

NEWS ON THE GO

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Thirty (30) youths in Blantyre's Mpemba area have graduated at Mafe Skills Development Centre after undergoing an intensive three-month skills training in dairy farming.

Meanwhile, the Government has announced that plans are underway to certify Mafe Skills Development Centre as the Technical and Vocational, Education and Training (TVET) institute, providing informal assessment and certification to vulnerable youths through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism.

RPL is a process through which non-formal learning and informal learning are measured, mediated for recognition across different contexts, and certified against the requirements for credit, access, inclusion or advancement in the formal education and training system, or workplace.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) with support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) is implementing the Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning (GPSL3) in Malawi. The GPSL3 aims to provide coordinated and enhanced support to ILO constituents to develop and implement new generation skills and lifelong learning ecosystems, which recognize that education, training, and lifelong learning are fundamental for a decent future of work.



Youths demonstrate lessons from the training

In separate interviews, the youths said the skills acquired during the training would contribute to the livelihood of many smallholders farmers in Malawi through income generation, increased resilience during food crises, and by strengthening social security.

“We are happy that this training has been completed. It is now time for us to go and showcase the skills in our community. They have taught us how to keep animals and generate income from the business,” said 21-year-old Catherine Mkwate.



Catherine during practical training at the centre

She added that the knowledge gained would make her run the dairy farming business productively, stating that smallholder dairy production is important in supporting rural livelihoods.

“Dairy farming provide income opportunities, particularly for women, and high-quality nutrition. It also provides farmers with a form of savings, as farmers often buy livestock when they have extra cash and sell when they need money. Dairy production also generates inputs like organic fertilizer that are important to crop production and can also serve as a form of productive capital, as cattle can be used for ploughing and transporting goods to market,” said Catherine.

Another youth, Chisomo Malekano stated that the training has motivated young people in the area to venture into dairy farming, adding that many youths in the area engage in illicit activities.

“Our friends in the community are suffering. Many of them have been married-off, while others are single parents after being impregnated by irresponsible men. We are luck that we have participated in this training because our friends are busy drinking beer and smoking,” said the 22-year-old.

She has since appealed to relevant authorities to provide financial assistance to Mafe Skills Development Centre, so that more youths could be trained in the area.



Chisomo during practical training at the centre

Meanwhile, Mafe Skills Development Centre proprietor Mphatso Jumbe has expressed gratitude to ILO for enhancing her skills in dairy farming through its Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning (GPSL3) initiative, stating that the partnership with ILO has made her acquire the right skills in dairy farming.

“I never knew what the STED (Skills for Trade and Economic Diversification) approach was until you allowed Mafe to contribute in the dairy farming STED research. It changed my approach to business and allowed me to be able to see the skills gaps in my enterprise, as well as anticipate the skills needed in reference to Mafes strategic plan,” she said. “You have contributed a lot to this given Mafe Farm the right skills and support to develop you have provided for Mafe. It is my hope that this partnership develops and strengthens even further to help change the dynamics in our sector in Ntonda Extension Planning Area (EPA) and beyond.”

Ms. Jumbe said she was hopeful that through partnership with ILO her vision of establishing Mafe Skills Development Centre as a dairy hub and centre of excellency will be achieved.

“Mafe is a very necessary bridge in bringing the right skills to production and value addition in our catchment area and beyond. There is no way we can do any development without human development. Mafe’s strategic intent builds on providing a productive environment for young people. Mafe focuses on providing great support to women to thrive in this business. Mafe is committed to developing every farmer’s capacity to produce and make profits,” she said.

Ms. Jumbe narrated that ever since she took over the running of the farm after the demise of her father, she has been providing on-farm apprenticeship to young people in Malawi.

“I took this farm after my father died. They said I won’t make it; it was not for young women. It was not expected because I am a woman, young, and educated. I clean my own khola feed; my own animals just as well as I can build a strategic plan for Mafe with hope that the next generation will take it. Our sector is not sustainable without young people,” she said.



Mphatso speaks during the graduation ceremony

Meanwhile, Ministry of Labour Skills Development Deputy Director Richard Chirwa said the Government was committed towards developing skills that would contribute to gainful employment in the country.

Officiating at the graduation ceremony, Mr. Chirwa said since the country was grappling with high unemployment levels among young people, there was need to improve the value chain and entrepreneurship in the dairy sector.

“These (dairy) skills will help the youths get gainful employment and contribute to social economic development of the country. It is unfortunate that the country had only been focusing on skills like bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, welding, and metal fabrication. But the agriculture sector is where we can develop skills for gainful employment looking at the fact that Malawi is agro-based economy,” said Mr. Chirwa.



Mr. Chirwa officiating at the graduation ceremony

And ILO National Project Coordinator Patrick Makondesa said the dairy sector has a huge potential to contribute to job creation in line with the Malawian Government’s commitment of creating one million jobs, if it is properly developed.



Mr. Makondesa speaks during the graduation ceremony

Mr. Makondesa added that there was need for the Government to invest in the dairy sector focusing on the value chain involved in the sector.

“We were approached by Ministry of Trade and Industry to help them implement the national export strategy and through that ILO supported the Government of Malawi to run a STED (Skills for Trade and Economic Diversification) study to understand the value chain in various sectors in the national export strategy. We looked at the skills gap that are existing in the dairy sector. We are now implementing some of the recommendations provided in the STED dairy study and MAFE Skills Development Center is a baby of the ILO Global Programme on Skills and lifelong Learning,” he said.

