

Hivos Malawi Strategic Partners Meet in Lilongwe

As one way of making sure that the dream of Green and Inclusive Energy (GIE) is achieved in Malawi, Malawian strategic partner organization of the Hivos International funded Green and Inclusive Energy project met in Lilongwe from February 20 – 21, 2017.

The Malawian partners consisting of the National Association of Business Women (NABW), Community Energy Malawi (CEM), Malawi Health Equity Network (MHEN), Youth Network Council (YONECO) and the group coordinator Renew'N'Able Malawi (RENAMA), together with representatives of Hivos' Malawi and Zimbabwe offices, agreed on a number of key steps to make sure the activities on the ground have a lasting impact.

Malawi currently uses hydroelectric energy as her main power source. Although water is a renewable resource, the ten percent supply is not enough to meet demand. Electricity is furthermore concentrated in the urban areas and along main road connections, leaving not only the majority of city citizens, but also the rural masses in dire energy poverty.

Through the Malawi Rural Electrification Program (MAREP), the Malawi Government has taken measures to have the rural masses realize their right to energy. However, electrification rate has not notably increased over the past decade, while the growing population and industry development pushes additional demand.

Therefore, other energy options urgently have to be explored. Again, there is a need for swift energy actions for the future. As the former US President, Barack Obama, once said, “Our future is what we build it to be. The jobs and industries of the 21st century will be centered around clean renewable energy.”

To achieve these future global vision, Hivos Malawi's partners in the Green and Inclusive Energy program have, among others, made plans to increase citizen awareness, public education and advocacy through different communication platforms.

Within the partner's various activities, YONECO will spearhead awareness radio programs for the youth; NABW will be advancing opportunities for energy access and related businesses to women; MHEN will drive a better integration off-grid energy into the health sector development e.g. solar in rural health centers; CEM and RENAMA will be focusing much on pro-poor,

inclusive and renewable-focused policy and strategy advocacy, development of energy education materials and breaking it down to vernacular languages. RENAMA together with all partners will continue facilitating sector information sharing through various regional and national platforms.

There will also be trainings to community members in the partners' multiple existing projects, who are well-placed to take the message of GIE to others. Media awards to reporters who actively promote the GIE message are also in planning. Lastly, recognizing the important part policy makers have, the partners will also meet with specific parliamentary committees to advocate and lobby for a strong commitment of the decision makers to sustainable energy aspects. This is the future of Malawi, therefore, measures have to be put on the ground.

The removal of import duty on off-grid energy equipment like solar system components by the government was a first step into the right direction, as long as private sector players like suppliers let these cost reductions trickle down honestly to customers. Nevertheless, there is still more to be done, especially the removal of VAT on such equipment as well as on imported energy efficient stoves and parts for local assembly, which can create positive impact on affordability of renewable off-grid energy for Malawians.

Speaking at the meeting, Reginald Mapfumo from the Hivos regional headquarters in Zimbabwe, said that a good working relationship among the Hivos Malawi partners in the project will make the objectives achievable. "You need to work together, explore opportunities to have the message taken to the people," he said.

About the author: Wonderful Mkhutche is Advocacy and Communications Officer for Renew'N'Able Malawi (RENAMA)