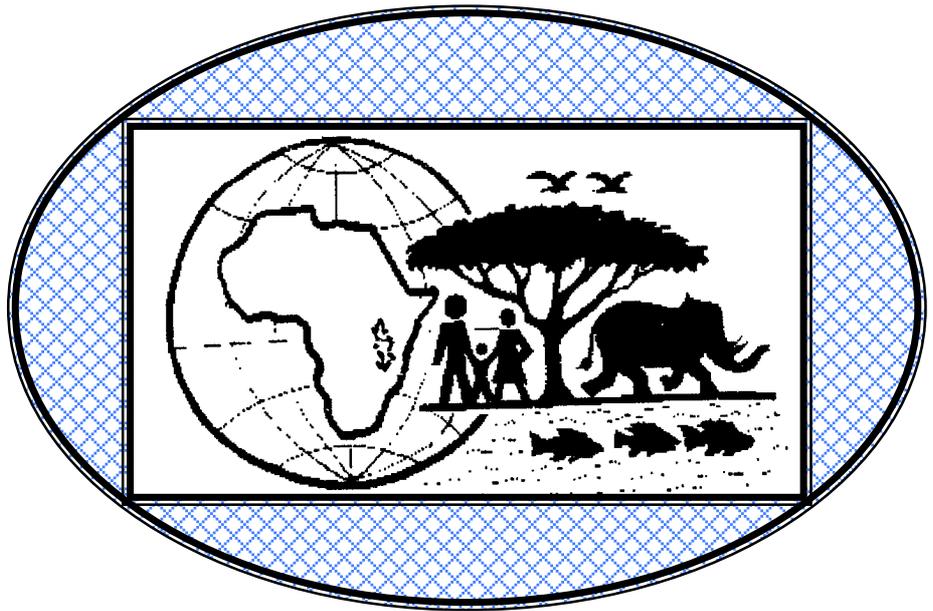


**C
F
S
C

P
R
E
S
S

R
E
V
I
E
W**



**MARCH
2011**

**News clippings
with analysis
From the
Major newspapers
in Malawi**

Compiled by the
*Center for Social Concern
(CFSC)*
*Box 40049 Lilongwe 4
Area 25
Next to St. Francis Parish
Tel: 01 715 632*

www.cfscmalawi.org



LIST OF NEWSPAPERS REVIEWED

Daily Times

The Weekend Nation

The Sunday Times

Malawi News

The Guardian

Nation on Sunday

The Nation

PREVIEW

The Nation's Tax Regime

Tax revenue is critical to financing for development, poverty eradication, fulfilling priority areas of the national development plans, and for delivering the public social services promised in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy. The Challenge is to have a domestic tax policy that balances efficiency with equity. The Minister of Finance, Ken Kandodo, heralded a tax revenue over-performance at the presentation of the mini-budget in Parliament during the February sitting. But, several institutions (CFSC, MEJN) continue to reiterate the observation that the tax burden distribution is heavily biased towards the few eligible and potential taxpayers.

In March, when CAMA and Economic Empowerment Action Group took the minister on his to sound similar concerns over the nation's tax regime. The Minister of Finance, however, refuted the allegations saying, "it is not correct to suggest that tax revenues over-performed as a result of over burdensome taxes." The Honorable Minister probably needs a reminder that our tax regime relies heavily on PAYE as a method of collecting revenue and that the working poor are the ones that sustain this method of taxation. Thus, the income earners to a certain extent carry the burden that comes along with the success report that the minister presented to Parliament.

What the minister forgot to tell the public was how much employment has been created in the course of the period he was reporting on to count for the contribution towards the revenue over-performance. As it is not rocket science to recognize that a tax policy that relies heavily on PAYE must go along with a policy for creation of more jobs and opportunities.

Lastly, as the budget session approaches in June, it is the hope of many Malawians that the Ministry's review of the nation's tax regime will take into account that a tax regime needs to recognise the common threat to political progress, sustainable economic development, and poverty eradication that results from the unacceptable domestic obstacles to effective taxation for development, such as lack of transparency in extractive industry.

POLITICS

The Malawi President Bingu wa Mutharika seems to have fallen in love with trouble in recent times. In March Mutharika told his party followers to deal with any of his critics. The President who is also leader of the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* publicly gave these orders to party members at a rally at Kamuzu Stadium in Blantyre in March. Mutharika is reported to have told the nation that his followers should protect him from critics. Such statements coming from a President of the nation have left people with mixed feelings and reactions wondering what exactly he meant.

