YONECO VOICE

Monthly Newsletter September 2026 Issue 9 Volume 13

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Our Programmes

- **Youth Development.**
- **Child Protection and Development.**
- **Women Empowerment and Gender Equality.**
- **Governance and Human Rights.**
- **Media, Collaboration, Networking and Coordinating.**
- **Climate Change and Disaster Management.**
- **Institutional Management.**
- **Research and Documentation**

About Us

Our Vision

A self-reliant, healthy, empowered, resilient, responsible, and inclusive society that respects democratic values and principles.

Our Mission

We are committed to empowering the youth, women and children, promoting good health, human rights and democratic culture, adapting and mitigating the impact of climate change and conducting research for evidence-based programming and advocacy

Our values

Integrity
Teamwork
Confidentiality
Respect for human dignity
Transparency and Accountability

YONECO VOICE-Monthly Newsletter
September 2026

Executive Director's Note...

with MacBain Mkandawire

Dear Reader,

September 2026 is here, leaving us with only three months until the end of the year. A lot has happened and continues to unfold. Despite everything, our focus must on making sound decisions to ensue that our efforts are yielding positive results.

A new academic year is set to begin on 14th September. As a Chichewa adage goes, liwiro la mumchenga nkuyambira limodzi (A fair start makes for a fair race). It is crucial that all continuing students and those of school-going age start together with their peers on the first day. This is also a period of zinamwali (initiation ceremonies), with young boys and girls currently in initiation camps. We must recognize the urgency of time and ensure all ceremonies conclude before the new academic term commences. Initiation rites should not interfere with students' return to school. Parents, guardians, community members and leaders, should all play a role in ensuring that children are enjoying their fundamental right to education.

Learners who start school later than their peers often struggle to catch up. Consequently, the students end up losing interest in education altogether. When this happens, it is not just the individual child who loses out, the entire nation also loses a potential leader, innovator, brilliant educator and what-have-you. A timely start gives every child an equal opportunity to learn, settle into school and succeed in his or her studies.

As schools are about to open, students must also understand that their right to education comes with associated responsibilities. We urge all parents and guardians to encourage students, especially those who have passed national examinations and are in high spirits, to avoid risky behaviors and excessive last-minute celebrations. Furthermore, young people should not let excitement about the end of the holiday lead to drug and substance abuse or other risky behaviors that could prevent them from returning to or remaining in school.

The world commemorates International Literacy Day on 8th September 2026. The theme for this year's celebration is "Literacy for People, the Planet, and Prosperity." This year's International Literacy Day has its own significance; it marks the Day's 60th anniversary. In this regard, let us remember that literacy extends beyond the ability to read and write. Literacy further equips individuals with knowledge and skills that enable them to make sound decisions, meaningfully participate in socioeconomic activities and contribute effectively to sustainable development of their societies. Literacy is essential to development. As such, it is critical for Malawi to prioritize investingg in literacy to achieve sustainable growth and national prosperity. Malawi needs to create enabling learning environments where children acquire essential skills and knowledge that are critical for development.

On a sad note, it is everyone's prayer to see an end to the current economic challenges which Malawi is wrestling with. However, the expected end seems not yet in sight. Malawi is still grappling with economic challenges like high levels of public debt which also have a negative bearing on the wellbeing of families and children. The various economic hardships can potentially increase vulnerability to child labor, child marriage, school dropout, exploitation and other forms of abuse. As such, child protection and welfare

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must remain central to the country's efforts to improve the economy and achieve prosperity. Economic recovery and strengthening efforts should translate into reduced household pressure and an improved quality of life for children and families.

The political environment in Malawi continues to deteriorate, and the escalating strife can only lead the country to a catastrophe. The ongoing debate over the independence and authority of the Speaker and the entire legislature, which constitutes one of the three arms of government, is a critical issue. Any misunderstanding that arises from this should be resolved through constitutional, parliamentary and other democratic processes.

There is a need to remember that differences of opinion are normal and necessary in a democratic dispensation. This being our case, we should always ensure that political disagreements are not descending into intimidation, personal attacks, or any other actions that undermine our cherished democracy. Sadly, the impact of uncontrolled tempers and intolerance has far-reaching consequences on the rights and welfare of the people we are mandated to serve.

This is our call for responsible political leadership in Malawi. The country needs leaders who believe in tolerance, engagement, and dialogue. As a nation, we are facing many socioeconomic challenges. The least our leaders could do is to redirect their energy and time from petty politics to finding solutions that improve citizens' welfare.

