

# THE URAC UPDATE MONTHLY

A newsletter of the Urban Research and Advocacy Centre (URAC), Mzuzu, Malawi

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## 1959 martyrs as remembered in Nkhata Bay

Since the day (3<sup>rd</sup> March) was set aside to remember the fallen heroes of the 1959 massacre by British soldiers, over time it has lost its core meaning. Right from the onset the day was characterized by harsh developments.

People were forced to remain indoors, observe the day with a somber mood and all major social and economic activities were suspended. Those that were seen to contravene the set rules were detained. A radio play 'Akufwiyanj' and funeral songs were aired throughout the day on the only public broadcaster then.

Things only changed after 1994 when the UDF led government separated the Chilembwe day from the 3<sup>rd</sup> March events. The 15<sup>th</sup> January was set aside as the Chilembwe day while 3<sup>rd</sup> March was set aside to remember those that lost their lives during the State of Emergency. After consultations with local leaders in Nkhata Bay, the government erected a memorial pillar close to where people were killed. Since then every year the people of Nkhata Bay mourn the loss of their relations. The government only sends a representative to grace the memorial.

The main cause of massacre was local resistance to colonialism and imposition of a federal system of government involving countries now called Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Based on narratives from lived experiences, on this particular day the ship docked at Nkhata Bay Town from Karonga carrying leaders who were arrested in Karonga and some from Chilumba. The ship wanted to load those detained in Nkhata Bay to join their colleagues in the ship en route to Kanjedza detention camp in Limbe. When news broke out that the ship carried some political detainees and wanted to load some detained in Nkhata Bay, the local people blocked the whole process. They demanded the immediate release of those detained in the ship and at the same time blocked the colonialists from taking those detained in Nkhata Bay to board the ship.



Kakumbi Gravesite: Reminder of the 31 Malawians that were massacred by British soldiers on March 3, 1959

Sensing the danger, and with the use of Northern Rhodesia forces, the District Commissioner then read the anti-riot act at least three times. There are two stories to this. Some say the local people did not understand the anti-riot act while others said they were simply defiant. Upon seeing that the people were still 'adamant', the soldiers opened fire and killed many Africans. The actual number of those that were actually killed vary but the outcome marked the turning point of political events in Nyasaland (now Malawi). Eye witnesses say over 30 were murdered.

News of this massive killing captured headlines in London so much so that it became clear from the colonial office that the Federation was not favoured and the move towards the release of those detained commenced. Some were released in April 1960, especially those from Gweru (Zimbabwe) prison while others were released in later months especially those from Kanjedza (Malawi) detention camp.

It is an undeniable fact that the events that took place in Nkhata Bay marked a turning point in the demand for freedom in Malawi. It is suggested that there is need to go beyond just offering prayers on the day. It is necessary recognise and reward those that suffered during the day and the entire period. The events in Nkhata Bay should be given special recognition in Malawi's history as they marked the turning point towards the road to freedom. The significance of this day should also go beyond mere politics. The relatives of those that lost their lives at Nkhata Bay should be recognised and be made part of the group that take part in recounting the heroic stories of their loved ones. In doing so, the legacy will live on. *Chrispin Mphande, Mzuzu University*

# Clean Beaches Project baseline study results

By: Joshua Veenstra, Maximilian Ziech, Faith Manda & Amons Longwe, URAC

Malawi experiences cholera outbreaks almost annually. Up to 800 cases of cholera have been reported in 2018 with some 25 deaths according to reports by the Epidemiology Unit of the Ministry released this month. Among areas most affected are lakeshore districts of Karonga and Nkhata Bay where open defecation is common. The main reasons for open defecation are sandy soils and lack of skills to build on such soils. The situation is worse for fishing villages on beaches.

As a way to contribute to solving the challenge URAC is implementing a clean beaches project. To get the right ideas before actual project activities, a baseline study was conducted in January 2018 with a focus on both the migrant and original villagers.