Others have noted that the recent events are slowly leading Malawi into a dictatorship. Malawians dealt with autocratic styles of leadership in 1993 when the nation unanimously voted in a referendum to do away with a single party state. Now, in a democratic Malawi, these kind of directives should not be given any room. The *DPP* will surely be judged for giving powers to the misguided youths to deal with innocent citizens whose crime is to caution government where necessary. For sure these announcements match that of a dictator not a democratically chosen leader and echo the actions of the *Malawi Congress Party MCP* carried out through the Youth and Young Pioneers.

Opposition political parties and other observers have faulted Mutharika for these orders. According to the observers the order has serious meaning as some might think Mutharika is asking the youths to beat up anyone who bothers the President. Mutharika has come under heavy attacks following his conduct and utterances lately. It is the same Mutharika who has bashed the media, faith groups, and the civil society simply for questioning some of his decisions and leadership style. Just recently Mutharika gave the Malawi Police Service an order to shoot or kill. As if this is not enough Mutharika asked whoever wants to demonstrate to pay a deposit of K2 million. Whatever happened to the man who promised to hold and defend the Constitution? It should be noted that the same Constitution that allows for freedom to assemble and demonstrate, rights which have been severely curtailed in recent months.

Following the President's statements some party official have been going around justifying and trying to explain to the nation what exactly Mutharika meant by asking the members to deal with his critics. The party's General Secretary Binton Kumtsaira and other dignitaries from the *DPP* have been at pains to wave some of the people's fears that have arisen following Mutharika's statements. Although party leaders have assured Malawians that the *DPP* will not use force it is still fresh in people's minds is the way some youths terrorized the people in the *UDF* era. For those that were old enough in the time of Kamuzu they still have memories of how the notorious Youth leaguers and Young Pioneers persecuted people. This is the last thing that these people would want to resurface.

The dust is refusing to settle in the *United Democratic Front UDF*. Although some might deny that there are squabbles in the party but going by press reports in March one can easily see that all is not well. Reports have disclosed that there are now two visible factions in the *UDF*, the Friday Jumbe camp and that led by George Nga Mtafu. The reports even further announced that the Jumbe faction has been denied access to the party's offices. There is a lot that the party needs to do in the rebuilding process. The *DPP* needs to reestablish itself at the grass roots level where it used to have massive support.

Part of March saw Members of Parliament meeting at the National Assembly buildings in the Capital City. One of the questions that took centre stage was the Local Government Election and when they would take place. The government side made sure that they never gave any concrete answers to the issue. As reported in the press, the Ministry of Local Government did not comment on the issue. If anything they wished that nobody had asked such a question during their meeting. There have been fears among the aspirants and other observers as they think there is not much time before 20 April, the set date for the elections. Opposition political parties have also asked the government to come up with a statement on the local polls now that 20 April is fast approaching. Similar political parties have also asked government to come up with a statement on the issue.

President of the *Malawi Congress Party MCP* John Tembo, who is one of Malawi's most experienced and seasoned politicians, in the month under review, advised the government to try negotiations in the case of the standoff between the Inspector General and the Chancellor College. Tembo feels that the only way to resolve such a situation is by negotiation. Meanwhile candidates for the Local Government Elections have asked government to do something about holding the local polls.

Jumani Johansson finally spoke about his political ambitions. If there is a chance of joining a political party he would go for the *Malawi Congress Party MCP*. Jumani who has been in the press for a long time over the allegation that he is the son of the late and former Head of State Kamuzu Banda recently made his stand known on politics. He has some political ambitions after all. In the past it was widely held that the late Kamuzu never married and had no children. Jumani recently told the press that he will join the *MCP* a thing that has not pleased the leadership of the party at least going by the statements they made about Jumani's intentions.

ECONOMY

The news that donors may withhold budgetary support has left some experts wondering what is to become of Malawi in the next financial year. The current fiscal year ends on 30th June and if the donors stick to their words Malawi is in for it. Malawi gets about 40 % of its budgetary support from donors and the other part from revenue collections, therefore any disturbances in such allocations would be greatly felt. Now if the donors stick to their guns and do as it is reported in the press Malawi we should expect a rough ride in the 2011/2012 financial year.

