

From the Garage to the Global Platform

AFIDEP was launched in Nairobi in January 2010. It has steadily distinguished itself as a renowned research and policy institute in Africa.

Strategy 2024 Refresh

AFIDEP staff paused their everyday work to gather for a retreat to reflect on the Institute's performance and chart the path for the next two and a half years.

COP 27, ICFP

And more...



AN AFRICA WHERE EVIDENCE IS USED CONSISTENTLY TO TRANSFORM LIVES

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From the Garage to the Global Platform

By Oesi Thothe



Dr Eliya Zulu speaking at the re-launch of Parliament of Malawi Sustainable Development Caucus

The African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) 's board of directors relocated the Institute's headquarters from Nairobi, Kenya to Lilongwe, Malawi. The move follows the Government of Malawi conferring AFIDEP with diplomatic status. The board sees this recognition, and the State cooperation that comes with it, as strategic for the rapid growth of the Institute's activities, especially its contribution to research in the continent.

Accordingly, AFIDEP's founder and Executive Director, Dr Eliya Zulu, moved to Malawi as AFIDEP's Representative. Dr Rose Oronje heads the Kenya office in Nairobi. The Kenya office is the East African regional base, while Malawi, under Professor Nyovani Madise, coordinates activities in Southern Africa.



Dr Eliya Zulu at his farewell dinner in Kenya. His goal was to fill what he saw as a gap between research findings and their use by policymakers

Since its launch in Nairobi in 2010, AFIDEP has distinguished itself as a renowned research and policy institute in Africa with a focus on five thematic areas:

- Population dynamics and the demographic dividend
- Health and wellbeing
- Transformative education and skills development
- Environment and climate change
- Governance and accountability

When he founded AFIDEP, Dr Zulu's goal was to fill what he saw as a gap between research findings and their use by policymakers. He wanted AFIDEP to work closely with African governments to identify knowledge gaps and ensure that evidence informs policy and program implementation for better lives.

On the evening of 29 July, 2022, friends and partners of AFIDEP met in Nairobi to recognise Dr Zulu's role in AFIDEP's consistent adherence to the aspirations of an Africa where evidence is used consistently to transform lives. Speakers lauded AFIDEP's founding story and missionary agenda across Africa. They celebrated AFIDEP's engagement with governments over the years. This engagement afforded researchers a broader perspective in analysing, synthesising, and packaging evidence-based knowledge that policymakers can understand and use effectively.

The celebrations spotlighted AFIDEP's significant and diverse milestones over the past 12 years. AFIDEP has, for

instance, provided leadership in population dynamics and development planning, focusing on investment in Africa and youth potential socio-economic transformation in Africa. It has especially documented what African governments could do to transform the continent's youthful populations into the driving force for a socio-economic revolution through a demographic dividend (DD). The objective is to galvanise Africa to take advantage of the changes in its population structure and drive socio-economic growth.



The DD is a temporary economic benefit that can arise from a significant increase in the ratio of working-age adults relative to young dependents resulting from a rapid decline in fertility and mortality.

Sustained investments in education and skills development, health, job creation and good governance are required to maximise the benefits of the age structure change. AFIDEP's work on DD across Africa informed the African Union Development theme for 2017, "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth." Its work influenced the inclusion of DD priorities and actions in medium and long-term development policies in 16 countries.

The celebration looked back at work done and glimpsed the future. The Institute remains grateful to the Government of Kenya and its partners for nurturing it through its growth stages to the giant it has become. It recognises that its growth has, over time, attracted goodwill and support from funders, academics, and friends from Africa and the global community, as exemplified through increased funding and the diversity of expertise of its staff. AFIDEP boasts a multidisciplinary team of scholars across social sciences, public health, public policy, communication for development, and a network of experts worldwide who contribute to the Institute's work.



The beginnings: Dr Eliya Zulu and Prof Francis Dodoo

The Malawi office, now the headquarters, was opened in 2013. One of its most significant milestones has been supporting the Malawi Parliament to come up with constitutional amendments to enhance the autonomy and capacity of the legislature in steering the country's democratic governance and socio-economic development. In recognition of AFIDEP's impactful work in Malawi and across Africa, the Government of Malawi granted AFIDEP diplomatic status in September 2021. The diplomatic status demonstrates the government's commitment to providing an enabling environment for AFIDEP's work and similar organisations. The Malawi government aspires to be a regional hub for research cultures, especially those supporting Africa's development. This gesture could attract other similar institutes to Malawi as a host country.

Dr Zulu is confident that the diplomatic status will enhance AFIDEP's financial and operational capacity and advance its mandate in Malawi and across Africa. In particular, the diplomatic status should enable AFIDEP to attract local and global development research and policy experts to strengthen the Institute's policy and research work for the development of Africa.



AFIDEP Nairobi staff when the board chairman Prof Francis Dodoo had paid a visit

Strategy 2024 Refresh: AFIDEP Staff Reflect on Progress and the Future Amidst Global Upheavals

By Oesi Thothe



AFIDEP has a staff complement of over 70, with a broad and diverse expertise drawn from across Africa

Halfway through AFIDEP's five-year Strategic Plan 2020-2024 (Strategy 2024), AFIDEP staff paused their everyday work to gather for a two-day retreat in September 2022 to reflect on the Institute's performance and chart the path for the next two and a half years. The Strategy aims to support African governments to accelerate progress towards achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063, by driving the institutionalisation of evidence in decision-making across the continent. Explaining the significance of the retreat, AFIDEP's Executive Director, Dr Eliya Zulu said "the retreat provides the team an opportunity to review the impact made as we implement Strategy 2024 and how best we can approach the remaining years in realigning to our super goal." The super goal being 'Improved well-being of all Africans and transformed lives.'

Africa's sluggish performance and the role of evidence in accelerating progress

At the start of the Strategy's implementation, Africa's sluggish performance on SDGs and Agenda 2063 already needed to be countered. The 2020 Africa Sustainable Development Report, which analyses Africa's progress toward the SDGs and their corresponding Agenda 2063 outcomes and goals put Africa's average performance at 53.82%. The COVID-19 pandemic that brought the world to a halt in 2020, as well as subsequent economic crises, insurgencies and wars, added another strain to the slow progress, and in some

countries, reversed gains spanning many years of effort. The 2022 report on Agenda 2063 highlights that nearly 40% of Africans still live in extreme poverty. These unexpected global challenges drive home the need for Africa to strengthen its own capabilities to withstand and navigate shocks without plunging its people into further poverty. Thus, the value of AFIDEP's mission of evidence as a strong anchor for Africa's march towards sustainable development is more relevant than ever. Attesting to this through her session on 'Accelerating Achievements of SDGs,' the Head of AFIDEP Malawi Office, Prof. Nyovani Madise, highlighted how AFIDEP advanced the regional TB and lung health agenda by providing new evidence that supported parliamentary health committees in African countries to champion the need for policies and programmes that reduce the high burden of TB and lung disease in their countries. TB is among the leading causes of death globally, and a systematic effort that ultimately eliminates the disease will greatly improve health outcomes in Africa. Thus, Prof. Madise underscored the valuable nature of the work we do.

Need to improve how we document and share our impact

Dr Rose Oronje, Head of the AFIDEP Kenya Office, presenting on 'Communicating our Impact', provided an added boost to staff morale highlighting that the organisation is indeed making a positive difference on the continent, and we should be bolder in communicating

our value. The value of our work is reported by governments, development partners and other stakeholders as essential to the realisation of national, regional and global priorities. She underscored the need for staff to do better on tracking, documenting and communicating the difference the Institute's work is making on the continent and globally as we get into the second half of the strategic planning period.