The study interviewed 48 people from purposively selected 10 beach villages from Tukombo to Mdyaka. The data which were captured and processed using the SPSS program revealed there is a serious need for intervention on issues of safe water and sanitation.

## Results of the Questionnaire for Original Villagers

The original villagers whose living depends on fishing have problems to access safe water. The use of soap is as well a problem.

Out of 48 villagers who were interviewed, 40 people have toilets, 8 persons do not have a toilet and 6 out of these 8, attributed their failing to have toilet to sandy soils which makes toilet construction a problem. Also, 4 interviewees use their neighbour's toilet while the other 2 use the bush as their place of defecation and the remaining 2 said they bury in the sand.

On water for washing plates/clothes, it was revealed that out of 48 interviewees, 33 use the lake, 3 use rivers, 2 use a tap or a kiosk, 11 use a borehole and the remaining 2 use wells as their water source. The revelation was also made on sources of water for bathing where 3 stated that they use the lake, 3 use the river, 12 use a borehole, 3 use a tap or a kiosk and 4 use a well as their main water sources. 33 out these 48 interviewees use a borehole as source of water for cooking while the other remaining use other sources like the lake. . And lastly, 35 interviewees said that

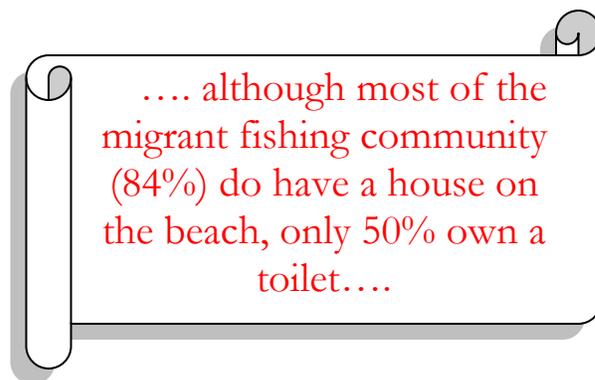
- That means that even people who possess a house don't always have an own toilet.
- But in many villages, there is one communal toilet used by many residents.

The good thing is that all respondents (100%) accepted to contribute monthly money for supporting the project. The

they use a borehole for their drinking water while others use the lake.

However, study also revealed that most of these people keep their drinking as well as cooking water in unsafe utensils like pails. Very few people use soap after changing babies' nappies, before and after eating as most of them only use it for bathing and washing clothes or plates.

The other important issue is that the study reveals that most of the people suffer from Malaria and diarrhea. 36 out of these 48 interviewees revealed that they at times have



been sensitized on safe sanitation by various means like the media and Health Surveillance Assistants from the Hospital

## Results of the Questionnaire for Migrant Fishermen

After visiting many villages along the lakeshore for doing the baseline study we analyzed the collected data using SPSS. Out of the 10 sampled villages and 18 migrant fishermen were identified.

All the 18 respondents indicated that they rely on fishing as their primary source of livelihood. However, 4 people mentioned that they also rely on business as a secondary means of finding money.

Further the study revealed that although most of the migrant fishing community (84%) do have a house on the beach, only 50% own a toilet.

- The main problem for not having a toilet on the beach is the sandy soils which make it really hard to build a toilet. And instead of using toilet, many defecate on the sand and later bury it.

contributions ranged from MK200 to MK500 as the charts below illustrate.

This newsletter provides insights on urban & rural development issues in Malawi and what URAC does and plans to do to contribute to realization of SDGs through action research, advocacy, collaboration, and community capacity building in these thematic areas: water and sanitation, health, environment, housing, urban food security, disaster risk management, cross border interaction, livelihoods, local governance, land and resources tenure security, watershed and wetlands management. URAC thus creates a platform for voices of communities, researchers, students and practitioners to provoke action by policy and decision makers

Hygiene practice and behaviour is very low. None of the respondents we asked uses soap before eating while only 21% use soap after using the toilet. Likewise, the use of soap after changing baby nappies was surprisingly low (see table). Similar studies in urban areas have revealed low hygiene behavioral practices. For example, Manda (2009) found that only 2% washed hands before eating despite soap being available.

