Irrigation (DoI), is building the 118 Km-canal through the SVTP under which 43,370 hectares of land will be cultivated in Chikwawa and Nsanje.

The SVTP will benefit 223,000 households in Chikwawa and Nsanje districts when completed.

It is anticipated that there will be a boom in construction in the Shire Valley once the canal is operational, hence the need to have physical development plans in line with the Physical Planning Act 2022 (Amended).

The SVTP has been piloting the provisions of the Physical Planning Act 2016 and the Physical Planning Act 2022 (Amended) since 2019.

The Physical Planning Act 2022 (Amended) is designed to make provision for physical planning and the orderly and progressive development of land in both urban and rural areas.

The Act provides for town and country planning at national, district and local level. And thanks to the Act, gone are the days when physical planning was associated with urban areas.

Among other things, the Act also provides for control and enforcement of development in cities, towns, districts and villages.

ENGAGED—Mafale VDC and CLC members in discussion during a training on landuse plan

OVER HERE—SGVH Mafale (2nd left) keenly follows proceedings at a practical session during a sensitisation meeting on village land use plan in SGVH Mafale's area, TA Lundu, Chikwawa

ALTOGETHER—Mafale VDC and CLC members practise how to demarcate a plot Pictures by Gospel Mwalwanda

Work is in progress preparing physical development plans for various areas in Chikwawa.

"Preparation of physical development plans in Chikwawa District started in 2019," says Blessings Nyasulu, a Physical Planning Officer in the Department of Physical planning, Ministry of Lands.

The Chikwawa District Council, through the Ministry of Lands, developed the Chikwawa District Physical Development Plan with funding from the SVTP.

The Plan was launched in August 2020 and is currently under implementation, with major activities being the development of local land use plans and urban structure plans, among others.

A District Physical Development Plan will also be developed for Nsanje district.

Nyasulu says the aim of developing physical development plans is to provide spatial framework for the coordination and implementation of projects and development in the district.

He says there is a linkage between the physical development plans and the irrigation canal under construction which is intended to boost agricultural productivity and promote commercialization.

"Donors would not start the irrigation project as they requested to have physical development plans prepared in advance," says Nyasulu, who is also involved in physical planning activities in Chikwawa.

So far, Urban Structure Plans for Chikwawa Boma and Ntchalo have already been prepared while the same are being finalized for Ngabu, according to Nyasulu.

Nyasulu says several detailed layout plans and group village land use plans have been prepared.

"These are very important tools to help the Chikwawa District Physical Planning Committee to ensure there is development control and enforcement," he told this writer in an interview.

"Even at village level, developers submit their applications to CLCs for approval. In the long run, we will have a better district with orderly development."

Physical development plans previously were done in towns and urban centres and in some instances in some areas that had been declared a development control area by the Minister of Lands.

But with the Physical Planning Act 2022 (Amended), the whole country is now a planning area.

And this, says Nyasulu, implies that "no development can take place without obtaining development permission anywhere in Malawi."

Locals are in agreement that with the anticipated rise in construction projects in the district because of the SVTP, they will have to make good use of land by putting up structures methodically.

"There was a lot of wastage of land in the past. For instance, we used to put up buildings haphazardly, ignoring access roads," admits Peter Kandiero, a member of Mafale CLC.

Kandiero says the training they received will enable them to maximize the use of their land and "with these layout plans, you can have many plots on a small piece of land."

He adds that the other good thing is that every developer will have to pass through a CLC before implementing a project, thanks to the Physical Planning Act 2022 (Amended).

GVH Mpheza of TA Ngabu says his area fully supports the idea of having and using layout plans when effecting development and that they could not have come at a better time.

"These lay out plans will help us to have good development, especially when the irrigation canal starts to function. It will reduce poverty as it will bring many development activities," he says.

GVH Mpheza said: "But activities will need to be implemented in a methodical way and not anyhow as is the case now."

Gibson Kamtsalira, Acting Regional Commissioner for Physical Planning in the South, who was also a trainer, says they targeted CLCs because they will be tasked with dealing with land issues.

"The training specifically deals with how they can make use of their village layout plan. We are teaching them how they can demarcate plots on an area that has a layout plan," Kamtsalira says.

He says it is very important to have layout plans in villages, noting that they help to ensure that land is used economically, and that they also help houses or households to be accessible by road.

"Besides, the area where we live will look better than previously before planning," Kamtsalira told reporters at Mafale.

He also says there is a big linkage between SVTP and the village layout plans, explaining that once the irrigation project takes off, there will be many social economic activities in the Shire Valley.

Kamtsalira says with the expected increase in social economic activities, more land will be needed and that for land to meet people's needs, "we need to plan land to avoid wastage."

"We shouldn't waste any piece of land," he says.

And the locals agree with the senior government official, vowing to put a stop to wastage of land by doing things in a new way, using village layout plans.

"I wish we had the village layout plans much earlier," says SGVH Mafale, born Lucy Chimbaza. "They will be very helpful in the development of our area and the district as a whole."

KAMTSALIRA—We shouldn't waste any piece of land