Our staff are our most valuable resource

The retreat underscored the central place of the Institute's staff in realising the ambitious goals set out in Strategy 2024. The retreat was therefore overdue considering that more than half of the current AFIDEP staff had joined the Institute when the implementation of Strategy 2024 was well underway.

Reflecting on the Institute's establishment and growth, Dr Zulu noted that the last staff retreat in 2018 had a staff complement of less than 30. "Today AFIDEP has a staff complement of over 70, with a broad and diverse expertise drawn from across Africa," he said.

An AFIDEP staff, reflecting after a session at the retreat, noted: "The session helped me understand how my role and duties contribute to the bigger goal. I can see how I can support team efforts for better results."

Another staff said: "The retreat was enlightening... Interestingly, I can now clearly see how projects are related to the broader AFIDEP mandate, especially the focus areas outlined in the Strategy."

As the AFIDEP team moves to complete the objectives laid out in Strategy 2024, they left the retreat strengthened and emboldened to establish the Institute as Africa's centre of excellence for evidence-informed decision-making serving the continent's need to continually transform the lives of its people.



From Policy to Action – The First Lady of the Republic of Malawi, Her Excellency Madam Monica Chakwera and Government Ministers Commit to Harnessing Malawi's Gender Dividend

By Julius Chingwalu and Lusungu Chinombo



Madam Monica Chakwera, First Lady of the Republic of Malawi

The African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women, on Thursday, 27 October 2022, hosted a national policy and action dialogue on Harnessing the Gender Dividend to Accelerate the Achievement of Malawi2063. Her Excellency, the First Lady of the Republic of Malawi, Madam Monica Chakwera, was the guest of honour.

Like other countries in the region, Malawi has the potential to achieve the gender dividend, sustainable economic growth and development by making strategic investments in programs that promote gender equality and the empowerment of girls and young women. In her address, the First Lady called on participants to make deliberate efforts to invest in the basic education of girls and young women. She further called on traditional leaders to play an active role in breaking the barriers, such as harmful traditional practices, including early marriages, that hinder girls and young women from completing their education. She appealed to the youth to help empower girls and young women so that existing efforts are sustainable.

The dialogue brought together key stakeholders, including government, development partners, youth, academia,

traditional and religious leaders, and the media, who discussed challenges hindering the empowerment of girls and young women in Malawi. The challenges include poverty; high illiteracy levels; teenage pregnancy; early and forced marriages; slow implementation and dissemination of legal and policy instruments; and limited employment opportunities for young women graduating from schools and colleges.

Stakeholders noted that strategic and deliberate investments in gender equality, health, education and building on existing policies that create jobs for the youth and young women, are building blocks for achieving the gender dividend.

Further, they highlighted that to protect young people and the girl child from exploitation, harassment, and violence, stakeholders, should provide them, their parents, traditional and religious leaders, and the community at large with comprehensive information. Further, responsible partners should reinforce existing laws, implement community-level policies and programs by meaningfully engaging young people in decision-making, and design sustainable programs to keep girls in school without neglecting the boy child.

“

We can no longer tolerate high education drop-out rates and high levels of underage marriages and childbearing. The level of gender-based violence and harmful cultural beliefs and practices that expose girls and young women to unsafe sex and exploitation should stop!

Madam Monica Chakwera

First Lady of the Republic of Malawi



The First Lady of the Republic of Malawi, Madam Monica Chakwera called on stakeholders to invest more in women and girls



Guests listening keenly during the proceedings



The First Lady, Madam Monica Chakwera with AFIDEP leadership, UNFPA representative, UNWOMEN representative, Minister of Gender and Minister of Youth



Hon Patricia Kaliati Minister of Gender giving her remarks



Ms Letty Chiwara UN Women Representative to Malawi



Gertrude Kapyepye called on stakeholders to place youths and women at the center of decisionmaking platforms



Participants listening keenly



Ms Jennifer Mjuweni, Director for Partnerships (NPC), explains the role of women and girls in Malawi2063



Ms Miranda Tabifor (UNFPA Representative), emphasizing how the gender dividend fits within the SDGs



Prof Francis Dodo presenting a gift to the First Lady



Inkosi Mabulabo highlighted an empowerment project his community is running to be replicated in other communities



Hon Esther Jolobala MP, called for a coordinated approach from government, CSOs and NGOs to harness the gender dividend



Dr Matthews Ngwale MP, as the event kicks off with the national anthem



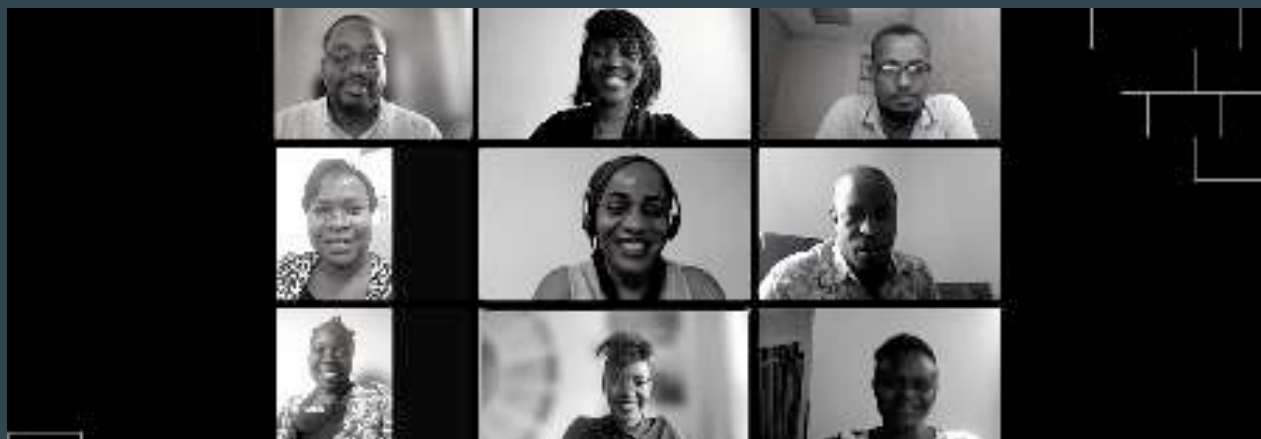
Some of AFIDEP staff at the event



Entertainment at the event

Communication, the Bridge Between Research and Policy: Reflections from the PRB Policy Communication Fellows Programme

By Lomuthando Nthakomwa-Masambuka



For at least two decades, the gap between policy and research has been increasingly highlighted within both policy and academic circles. AFIDEP acknowledges that evidence generated from research is vital to the formulation of both national and international policies, and as such needs to reach policymakers in a format they understand. That being said, the disparity between research and practice is still evident. Researchers often produce study findings that policymakers need, but rarely package them in a manner that makes them usable by policymakers.

In an effort to lessen the research-to-policy gap, the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) and the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), have since 2018 collaborated in hosting an annual Policy Communication Fellows Programme. The programme seeks to bridge the gap that often exists between research and policy through an intensive workshop tackling communication in the policy sphere. Fellows undergo modules highlighting the policy process, strategic communications, policy presentations, data visualisation, and other effective policy communication skills. The fellowship takes a hands-on approach, with fellows developing policy pitches, policy briefs, blogs, and presentations along the way.

This year's fellowship, which commenced in February, comprised of eight early-career researchers from Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia and Tanzania. Each of the fellows is currently pursuing a PhD related to population and sexual and reproductive health rights. To ensure the fellowship is practical, fellows are encouraged to use their current research topics for all module exercises; one of which is how to present research findings to policymakers. The initial presentations made by the fellows were data-heavy and focused little on making Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) recommendations. However, as fellows were continuously directed by the

programme facilitators, the presentations became less academic and easier to understand by those that are not subject-matter experts.

