Emerging Leaders

destination, as it is rich in natural flowers and trees--some are not found anywhere else in the world. The mountain is also famous for the Chingwe hole, which is known to be bottomless by the locals there. The Mulunguzi dam up the plateau also offers an opportunity for fishing for those with this hobby and plenty of beautiful birds for bird watchers.

MY FAMILY

I am second born in a family of four girls. My father was an economist, and my mum, a nurse. My father was once a diplomat in Brussels, Belgium. On return, we lived in Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi, where he worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1989, when I was aged nine, my dad was detained by the authorities without trial for one month. While in prison, he developed a serious liver infection, resulting in his death. At that time, Malawi had a dictatorship and one political party with a life president, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda. That government was toppled in 1992, when multi-party politics and democracy won in a referendum.

The death of my father shook the family badly. We were given three months to move out of the house we were occupying, as it was government property. We moved to stay with relatives and later rented a two-room house in which we lived as a family.

While this was happening, my eldest sister was twelve and we were all in primary school. My mother worked hard to provide for the family and the school fees were taken care of from the savings my father left. The second year of my secondary school coincided with a project called Girls Attainment of Basic Education (GABLE). This project paid for school fees for secondary school level girls. In 1997, I wrote my Malawi School Leaving Certificate (O-Level) exams and passed with distinction. I was then selected to pursue a Bachelor of Science Degree in the University of Malawi, through the normal selection programme.

Since I had been selected through the normal university entry programme, the tuition fee I had to pay was very low. When I was doing my final year, tuition fees were raised by over 600%, but, fortunately, the government introduced a loan scheme for students from which I benefited to finish my education. While still studying in college, the family savings were depleted, and my mother was the sole provider for the family. This was not easy with four girls, some still in secondary school then, one

ULEMU NYASULU

MY HOME

I was born in Zomba district of Malawi, a town where I now live. Zomba is also known as the University Town and is a small town in the southern part of Malawi, which forms part of the Shire Highlands. The town was founded by European settlers in the mid 1880s and become the capital city of Nyasaland (now Malawi) during the colonial era. Zomba has a few industries, mainly wood and lime processing.

Chancellor College, a constituent college of the University of Malawi is what makes the town popular. The college is one of the biggest employers in the town. When semesters are in session, students at Chancellor College set the rhythm of the small town, with hundreds flocking to the college every morning from surrounding locations and returning home in the evening. The small shopping area is also flooded with students over the weekends as they do their shopping in the supermarkets and the open market.

To the north of Zomba is the Zomba Plateau, which rises to about 2,100 metres. This plateau is a popular tourism

"The Internet Governance Capacity Building programme (IGCBP) has equipped me with considerable knowledge of ICT in some areas where I was lacking. My orientation has always been technical, rather than the social and human aspects of ICT. Since the IGCBP of 2006, my perspective of ICT in Africa has changed."

4 years old in Lilongwe

3 years old with uncle

Final year student (BSc), Chancellor College

Ulemu in her current office - Chancellor College

Ulemu at home in Zomba

Ulemu with husband, Gerald, and son, Merari

pursuing a professional course, and myself in college. It was hard to get personal needs met sometimes. However, I had a lot of support from family, family friends, and I also used to work during the school vacations and holidays to earn money. My husband (who was my fiance then), was especially helpful in getting vacation employment for me and my friends soon after he got his first job. He also supported me a lot financially.

MY EDUCATION

My first degree is a Bachelor of Science (Computer Science major), from the University of Malawi. It was awarded with a distinction in 2002. Soon after graduation, I secured a job as an associate lecturer with Chancellor College, where I am still working as a lecturer. I am also Deputy Head of Department for the Mathematical Sciences Department and Head of the Computer Section within the department. After working for a year and a half, I was offered a scholarship by the Australian government under the AUSAID programme, through the government of Malawi. I pursued a Master of Information Technology at James Cook University in Queensland, Australia majoring in Networking.

My experience in Australia was wonderful. Initially I had fears because this was my first time to live outside Malawi as an adult. However, living in Townsville, a small town on the Eastern Coast of Queensland was fun as I noticed that the people were friendlier than I had imagined. I was also impressed by their various systems, for example, social systems, government, immigration, higher learning, transport, and health, which I found to be very organised, and highly automated. The lecturers at James Cook University were very friendly and available to help at any time. My stay in Australia was made even more enjoyable because my family joined me under the scholarship. While studying in Australia, I worked as part-time tutor in the School of Information Technology. I also worked as an information and communications technology (ICT) support worker for North and West Queensland Primary Health Care.

