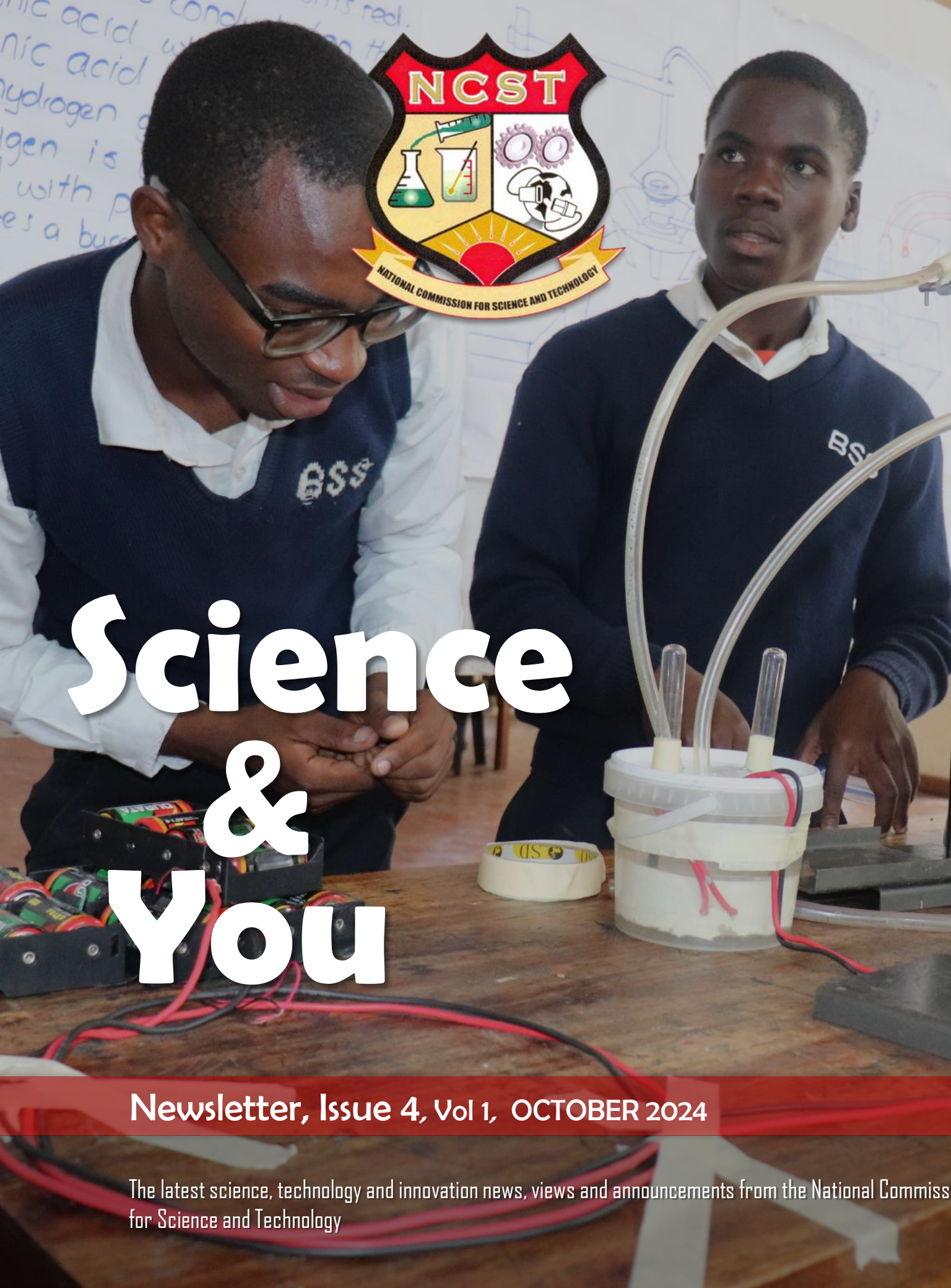

Science & You

Newsletter, Issue 4, Vol 1, OCTOBER 2024

The latest science, technology and innovation news, views and announcements from the National Commiss for Science and Technology

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND COMPOSITION OF THE FOURTH BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Meet NCST's fourth Board of Commissioners

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Prof. Ken Maleta, Commissioner

Prof. Cosmo Ngongondo, Commissioner

Mr. Enock Daniel Alfred Chibwana Commissioner

Dr Cecilia Maliwichi-Nyirenda Commissioner

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Mrs. Margret Shirley Dzoole, Commissioner

Prof. Limbikani Matumba, Commissioner

Gift A. Kadzamira

Director General, **National Commission for Science and Technology**

Dear our valued stakeholders,

Welcome to our latest issue of “Science and You”, an NCST newsletter series. I'm excited to share with you some of the progress we have registered in the rapidly evolving landscape of science, technology and innovation. At NCST, we are very passionate about unlocking the potential of science, technology, and innovation to drive positive change and improve lives of our people.