The fellowship placed much emphasis on a conversational approach to communicating research—with the guiding question being, 'would my grandmother understand this?' This was to encourage the participants to remember that research ought to be communicated assuming that no one else is a scientist, while not taking away from the science itself.

The fellowship is best described as a 'learning while unlearning' process. Commenting on the fellowship, one of the fellows stated, "I applied [for the fellowship] because I thought I was going to get a grant...but what I have found out is that I was looking for a fish, but they actually gave me the techniques for fishing itself. I've been able to communicate with stakeholders in family planning, being able to get their views. I have been able to personalise what I received from this fellowship. I've been able to get across to NGOs [involved in family planning], I'm getting connected to policymakers—and it's bringing me much joy. I have been able to develop my thoughts in a way that is communicable to policymakers. All this I never received in medical school, but I have received in this fellowship."

As the need for evidence in policymaking becomes more and more recognisable, AFIDEP believes that capacity building workshops that focus on policy communication for researchers are vital. While easy to overlook, it should be noted that policy communication is often not taught at the PhD level, leaving early-career researchers with vast knowledge but no tools to use it to make an impact. If policy is to truly be evidence-based for the good of a nation's citizenry, there is a need for institutions to invest in training those that generate the science to communicate it.

Getting Back-on-track: Achieving Agenda 2030 Post-COVID-19 Pandemic

By Dr Michael Chipeta, Ruth Vellemu and Christopher Kaudzu

In September 2015, UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a commitment to a global, country-led transformative socio-economic and environmental development agenda based on 17 goals.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic derailed progress in achieving the SDGs because countries redirected resources to tackle the immediate needs the pandemic presented. Notably, governments in low-middle income countries (LMICs) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) scaled down efforts within the healthcare system, i.e., in the Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) and family planning (FP) sectors, among others, to respond to the pandemic. As such hindering populations from accessing SRH and FP services.

How can countries get back-on-track?

Using evidence in microplanning and resource targeting will allow countries to get back-on-track. To do this, governments need to identify hotspots where uptake of healthcare services such as SRH and FP is the slowest and where COVID-19 has impacted access to care. LMICs with limited resources, especially in SSA, have difficulty identifying the hotspot areas where interventions with the most significant potential to change people's lives might be targeted and scaled up. The main reason is the lack of reliable data and research at the sub-national level, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

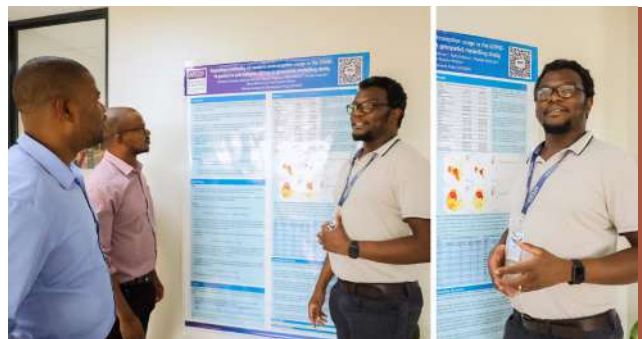
The Putting Countries Back on "The Path to Achieving the SDGs" (Back-on-Track) project is investigating the potential effects of COVID-19 on health service delivery by looking at trends before and during the COVID-19 period. The investigations are in three SSA countries, Kenya, Nigeria and Ethiopia.

The project is also building country roadmaps to ensure resilience in health service delivery during pandemics and help countries get back-on-track to achieving SDGs.

Assessing continuity of modern contraceptive usage in the COVID-19 period in SSA

As part of the Back-on-track Project, researchers conducted a comparative analysis of modern contraception use before and during the pandemic to assess the continuity of usage. The team analysed data on individual, household and contextual factors from multiple sources to cover pre-2020 and during the COVID-19 (2020-2021) periods.

Modern contraceptive use varied across the countries, with the lowest usage estimated for Ethiopia and the highest for Kenya. Some factors influencing the usage of



Dr Michael Chipeta at ICFP 2022

modern contraceptives include socio-demographic characteristics such as education, age, marital status and household wealth, among others, in Kenya and Ethiopia.

While some counties, like Kenya, continued upward during the COVID-19 period, others experienced a downward trend. Regions that experienced declines in FP services were primarily urban settings where the government imposed COVID-19 restrictions. Unfortunately, regions with the highest poverty rates also faced service decline meaning the pandemic exacerbated the inequalities.

Modern contraceptive coverage progress is also likely to be affected by factors other than the pandemic in future, i.e., droughts leading to famine in northern Kenya and parts of Ethiopia and the conflict in parts of Ethiopia.

The findings from the comparative analysis identified hotspots at sub-national levels that would need interventions post COVID-19 to meet national and global targets like the SDGs and International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD +25).

Despite the pandemic, countries can improve and get back-on-track to achieving SDGs. National governments can achieve this by implementing targeted interventions for the limited available resources to have the most significant positive impact on women's health.

As countries and organisations convened at the International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP2022), the project team took the opportunity to share its research and learn from others. The engagement helped validate the findings and get feedback from the research community. The study will help countries make suitable investments to get them back-on-track.

AFIDEP at 2022 ICFP to Champion Evidence-Use to Address Existing Gaps in Satisfying Family Planning Demand

By Oesi Thothe and Dr John Mushomi



AFIDEP delegation and partners held several sessions to share some of our ongoing project at ICFP 2022

The high levels of unintended pregnancies have unfortunate consequences for women's and girls' livelihoods. Keen to note is that with unintended pregnancies, over 60% end in abortion, and 45% are unsafe. The State of World Population Report also states that between 5% and 13% of all maternal deaths result from unsafe abortion.

About 160 million women worldwide have unmet needs for family planning, sub-Saharan Africa being the most affected (UNFPA 2022). Yet the world, through the Sustainable Development Goals, committed to "universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education" (SDG3.7.1). Therefore, there's an urgent need for the global world to find innovative ways to accelerate equitable contraceptive access and the choices it promises women and girls globally.

The 2022 International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP2022), conscious of the prevailing circumstances around women and girls, declared the need for fresh thinking in how the global community innovates, collaborates and accelerates to reach the global agenda target by especially reaching out to those with the highest unmet needs. The family planning community hopes that the shared learnings, best practices, and reflections on successes gleaned from this conference will invigorate family planning stakeholders, champions and advocates, to work towards a world where everyone everywhere

has access to family planning information, resources and means.

The conference timing could not be any better. The global population reached the 8 billion in the same week of the ICFP conference. When reflecting on the 8 billion at the ICFP2022, the UNFPA Executive Director, Dr Natalia Kanem, said "It is a success story of people living longer and healthier lives, an indication of health advancement, and reduced maternal and child mortality rates." She, however, called for a recommitment to leaving no one behind and encouraged efforts to support young people to reap the Demographic Dividend.

The 8 billion population mark also highlights the need for the world to put people at the centre of development action. It requires evidence-based plans and programs so that the 8 billion people live quality lives sustainably with the environment.



Dr Naa Dodoo representing AFIDEP at the side event hosted by Guttman Institute at ICFP 2022

For over a decade, AFIDEP has championed evidence use in decision-making. Furthermore, about 40% of AFIDEP projects speak to the different facets of family planning. These seek to support policymakers with evidence to address the diversity of the family planning program challenges. AFIDEP placed this evidence in the hands of policymakers and stakeholders because national and global decision-making that will accelerate the 8 billion towards Agenda2030 must be based on relevant and timely evidence.