Malawi is going into the 2026/2027 agricultural season with concerns over the potential effects of the impending El Niño. The seasonal outlook indicates a high likelihood of below-normal rainfall and severe dry conditions across the country, particularly in the central and southern region districts. We commend the Malawi government, through the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) for strengthening preparedness for this impending disaster by activating Tier 1 Drought Early Warning Actions. However, we need to do more as some rivers and streams are still flowing. We should consider using various irrigation techniques to support farming communities. Additionally, these actions should not be left to the government alone. All actors and stakeholders must join forces in a concerted effort to protect our available food and water resources.

As a country, it is time to promote the rights and welfare of youth, women, children and all vulnerable groups of people. We must also promote responsible political dialogue and prepare our communities for climate-related risks. As we are addressing the contemporary challenges, let us also ensure that we are also building a stronger and more resilient Malawi of tomorrow.

Have a wonderful September, 2026

YONECO
Youth Net and Counselling

Sustaining Institutional Growth and Independence for Social and Economic Development of Youth, Women and Children.

YONECO CULTURAL TROUPE

Experts in: Community Mobilization
Advocacy
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YONECO Equips Chitipa Youth with Business and Financial Skills

Members of Twafwane Youth Club in the district posing for a photo with YONECO field officer after the session.

YONECO has equipped members of Twafwane Youth Club in Chitipa with practical business planning and financial management skills aimed at promoting youth entrepreneurship and self-reliance.

The session covered identifying viable business opportunities, calculating start-up costs, budgeting, record-keeping, saving and separating business finances from personal money.

Participants also developed business ideas for various ventures suited to the needs and opportunities in their local communities.

"The training has equipped me with relevant knowledge and skills. I feel more confident to start a business and become self-reliant," said Gilbert Kaghange, a Tafwane Youth Club member.

YONECO has scheduled additional training sessions targeting 20 other youth clubs across the district.

Nsanje, Chikwawa Youth Urged to Harness Opportunities for a Better Future

On 15th August 2026, YONECO participated in the 2026 Youth Conference that was held at Chikwawa Police Ground. The conference brought together youth from Chikwawa and Nsanje Police Youth Clubs. The session was held under the theme "One Vision, Many Voices – Unlocking Limitless Potential," the event emphasized the importance of youth collaboration and blending ideas to thrive in life.

YONECO's District Manager for Chikwawa, Mabel Makondetsa, attended the function as the guest of honour. In her remarks, she encouraged the youth to use various available platforms including the social media to voice pertinent issues affecting them, highlighting their crucial role in building a better community and future.

Part of the group that participated in the conference.

"YONECO's doors are open to every youth to showcase their talents and potential skills," she stated. "Our organization is committed to nurturing young people through capacity-building sessions, aligning with the government's Vision 2063 on human capital development."

She further emphasized that a young person's voice extends beyond social media, explaining that youth express themselves daily through their choices, associations, education, relationships, and decisions about their future.

Sergeant Edina Chilemba, Youth Coordinator for Chikwawa Police, noted that the country's prisons are filled with young people capable of contributing to national development. She urged the youth from Nsanje and Chikwawa to focus on skills development.

The event also facilitated the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and skills between the two youth clubs. The Chikwawa Youth Club showcased their income-generating activity of making soya flour. Additionally, the youth presented sporting activities and drama aimed at promoting good health, critical thinking and decision-making.

Interns Profiles

Ireen Maluwa is a fourth-year Bachelor of Arts in Humanities student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA). She is currently undertaking her internship at YONECO Headquarters in Zomba under the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Department. Ireen is using the opportunity to expand her professional skills while gaining a deeper understanding of development and community-focused programming.

Valencia Menyani is a fourth-year Bachelor of Arts in Development Economics student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA). She is currently attached to YONECO Headquarters in Zomba under the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Department. Her internship is helping her strengthen her skills in research, data management, and understanding how evidence contributes to development interventions.

Natasha Chikatentha is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Economics at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR). As a fourth-year student, she is gaining hands-on experience with YONECO's Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Department in Zomba. Natasha is interested in using her knowledge and skills to contribute to sustainable development and community empowerment.