When it comes to the sources of water, the results show that the main source for bathing and washing the clothes

Times when soap is used	Responses
Bathing	18
Washing Clothes/Plates	18
Before Eating	0
After Eating	3
After Using the Toilet	11
After Changing Baby nappies	2
Total	52

Number of respondents using soap (N=48). The question envisaged multiple responses.

and plates is the lake. For drinking and cooking the main source is the borehole in many of the villages. Almost everyone stores drinking water and most of them use pails for storing.

Therefore, interventions that can prevent diseases such as cholera or dysentery are needed in the following areas:

- Water storage to prevent infections
- Hand washing with soap awareness and education
- Toilet construction education or training and awareness in fast sand
- General human waste disposal education and awareness.

## Religion during disasters: Wounding or Healing?

Religion in Malawi has been used positively and negatively during disaster. In Malawi there are three major religions. In this article, I reflect on how African Traditional Religions, Islam and Christianity have been both *wounding* and *healing* in times of disaster.

Positively, religions use prayer to deal with disaster. African Traditional Religions consult spirit beings in times of drought for rains to come. This is positive in that it strengthens hope among the believing community that there can be light at the end of the tunnel. African traditional prayers have been linked to bringing rain.

Christians have also prayed to end draught. In the late 19th Century, we have a classical example where Angus Elmslie, a medical doctor and later an ordained minister of Livingstonia Mission prayed for the rains. The rains fell soon after the prayers (Elmslie, 1886). Indeed, it was because of this incident that Chief Mbelwa granted Livingstonia Mission a place at Njuyu for a mission station. This was especially powerful because African traditional prayers did not bring an end to the two months' drought that had struck the land. In the incident at Njuyu, Chief Mbelwa and his followers had sacrificed cattle to the ancestral spirits so that the rains would come, but this did not happen.

Other examples, where African Traditionalists offer prayers to end drought in Malawi are many. In Misuku Hills among the Sukwa, traditional prayers are made to the ancestral spirits of the departed chiefs at their graveyard to



Masyeto: where the chiefs are buried

end draught. Mungoma is one area where such prayers are done. Beer is used as sacrifice to the spirits in the prayers. The place where the chiefs are buried is the Masyeto (Gadama, 2010).

Rain making prayers are also done at Chikang'ombe among the Tumbuka in Rumphi. Prayers are made to the nature Spirit that inhabits the mountain (Ncozana 2002). In the Center such prayers are made at for example, the Chisumphu Cult. Here, prayers are made to ancestral spirits (Phiri, 1997). In the South of Malawi, prayers are made at the Bimbi Cult among mainly the Yao (Amanze, 2002).

Another positive element in the two religions is their teaching on conserving nature which is key in preventing

draught. In African Traditional Religions, people are forbidden to cut trees and clear vegetation in places that are sacred. The places of worship are sacred and preserved. An example here is a place known as Khulubvi in Chikwawa District (Kalemba 1997).

Both Christianity and Islam teach their faithfuls to preserve and care for nature according to the Judaistic teachings on which both religions are built. In Christianity, the Genesis creation story teaches that human beings must care for the environment. Lately, *Laudato Si*, a Catholic Papal document has specifically dealt with this need of Christians caring for nature. Nature according to this document must not be treated with inferiority. It must be treated with dignity. The Chancellor College, Theology and Religious Department contributed to the conservation project of the Lake Chirwa Basin a booklet from a religious point of view (Moyo & Ott, 2002). Mzuzu University has a Doctoral Thesis specifically highlighting the position of the Bible on caring for the Environment. Its main argument is that Christians must treat the environment as part of the family of God (Khisi, 2017).