The ICFP2022 tagline is innovate, collaborate, accelerate towards universal health coverage and family planning. And to achieve the SDGs, especially as captured in Goal 17, “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development...” would require collaboration between researchers, policymakers, between the public and private sectors.

AFIDEP’s founding principle, is to bridge gaps between research, policy and practice in development efforts in Africa. AFIDEP brings to the world this contribution. Partnering with African governments, and supporting them in formulating effective programs and policies. This as an example to other stakeholders if they can emulate so that we can collectively, achieve Agenda2030.

FP is a universal right that everybody, everywhere, from all creeds, should access unhindered and without cohesion. AFIDEP calls on all ICFP2022 participants and the global

world to walk the conference’s talk using relevant and appropriate evidence.

AFIDEP and partners held several sessions to share some of our ongoing project. These include the ‘Back-on-Track Project’ and Building Capacity for Integrated Family Planning and Reproductive Health (RH) and Population, Environment and Development (PED) Action (BUILD) project and Re-examining Traditional Method Use: Desperation or Innovation (TEAM-UP) project.



AFIDEP executive management with members of Malawi Parliamentary Caucus at ICFP 2022



From left: Dr John Mushomi, Ruth Vellemu and Dr Maame Peterson (Research and Policy staff at AFIDEP) at the booth display at ICFP 2022

Artificial Intelligence: A New Era in the Fight Against Cancer in Africa?

By Pauline Soy



Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide. According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the disease accounted for nearly 10 million deaths in 2020. Notably, there are some emerging technologies African researchers and scientists developed and tested to ease the burden of cancer and other diseases across Sub-Saharan Africa.

As the world marks Cancer Day today, February 4, 2022, with the theme Close the Care Gap, we explore the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in diagnosing and treating cancer in Africa.

Britannica defines AI as “the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings”.

AI can improve health services, diagnostics and personalized medicine in Africa by automating medical procedures.

Some African scientists and innovators are exploring AI tools and applications to diagnose and treat different kinds of cancer to combat and reduce deaths caused by the disease.

In Uganda, scientists have developed a PapsAI platform powered by AI technology to provide early cervical cancer diagnosis and treatment, saving lives through early diagnosis and extending survival for many people. PapsAI is offering inexpensive diagnostic tools for cervical cancer, cutting the cost of its diagnosis. The platform significantly enhances cervical cancer detection through the pap smear screening method, eliminating the shortcomings of the labour and time-intensive, manual analysis prone to human error. WHO Africa recognized PapsAI founder as one of the AI health innovators with the potential to reduce the disease burden in Africa. (who is the founder?)

A Ghanaian startup, minoHealth, uses artificial Intelligence for automated diagnosis, forecasts and prognosis of several diseases. Their research lab, minoHealth AI Labs, is focused on applying AI in the study and treatment of cancer, among other health areas. The startup has developed AI systems for automated diagnostics of 14 chests and breast cancer. The lab is testing and improving these AI solutions. It is essential to mention that the Executive Director of minoHealth AI Labs is the Lead for the Topic Group on Artificial Intelligence for Radiology under the United Nations ITU and World Health Organization Focus Group on AI for Health (FG-AI4H). Further, minoHealth AI Labs is a member organization that works on developing global standards and regulations for the development, benchmarking and use of AI solutions in Radiology.

In Southern Africa, Icon Oncology recently announced a partnership with Limbus AI to introduce cutting-edge AI-powered software designed to use in radiation oncology, which is part of cancer treatment that kills cancer cells. The software reduces the planning time before a patient can start radiation therapy.

Notably, the African Union High-Level Panel on Emerging Technologies (APET), a strategic initiative of AUDA-NEPAD, identified AI as one of the ten emerging technologies that are priority areas of relevance for Africa’s socio-economic development. The Panel encourages African countries to consider adopting AI-enabled digital technologies in health care.

It is pertinent for African governments to invest in AI research and development as a contributing technology in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. AI-enabled health system requires public funding in line with countries’ public health priorities and a new workforce of data scientists.

Legal and policy issues in the development and use of AI

Across the world, countries are currently developing a governance policy or legal framework for implementing AI in different sectors, including healthcare. In Africa, most countries still need a national digital health policy or strategy to guide the implementation and monitoring of digital health strategies.

An AI-enabled health ecosystem requires strategic vision, policies and regulations to guide its application, protect the users, and foresee and curb the risks. In 2019, African Ministers for Communication and Information and Communication Technologies adopted a continent-wide Declaration focusing on a collective and coordinated approach to AI. Member States of the African Union agreed to an African Common Position to adopt AI.

Traditional Contraceptives Use in Modern Times

By Victory Kamthunzi



The 2017 UN “World Family Planning” report indicates that 63 per cent of women in the reproductive age range (15-49 years) who were married or in a union worldwide were using some form of contraception, with contraceptive use above 70 per cent in Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Northern America, while being below 25 per cent in Middle and Western Africa. Another study estimates that 80 per cent of young women in sub-Saharan Africa either use a traditional method or do not use any form of contraception. Yet, the focus of fertility reduction and contraceptive uptake programming has been on modern methods with traditional methods of contraception receiving little to no attention. There is a scarcity of research, policy and advocacy efforts geared towards understanding the motivations, patterns and profiles of women who use traditional methods of contraception in sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, current research instruments do little to unearthing the dynamics and distinctions of traditional method use. Most studies on contraceptive use have primarily been informed by the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) which tend to be focused on gathering information on a single method (often modern method) in capturing a woman’s current use of contraception.

Recognising this gap, a traditional methods use study is being conducted by the TEAM-UP Consortium led by the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), that will develop and test new family planning (FP) measurement approaches by investigating how to account for and include traditional method users in measurement and programme approaches. The consortium seeks to address the likely bias in estimating accurately, traditional contraceptives use prevalence using standard family planning survey designs and

instruments, as well as to advance the understanding of the motivations for traditional methods use.

The reasons for traditional or modern method use are varied and complex, therefore traditional contraceptive method users must be uniquely recognised in the family planning discourse since their needs may be characteristically different from those of modern users, as well as, non-users of contraception. Diverse factors determine access to sexual and reproductive health services and the use of contraceptives. For instance, it is often assumed that urban residents may have better access to reproductive health services thus more likely to subscribe to modern than traditional contraceptives use compared to their rural counterparts. However, recent studies have found that highly educated women and women who live in urban areas are more likely to use traditional methods of contraception than their less-educated or rural counterparts. Thus, lumping women from different contexts together may be problematic in addressing women’s contraceptive needs, especially for family planning policies and programs that seek to reduce the unmet need for family planning.

In understanding and clarifying the reasons for traditional method use, the consortium is asking questions that include whether users of traditional methods are using them as they transition to modern methods, or if they are a replacement for modern methods because of their fear of side effects, or other structural or ideological barriers. Furthermore, they are looking to comprehend users’ own definitions of what a traditional method is, given that there is no one universal definition for traditional contraceptive methods. Understanding women’s contraceptive method choices is key to enhancing family planning services provision and programming.

If We Want a TB-free World, We must Invest!

By Edel Sakwa, Ann Waithaka and Dr Leyla Abdullahi



AFIDEP joined actors and partners in Kenya at a national event held in Machakos County in commemorating the 2022 World TB Day

As one of the leading infectious diseases and causes of death globally, Tuberculosis (TB) remains a severe public health concern worldwide. Each year on March 24, stakeholders, including the health community, relevant government agencies and the general public, observe World Tuberculosis Day to raise awareness and ignite commitment and efforts toward eliminating TB.

