

Sunday Times

COMMENT

Freedom of Expression, Our Birthright

Too much liquor is wasting Malawi's foundations

Almost at every corner of our streets and market places, there are dangerous activities taking place. Activities that not only pose a threat to people's security but the very future of the nation.

Among the activities that need serious attention is the selling of illicit alcohol and drugs of various sorts.

Going through these streets, one will have that depressing reality of the youth being wasted through the consumption of these drinks with reckless abandon.

And, to make it more frightening is the fact that these youths, aged mostly between 18 and 39 years old are the people who are in their productive years of life. Actually, some may be under 18. This is a serious problem that must leave every well-meaning Malawian worried.

Asking them what exactly prompts them to such unproductive and careless behaviour their common mantra is that "they have nothing worthwhile to do that can keep them busy and start earning a living."

At the first instance, such excuses might sound flimsy as they come and one can easily say they are just about a people who have failed to tame their urges and addictions.

But on a second thought, we need not give such people an excuse of indulging in such behaviours.

We can argue on several fora that the government and other non-governmental organisations made interventions to curb this behaviour by, among other things, introducing loans for the youths in order for them to venture into businesses and other things that can make them occupied and make their lives worthwhile.

However, accessing such opportunities for the youth is a hustle itself harder than spending time on a ramshackle shebeen where, unfortunately, their lives are being wasted.

At best, we would have loved if the interventions such as the loans and what have you are implemented in a way that is not only on paper but practical.

Let us say, for instance, the youth should at first be equipped with necessary skills while at the same time being empowered with financial management skills as well as psychosocial training. Having such would provide a well-tailored package for the youth.

Besides, to make the loans programme worthwhile, there is need to depoliticise them so that every youth regardless of party affiliation can access them.

We should remember that every great nation is built on the foundation of the youth. Any nation that stands aside and watch its youths drowning themselves in the dregs of alcoholism is drunk on its own making.

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This is true. We took time to count liquor selling points one by one in just three townships of Chibavi, Chibanja and Chiputula.

The three combined have over 190 selling points. The city has 15 wards.

This means the more the bars, the more accessible alcohol is to people, particularly the young ones.

MCC Environmental Health Officer Llyod Gomani said there is a procedure one has to undergo before operating a liquor business.

Gomani said they conduct inspections every month through a team from the Health Directorate and every liquor selling premise that breaches the terms and condition of the license given risk closure of their premises as well as having their license revoked.

However, owing to the blossoming trend of liquor selling points, Gomani said the council has been alerted.

"The council has noted that there have been a number of premises that are being opened without following the procedure.

"The council together with Police has plans to raid the premises that are selling liquor illegally. Through the Liquor Board

Shebeens, cheap liquor wreck lives

different measures have been put in place to curb illegal liquor vendors one of which will be a joint inspection of different Inspectors from different stakeholder such as Malawi Bureau of Standards, Police, Mzuzu District Health Office as well as CSOs. This joint inspection will target all liquor selling premises licensed as well as unlicensed to enforce the bylaws that govern liquor selling business," he said in a written response to a questionnaire.

Other interventions

Last year, the sale of locally distilled beer and other imported spirits made headlines when the infamous "Ambuye N'tengeni," claimed the lives of some young people at Manase in Blantyre.

Police had to swiftly come in to control the situation by invading the unlicensed beer sellers and confiscating the killer products.

However, the business now continues.

South West Police deputy police spokesperson Beatrice Bwanali, said

that they still conduct the operations.

"The offences include operating a liquor business without permit or license. Another is failing to display a liquor license. We still conduct the operations and those found in contraventions are arrested," he said.

What do anti-drug abuse activists say?

Drug Fight Malawi Executive Director Nelson Zakeyu is on record to have said that the country can control importation and sale of unregulated alcohol if the policy was prioritized.

Executive Director for Young Achievers for Development Jefferson Milanzi blamed it on non-implementation of alcohol policy.

"The policy was adopted but is yet to be implemented. The policy outlines guidelines on accessibility and availability of alcohol. It also talks of penalties. However, since we have been sitting on it, that is why we are in this situation," he said.

Christopher Mhone Programmes Manager at St John of God suggested that

there is need for concerted efforts to raise awareness around harms associated with alcohol and drug use.

Mhone said there is also a need to encourage early seeking behaviour for those with alcohol drug use addiction.

He further suggested a review of policies on alcohol to address age restriction on accessing alcohol and drugs and restrict advertising of alcohol.

"We also need to ban the use of celebrities as brand ambassadors for alcohol related products, ban promotion of alcohol products, and reinforce implementation of the policy. Further alcohol producers should pay ring fenced taxes to go towards rehabilitation services for drug and alcohol users," he suggested.

Government's past action

In 2015, the Government banned the sale of liquor sachets in all outlets. However, it has been learnt that the same products are now being sold in bottles which undermines the decision.



BY REBECCA CHIMJEKA
MATEMBA, BELEM,
BRAZIL

Terra Global Capital has singled out Malawi as a country with vast potential to scale up nature-based solutions in the fight against climate change—if decisive national action is taken to curb deforestation and strengthen carbon market readiness.

Speaking on the sidelines of the ongoing COP30 Summit in Belém, Managing Director for Natural Resource Management at Terra Global Capital, Erica Meta Smith, said Malawi's degraded landscapes present both a challenge and an opportunity.

"Malawi has experienced significant historical deforestation. There are areas that are degraded, eroded or too steep to support agriculture. These are exactly the landscapes where nature-based solutions like agroforestry and forest restoration can thrive," she said.

Smith explained that restoring such areas can increase carbon stocks and position Malawi to earn revenue through carbon credits—both from

Malawi gets attention at global climate summit



SMITH—Malawi has experienced significant historical deforestation

emission removals and emission reductions.

"For removals, we increase forest cover and grow carbon landscapes. For reductions, we protect the last remaining forests from further destruction. Both pathways can generate carbon credits, provided Malawi follows market standards to ensure the emission reductions are verifiable and tradeable," she said.

Smith noted that Terra Global is working with Malawi in three protected areas Nyika Vwaza, and Nkhosha—where

conservation efforts are progressing, though nationwide deforestation remains a major concern.

"It is sad to see how much forest Malawi has lost in the past 15 years. There is great potential to reverse this, and Terra Global stands ready to support. But we are waiting for clear action from the Government of Malawi," she said, pointing to the Kulera Landscape REDD+ Program as Malawi's most successful model so far.

The Kulera Program launched in 2009, was Africa's first Verified

Carbon Standard (VCS) and Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Triple Gold REDD+ project. It remains Malawi's longest-running and largest REDD+ initiative.

The program has Produced more than 3.3 million Verified Carbon Units (VCUs) generating \$22 million (about K38.2 billion) for forest protection and community development supporting 350,000 people living within 5 kilometres of protected areas covering over 700,000 hectares of forests.

Meanwhile, Director of Economic Planning and Coordinator for the Regional Climate Resilience Programme (RCRP-2), Adwell Zembere said the government is scaling up nature-based solutions nationally through a major World Bank-funded programme.

According to Zembere, Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) will be the hallmark of interventions under RCRP-2, which is being implemented by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization.