

Tsache Latsopano Limasesa Bwino-
“A New Broom Sweeps Well”
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This title is a common Malawian proverb that teaches a timeless lesson: a new person can bring good ideas(1). This is precisely what needs to happen in Malawi. We have known this lesson to be true even as far back as biblical days when it was said that, “If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day but, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” It seems cliché to quote the Bible, yet it fits the situation of agricultural production in East Africa. Just take it from Tito Jestala. He is a Malawian farmer and has had trouble barely managing to produce enough food to cover his input costs. Jestala had to watch nearly 30 of his neighbors die due to malnourishment, but now he has doubled and even tripled his harvest yield. The answer? Fertilizer(2). If something so simple can change the face of agriculture in Malawi, why are we not using it all over the world to feed the hungry and stop global food insecurity? Although there are many problems contributing to the food insecurity crisis all over the world, there are more specific problems that plague Malawi. Even though Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, it is spending money to better the agricultural crisis within the country(3). Education is a very broad and important topic when considering food insecurity and many of the troubles and tribulations facing Malawi. Many of these concerns and difficulties can be traced back to education in its many forms. It is clear that if we educate farmers and create a positive, supportive partnership, that food security will come. If we lend assistance, we are creating partnerships and most of all, gaining allies. Through education, many of these problems can be addressed and solved and hopefully, make the future for Malawi and the other countries that depend on their exports, much, much brighter.

“The warm heart of Africa” as it is called, Malawi is located in southeastern Africa or, for the purpose of this essay, simply East Africa. It is a beautiful, scenic country with a large lake, Lake Nyasa or Lake Malawi, to the west. Malawi is considered an extremely poor country with 65 percent of the population living in poverty(8). Family life is very important to Malawians and is highly stressed. An average mother in Malawi will give birth to about five or six children, but due to the incredibly low infant mortality rate (89 out of 1,000 survive), less than half of those children will survive past the age of five years(6). Malawians thrive on their main staple: corn. They grind it into a cornmeal-like consistency, which is then used to make a porridge called *Nisma* that is eaten with vegetables or on occasion, fish or meat(5). A large majority of the children in Malawi do attend a primary school and a new trend is evolving where more students are enrolling in a secondary school, even though academic performance has been on the decline. Malawi is an extremely poor country with people living on less than two dollars a day. Numerous problems plague the people of Malawi, but there are also many possible solutions for relief.

The economy relies heavily on agriculture. Agriculture represents 80 percent of both the workforce and the total exports from the country(7). Nearly 90 percent of the population of Malawi will engage in some form of subsistent farming. Tobacco and tea are the largest, most important commodities exported and tobacco accounts for between 50 and 70 percent of Malawi’s export earnings. Other important crops that are grown include sorghum, sugar cane, cotton, corn, and peanuts. Many families also raise various livestock. The fishing industry on Lake Nyasa(Lake Malawi) is also of great importance for family survival as well as commercial

purposes.

Agriculture in Malawi is heavily affected by outside forces(7). Fluctuations that affect the market in the U.S. in a small way may make a large impact on the price or profit on agricultural products exported from Malawi. The cutback of smoking and the soaring tobacco taxes in the United States hurt the tobacco exporters in Malawi. Soil fertility is also an issue and farmers cannot afford the initial input to purchase fertilizer. Although women do a large majority of the agricultural work, there are no training programs funded for females who do most of the work.

Malawi is taking positive action and taking a step in the right direction for agriculture in the country. There is a subsidy program in place that allows farmers to buy seed and fertilizer at less than one third of the regular price(2). This subsidy boosted yields and the country now has a surplus. There are even cultural barriers that are being broken within Malawi. Fanny Makina was elected as the first female chair of Malawi's National Association of Smallholder Farmers.

In 2005, Malawi faced its worst food shortage and food insecurity crisis in over a decade(4). Drought played a huge part in this problem with more than 4 million people, nearly 34 percent of the population, without adequate food supplies. Just a short two years later, farmers were producing a surplus of crops. Malawi farmers went from a 44 percent deficit to an 18 percent surplus. Then in 2008, they produced a 53 percent surplus and were able to export corn to Zimbabwe and provide food for the hungry there.