In this quarter, we've made significant strides in a number of areas, by providing research grants under the Science Granting Council Initiative (SGCI) to a number of researchers in areas such as Artificial Intelligence in Health and Agriculture; Biotechnology; and Energy. We are driven by passion for discovery and commitment to harnessing the power of science, technology and innovation to transform industries and lives of Malawians. We continued playing our role of promoting, supporting, coordinating and regulating the development and application of Science, Technology and Innovation to support the wealth creation agenda and improve the quality of life. NCST has managed to empower a number of innovators to unlock new business opportunities through our grant schemes under the S&T fund. Success Stories include Ekalite LED Bulbs, House Power Bank and Unified Electric Power Amplifier (UEPA). The Commission is proud of the impact on grassroots innovators at community level in Malawi. The Commission also stepped up its efforts to inspire and support young girls to pursue careers in science disciplines by organizing secondary school girls' mentoring sessions. Research has shown that girls are under-represented in science-related careers, and often lack support as the society is less empathetic to address their social problems. By providing these mentorship programs specifically tailored to young women, together, we can empower them to explore their interests in science, and technology and innovation, connect with female role models and increase enrolment rates in STEM subjects. I am pleased to mention that we managed to reach out to over 1000 secondary school girls.

I am also proud to announce a significant move aimed at fostering innovation and advancing technology in the country. The Commission is poised to launch the Innovation Portal aimed at connecting researchers and innovators with industry stakeholders and funders consequently address the quality of innovative products produced in the country. It is anticipated that the portal will push for the development of quality innovations that will enhance our competitiveness as an industrialized nation.

In a bid to take research to the people, the Commission stepped up its efforts to address the challenges of misinformation and misconceptions surrounding biotechnology in Malawi. NCST has actively engaged journalists through a number of media training workshops to ensure accurate and informed reporting on science, technology and Innovation in particular Agriculture Biotechnology. In addition, NCST has also engaged the research community in knowledge translation in order to inform policy and practice.

As a Commission, we are embracing modern and pragmatic approaches that will enable us achieve the intended results. Implementation of our programmes will require a well-resourced Commission for us to effectively serve all stakeholders.

If you have any feedback or suggestions, please do not hesitate to reach out to our Science Engagement Section of the Commission. We are always listening and looking for ways to better serve you.

Thank you for being part of our community. We're honored to have you as a reader and look forward to continuing to serve you.

Gift A. Kadzamira, Director General,

In this Issue

SOLVING RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES;

ONE DIGITITAL PLATFORM AT A TIME

Imagine a time where at the click of a button you were able identify right within the African region equipment that you were in dire need of, a time where you were able to find and connect with researchers who share similar interest with you in a matter of minutes and a time where you could showcase your inventions to the entire continent and connect with the industry giants. That time is now and these dreams and aspirations have been realised with the coming of a new, fresh and crispy platform called "Technomart" which seeks to promote research infrastructure sharing within the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region.

A study conducted by the AAU to map research infrastructures is SSA recommended that "research infrastructures in African higher education institutions must be conceptualised, designed, operated and managed as a strategic capability, with a long-term view and in a co-creation manner – involving HEIs, industry, government and other actors of the ecosystem". Adopting this approach can strengthen governance, stimulate innovation, optimize operations, reduce redundancy, and enhance regulatory compliance and policy development.

Being a region that recognises its challenges and puts in efforts to solve them, Technomart was developed by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) in partnership with the Association of African Universities (AAU) under the auspices of the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI). Objective 5 under theme 6 of the SGCI project which focuses on supporting councils to customise and implement an infrastructure sharing protocol has been the key in supporting UNCST's work to complete the Technomart and facilitate research infrastructure and equipment sharing and management.