Wisdom Yohane Gomiwa is a fourth-year Bachelor of Social Science student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA). He is currently attached to YONECO Headquarters in Zomba, where he is developing practical skills in research, monitoring and evaluation. His internship is providing an opportunity to connect classroom learning with real-world development work.

Jonathan Nkhata is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Community Development at the Catholic University of Malawi. He is currently serving as an intern with YONECO and is attached to the organisation's District Office in Chikwawa. Jonathan is particularly interested in community development and youth empowerment, while his internship is helping him build practical skills in project monitoring, data collection, reporting, and community mobilisation.

Interns Profiles

Vumiliah Cecilia Chizimba is a fourth-year Bachelor of Arts in Development Economics student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA). She is undertaking her internship with YONECO's Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Department in Zomba. Vumiliah is keen to broaden her knowledge of development programming while strengthening her research and analytical skills.

Mphatso Manjandimo is a fourth-year Bachelor of Arts in Economics student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA). He is currently completing his internship with YONECO's Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Department at the organisation's Headquarters in Zomba. Through the placement, Mphatso is building practical experience in research, data analysis, and programme monitoring.

Brandina Banda is a fourth-year Bachelor of Arts in Humanities student at the University of Malawi (UNIMA). She is currently an intern with YONECO's Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Department in Zomba. Her internship is enabling her to gain practical exposure to research and development work while strengthening her analytical and professional skills.

Faith Kamndota is a third-year Bachelor of Business Communication student at the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS). She is currently gaining practical experience through her internship with YONECO. Faith is developing her skills in Social and Behaviour Change Communication, community engagement, and communication for development, with a strong interest in using communication to create positive social change

Fortunate Gulloh is a fourth-year Bachelor of Social Sciences student at the Catholic University of Malawi, majoring in Social Work with a minor in Development Studies. She is currently undertaking her internship with YONECO in Chikwawa District. Fortunate is passionate about supporting individuals and communities and is using the internship to strengthen her skills in case management, community engagement, and social support.

Children Benefit from Child-Friendly Mental Health Session in Chitipa

Some of the children who patronize the DIC in the district during one of the sessions.

YONECO, through its Chitipa District Office, conducted a child-friendly mental health session at the YONECO Drop-in Centre (DIC) to promote emotional well-being, self-expression and positive coping among children.

A total of 23 children, comprising 16 boys and seven girls, participated in interactive activities that included singing, dancing and group games facilitated by YONECO staff.

"I enjoyed singing, dancing and playing with my friends. I also learnt that when I feel sad or worried, I should talk to someone I trust instead of keeping my feelings to myself," said one of the children who participated in the session.

The session used play, music and movement to create a safe and supportive environment where children could express their emotions, relieve stress and build confidence. The activities also helped children learn simple ways of managing difficult feelings and encouraged them to seek help whenever they felt sad, worried or overwhelmed.

YONECO FM
The Real Voice of The Youth Women and Children

Chikwawa Children Urged to Speak Up Against Abuse

Some of the children who were engaged as part of the child rights awareness sessions in the district.

On 18 August, 2026, YONECO has conducted a child rights awareness session for seven children at Mwita Village in Traditional Authority (T/A) Katunga, Chikwawa district, to strengthen their knowledge of child rights, protection and reporting pathways.

The session engaged the children in an interactive discussion on the rights they already knew and their understanding of where to report cases of abuse. Their responses guided discussions on additional child rights and different forms of abuse.

The children were reminded that every child has the right to safety, protection, education, healthcare, care, dignity and respect. They were also encouraged to speak up when they experience or witness abuse and to seek support from trusted adults and relevant child protection structures.

YONECO also introduced the Tithandizane Child Helpline toll-free number 116, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as an important channel for reporting abuse and seeking assistance.

The session further provided an opportunity for the children to ask questions, share their experiences and clarify misconceptions about child rights and protection.

Mbenjere Community Urged to Unite Against GBV, Protect Children

Community members from Mbenjere in Machinga during the community awareness meeting.

Community members from Mbenjere in Machinga district, have been urged to take collective action against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and strengthen child protection systems in the area.

The call was made during a community awareness meeting that was held at Mbenjere TeleCentre on August 9, 2026, organized by YONECO in collaboration with the Malawi Police Service and local leaders.

Participants were sensitized on GBV, child rights and various forms of abuse, followed up by discussions on their role in preventing violence, reporting abuse and creating safer environments for children.

"Let us work together to prevent GBV, protect our children and uphold their rights," explained Village Head Mbenjere in his speech.