Bingu wa Mutharika, President of Malawi, is responsible for the surplus. Bingu, as he is known throughout Malawi, allocated \$58 million from the country's savings to provide hybrid seeds and fertilizer to the poorest farmers in Malawi(4). These 1.3 million farmers received a coupon that allowed them to buy one bag of seed and two bags of fertilizer at a third of the normal cost. With just a bag of seed and two bags of fertilizer, the "Malawi Miracle" occurred and the farmers of Malawi produced 3.44 million metric tons of maize which also happens to be a national record. If a terribly poor country such as Malawi can allocate this kind of money to boost yields, other countries can follow this example.

Access to this subsidized fertilizer and seed is very important, but continued growth and sustained success requires comprehensive education. They must become aware of agricultural practices that will help them boost yields. Agricultural education needs to be introduced into the schools so that students who become farmers will be ready for the changing face of agriculture.

The problem in Malawi is one that many of us can relate to- money. Money to purchase simple things like fertilizer. Money to educate the Malawian farmers on the subject of better agricultural practices. Money to provide a fair and balanced marketing system for their exports. With the entire world taking an economic hit right now, it is imperative to keep foreign aid and other subsidy programs flowing to these countries like Malawi.

The prospect of education in many ways is a problem. Education can be broken down into three parts. First, the education of Malawian farmers is crucial in that we need to teach them new agricultural practices and alternatives and inform them of agricultural products that can really boost yields. Second, we need to integrate agricultural education into the school system. If 90 percent of the workforce is involved in agriculture, then it seems logical to begin educating children in school about agriculture. Third and finally, we need to educate neighboring and other countries within Africa about some of the positive efforts that are happening in Malawi which are proving to be quite successful.

With a cultural barrier comes many problems. It is not as simple as going to Malawi and telling them how to farm. Unfortunately, we must use a different approach. We must teach them, educate them and most of all show them what must be done for the people of Malawi to become agriculturally self sufficient. Our purpose for educating these people should be one of understanding their culture and their country. It is essential that World Bank, United Nations and other organizations keep funding these countries. The capital though should not be aimed at trying to feed the people directly, but indirectly. They need to be educated to use self-sustaining practices for land productivity and preservation.

Malawians may be unaware that their actions today could possibly have catastrophic consequences, 10, 25, and 50 years down the road. Tobacco is Malawi's largest export and to keep up with demand, they have cut down thousands of trees for many parts of the tobacco industry. This includes burning the wood for drying the tobacco and building items for the purpose of preparing and processing the tobacco leaves. This contributes to massive deforestation at an alarming rate, which in turn, plays a large part in soil erosion, ultimately leading to lower yields. All of this means less money for the farmer to purchase food for his starving family. Organizations such as Philip Morris USA have partnered with Washington State University to fund educational programs for people in Malawi, as the country is vital to the tobacco industry and they value its future

In our country women have the same equal rights as men. They are allowed to vote, serve in the military and allowed to do any job a man can. Unfortunately, the same barrier has not been crossed within most African countries, including Malawi. Women do the majority of the farm work and are the ones responsible for tending crops. Although there have been strides made to provide educational programs to the men of these countries, the money has not been well spent. It is the women who are in need of the agricultural education because they are more involved in the food and fiber process. Programs and capital have to be set aside for the women of these countries. Although there may be cultural barriers to break, the women of the country at the very least need the opportunity to receive the education to better their yields and stop this world spread food insecurity.

Some cultural barriers have been breached within Malawi's agricultural system. A handful of women are now in very high agricultural positions, giving a voice to women agriculturalists all over Malawi. Fanny Makina was elected as the first ever female chair of Malawi's National Association for Smallholder Farmers(9). Makina is in charge of approximately 105,000 farmers and hopes to lead them to agricultural security. Erica Maganga has been elected Principal Secretary II in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security(10). Maganga has pointed out numerous times that women do 80 percent of the agricultural work but only receive 5 percent of the extension programs. Maganga has even given presentations to girls' schools in hopes that they will become empowered and hopefully break all of the barriers of women's rights.