It has been said more than once that the current government needs to tread carefully in as far as governance is concerned. On several occasions the authorities have bashed the donors much to the people's surprise. For sure one should not bite the hand that partially feeds one. Among other things the donors are pressing for Malawi to change some of its repressive legislation on minority laws and the freedom of the press. It should be noted that if the donors' threats materialize it will be the ordinary citizen who will be the one to suffer. But government has been adamant with Mutharika bashing the donors every now and then.

Since President Bingu wa Mutharika officially opened the three tobacco markets, namely Lilongwe, Chinkhoma and Limbe Auction Floors, farmers are yet to be impressed with the prices that are being offered for their tobacco. As some observers have noted the future of the gold leaf seems to be cloudy because of the little money it is fetching on the market. Press reports have disclosed that the markets have been closing and opening following the disagreements over prices. The farmers still feel their crop is of high quality and should fetch more than the buyers are offering. Among other things there have been calls from all corners of the world asking for the ban of tobacco smoking. This has, in a way, affected the leaf's market.

Still on the same issue of tobacco while opening the auction Mutharika took a swipe at buyers of tobacco who he labeled colonialists. The President has always blamed these buyers for abusing Malawians by paying low prices. There is a tendency among farmers in Malawi that they never return home when their proceeds from tobacco sales are out. But the sad thing is the same men involve their wives in the planting and taking care of the crop till the very last day. In the end the women are on the receiving end of the poverty that comes their way because they have no other source of income.

The beginning of the tobacco season perhaps should act like a reminder for Malawians that the people behind the tobacco leaf that is currently being sold are tenants and that the tobacco Labour Tenancy Bill is still lingering in a political limbo. To date it has not yet found its way into the National Assembly. Despite a lot of advocacy work that the civil society has put into backing the bill it is still gathering dust. As money flows in from the sales of tobacco there is need to legalise the tenancy system in Malawi so that tenants may also enjoy the proceeds of their labour. Tobacco is Malawi's main foreign exchange earner.

FOOD SECURITY

Contrary to what the press reported in the month of February on the prices maize, the press in March told a different story. In February the prices of maize were reported to be going down with some areas selling the grain at as low as K1,300 per 50 kilogram bag. And again there seems to have been plenty of maize for sale. It was easy to find maize in the past months. One month later the situation has changed with a 50 kilogram bag going for K2,000. This has always been the trend as people are about to start harvesting, the price of maize goes up. When the lean period is over the prices of maize usually go down because there is a lot of maize in circulation. With just a few weeks to harvest time in some areas we should expect a lot of maize as has always been the trend.

2011 seems to be another year of plenty if reports by the Ministry of Agriculture are anything to go by. This is going to be the sixth bumper harvest in Malawi because of good rains and the availability of subsidized fertilizers. But as observers have noted Malawi needs to find some alternatives to fertilizer, we surely cannot rely on them forever. Some environmentalists have warned that the more people are putting these chemicals in the soil, the more they are stealing its natural nutrients. These have time and again advocated for the use of organic manure which they say is cheap. On the other hand economists feel there is a lot of money that goes into the subsidy programme and as such the price should go up to K1,000 from K500 a bag. In this way some will be saved thereby accommodating more people in the targeted farm input programme.

Some food and agricultural experts have noted that it is important to practice agricultural diversification. According to the deputy Minister of Agriculture, Margaret Roka Mauwa, farmers need to carry out different activities in their daily lives. Among other things farmers need diversification for continued food security in Malawi. Not only can this help in food security it also assists in the finances of the farmers because they can always sell some of the surplus crops. Farmers are being urged to practice aquaculture and diary farming.

There is some good news that came from the 2011 African Seed Congress that Malawi recently hosted. One can actually see that some countries in Africa applaud Malawi's success in food security and want to emulate this example. Reports have shown that some of delegates at the meeting wanted to know how Malawi is managing to run the *Farm Input Subsidy Programme*. It is common knowledge that one of the reasons Malawi's food status has changed for the better is the availability of subsidized farm inputs.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Even a little boy can notice that all is not well between the civil society organizations and the executive. Of late there have been counter accusation coming from both the President and the leaders of some civil society organizations and they have been on each other's neck for some time. Mutharika seems to have made enemies with civil society going by his speeches lately. At almost every opportunity Mutharika castigates civil society leaders branding them as fortune seekers who tell lies to donors just to get some money. As observers have noted the situation is not healthy for a democratic Malawi. As a nation we surely need civil society to assist the government by giving advice where necessary.

A number of observers have condemned in strongest terms about the attack on civil society leader Undule Mwakasungula. After weeks of a verbal war between the government and civil society, and alleged death threats to some civil society leaders, thugs broke into the *Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation CHRR* offices. Observers have cautioned the government to tread carefully on this issue. The attacks on the *CHRR* Director were all over in the press and even some international organizations have added their voice in condemning the government on the way it is treating civil society.

Meanwhile civil society organizations have questioned the reasoning behind the announcement by President Mutharika for people to pay K2 million deposit just to demonstrate on the streets of Malawi. The President made this announcement after police foiled a peaceful demonstration organized by civil society in Malawi. A number of analysts have questioned Mutharika's motive in denying the *CSOs* a chance to demonstrate. Paying for demonstration is illegal according to the civil society organizations.

Police went further and denied Nanzikambe Arts Group to have their freedom parade in the city of Blantyre. For some years the group had been had the marches without any problems from the police. To everyone's surprise the authorities allowed *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* members to parade in the same city without any hassle. As observers noted the idea of taking sides does not reflect well on the government. One wonders why some citizens are allowed to do anything they wish for simply because they are *DPP*.

The Livingstonia Synod of the *Church of Central African Presbyterian CCAP*, expressed concern over the prolonged delays in meeting between the church leaders and the President. For a long time the Synod and the President have not seen each other eye to eye following some disagreements. Among other issues the Synod reverends are bitter with the Mutharika government for reintroducing the quota system of selecting students into institutions of higher learning. The Synod's leadership feels the system is unfavourably targeting people from the north. Now months after Mutharika publicly extended an invitation to the Synod to discuss issues the meeting still has not been held. As observers have noted it is only a meeting of this nature that would help the two parties to resolve their differences and map the way forward.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIVES

Issues of child labour continued to get a lot of media attention in the month under review. The Livingstonia Synod of the *Church of Central African Presbyterian CCAP* embarked on a project that will see a number of children going back to school. It is common knowledge that some children in almost all the farming districts in Malawi are involved in child labour. This is evidenced by a report that *Plan International* released in 2010 that showed that over 60,000 children are living dangerously in tobacco estates.

A number of observers and children's rights activists have expressed shock over the lenient sentencing of a man who is alleged to have defiled a child recently. A traditional leader is reported to have told a defiler to walk around with arms up in the air for two hours as part of a punishment for defiling a child. To add salt to the wounds the defiler was told to pay only K200 which he easily paid. But what happens to the child? This is the question that many child rights activists have been asking. Such lenient punishments should be discouraged at all costs. Anyone can easily pay the K200 but what about the emotional and psychological pain that the defiled child bears.

For some years the people in Chiradzulu District have had to live in fear because of a number of wild things happening in there. In the Bakili Muluzi era, the former President sent a strong warning to anyone who reported alleged killings in Chiradzulu. There were reports that women had their breasts cut and eyes removed, but the authorities at that time tried to make sure that such report never made their way into the media. These acts of violence have resurfaced and now people have all the reasons to live in fear. The fact that these reports appear in the press every year, should give authorities more homework on how the residents in the district can live in peace.

March witnessed some cases of police brutality. Reports have shown that law enforcers assaulted a suspect in Lunzu and now he is living with scars on his back courtesy of police brutality. Another suspect died after allegedly being assaulted by a drunk police officer in Zomba. These cases of brutality come out after it is widely portrayed and reported that the police have changed and are now a reformed organization. It should be noted that recently President Bingu wa Mutharika was all praises for the Inspector General of Police, Mr Peter Mukhitho. With this record one may wonder why the President feels the Inspector General is being said to be the best when his subjects are in one way or the other suppressing the rights of some citizens. Now if the Mukhitho subordinates act in this manner then the police's image is tarnished, including that of the IG.

Malawi commemorated Martyrs Day in the month under review. Despite the annual commemoration being held in the country relations of some of the martyrs are not happy because they feel sidelined and unrecognised. This argument has come about after organizers of memorial service in Nkhata Bay felt it would have carried more weight if President graced the occasion.