In 2020, an estimated 10 million people fell ill with TB, 56% men, 33% women and 11% children. 4.1 million people were not detected, and 1.5 million died from TB. The latest figures indicate that approximately 33,000 Kenyans died from TB since 2020. An alarming two people die every hour despite effective treatments being available.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted services, including TB care and management, leading to increased deaths in the country. This year's theme is 'Invest to End Tuberculosis. Save Lives' is an urgent call to attention to the need to invest necessary resources to

step up the fight against TB and realise global commitments to end TB.

AFIDEP joined actors and partners in Kenya to commemorate the 2022 World TB Day in Machakos County. The National Tuberculosis, Leprosy, and Lung Disease Program (NTLD) of Kenya organised the event in the Ministry of Health. Machakos County Governor, Dr Alfred Mutua, called upon county governments to focus on strengthening TB testing and treatment, noting that having exemplary political leadership who fights for policies prioritising universal health care is critical. "Politicians should invest in ensuring great budget control within designated health services for development," he said.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), funding for TB prevention, diagnosis and treatment services continues to fall short of estimated global needs and the United Nations' global target.

While national strategic plans and accompanying budgets for Tuberculosis have grown in ambition, mobilisation of funding has yet to keep pace. In Africa, for example, governments contribute only 22% of the resources required to deliver adequate TB services, with 44% going unfunded, seriously impeding efforts to reduce the TB burden.

A US Government representative, John Keuhnle, highlighted that "TB is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in Kenya, yet it is treatable and curable". He further indicated that TB infections and death statistics could drop if partners work together to develop interventions collectively.

A recurring theme during World TB Day was the need for an all-inclusive and comprehensive approach to diagnosing, treating and managing treatment. As we invest in ending TB, there is a need for interventions aimed at increasing men's access to TB treatment, care and support. Males have the highest risk of death from TB, and when men have undiagnosed and untreated TB, they risk transmitting it to their families and community.

Through the Leaving no-one behind: Transforming Gendered pathways to Health for TB (LIGHT) Initiative, AFIDEP is working with partners in Africa and the UK to generate new evidence on the effectiveness of different gender-sensitive pathways and approaches to health for those with TB, especially in urban, HIV-prevalent settings.

Within this scope, in 2021, AFIDEP conducted a policy analysis in Kenya that revealed a gendered TB policy gap in diagnosis, treatment and management of TB. The lack of gendered TB policies run the risk of continued high transmissions to populations of all gender and ages, hindering the realisation of national and global targets for ending TB. A key recommendation from the analysis is to spotlight more on the high burden of TB among men and invest in male-friendly diagnostic and screening services to reduce undiagnosed TB among men and, ultimately, the entire community.

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Lack of gendered TB policies run the risk of continued high transmissions to populations of all gender and ages hindering the realisation of national and global targets to end TB.

AFIDEP at the International Good Governance and Fight Against Corruption Conference in São Tomé Príncipe

By Dr Alex Jiya and Christopher Kaudzu

A FIDEP, through the Africa Integrity Indicators (AII) project, participated in the International Good Governance and Fight Against Corruption Conference in São Tomé and Príncipe, which ran from 12 April to 13 April 2022.

The conference was held under the “Sociedade Civil pela Transparência e Integridade” project, with support from the European Union and the Portuguese Cooperation, aimed at increasing knowledge and exchange of good practices in the fight against corruption and impunity. The conference involved discussions among local and international CSOs, journalists, actors, policymakers, and top government officials from São Tomé and Príncipe.

The conference saw various presentations from the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, The Economist Intelligence Unit, Associação para Cooperação Entre os Povos (ACEP), the Federation of NGOs of São Tomé and Príncipe (FONG-STP), the Ambassador of Portugal in São Tomé and Príncipe, top government officials, among others.

In the presentation on the new Corruption and Governance Index of São Tomé and Príncipe (CGI-STP), a new initiative

of the Civil Society Network for Good Governance, FONG-STP, and ACEP, Ernesto Nhanale, a Consultant and Executive Director of MISA, Mozambique, highlighted various challenges facing São Tomé and Príncipe in the fight against corruption. The lack of data on the corruption cases investigated by the bodies mandated to investigate corruption allegations and prosecute those found guilty. The high level of political control and censorship/control of institutions to exercise freedom of speech was also highlighted as a significant issue impeding watchdog actions in the country.

In his presentation on the preliminary findings of the 10th Round of the Africa Integrity Indicators, Alex Jiya, AFIDEP’s Research and Policy Analyst, echoed the findings presented by Ernesto Nhanale by highlighting the need for São Tomé and Príncipe to learn from countries performing better on Indicators of Anti-Corruption mechanisms and public integrity in AII. Such countries included; Seychelles and Mauritius, among others. He concluded by emphasising that São Tomé and Príncipe could benefit much in the fight against corruption by improving the independence and effectiveness of the bodies responsible for fighting corruption.

Beyond Food Security: Focusing on Sustainable Farming Models in Malawi

By Amanda Chatata

The COVID-19 global pandemic is exacerbating food insecurity in African countries, including Malawi. Food security exists when every person has physical and economic access to sufficient and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs. Hitherto, food insecurity and undernourishment remain a significant concern in Malawi.

It is widely accepted that the primary cause of food insecurity and malnourishment is chronic poverty. Many Malawians lack economic opportunities to produce or purchase adequate, safe, nutritious food. Not to overlook certain factors, food insecurity is also caused by the rising population in Malawi. Food insecurity is also influenced by climate-related shocks that have subsequently led to low productivity in the agricultural sector. According to Aquilina

Ngowera, smallholder farmers in Malawi continuously cultivate small pieces of land, expecting adequate harvests to feed their families. Regrettably, in the last decade, 25% of the country’s population has experienced droughts and floods more than seven times.

In addition, Malawi currently has an unstable economy which has tolled on the availability and access to food. Food prices have increased in Malawi, because of inflation, making it harder for people to have the “three meals a day” they had hoped for. Furthermore, the high unemployment rates have made income-earning harder than before to sustain daily livelihood. The challenges associated with food insecurity and poor nutrition can affect many things in a community. Still, it

mainly affects people's health, making them prone to chronic diseases and poor mental health and development.

According to the Borjen project, 37% of Malawian children are stunted due to chronic under nourishment. As a result their brain development is compromised, consequently affecting their education.

A recent study on **"Improving nutritional status among urban poor children in sub-Saharan Africa"** by Maurice Mutisya et al. gives an elaborate explanation of interventions that improve nutritional status in infants and young children (IYC) living in low-income slums in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

The approaches put in place to improve nutritional status include **Nutrition-sensitive intervention**, which highlights primary causes of nutrition that include agriculture and food security, and **nutrition-specific intervention**, which addresses proximal causes of nutrition illustrated by adequate food and nutrient intake and caregiving and parenting practices.

It is estimated that these interventions could prevent 20% of deaths in countries with high child mortality among under-fives. Conferring to the article, nutrition-sensitive factors should be considered to maximise the potential impact and effectiveness of implementing these interventions.

A cost-benefit analysis on food and nutrition security in Malawi, implemented by the National Planning Commission with technical assistance from the Copenhagen Consensus Center and AFIDEP, highlights interventions that can deliver

sustainable food and nutrition security as well as greater dietary diversity.

The first intervention to promote sustainable food and nutrition is **crop diversification**. Most Malawian farmers are smallholder subsistence farmers who engage in monocropping, leading to a nutrition deficiency. The intervention advocates encouraging and supporting farmers to diversify into higher value and more nutritious crops in production. The report recommends different strategies for Malawi's different agro-ecological zones to produce crops that can withstand the weather and climatic conditions of the region.

Crop diversification will help improve agricultural productivity, provide adequate food supply, promote food security and improve food nutrition.