The meeting also provided a platform for community members to raise concerns about GBV and child protection. Participants called for more community awareness campaigns to strengthen knowledge on prevention and reporting of violence.

Community members were further encouraged to report cases of violence, abuse and child protection violations through the Child Helpline 116, GBV Crisis Line 5600, or by visiting a YONECO office.

Call for Support for Street-Connected Children at Tsoka Market

One of the most common places under the Lilongwe Bridge where many of the children seek shelter.

On 13 August 2026, YONECO interacted with children aged between 10 and 15, some of whom were teen mothers, who wandering unsupervised at Tsoka Market in Lilongwe while their mothers were drinking in shebeens.

YONECO also spoke with some Tsoka Market committee members, who confirmed that many children reside in the market, seeking refuge under the bridge and in other unsafe areas within the vicinity.

The market authorities expressed a need for the children, particularly the teen mothers, to be supported with income-generating opportunities to enable them to find safer environments in which to live with their toddlers.

One 13-year-old child who lives within Tsoka Market revealed that his parents divorced. His father relocated from Lilongwe to Phalombe, leaving him and his siblings. The boy explained that his mother died immediately after, a scenario that forced him to migrate to Mozambique to stay with his grandmother.

"Life with my grandmother was very difficult; I had no option but to return to Malawi when I was 10 years old," explained the boy.

Currently, Vincent sells water and uses the money to buy food. On some days, he makes no sales and resorts to begging to feed himself. Vincent bathes under Lilongwe Bridge, where water is available, and sleeps at Tsoka Market in slum-like conditions.

Vincent's story illustrates how family breakdown and poverty compel children onto the streets and highlights why they urgently require support and protection.

Irish Aid
Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Trócaire

UNFPA

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CHILD HELPLINE

5600
GBV CRISIS LINE

393
YOUTH HELPLINE

6600
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- Case Management.
- Safe Places for survivors of GBV and VAWC.

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YONECO Supports Backyard Gardens for Improved Household Income, Nutrition in Nsanje

Some of the SLG group members who have benefitted from the vegetable seeds for their backyard gardens in the district.

YONECO has supported 18 Savings and Loans Groups (SLGs) with vegetable seeds for backyard gardens in Nsanje district aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment, improve household food security and enhance nutrition.

The initiative was implemented in collaboration with the District Community Development Office (DCDO) and the District Gender Office (DGO) targeting SLG members in the areas of Traditional Authorities (T/As) Chimombo, Ngabu and Malemia.

The groups received a variety of seeds, including rape, spinach, cabbage, tomatoes, and onions.

The recipients were encouraged to utilize the seeds effectively, noting that proceeds from vegetable sales would generate income for women, while contributing to improved household nutrition.

"We will conduct regular monitoring visits to assess progress and provide technical support to achieve the objectives objectives of this initiative," explained Edward Baxter Nyirenda, YONECO Field Officer in the district.

Women Urged to Reject Child Marriage, Embrace Economic Empowerment

Members of Khumbo Lathu Women's Group captured here after the community awareness on GBV session.

On 9 August, 2026, YONECO urged women in Chiradzulu district to take a stand against child marriage while pursuing economic opportunities that can strengthen household livelihoods and reduce their vulnerability to Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

The call was made during a community awareness session that was attended by 20 members of Khumbo Lathu Women's Group at Mombezi Court. The participants discussed child protection and explored opportunities to access loans to start or expand businesses.

YONECO urged the women to work with authorities to prevent child marriages and keep girls in school.

The group was also encouraged to engage financial institutions to better understand available financing options and establish sustainable linkages to suitable services.

"We have been hesitant to apply for loans from microfinance institutions because of concerns about interest rates and collateral requirements," explained Bridget Eliya, a member of Khumbo Lathu Women's Group.

Stakeholders Validate Pamchezo GBV Safe Space Intervention

A representative from YONECO making her remarks during the workshop. Below: Stakeholders posing for a group photo.

YONECO, in collaboration with the University of Malawi (UNIMA) and other stakeholders, conducted a two-day validation workshop for the Pamchezo Peer-Moderated Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Safe Space intervention from 19 to 20 August 2026 at Hill Springs Lodge in Zomba.

Supported by UN Women Malawi, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), and Stellenbosch University, the initiative aimed to address limited access to GBV support services among students in higher education institutions. It also sought to establish student-centred safe spaces where students could openly discuss GBV, access support and contribute to ending the culture of silence surrounding violence.

