

# MALAWI AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Trócaire has been working with partners in Malawi for the last forty-eight years. Malawi is a landlocked country, bordered by Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique.

Malawi is often referred to as the warm heart of Africa. Malawi is a country with extremely high levels of poverty, where life is already a struggle for many. Climate change means flooding and droughts are becoming both more extreme and unpredictable. People are losing their homes, their livelihoods and even their lives. In this resource we are focusing on Trócaire's work for water justice as a response to the effects of climate change.

Machinga, where Trócaire is currently working with the Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM) Zomba and Churches Action in Relief and Development (CARD), is one of the districts most impacted by the effects of climate change.

Machinga is a district in the southern region of Malawi, located along the main road that connects Zomba and Lilongwe. Over the last number of years, Trócaire has developed strong working relationships with both church and non-church partners in Machinga.

## Water Justice in Malawi

### Challenges

Malawi is one of the twenty poorest countries in the world and experiences considerable water stress. 'Water stress' means that Malawi is particularly vulnerable to drought and extreme weather events, which are increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate crisis. Over one third of Malawi's population does not have access to clean water. Rural communities in Malawi face

**'Listen carefully, I am about to do a new thing, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even put a road in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.'**

**(Isaiah 43:19)**

### Reflect

How much water have you used today? In your home? In your work? In your liturgy?

significant challenges in accessing clean and reliable water sources.

### What is Water Justice?

In a just world everyone would have access to sufficient supplies of safe and affordable water; however, for many people around the world, this does not happen. This is an injustice. Obstacles that block access to safe water are the root cause of this injustice. These obstacles arise from issues such as drought, flooding, restricted access to safe water sources, pollution or a lack of control over local water sources. Other issues can increase people's vulnerability to water injustice, such as climate change, migration, conflict and population growth. Ongoing water injustice will result in increasing numbers of people being pushed into poverty, as it affects health, sanitation, livelihoods, education and more.





Malita with her twins, Patricia and Patrick, at their home in Malawi.  
Photo credit: Muiru Mbuthia, Trócaire

## LENT 2024 FAMILY STORY

Too little or too much water is a daily struggle for Malita and her family. Malita is a single mother of six children, including 12-year-old twins Patricia and Patrick, who are featured on the front of the 2024 Trócaire box. Their story is unfortunately one that is typical in Malawi as they struggle every day with the many problems relating to access to water. Malita was already finding it a struggle to support her family before the burden of increased droughts and floods. Living in a small homestead in Machinga district, Malawi, Malita, the twins and two of their siblings, Margaret and Kondwani, have no direct access to clean water for the household.

Too much water and the family's livelihood is destroyed. Sudden floodwaters can wash away the crops and any nutrients in the soil, leaving families like Malita's with nothing and no hope for a harvest in the next season. Cyclones can rush through the community unexpectedly, washing

away the crops and nutrients in the soil. Last year, floods destroyed part of the family's house. By June, they had used up all of their harvest and had nothing else to eat.

Too little water can be much more of a struggle than too much water. From August to November, every morning and up to five times a day, Malita and/or her daughters, Patricia and Margaret, must make an hour-long round trip on foot to collect water from a stream. This is because the shallow well near their home dries up every year. Malita carries 20 litres of water back to the house in a bucket on her head. Malita reports that the dry season has become more prolonged in recent years, and droughts are becoming more frequent as each year the rains fail to arrive.

The dry season, which typically lasted from April to October, can now go on much longer, with the

first rains not arriving until December or January some years. During these dry seasons, the well that the family uses for water for drinking, washing and cooking dries up and they are forced to walk further to fetch water from another source.

It is not uncommon for the family to spend up to five hours every day fetching water. Some mornings, the journey to collect water means that the twins are late for school or they are too tired to go to school. When the children return from the well, they must walk a further 4 km to school. Fortunately if they have missed breakfast, they can have some porridge in school before they start classes.

The water that the family spend so long collecting is not always safe to drink. Animals use the same water sources so Malita must treat the water with chlorine tablets before it is drinkable. Even then, the children still fall sick with diarrhoea every couple of months. When it is serious enough, Malita must walk with them to the hospital, which is a further 5 km away, to seek treatment.

In addition to collecting water, Malita's days are busy on her small farm, a one-acre piece of land where she grows maize, cassava, millet and pigeon peas to feed her family. She also cultivates tomatoes, leafy vegetables and mustard that they eat. They sometimes have enough left over to sell. Malita depends on her crops to feed her family, so a low yield in a typical year can have a serious

impact on the family's ability to eat. This over-reliance on the farm is compounded even further when the dry season is prolonged and there isn't enough rain to water her crops. For Malita, no rain means her children must go to bed hungry, an outcome she desperately tries to avoid all year round.

As she explains, there are times when they eat twice a day and times when they eat only once. It depends on the season. Sometimes the children will eat after school but sometimes not. There are times when the children must go hungry and when that happens, Malita cries herself to sleep.

Malita is a loving mother with a strong spirit that she has instilled in her children. Her biggest fear is not being able to provide for her family. The challenges of climate change are quickly making that fear a stark reality. Strengthened by her faith, Malita hopes to be able to provide for her family, for her children to get a good education so they can grow up to have good jobs in the community or beyond. She prays for a safe water source closer to their home, which she says would make a huge difference to their lives.

Trócaire's work in Malawi is focused on supporting communities, particularly women like Malita, to adapt their livelihoods to cope with the impact of climate change or ensuring families like hers can continue to survive.

Malita.

Photo credit: Muiru Mbuthia, Trócaire

