



GOSPEL MWALWANDA  
CONTRIBUTOR

# Transforming Shire Valley bit by bit

As the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP) takes shape, the World Bank envisages the multibillion investments improving the livelihoods of Malawians beyond the floodplain at the southern tip of Malawi.

World Bank country director for Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania Nathan Belete recently praised Malawi for the “initiative and keen interest” to transform the Shire Valley while safeguarding the environment.

He visited the country on a mission to see projects jointly funded by the World Bank and African Development Bank (AfDB), including the SVTP.

Spanning from 2018 to 2031, the 14-year programme, being implemented by the Department of Irrigation in the Ministry of Agriculture, will irrigate 43 370 hectares using water from the Shire River at Kapichira, from where canals will convey the water by gravity to vast fields in Chikwawa and Nsanje.

The country’s flagship irrigation project aims to increase agricultural productivity and commercialisation for the benefit of 48 400 households.

The first of the three overlapping phases involved construction of the intake at Kapichira and first six kilometres of the 118-kilometre canal to Bangula in Nsanje.

In January last year, Cyclone Ana damaged the intake near Kapichira Hydropower Station, necessitating its redesign.

The storm shattered the 130 megawatt power generation site, dimming a third of the national grid.

Belete and AfDB water engineer Wael Soliman, the SVTP task manager based in South Africa, spent three hours at Kapichira.

In searing summer heat of the Shire Valley, the pair inspected preparatory works for the construction of the redesigned intake and Kapichira Dam restoration.

Later, they visited Phata Sugarcane Out-growers Cooperative in Chikwawa, one of the 13 cooperatives under the SVTP.

“The investments we have seen are really going to be transformational, not just for the economy but also for the people and the livelihoods



Part of the 118km canal under construction in the Shire Valley



Khaila briefs Belete (C) on preparatory works at Kapichira intake in Chikwawa



An Egenco official briefs Belete on Kapichira Dam restoration works

PHOTOGRAPHS: GOSPEL MWALWANDA

of those living in this area,” Belete said

He said the rehabilitation of Kapichira Dam and irrigation activities, require cooperation and coordination among all relevant government agencies such as the Electricity Generation Company, Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Belete also called for speedy implementation of the works underway.

“Irrigation needs to be there for farmers to benefit. But for this to be done, it has to be done in good sequencing of infrastructure development,” Belete said.

The project is expected to benefit some 223 000 farmers who will consolidate their land to form large farms that will be mechanised and run as cooperatives.

This is a departure from traditional irrigation schemes in Malawi where farmers

cultivate individually, mostly using hoes.

The cooperatives are earmarked to grow high-value crops. Factories will be built in the Shire Valley to add value to the farm produce and maximise profits.

Farmers under the project will have a share of the commercial farm corresponding to their land size.

SVTP has been on the drawing board for more than

80 years having been conceived as the Shire Valley Project.

The colonial government envisaged the project to control the flow of water from Lake Malawi and flooding in the Shire Valley.

This included the construction of Liwonde Barrage.

The colonial design also envisioned utilising the Shire River to produce electricity at Nkula, Tedzani and Kapichira.

For decades, the irrigation project was subjected to feasibility studies until April 2020 when construction started under SVTP.

“This project is very important to the country,” SVTP coordinator Stanley Khaila said about the project slowed by disasters as well as the shortage of fuel and cement.

He added: “The flow of support should continue so that farmers can start irrigating in a big way. Farmers here have waited for too long. Some who heard about the project are no more”

Other financiers for the project include the Opec Fund for International Development and the Global Environment Facility. ■