The second intervention is using **Purdue Improved Crop Storage (PICS) bags**. These storage technologies limit post-harvest losses to 9% from 24% to 28%. PICS bags improve storage quality and extend the longevity of existing and harvested crops, mitigating any threats of pests and rotting. This intervention improves storage facilities reducing losses and increasing the amount of food available for consumption.

Malawi is exuberant! Yet people still suffer from food insecurity and malnourishment due to chronic poverty. Implementing these interventions would finance and assist in improving quality and providing adequate food, saving Malawians from dire hunger by giving them the three meals they deserve.



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Food prices have increased in Malawi, because of inflation, making it harder for people to have the "three meals a day" they had hoped for

Clamp Down on Citizens' Voice by African Governments Continues Unabated – Africa Integrity Indicators Reveal

By Adaudo Anyiam-Osigwe



The freedoms of information and expression are under threat

The 10th round findings of Africa Integrity Indicators (All), a research project of AFIDEP and Global Integrity, raised alarm on the dangerous trend over the decade as most African governments continue to restrict the freedoms of information and expression, with the COVID-19 pandemic affording some governments an additional impetus to further impinge on these freedoms.

For 10 years, All has used scientific methods to yearly assess transparency, accountability and social development in all 54 African countries. Using a pre-defined research tool, in-country researchers score various governance indicators, which are then subsequently peer-reviewed, and preliminary results released in April for experts, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to review, validate or send through feedback. Feedback received is then incorporated before the final results are published in July each year.

This year's results, covering September 2020–September 2021, revealed that there was a slight increase in the indicator measuring press freedom from the 9th round, but the minimal gains of this indicator were largely offset by a sharp decrease in the indicator measuring government censorship, especially of online content. In general, both indicators measuring press freedom and government censorship have continually declined over the past ten years.

At a webinar to unveil the 10th round findings of All and discuss its implications on governance in Africa, discussants Sarah Wesonga of Article 19-East Africa and Martha

Munthali of the African Union Advisory Board Against Corruption highlighted the disconnection between written laws and their implementation in practice. This disconnection was clearly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic as Sarah Wesonga noted that provisions in seemingly progressive laws enshrining citizens' right to freedom of expression were deployed with the stated aim to control the health emergency. For instance, a number of countries such as Ethiopia and Uganda carried out Internet shutdowns during the pandemic, mainly for political motives.

The 10th round findings captured a full year of the pandemic, declared in March 2020 by the World Health Organization, and the indicator related to health campaigns and responses to epidemics rebounded from the 9th round, which captured the earlier months of the pandemic. These findings on health and the freedom of expression reveal the interconnectedness of different aspects of governance. A further interconnection was highlighted by Martha Munthali who noted that the inability of citizens to voice concerns prevents governments from taking decisive action to address the offenses of high-ranking civil servants and politicians, hampering the war against corruption.

A key factor for good governance in Africa is the institutionalisation of the rule of law, which Dr Justice Mavedzenge of the Democratic Governance and Rights Unit at the University of Cape Town described as an evolution from law to judgement to justice in practice. He

noted that there is often scrutiny of the upper echelons of the justice system and a corresponding disregard for the workings of lower courts. These lower courts, however, are closer to the people and serve as means through which they achieve redress and justice, but they can also be weaponised to punish perceived critics or dissenters of incumbent governments. Dr Mavedzenge thus emphasised the independence of the judiciary as paramount, including its decisional independence and financial autonomy, to safeguard the rights and freedoms of the citizenry.

It is not all gloom for the continent. The indicators measuring women representation in cabinets and legislatures increased from the 9th round, though the indicator for representation in the judiciary remained the same. As women representation has gradually become a norm in political appointments, the last decade has seen the rise of these indicators. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement as less than half of the continent meets the 33% threshold of representation in the three arms of government.

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The inability of citizens to voice concerns prevents governments from taking decisive action to address the offenses of high-ranking civil servants and politicians, hampering the war against corruption.

The top five performing countries are South Africa, Seychelles, Mauritius, Tunisia and Namibia. South Africa and Mauritius have always been top performers, while Seychelles has continually improved its performance and has entrenched itself at top. Tunisia maintained its spot despite the closure of the headquarters of its anti-corruption body by the executive branch of government. Cabo Verde dropped out of the top five due to the executive branch's interference in its judicial branch. Mali showed the most improvement in the 10th round despite a coup d'état occurring during the research period. The period, however, did not cover the postponement of elections, and research during the 11th round will reveal the impact on its overall score. At the bottom of the ranking, consistently for over the decade, have been Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea and Somalia.

All the data is publicly available on the project's website. Dr Rose Oronje, AFIDEP's Director of Public Policy and Knowledge Translation and Head of Kenya Office, reiterated that the data must serve an intentional purpose to stimulate action towards improving the lives of the people of Africa.



Stimulating Farmers to Take Up Irrigation Farming

By Christopher Kaudzu



For a long time, Malawi's economy has been agriculture driven. The sector contributes about 42 percent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Due to this overdependence on agriculture, the country has had a fragile economy for over three decades as a result of poor rainfalls, drought and other climatic challenges.

Malawi has constantly relied on rainfall as the main water source for its agriculture. Due to climate change, the country's productivity has been greatly affected. Irrigation as an alternative to rain-fed production has been underutilised despite having large scale irrigation projects such as the Greenbelt Initiative (GBI). The Greenbelt Initiative (GBI) sought to increase the level of agricultural productivity in support of the National Resilience Strategy.

Smallholder farmers have been encouraged to adopt irrigation farming, but challenges such as access to finance, affordability of irrigation equipment, quality of extension services and access to water have hindered farmers from venturing into irrigation farming. Implementing the right policies and interventions would propel this sector.

A study conducted by the Malawi Priorities a research-based collaborative project implemented by the National Planning Commission (NPC) with technical support from the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), and the Copenhagen Consensus Center (CCC), highlights the best ways of stimulating farmers to take up irrigation farming. The study focuses on two interventions as ways to increase the area for irrigation.

The extension services have faced challenges as they are inadequate extension workers to reach farmers and the need for proper training and mobility for outreach

services. Extension workers need training and this would improve the services offered to farmers. The first intervention focuses on reorienting the extension services leading to the uptake of gravity irrigation by smallholder farmers. The study assessed the need to reorient extension workers and improve the provision of Agriculture Extension Development Officers (AEDOs) and lead farmers (LFs) to provide adequate and updated information on irrigation for the usage of smallholder farmers. The cost of these interventions is aligned with the costs associated with training and increasing the number of AEDOs, irrigation infrastructure and its maintenance and area of cultivation.

The second intervention highlights the provision of financial support and grants to smallholder farmers and estate farms for solar irrigation pumps as a means of addressing the challenge of the high cost of irrigation equipment. In this intervention, three main categories need to be addressed: (a) irrigation infrastructure and maintenance, (b) the cost associated with monitoring and management of the financing instrument and (c) the marginal change in costs associated with a greater area of cultivation.

The estimation of benefits is as per the first intervention: increase in output associated with irrigation during the dry season, and reduction in variability during the wet season. Overall, the emphasis of the research remains that both, the choice of irrigation technology and the choice of crop, are critical drivers of the return on investment, making strategic crop diversification a key component of any irrigation intervention.

The Malawi Priorities Project, is a research-based collaborative project implemented by the National Planning Commission (NPC), with technical assistance from AFIDEP and the Copenhagen Consensus Center (CCC), highlights most cost-effective policy interventions that can support and help the nation.

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Smallholder farmers have been encouraged to adopt irrigation farming, but challenges such as access to finance, affordability of irrigation equipment, quality of extension services and access to water have hindered farmers from venturing into irrigation farming.