In addition, Christianity and Islam have provided practical help in the times of water related disasters. During floods or hunger these religions have offered practical help to the victims. Some have provided food or other relief items. An example here is what the Baptist church did in Zomba District through its Lydia Foundation ministry. They provided iron sheets and plastic sheets to reroof churches and homes (Lydia Report December 2017).

There are many other Christian groups that provide help during disasters. In Karonga some churches provided accommodation to those that had homes destroyed by floods.

However, religions have not always been helpful in dealing with water related disasters. In some Christian

## Introducing Mzuzu Urban Farmers Network (MUFNet)

With over 20% of global food supply produced in urban areas, the importance of urban farming grows as does the shift of the populations to urban settlements. Mzuzu Urban Farmers network (MUFNET) is a network of small scale subsistence farmers established by Urban

circles, there have been teachings that these disasters have come because of the sinfulness of Malawians. Repentance prayers at national level have been organised by such Christians. However, African Traditionalists have recently come into the limelight for causing death of innocent people, especially the elderly, during drought. The African traditional belief that elderly people possess magical powers to withhold rains is one of the most unfortunate things a religion has ever brought in Malawi. The President of Malawi, Arthur Mutharika, even spoke against such beliefs in 2017 when some elderly people were murdered in some parts of the country allegedly for withholding rains. Mr Thindwa, a Secularist has fought hard against such African Traditional beliefs.

### Conclusion

Religion in Malawi must rid itself of teachings and practices that are wounding to Malawians during disaster. Religions must be healing towards those that fall victim to natural disasters.

*Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, Mzuzu University*

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income urban farmers in Mzuzu city (Malawi) through improved food security and income generation.

MUFNet has 132 active members in the 15 political wards of Mzuzu city. MUFNet members contribute a minimum of K100 (Eu0.80) per month to a revolving savings and loans scheme from which members get loans for inputs like seed and fertilizers. As seen in the table there is a clear gender dimension to urban food security.



Strawberry & maize garden at Mphatso Motel © Mtafu Manda

## Water, sanitation and health challenge at Ngara beach village, Karonga

A row of rundown, grass-thatched pit latrines on the roadside at Ngara fishing village in Karonga is the first thing that greets travellers on M1 Road

These overgrown, tiny shacks that line up the heavily populated cluster on the northern shores of Lake Malawi offer a glimpse of the major cause of cholera in the fishing village.

They are too few for the locals and residents, leaving many defaecating in the open and in the lake where they draw drinking water.

The derelict latrines reflect the fishers' struggle to find land for the sanitation facilities in the sandy beach strip.

The soils and population pressure force the locals to construct shallow latrines along the busy motorway where the soils are firmer.

Ngara has registered over 20 cholera cases since November 1

"We can't dig deep because the water table is just too high," says Chief Mwirang'ombe's adviser, Mwangende Sichali.

When it rains, running water washes away human waste into the lake, almost 50 metres away.

"It is a struggle here," he says. "We can't find proper land for toilets. Only concrete toilets can stand stronger in the lakeside sands."

But the main challenge is that the locals lack financial muscle to buy cement for toilets, Sichali explains.

Through the support of URAC, MUFNet seeks to benefit from government food security programmes such as the input subsidy programme to help increase productivity to satisfy the growing market of fresh food in Mzuzu City.

In this way URAC and MUFNet aspire to contribute not only to food security but also job creation and the general urban economy of Mzuzu. As such URAC calls on Mzuzu City council to formulate bylaws that reconcile the needs environmental concerns with food security needs of the rapidly growing city. *Benjamin Shaba, Planning Student, Mzuzu University*

WARD	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Zolozolo West	4	8	12
Katawa	1	14	15
Jombo	5	4	9
Mchengautuwa West	9	6	15
Luwinga	5	5	10
Msongwe	1	19	3
Chibavi East	5	5	10
Lusangazi	6	2	8
Lupasao	6	4	10
Chiputula	5	5	10
Mchengautuwa East	3	4	7
Masasa	6	4	10
Zolozola East	1	6	7
Chiwanja	3	3	6
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>132</b>



Ngara Beach Village, Karonga has been one of the major cholera problem areas due to compromised WASH. Pix: courtesy of *Nation Online*, <http://mw-nation.com/inside-ngara-fishing-village/>

He explains: "The fishing village has just two or three concrete toilets. The other latrines, along the M1 Road, are mostly shallow, unsanitary and far from the camp.