THE EFFECTS OF IGCB ON MY LIFE AND CAREER

The Internet Governance Capacity Building programme (IGCBP) has equipped me with considerable knowledge of ICT in some areas where I was lacking. My orientation has always been technical, rather than the social and human aspects of ICT. Since the IGCBP of 2006, my perspective of ICT in Africa has changed. The challenges faced are clearer, not only needing technical solutions, but also policy and social solutions.

In fact, my career development plans have completely changed. Before attending the programme, I had plans to pursue a Ph D in a networking related field, for example, routing protocols or Quality of Service. My inclination was to be in the technical area of ICT. I now have plans to do a Ph D that will focus on diplomacy, policy, and legal issues in ICT. I realise that it is very easy to learn technical ICT, and be able to implement different systems. However, plans for implementation of infrastructure, development of information systems, are inhibited by policy makers, who sometimes for lack of insight into ICT, tend to be hesitant to support such initiatives. Consider the case of the EASSy cable. The biggest issue in the delay of this project is policy and not implementation. I, therefore, think there is a huge gap at policy level. To articulate policy issues, one has to be well versed with all the issues that surround a subject area. I consider myself to have a good overview of technical aspects in ICT and that is why I would like to explore legal, diplomatic, and policy aspects in my Ph D studies. This will give me good grounding to represent and lobby for my country and Africa at international forums.

Career wise, the IGCBP has empowered me to be a more balanced teacher. I am able to introduce college students to global Internet Governance issues. I am also able to confidently talk about global ICT issues that I learnt from the programme in conferences, meetings, or workshops.

I have also learnt through the IGCBP programme that Africa can have a voice that can influence global policy in ICT only if capacity issues are articulated and presented from a well-informed perspective. The complaints about a lack of voice for Africa may actually be because few qualified people properly represent our nations. For example, my contributions in reviewing the National ICT Strategic Plan for Malawi were mainly due to the IGCBP. The knowledge I gained in that programme helped me to look at the document in a holistic manner.

Other than this, one of the major gains from this programme is an opportunity to network with professionals from law, infrastructure, and policy areas who are now involved in ICT. This network has benefited me in numerous ways. I always seek advice on different ICT issues from members of this network and the advice is always invaluable.

THE E-LEARNING EXPERIENCE

E-learning was a new experience for me. The main difference I noticed from other courses I have attended is that e-learning was a student-centred approach. I learned because I wanted to learn. I have a purpose in life, and I thought that this programme was going to help me achieve what I see myself in the next decade. In addition, the tutors were very helpful, ever present, encouraging, and made the learning experience a pleasant one.

Time was always a limitation in this course. Sometimes our jobs require travelling and that might mean that one has no access to the course updates for a while. However, asynchronous learning helped as one was able to work at any convenient time.

As mentioned above, the first valuable thing I received from this course is to network with different people from different backgrounds, as one of the criteria for class composition is diversity. It has helped me to be a more balanced person in terms of my perspective of the world, people around the world and different fields that relate to ICT.

Second, Diplo programme made it possible for me to attend an international forum for the first time in my life-- the Internet Governance Forum in Athens. This is the most important benefit I got from this programme. I do not think I would have gotten this experience any time soon from anywhere else. This experience was a huge eye opener for me. I saw for myself what happens at such forums, and this is one of the major things that has helped me decide what future career I would like to pursue.

Good capacity building is one that offers the candidates a chance immediately to practice what has been learnt in a real environment. For example, one problem I see with graduates in the area of ICT is that once they do their studies, either abroad or locally, they are placed in managerial positions without an opportunity to do hands on work with their expertise. I believe that a good programme should help the candidate work in a relevant area and produce results before changing to managerial positions. This is not to discourage promotion, but one can be promoted across the ranks while working hands on using their expertise.

The Diplo programme is a great stepping stone, as it allows one to immediately participate in global issues. Diplo should continue to introduce the alumni network to conferences, workshops, initiatives, fellowships, and scholarships so that the empowering process continues for the members through other avenues.

PLANS AND VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The main challenge for the digital world in Malawi is the infrastructure. Funding for ICT infrastructure is a problem and many schools and colleges still do not have access to the Internet. My vision for Malawi is to have a country where all educational institutions are connected to the Internet and to each other. This would provide for reduction in cost, as we would take advantage of synergies and use lecturers/teachers from other institutions to teach students across the country through

the use of video conferencing, for example. We would be able to have common resources, platforms for collaborative research, reading material, and findings accessed locally without having to pay the Internet service providers.