The second part of education that was discussed earlier was agricultural education within the primary school itself as school enrollment is on the rise within Malawi. All across the United States there are chapters of an organization known as the FFA(Future Farmers of America). This organization prides itself in developing the agricultural leaders of tomorrow. A very simplified version of this organization needs to be implemented in Malawi schools. It could allow for a blending of ideas; an ambassador program of sorts. It would allow students from the U.S. to partner with students in Malawi. Agricultural education needs to become a staple in Malawi schools. With 90 percent of Malawi employed or involved in some area of agriculture, it only makes sense that their knowledge of agriculture in primary school be nurtured so that the future of agriculture in Malawi is much brighter.

Although the focus of this paper is Malawi, the ultimate perspective of this year's topic, *Food Insecurity*, is to make sure that people all over the world never have to be afraid of hunger. Malawi has many problems in its future but, it has come a long way in a short time. If Malawi as one of the poorest countries in the world can set aside \$58 million to provide seed and fertilizer at a very affordable price, why should the same plan not be implemented in other neighboring countries in Africa or all over the continent for that matter?

As I stated earlier in this paper, we need to focus on feeding the people of the world not directly, but indirectly. We need to refocus our spending on not buying food but teaching people how to grow their own. For the food insecurity crisis to end, we need to work together and the people of Africa need to collaborate and share ideas with one another. I would like to see some kind of Ambassador of Agriculture appointed in each country and their job is to visit other countries and bring back new ideas and brainstorm ideas for agricultural practices. If there was some sort of partnership or union of agriculture for eastern and even all of Africa, then the entire African continent would do better, and if some are doing better, then we all do better.

How can I help? We often wonder, as just one person, what we can do. We have all heard the commercials, "For only eighty cents a day, less than the price of your morning coffee, you can support these children..." The programs and organizations are out there. Just think, a bag of Urea (nitrogen) costs 950 kwacha in Malawi. That is only \$6.60 in the United States. Only \$6.60 makes the difference whether Tito Jetsela can produce enough to feed his family or, if he has to watch 30 more of his neighbors die. If everyone in the U.S. would contribute one dollar, just ONE dollar, we would be able to keep the subsidized prices of hybrid seeds and fertilizer for those 1.3 million Malawian farmers going for over 5 years.

Education is quite a broad topic and has been exhibited in its many forms throughout the preceding text. Education is the foundation for any society no matter the curriculum. Agriculture is extremely important to the country of Malawi and so agricultural education needs to become a priority both with children and adults. Old habits and agricultural practices need to be revised and updated. We need to step in and educate the people of Malawi but we also need to be respectful of their culture because after all, it is their country. It is hard to comprehend that a little money here, in the United States, will go a very long way in Malawi. It is possible for a collaboration to exist not only with the U.S. through the FFA and 4-H programs, but also an intercontinental partnership within Africa that allows countries to learn of the positive agricultural ideas that exist in other countries. Not only can they learn of these positive ideas, but if the funding is secured, they can go and actually see the progress that has been made in a neighboring country and take the same knowledge back to their homeland. They can then apply the ideas to their situation and spread the knowledge. Education is so important in its many forms. People, old and young, can be taught many things about agriculture. If we help and they do better, then everyone does better. We must encourage organizations like World Bank, United Nations, Philip Morris and Washington State University to keep the capital coming to the people who really need it. If just a slight adjustment is made to how the money is spent, we can feed these people for more than just a day. Malawi can become a self sufficient country and keep producing surplus crops. Hopefully numbers like the infant mortality rate and the average age will take a turn in the opposite direction and both be on the rise. Armed with the proper education, knowledge, and support, Malawi can become a self sustaining country and change its position of being one of the poorest countries in the world. We need people to be that "new broom" and bring new ideas. We cannot, nor would we want to, get rid of everything Malawi knows but, we do want to update what they already know and potentially "sweep" the poverty, starvation, and food insecurity out of the country and hopefully, even out of the world.

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