Lack of latrines pushes the fisherfolk to defaecate in water or nearby shrubbery.

“We really need financial support to have concrete toilets,” says the village elder.

Ngara is among the hardest-hit cholera hotspots in Karonga where the outbreak has affected 199 people and killed four in three months.

According to Ministry of Health (MoH) spokesperson Joshua Malango, the watery diarrhoea caused by a breakdown in sanitation and hygiene has hit about 275 people in six districts countrywide.

Besides Karonga, other affected districts are Lilongwe, Nkhata Bay, Salima, Kasungu and Dowa.

The highly infectious sanitation-related diarrhoeal disease is also likely to spread to 16 districts of the country, the ministry warns.

Malango says Karonga remains the worst hit, having recorded almost two thirds of the national burden.

Over 20 cases occurred at Ngara alone, says Sichali.

The disease spreads rapidly because of the poor sanitation at the overcrowded camp.

“Fishers from far and wide camp here. They come in several boats carrying up to 10 people each. All these sleep in one house without a toilet. Some defaecate in bushes, others run to the lake. The first cholera case spread rapidly because of such poor sanitation practices,” he says.

Ngara’s vulnerability to cholera is a story of social, economic and geographical barriers faced by lakeshore communities.

In 2008, the country adopted the Community-Led Total Sanitation Policy to ensure every home owns and uses a sanitary latrine.

The push to end open defaecation was envisaged to reduce cholera and other sanitation-related diseases that account for 53 percent of patients in the county’s health facilities.

According to Minister of Health Atupele Muluzi, only 69 out of 295 traditional authorities have achieved the open defaecation status.

“Balaka was the first full district to be awarded the status in November 2017. So far, 31 percent of villages still need to meet the required standards,” he said.

The sluggish race to ensure every household owns a latrine raises questions if there are any solutions to overcome the sanitation gap in beach villages?

Water and sanitation specialist Christopher Chindole urges locals to adopt eco-san latrines for sandy and waterlogged terrains.

“There are eco-san toilets, called skyloo. One doesn’t have to dig a foundation. The toilets are built from the surface as long as there is a slab,” he says.

Chindole says the low-cost latrines can be constructed using locally -found reeds, bamboos and other locally available materials.

“We need to upscale campaigns to make people in cholera-prone beach villages aware of technologies,” he says.

The cholera outbreak in Karonga is linked with an earlier spate in Mbeya District, Tanzania, which borders Karonga.

Chindole says the country failed to contain the first public health crisis because sanitation issues have been neglected nationwide.

“It appears government and most nongovernmental organisations have shifted their attention and funding from sanitation issues to disaster and climate change,” he says.

Government invested funds from the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF) in a project to create demand for improved sanitation and hygiene facilities in Nkhotakota, Rumphu, Balaka, Ntchisi, Chikwawa and Phalombe.

Only four out of the six districts have achieved the open defaecation-free (ODF) status when the project phased out last year.

“In most districts, people are still practising open defecation and we have a long way to achieve the ODF status across the country,” says Chindole.

But Malango says government has not shifted its attention away from sanitation.

“Water, sanitation, hygiene and climate change are all government’s priority areas.”

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## Cholera: A challenge for development workers

The cholera outbreak that has affected thirteen of the country’s 28 districts including the capital city, Lilongwe, manifests how poverty, combined with poor environmental, health and urban planning, can destroy family, community and national welfare and resources.

Heavy rains, poor hygiene practices and capacity shortage to address the impact of climate change, also increases people’s vulnerability to floods and water borne diseases such as cholera.