EDUCATION

It never rains but it pours for the Ministry of Education. The directive by government for civil servants to start receiving salaries via the bank should have perhaps eased things for the Ministry and government workers but it has also come with some hiccups. Press reports have shown that a number of teachers, just like fellow civil servants, have opened banks accounts but had problems to get their salaries. Some teachers stayed for days without receiving their wages. One can never run away from the fact that money plays a major role as a motivating factor, and we cannot expect teachers to do their duties wholeheartedly when they are not paid. Whatever the problem is authorities should work out this issue of delayed salaries once and for all so that teachers have no excuse of not working hard

As if the salary delay problems are not enough the Ministry is also faced by a stand off between lectures of the University of Malawi and the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Peter Mukhitho. It all started when Mr Mukhitho called the Associate Lecturer of Chancellor College, Professor Blessings Chinsinga, to question him over an example he gave when he was teaching a political science lesson. Following the questioning of the associate lecture there has been a stand off as lecturers are not working demanding an assurance that they are free from any interference. Meanwhile reports have shown that some constituent colleges, like the Polytechnic have also joined in the strike. The lecturers are still demanding that the Inspector General should apologise and assure them that there is going to be no interfering in education. President Mutharika has publicly announced that Mukhitho will not apologise in any way.

As the tension at the University of Malawi continues some claim that the Minister of Education, Peter Mutharika, should make a statement on the stand off between the lecturers and the Inspector General. There seems to be no solution in sight for the problem because all the lecturers want is academic freedom and an apology to their colleague Professor Chinsinga while the Inspector General, with Mutharika's blessing, say they will not apologise in any way meaning the students are the ones suffering.

Still on the same issues the Minister of Information, Simon Vuwa Kaunda, has made it clear that Education Minister Peter Mutharika will not resign from his Cabinet post for failing to intervene in the disagreements between the lecturers and the Inspector General. The *Peoples Progressive Movement PPM* had in the month under review asked Peter Mutharika to resign. The *PPM* feels Mutharika is failing in his duties as Minister following the many problems that his Ministry is having at present.

It is a known factor that primary school education is free in Malawi and therefore recent revelations that some are made to pay for examinations have raised eye brows. Reports have disclosed that a certain school in Ndirande Township is being forced to pay for examinations. Children at *Chitsime Primary School* are made to pay K250 to sit for the end of term examination. As some observers have noted K250 is on a higher side as some parents and guardians cannot afford to pay.

HEALTH

Some human rights activists have learnt with great shock that Kamuzu Central Hospital is forcing patients to undergo HIV tests. According to the guardians of some of the patients the hospital personnel are alleged to force patients to do this. But in normal circumstances the patient is supposed to consent the testing of his blood for HIV. For whatever reasons it is alleged *KCH* is doing this without following the normal procedure. Perhaps the fact that this issue has come out in the open will assist in the wiping out of such tendencies.

The impact of the fuel shortage that the country experienced late last year and in the beginning of this year did not only affect the business and economic sector but also health sector as well. According to the *Malawi Health Equity Network MHEN* some people lost their lives because ambulances could not take them to referral hospitals in time due to the fuel shortage. Similarly stand-by generators in some hospitals were not working thereby putting the lives of patients and expectant women at risk. Malawi cannot afford to lose some of its citizens due to fuel shortages because this problem can be easily solved. This scenario surely needs a lot of attention if the lives of patients are to be saved.

Press reports have disclosed that the health sector is currently riding in troubled waters following the cut in budget allocations. Evidence is given that the biggest referral hospital in the southern region *Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital QECH* funding allocation was cut by 30 % in the past three months. The hospital is currently running on low budgets to the extent that some activities are being jeopardized because of the little amount of money. According to press reports the cut in the budgets have resulted in hospitals accumulating debts because these are just some things that have to be done money or no money.

Similarly the cuts in the budget have also seen the Central Medical Stores accumulating a lot of debts for the purchase of drugs. Among other things the Medical Stores is reported to be struggling to settle a K3 billion bill. According to sources some hospitals have shortages of drugs that some patients have to buy in shops. As usual authorities have denied this saying they do not have reports of hospitals not having drugs, but even at *QECH* some patients are being sent home without drugs. As observers noted the situation is worse for those living in rural areas.

The press disclosed a follow-up on the announcement made late last year that Zomba State House would be turned into a hospital. There have been different view and opinions coming from various stakeholders. Some experts feel it is not viable to have the State House turned into a hospital because it is old and was only meant to be a State House. Among other issues the experts are worried about issues of safety of patients.

ENVIRONMENT

There is a general feeling among the people that live in villages that surround the Liwonde National Park that the government only cares for the animals and not the villagers. The villagers declaration comes against reports of authorities who charged the villagers for wounding animals. At times the animals attack the villagers and in defending themselves they wound the animals in the process. Most of the times villagers go into the protected areas to plant crops and meet the animal, in this case it is either the animal that gets wounded or the people. For a long time there has been this conflict between the animals and the people. It is high time the protected areas be fenced once and for all to avoid these scenarios.

Still on the same issue of Liwonde National Park press reports also disclosed of how the villagers might find themselves without food because of the animals in the park. Elephants are reported to have damaged maize gardens destroying the crop. This is again proving to be a big problem for farmers who have lost their crops to the elephants who invade their homes and farms. It should be noted that there close to 700 elephants in the national park. Conserted efforts are needed to find a lasting solution.

As the forestry national year continues press reports have disclosed that so far about 20,000 trees have been planted. This is a great achievement considering the fact that of late there have been reports of wanton cutting down of trees. Similarly hills and mountains are bare today because of the habit of cutting down trees for building, charcoal making, and other activities of that nature. Now the news that so many have been planted means Malawi is going into the right direction in reforestation. According to forestry officials although all these trees have been planted the exercise still needs more funding.

People of Phalombe district commemorated twenty years after district was hit by a catastrophic disaster. Since that time the district that was hit by a mountain avalanche was said to be an area of high risk to calamities. Many people were killed and many were displaced during that fateful day back in 1991. Latest reports have shown that there is now a new private weather station that can forest the weather. This is a good development as people can be forewrned of what the weather is going to be and hence they can make timely decisions on what to do. At the same time issues of irrigation along the Thuchila River also benefit from the weather forecast as farmers know when to irrigate or not.

GENDER

After undergoing interviews by the *Public Appointments Committee PAC* Rosemary Kanyuka was confirmed *Director of Public Prosecution DPP*. Kanyuka becomes the first woman to occupy the position of *DPP* in Malawi. The fact that Kanyuka is one of the women in decision making position is evidence that the government is going in the right direction.

Speaker of the National Assembly, honourable Chimunthu Banda, announced in March that he wanted more women in Parliament. As evidence has shown more women in Parliament means that a lot more issues and policies that have direct impact to women will find their way to the National Assembly. This will in turn benefit all the women in Malawi as they form the majority of the population. Against this background women should be encouraged to participate in Parliamentary Elections so that they make it to the National Assembly in the next election.

Malawian women joined the rest of the world in commemorating Women's Day of Prayers in March. Every year women in the world attend to these prayers under one theme and this year's theme was How Many Loaves Have You. Speaking at the main prayers in Malawi at Zomba Catholic Cathedral guest of honour First Lady Callista Mutharika, advised women in Malawi to empower each other.

It has been said more than once that women in Malawi should avoid pulling each other down. Evidence has shown that although over half of Malawi's population is made up women, they still fail to make it in many spheres because they are rarely supported by fellow women. Even when it comes to businesses women would rather support a man; give him orders and advice than to help a fellow woman. In political circles parties fail to support female candidates and the result has been the small numbers of women in decision making positions.

Reports on women in March took a new twist when they disclosed that some women's lives are now improving courtesy of the village loans. From the negative reports that women receive in the press, the month of March saw some positive coverage. A group of women are being economically empowered because of loans they get from village banks. This has been a change from the trends where when a woman appears in the press it is most of the time because she is a victim. Rarely does the press show a woman as a victor. This change in coverage should be commended.

Still on the same issues of positive media coverage, three Malawians have made Malawi proud for being in the top 100 global women awards. It does not get any better than this two women being on the list of top 100 is something to be proud of. The women Dorothy Ngoma, Inkosi Kwataine of Ntcheu, and 21 year old Sarah Nkhoma. The list is organized by *Women Deliver* in New York. It should be noted that in the list there are some prominent people in the world like Melina Gates, wife to Microsoft owner Bill Gates, and Talk Show host Oprah Winfrey.