The workshop brought together representatives from the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, UNIMA students, the Malawi Police Victim Support Unit (VSU) and other key stakeholders.

Opening the workshop, YONECO Executive Director MacBain Mkandawire emphasised the importance of creating safe and accessible platforms where students could discuss GBV and support one another.

"We cannot address gender-based violence if we continue to operate in an environment of silence. The safe spaces will give students an opportunity to speak, listen to one another and act. We want students to be part of the solution and to know that they do not have to face these challenges alone," said Mkandawire.

Deputy Director in the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, Rodrick Phiri, commended the initiative, noting that strengthening GBV prevention and response mechanisms in learning institutions was essential to creating safer environments for students.

The two-day workshop provided participants with an opportunity to review and provide context-specific feedback on the Pamchezo intervention. The recommendations generated during the workshop were expected to inform the finalisation of the Pamchezo Safe Space Manual ahead of its adoption and implementation.

YONECO Showcases Child Protection, Youth Empowerment Initiatives at 22nd NAF

YONECO pavilion at the 22nd National Agriculture Fair showcasing some of the organisation's interventions.

YONECO participated in the three-day 22nd National Agriculture Fair (NAF) held at the International Trade Fair Grounds in Blantyre from 27 to 29 August 2026.

Held under the theme "Transforming Agriculture through Innovation, Value Addition, and Market Linkages," the fair brought together stakeholders from across the agricultural sector to showcase innovations, products and initiatives aimed at promoting agricultural development and inclusive agribusiness.

YONECO established an information booth at the fair, where it showcased its work in child protection and the prevention of child labour, particularly in the agricultural sector.

The organisation highlighted interventions including the Toll-Free Child Helpline, Theatre for Development (TfD) and awareness-raising through YONECO FM (YFM).

The organisation also showcased its social enterprises under Y-Net Investments, including its sunflower cooking oil production initiative. Through contract farming, the initiative provided young farmers with inputs such as seed and fertiliser while offering a ready market for their produce.

YONECO's participation provided an opportunity to engage farmers, young people, government institutions, private sector actors and other stakeholders, while highlighting the link between youth economic empowerment, child protection and sustainable agricultural development.

YONECO Participated in ISPCAN Melbourne 2026 Congress

Some of the participants during the 2026 conference in Melbourne, Australia.

YONECO Executive Director, MacBain Mkandawire, participated in the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) Melbourne 2026 Congress, which was held from 24 to 26 August 2026 in Melbourne, Australia.

The three-day congress brought together child protection practitioners, researchers, policymakers and other key stakeholders from different sectors and countries to share knowledge, innovations and best practices aimed at strengthening child protection systems.

Held under the theme "Transforming Approaches to Safety and Healing," the congress provided a platform for participants to explore practical approaches to preventing child abuse and neglect while promoting safe environments and healing for children affected by violence and abuse.

Speaking on the sidelines of the congress, Mkandawire emphasized the need to translate discussions into meaningful action to strengthen child protection efforts.

"We must transition from dialogue to action and utilise strategies that protect and empower children," said Mkandawire.

Chikwawa District Steps Up Sanitation and Hygiene Campaign

Various stakeholders from Chikwawa district posing for a group photo after the clean up exercise.

On 17 August, 2026, YONECO joined Chikwawa District Council, various stakeholders and community members in launching Presidential Executive Order Number 2 of 2026 which aims to improve sanitation, hygiene and waste management, particularly in public places.

Held at Dyeratu Market under the theme "Everyone Counts in Keeping the District Clean," the event began with a clean-up exercise before participants took part in a solidarity walk to the newly constructed market.

The campaign emphasized proper waste disposal, personal hygiene and handwashing as key measures for preventing waterborne diseases, including cholera. A drama performance further highlighted the shared responsibility of keeping markets and public spaces clean.

"Keeping our market clean is not the responsibility of cleaners alone. We must all take responsibility by disposing of waste properly and practising good hygiene," said Clifford Mphaya, a community member who participated in the event.

The event was attended by 988 people, comprising 560 males and 428 females, including traditional leaders, councillors, health officials and other stakeholders.

Tithandizane National Helpline Services

Child Helpline 116

GBV Crisis Line 5600

Youth Helpline 393

Drug & Substance Abuse Hotline 6600

24/7

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