



UN Volunteer Andrea Medaas (Norway) and a member of the Phaie community in the Chinguluwe Extension Planning Area go over traditional agriculture tasks divided by gender, during a monitoring and evaluation visit to Salima District in Central Malawi. (Emma Gausi / UNV Malawi, 2016.)

In Malawi, empowering women in every aspect

Since March 2016, Andrea Medaas from Norway has been serving as a UN Youth Volunteer at the UN Women Country Office in Lilongwe, Malawi, assigned to the Women's Economic Empowerment programmatic unit. There she and her colleagues work towards the ultimate goal of ensuring that women in Malawi are economically empowered and benefit from development.

In her position, she finds herself working across different projects focused on empowering women in every aspect. One week she may be in the field monitoring business and entrepreneurship trainings for producer group members, and the next she may be representing her programmatic team at a Gender and Climate Change training for Members of Parliament. One thing is for sure, there is always something to be done.

One of the project she works with most closely promotes the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). With partners and private sector entities, she promotes women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community through the application of the WEPs.

"When companies sign the WEPs, we work with them to ensure that gender equality is a

priority in the way they do business," said Andrea, "not only because it is right, but also because the inclusion of women in the private sector makes financial sense, and leads to economic gains."

"We have launched the WEPs in all regions and nine companies have signed and become champions of the WEPs in the Malawian private sector," she was happy to add.

Andrea enjoys getting out of the office and meeting with beneficiaries who are seeing real changes and improvements to their livelihoods and futures, through the projects that UN Women are implementing.

"One of the most memorable conversations I have had in Malawi was with a woman named Loveness Moses, a 73-year-old mother of eight, who is a beneficiary of the support provided by the Extension Officers who were trained by UN Women," Andrea recalled. This support enabled Mrs. Moses to attend adult literacy classes, and at the age of 73 learn how to read and write. "From there, she was empowered to become a lead farmer in her community, where she is now a champion of gender equality at household level, and an advocate for education," Andrea said.

“ “I hope to continue to champion the rights of women and girls in my future work and remember, in all of my ventures, that no one should be left behind in the pursuit of a more just, equal and fair world.”

For Andrea, this beneficiary serves as a personal inspiration -- a reminder that it's never too late to learn and that empowerment has a ripple effect. "It has the potential to transform not just one life, but generations of lives to follow," the UN Volunteer said. "Women like [Mrs Moses] serve as my motivation to dedicate my time, energy and efforts to the imperative and crucial work of gender equality, and empowering women."

Andrea said that when she was growing up, her family moved around quite a bit; from Norway to the UK, the United States and Russia. "Volunteerism has always appealed to me, especially at a community level – and because first and foremost I consider myself to be a global citizen, my community is the whole world," Andrea said, adding "and that's why it makes sense for me to be a UN Volunteer. Contributing to a mandate of peace and sustainable development has always resounded with me." Andrea attributes "the privilege" of spending many years in Norway, a country with one of the highest gender equality ratings in the world to indelibly influencing her perspective.

"Without gender equality, everywhere, for every person, we will not be able to achieve the objectives of peace and sustainable development and security for humankind," she said. "It feels good to be working towards something that I believe is contributing to a greater good,

and something far larger than myself. My advice for those considering volunteerism is to stop waiting, stop feeling like there is nothing that can be done to address the overwhelming challenges that humanity is facing at this moment in time. Get out there and be proactive. If not you... who? If not now... when?"

30 UN Volunteers are currently deployed to Malawi. They serve with five different UN agencies, including UNICEF, UN Women, UNDP, UNHCR and UNAIDS, in a wide range of positions.



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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 5: Gender equality](#) [SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth](#)