As vibrio cholerae, the bacteria that carries cholera, swept the nation, in its wake infecting 679 people and dehydrating to death 6 victims of contaminated water or food in areas inadequately serviced with clean drinking water and sanitation facilities, attention has been drawn to the fertile grounds hidden in poor settlements around large cities and emerging urban areas.

A 2014 ‘Survey of Urban Poor Settlements in Lilongwe’ conducted by the Lilongwe Urban Poor People’s Network (LUPPEN) and ActionAid Malawi noted that failure to

provide the city's poor settlements with affordable social services, stagnates the living standards of the poor in informal settlements.

Malawi is one of the fastest urbanising countries in the world, with rural to urban migration in the major cities of Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Zomba and Blantyre striking 4.4 percent, 4.4 percent, 3.0 percent and 2.8 percent respectively.

The recent cholera wave has mostly affected Karonga, Mzuzu, Kasungu, Salima and Nkhata Bay districts, which are quasi-urban growth centre in rural areas deliberately created to influence urbanisation away from the major cities by providing attractive urban facilities such as schools, clinics, roads, markets, business environments to catalyse small and medium enterprises.

However, failure to supply adequate water and electricity has remained a challenge to this drive which has seen a growth of rural people racing to these centres in search of opportunities.

The increase in urban population has proved to be a major challenge to public health and urban planning as poor residents resort to settle in risk-prone areas that expose them to environmental hazards that include waste accumulation, air and water pollution.

Without safe drinking water, the urban poor collect water supplies (which are mostly used untreated) from boreholes and unprotected shallow wells. Various laboratory tests of water samples in some of these areas confirm that the water is contaminated and not suitable for human consumption.

In Karonga, the epicentre of the cholera outbreak, the district Epidemic Response Committee reported that poor water supply and sanitation, especially in fishing communities, were fuelling the spread of the disease.

Traditional Authority Mwirang'ombe told the committee that cases reported to health facilities indicate that the most affected were fishing families leaving in temporal settlements with no toilets along Lake Malawi.

"People from these fishing communities drink from, and defecate in, the lake," he said.

Amos Tizora, Executive Director for Circle for Integrated Community Development (CICOD) says transmission of cholera can be contained if the country shifted its response activities from disaster management to long term disaster risk management which will tackle the root causes of the outbreaks.

Factors that contribute to the spread of cholera include overpopulation, unplanned urbanisation, and environmental degradation. Lack of clean drinking water; low coverage of pit latrines, lack of hand washing facilities, poor sanitation in public markets, and cross-border disease spread as well as cultural perceptions such as belief in witchcraft and 'the act of God' also play significant roles.

Long distances to access health care centres, poor case management due to shortage of supplies or lack of knowledge among health workers contribute to high cholera case fatality rates in Malawi.

However, a participatory, community-led, multi-dimensional approach into extensive investments, municipal finances, legislation, social policies, urban planning and others in needed to bail out the country's vulnerable and at-risk populations.

*By Charles Mkenla, Hyphen Media*



**Dr. H. Koppel (right) of Malawi Freunde Rottenburg e.V. continues fundraising for Malawi projects. In picture Dr. Koppel receives a cheque from a well-wisher.**

## URAC BOARD MEMBERS HOLD MEETING

Board members of URAC met in Mzuzu recently to review the work URAC has been doing so far. They also contributed to future plans for the organization.

At the meeting Prof David Mphande and Ms. Maria Chimbalanga were conformed as chairman and secretary respectively.

### The full board composition is as follows:

- Prof. David Mphande, University of Livingstonia, Ekwendeni
- Mr. Mike Moyo, Urban Planner, Lilongwe
- Dr. Levi Manda, Development Communication Expert, Blantyre
- Ms. Maria Chambala, Nurse, Mzuzu
- Mr. Hastings Banda, Village chief, Chintheche
- Mr. Bernard Silungwe, MUFNet Member, Mzuzu