My second vision for Malawi is to have local professionals in the area of ICT have a local and global effect through research and development. It is saddening to see graduates that have degrees equivalent to their counterparts in the developed countries, but unable to effect our country and the region. This is mainly due to dominance of foreign products that keep us on our toes, learning all the new things deposited in the country, one after the other. Local consumers are attracted to these products, causing a demand for them. This forces a Malawian graduate to learn the new technology and try to master it, and before he or she does that, something new arrives. We are basically kept on our toes learning this new thing and that new thing. In other words, we are still colonised technologically, ruled by foreign technology, and unable to choose what is good for us. Of course, issues of market for our products would arise, where can one sell Malawian innovation in ICT? Well, with the advent of the Internet, all things are possible. We would then end up with improved lives and a better economy.

Globally, I am looking forward to a day when Africa will have access to bandwidth at rates as low as that currently paid in developed countries. I am optimistic that this could happen in the short term. I look forward to a fully decolonised Africa.

Today, I am involved in a number of projects.

• I work as a research tutor in the Internet Governance Capacity Building Programme. My students are quite diverse, coming from Malawi, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Ghana, Burundi, Canada, and Zambia.

• I am also involved with of the development of the first Malawi ICT Policy for the next decade, with focus on ICT for development. It is expected that the document will be presented to parliament this year. The University of Malawi is part of the group working on this document, and it is through representing the university that I contribute to the production of the document. However, I also have been making contributions towards the production of this document as a member of the ICT Association of Malawi. The working group comprises the private sector, academicians, civil society, and government.

• Most universities in Africa do not have access to sufficient bandwidth or to online materials, as is the case

"I realise that it is very easy to learn technical ICT, and be able to implement different systems. However, plans for implementation of infrastructure, development of information systems, are inhibited by policy makers, who sometimes for lack of insight into ICT, tend to be hesitant to support such initiatives. Consider the case of the EASSy cable. The biggest issue in the delay of this project is policy and not implementation."

"Initiatives such as those of DiploFoundation are highly appreciated. I think what we need in Africa is exposure to global forums and issues. This is the only way we can have an effect. I feel that with the number of university graduates that we currently have in Africa, if each one of them were able to contribute meaningfully in their field to help the government and advise it on global issues, Africa would never be the same."

Chancellor College, Malawi

in developed countries. In order to promote Internet connectivity for the tertiary education and research sectors, the Malawi Research and Education Network (MAREN) was established in October 2005. I joined MAREN in 2006 soon after my return from Australia and I am part of a task force that oversees its operations. MAREN has successfully lobbied for the use of existing fibre owned by the Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi (ESCOM). This is strategic because the main fibre line runs close to most tertiary education and research institutions. MAREN is now seeking financial, technical, and material assistance to connect institutions that are not close to this main fibre line. The options explored at the moment are fibre and wireless connection.

• I am also a board member of an organisation involved with the distribution of computers to secondary schools and other youth organisations in Malawi, Computers for Malawi. As was the case with MAREN, a colleague introduced me to this organisation and requested if I could take her place as she was leaving the country for further studies. At the time, my plate was full but the noble objectives of this organisation are worth the sacrifice. The computers are solicited mainly from Computer Aid with the help of donations from well-wishers.

• As already noted, I am a lecturer in the University of Malawi. Apart from the normal duties of a lecturer, I am deputy head of Mathematical Sciences Department and head for the Computer Science Section within the department.

PERSONAL COMMENTS

Over the years, I have learnt to accept circumstances that surround my life at the time. I am a Christian, and I believe that God let those things happen for me so I could be who I am today, and especially for me to be able to think the way I think, and perceive life the way I do. I believe in life with vision and purpose, seeing the end before the beginning, and with God's help, taking steps to reach there.

Initiatives such as those of DiploFoundation are highly appreciated. I think what we need in Africa is exposure to global forums and issues. This is the only way we can have an effect. I feel that with the number of university graduates that we currently have in Africa, if each one of them were able to contribute meaningfully in their field to help the government and advise it on global issues, Africa would never be the same.

Africa has many educated people with a great local perspective; however, they have little global influence. I find that it is not enough to invite people to forums where it is a known fact that they will not contribute meaningfully. It is better to invest time in training them and, if this is done properly, through different avenues, even the Internet, their voices will be heard.

"Africa has many educated people with a great local perspective; however, they have little global influence. I find that it is not enough to invite people to forums where it is a known fact that they will not contribute meaningfully. It is better to invest time in training them and, if this is done properly, through different avenues, even the Internet, their voices will be heard."