Integration of Population in Development Planning and Budget Analysis in Malawi

By Christopher Kaudzu



AFIDEP BUILD Team, UNFPA and Members of Parliament

On 30 March, 2022, AFIDEP in partnership with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the BUILD project engaged the Malawi Members of Parliament on a capacity building workshop. The engagement sought to enhance the Parliament's capacity in integrating population in the planning, handling and analysing of the national budget.

In a presentation on Integration of Population in Development Planning and Budget Analysis, Professor Nyovani Madise, Director of Research for Sustainable Development Policies and Head of the Malawi office said "Malawi has a youthful population hence there is need to invest more in children and youth services to ensure that the population is healthy and educated."

Population dynamics is a critical factor that can shape the socio-economic development trajectories of countries through changes in the population age structure. A significant increase in the working-age population relative to the dependent population (i.e., children and the elderly) provides countries with a window of opportunity to accelerate economic growth through increased productivity, savings and investments.

The demographic dividend, therefore; offers Malawi an opportunity to stimulate economic development and improved well-being for its people in less than 30 years, but its success requires immediate integration of demographic, economic, and social policies. When investments in family planning and women's empowerment programs that promote demographic change are matched with improvements in human capital and a favourable economic environment, the benefits of the dividend will be powerful.

Dr Bernard Onyango, Senior Research and Policy Analyst at AFIDEP, echoed Prof Madise's sentiments saying, "An integrated approach to challenges in population and the environment can help decrease the

population pressure on the environment and improve food security and nutrition; leading to better health outcomes."

The training was attended by development partners, Members of Parliament and heads of parliamentary committees including the Budget and Finance Committee, Government Assurances Committee and the press.

During the workshop, the Second Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Honorable Aisha Adams (MP) said "Despite having recently passed the 2022/2023 budget, my expectation from this workshop is that Members of Parliament will gain skills to understand and analyse the national budget and public expenditures during the subsequent budget meetings of parliament. I hope that the workshop will result in high-quality debates of the national budget and effective allocation of resources in all sectors. The knowledge acquired here will be used to critically analyse the budget during the mid-year review and other subsequent budgets to come"

Speaking in an interview, Honorable Gladys Ganda (MP), who is also the Chairperson for the Budget and Finance Committee, reiterated the sentiments that the workshop has come at the right time after the budget has been passed. "This training is very crucial as Members of Parliament will be in a position to look at the budget against the population. The population growth rate is alarming and as we come up with development work, we need to project and predict the number of people to benefit from it." She added, "The new Malawi Investment Plan (MIP) which will run for ten years, needs to focus on the population and when planning; it should align to the resources available."

In the last five years, AFIDEP has worked with parliament to enhance its effectiveness in the delivery of its functions. The workshop was made possible with support from UNFPA and USAID under the BUILD project. The project seeks to achieve strong political commitment, sustained financial resources and accountability for voluntary family planning and reproductive health.

Supporting SADC's Climate Change Response through Systems Thinking and Integrated Development Planning Under the BUILD Project

By Felix Otiato



AFIDEP Executive Director Dr Eliya Zulu (right) confers with The Minister of Forestry and Natural Resources, Republic of Malawi, Hon Eisenhower Mkaka and Prof Sosten Chiotha, Regional Director of LEAD SEA and a member of the BUILD Consortium during the SADC Regional Green Climate Conference in Lilongwe, Malawi

The conference provided a platform for the region to assess the status of climate action in the region; connecting international commitments with regional, national and sub-national initiatives and to identify how to overcome barriers to ensuring that Southern Africa can meet its development objectives in the context of a changing climate.

In his keynote, Prof. Sosten Chiotha, Regional Director of LEAD SEA and a member of the BUILD Consortium called for partnerships and new ways of working to empower African citizens to drive climate action and build a greener and more sustainable future. Prof. Chiotha added that these new ways included;

- Providing new skills and knowledge,
- Driving innovation and entrepreneurship,
- Creating new businesses, products and services,
- Investing in people, infrastructure and start-ups.

Prof. Chiotha highlighted how the BUILD Project provides great opportunities to build capacity for integrated development planning by integrating population, environment and development (PED) action in climate change adaptation and mitigation to accelerate the achievement of development goals including the 2020-2030 SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan. Prof. Chiotha also promoted Evidence-Informed Decision Making (EIDM) and called for the involvement of researchers to guide climate action policies and actions in Africa.

In his remarks, SADC Deputy Executive Secretary Dr Theminkosi Mhlango noted that the Southern African region is one of the worst-hit by climate change. Dr Mhlango

emphasized that the region needs to be proactive to avoid further climate change related disasters. The Minister of Forestry and Natural Resources, Republic of Malawi, Hon. Eisenhower Mkaka echoed President Lazarus Chakwera's rallying call urging SADC member states to find and implement climate change interventions that minimise damage and disruption of lives.

"Sub-Saharan Africa is uniquely susceptible to climate change and has low resilience. Tropical cyclones have brought damage and affected lives and in Malawi, communities have been displaced, people died and some remain missing." Hon. Mkaka added.

In his closing remarks Hon. Mkaka thanked AFIDEP for committing to support the Government of Malawi and SADC in implementing key recommendations of the Regional Green Climate Conference through the BUILD project and other programmes at the Institute.

The support from AFIDEP will include technical support to strengthen the capacity of SADC member states in applying systems thinking and integrated development planning. This will ensure that the region's climate change and sustainable development responses are holistic and focused on definitively addressing the root causes of vulnerability to climate change and poverty while conserving the environment.

The conference brought together participants from SADC member states, development partners, Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society, local communities and leaders, academia and researchers, the private sector and marginalized groups such as women and youth.

Engaging Côte d'Ivoire State and Non-State Actors on PED Integration for Sustainable Development

By Felix Otiato



The Minister for Planning and National Development Hon KABA Niale (second left) addresses the BUILD project delegation led by AFIDEP Executive Director Dr Eliya Zulu (right) at the ministry headquarters in Abidjan

The Building Capacity for Integrated Family Planning/ Reproductive Health and Population, Environment, and Development Action (BUILD) project undertook a mission to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire from 24 to 30 April, 2022. The mission aimed to meet key state and non-state actors and gather relevant insights to inform scheduled project activities in the country and the larger Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Côte d'Ivoire is one of the four hub countries identified for implementing the BUILD Project over the five years. The other countries are Kenya (East Africa), Malawi (Southern Africa), and the Philippines (South-East Asia). Specifically, the mission sought to conduct the following activities;

- Conduct stakeholder engagement meetings with selected stakeholders in the environment, population, and health sectors who had been identified through initial stakeholder analysis,
- Create a plan of action for capacity building and engagement activities in Côte d'Ivoire.

Ministry of Planning and National Development

During the mission, the Minister for Planning and National Development Hon KABA Niale hosted the BUILD project delegation led by AFIDEP Executive Director Dr Eliya Zulu and Leadership for Environment and Development Southern and Eastern Africa (LEAD SEA) Regional Director Prof Sosten Chiotha.

Hon Niale noted that the BUILD project was timely as its objectives aligned with Côte d'Ivoire's development

priorities. These included harnessing population dynamics gains to achieve demographic dividends to address issues such as unemployment and youth education.

Ministry of Technical Education, Vocational Training and Apprenticeship

The BUILD project delegation was also hosted by Hon N'Guessan KOFFI, the Minister for Technical Education, Vocational Training and Apprenticeship, a former president of the Union for African Population Studies (UAPS).

The Minister disclosed that with a rapidly growing population in Côte d'Ivoire, projected to grow from 30 million to 52 million within the decade, the Côte d'Ivoire Government is interested in understanding the link between population and development. The minister called on the BUILD project to work with the government to develop an action plan that will utilize evidence-based research and ensure that population variables are prioritised and mainstreamed into the development agenda.

Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development

The BUILD project delegation also met Hon KOUADIO Parfait, Chief of Staff, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, who represented the minister Hon Jean-Luc Assi.

Hon Parfait noted that the meeting was timely as the ministry recently developed an environment and climate change policy document which incorporated population dynamics

as a key issue. The ministry committed to working with the project on activities such as COP-27 and in-country activities such as further stakeholder engagements and capacity building.

Parliamentary committee members

The BUILD project then met parliamentarians Hon TCHEIDE Jean-Gervais from the Research, Science, Technology and Environment Committee, Hon M. M'ba COULIBALY from the Finance and Economics Committee, and Hon KOUADIO Philippe from the Social Affairs and Culture Committee.

The three parliamentarians, accompanied by administration personnel from parliament, agreed to become the BUILD project champions and pledged to rally other members of parliament to support the Population, Environment, and Development (PED) approach.

Non-state actors

The BUILD project delegation also organised a workshop for non-state actors in the environment, population, and health sectors and discussed areas of possible collaboration, including capacity-building activities for local communities.

Stakeholders at the meeting

- Zero Deces En Donnant La Vie (Zed-Vie) focusing on reproductive health, family planning, and environmental conservation,
- Organisation Nationale pour l'Enfant, la Femme et la Famille (ONEF) focusing on reproductive health, FGM, women's economic and political empowerment,
- Femmes Côte d'Ivoire Experience (FCIEX), focusing on women and girls' empowerment,
- Federation des Reseaux et Associations de l'Energie, de l'Environnement et du Developpement Durable (FEREADD), focusing on climate change, environment, energy and sustainable development,
- Federation Nationale des Unions de Jeunesse Communale de Côte d'Ivoire (FENUJECI), focusing on youth movement,
- Association Ivoirienne pour le Bien-Etre Familial (AIBEF), focusing on family planning,

Côte d'Ivoire BUILD National Advisory Committee

The mission also held an induction session with members of the BUILD National Advisory Committee members, drawn from senior officials from state and non-state sectors who will serve as advocates for the project and play an advisory role in programming, resource mobilisation, scaling up of the project and serving as BUILD advocates in the country.

Learnings and plan of action

The delegation received positive feedback about the BUILD project in all engagements. The stakeholders were very keen to participate in project activities, and several opportunities for collaboration and partnership were identified during the meetings.

During the mission, the BUILD project delegation was joined and supported by local partner organisations in Côte d'Ivoire, including Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD Côte d'Ivoire), FHI 360, and Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) Côte d'Ivoire chapter. Among the upcoming activities lined up after the mission include;

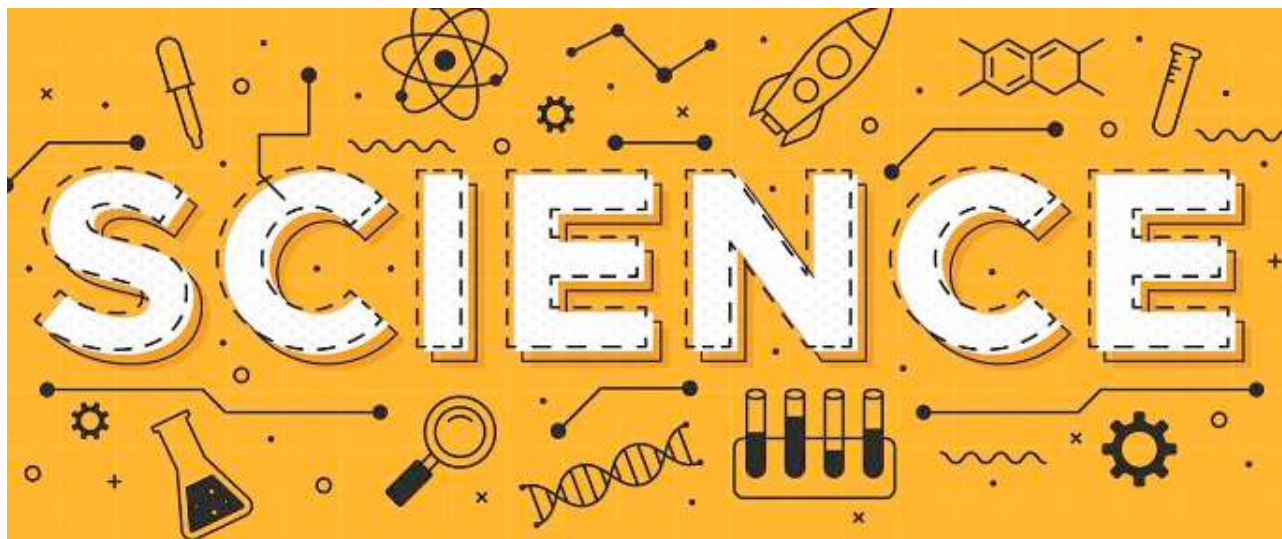
- A high-level stakeholders meeting involving state and non-state actors.
- Capacity building on PED, systems thinking, evidence-informed decision-making, and advocacy for policymakers and community-based organisations.



BUILD project was urged to work with the government to develop an action plan that will utilise evidence-based research and ensure that population variables are prioritised and mainstreamed into the development agenda

If We Want More Women and Girls in Science, We Must Empower and Ignite their Interest

By Dr Leyla Abdullahi and Ann Waithaka



Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) play a key role in the sustained growth and stability of any economy. Stem related concepts foster creative thinking and enables the next generation of innovators. This is especially important for developing countries where innovation can lead to new products and processes that can accelerate and sustain growth and development.

For nations to realise the full benefits of STEM, students and productive working groups must have equal access and opportunities. This is in line with sustainable development goal (SDG) 4 – quality education, that aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Historically and particularly in developing countries, the education of males has been prioritised more than that of females. Even now with efforts by the global community to give equal access to both genders in education, girls are systematically side tracked from science limiting their preparation, access and opportunities to go into STEM career paths.

Assuming that there is equal education opportunity for both boys and girls, most females will often still be inclined to choose a non-STEM career path due to various reasons. First, many myths surround STEM careers, such as boys having mathematics brains when compared to girls or that the workplaces are too male dominated and not supportive of women. However, there is no scientific evidence that shows innate cognitive biological differences between men and women in mathematics or science.

Secondly, there is little to no effort towards early intervention to get girls excited about STEM. Teachers and parents who offer guidance and advice at education and career phases often underestimate girls' science and mathematics abilities starting as early as pre-school. This can create a confidence gap. Thirdly, domestic pressures on girls and women including marriage and family responsibilities force them to take 'less demanding courses and jobs.' Lastly, there is lack of female role models to inspire interest and motivate girls and young women towards the STEM career path.

As we mark the 7th International Day for Women and Girls in Science, let us not only celebrate the great women leading innovations in science but commit to empowering girls and young women to participate in STEM fields, as well as lead and innovate. We must close the gender STEM gap by giving girls and women the skills and confidence to succeed in mathematics and science using various strategies. Such strategies include:

- Raise awareness and foster confidence among girls and women that they are just as capable as their male counterparts
- Give girls equitable encouragement and educational opportunities mostly in the community where boys are favored over girls.
- Empower women in all facets of their lives
- Promote public awareness to parents about how they can encourage daughters as much as sons in mathematics and science.
- Accentuate strong and visible role models of women in mathematics and science fields. This can be supported through mentorship where women in the STEM career to mentor boys and girls during their career path.

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Many myths surround STEM careers, such as boys having Mathematics brains compared to girls. However, no scientific evidence shows innate cognitive and biological differences between men and women in mathematics and science





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