WHAT SETS TECHNOMART APART AND WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

i. *Approved subscribers are able to manage institutional equipment and resources*
ii. *A search facility to find, access, and share R&D resources and infrastructure*
iii. *User can collaborate, showcase their expertise, exchange knowledge and connect with other researchers*
iv. *Institutions can identify innovations and partners with innovators looking for industry partners.*
v. *The platform helps to avoid duplicative purchases of equipment, save costs relating to transfer of materials and promote efficient use of resources through sharing.*
vi. *The platform mines patent information into the system for easy identification of expired patents that can be tested, developed and commercialised into technologies that suit the national agendas.*

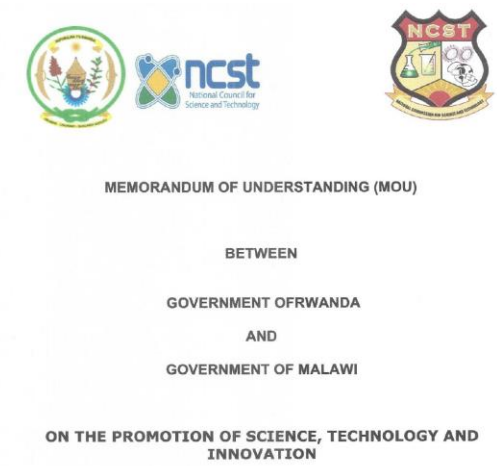
The time if now for researchers and innovators to collaborate, share benefits and maximise research infrastructure usage within the region. The National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST) in line with its function to create science and technology awareness embraces this platform and recognises that Technomart resonates with similar platforms at the Commission such as the NCST Digital Repository and Directory and the Innovation Portal. The Commission urges the Science Technology and Innovation (STI) constituency to access these benefits of the Technomart through: https://www.technomartafrica.com

By: Yalonda Mwanza-Kapewa, McDonald Kamanga and Nodumo Dhlamini

https://aau.org/mapping-research-infrastructure-to-enhance-the-resilience-of-science-systems-in-sub-saharan-africa/

Grand Challenges Partnership between NCST Rwanda and NCST Malawi bears fruits

Following the launch of Grand Challenges Malawi on 30th August 2023, NCST-Malawi and NCST-Rwanda signed a letter of intent on 29th September 2023. On 12th October 2023, the two Commissions signed an Memorandum of Understanding in which a joint partnership plan was developed. The joint partnership plan outlines the action and targets agreed upon to implement the agreement. The purpose is to engage both councils with the purpose of engaging Malawi and Rwanda scientists, researchers and innovators from the academia, research and innovation initiatives in order to strengths international partnership and leverage STI and R&D programs performance, improve human scientific capacity in national institutions, and contribute to the development STI and R&D policy and practice.


MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

BETWEEN

GOVERNMENT OFRWANDA

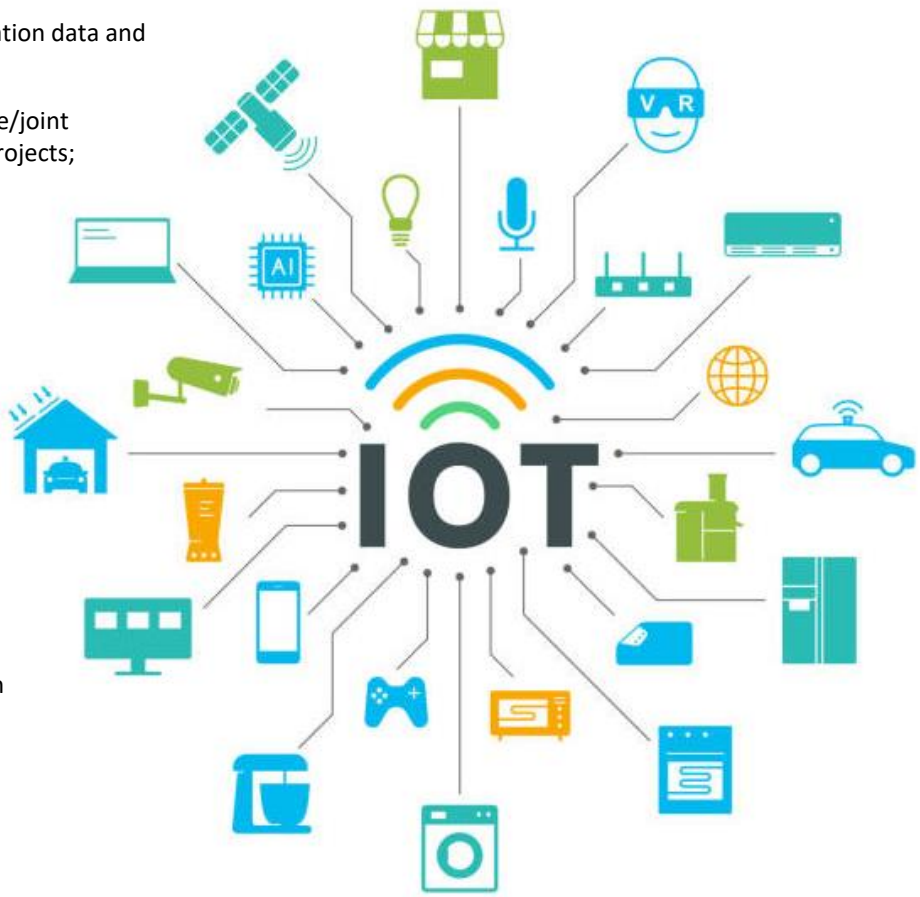
AND

GOVERNMENT OF MALAWI

ON THE PROMOTION OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

The partnership between NCST Rwanda and NCST Malawi intends to cover areas of collaboration that include but not limited to:

- Training programs to support human capital development in science, technology and innovation;
- Organizing science, technology and innovation workshops, seminars and conferences in areas of mutual interest;
- Exchange of science, technology and innovation data and information;
- Formulating and implementing collaborative/joint research and development programs and projects;
- Establishing joint funding mechanisms to support small and large scale regional STI research projects;
- Facilitating access to science and technology infrastructure between parties



This new research collaboration and partnership plan is bearing good results as the National Research Foundation (NRF) of the Republic of South Africa has financed the two partnering councils to support 4 research projects each in the areas of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotics, 3D printing, Drone technology and Internet of Things (IoT). The Research work is also expected to support some student PhD and Masters' work.

By Kondwani Gondwe (NCST-Malawi) and Louis Sibomana (NCST-Rwanda)

Empowering Girls to Pursue Careers in Science Among Secondary Schools

Umbwi Secondary School sudents

As one of its functions to Promote, Coordinate and Regulate the development and application of Science, Technology and Innovation in Malawi, the National Commission for Science and Technology through the Information, Education and Communication(IEC) Section, organized a mentoring session, in different secondary schools to encourage girls to take up science subjects as one way of minimizing gender bias in the country and as one way to contribute towards the achievement of the Malawi2063 Agenda.

The primary aim of the girls' mentoring sessions is to inspire and support young girls to pursue careers in science. Studies have shown that most girls do not participate extensively in science, which is reflected in the low number of women in scientific fields. These sessions aim to dismantle gender stereotypes, provide role models, and offer guidance and resources to help girls navigate the challenges and opportunities within scientific fields.

The journey began on June 24th, 2024, at Umbwi Secondary School in Dedza District, where the first session took place. The students gathered in anticipation, unaware that the guest speaker would be a living testament to what determination and hard work can achieve. Dr. Olivetta Chitanje, a 25-year-old medical doctor from Kamuzu Central Hospital, stood before them—not just as a doctor, but as a beacon of hope.

Dr. Chitanje shared her story, one rooted in a village often overshadowed by negative stereotypes. She recounted her journey from Seto Village to Likuni, Lilongwe, where she defied the odds to excel in school and ultimately secure a place at the College of Medicine. Despite facing uncertainty and financial challenges, Dr. Chitanje's resolve never wavered. Her message was clear: success is attainable for anyone who is willing to work hard, stay focused, and never give up.

"Take responsibility, set your goals, and endure challenges,"

Dr. Chitanje urged the girls, emphasizing the pillars that guided her to success. Her words resonated deeply with the girls. *Mary Khoza*, a Form 3 student and head girl at Umbwi Secondary School, dreams of becoming a lecturer in science subjects and excels in both Sciences and Humanities. She believes her chosen field will help her achieve her goals. Mary believes that with hard work both boys and girls can do well in science. She noted that society regards science as hard for girls and role models like Dr. Chitanje provide significant motivation.

Mary Khoza(left) and Jacqueline Chikalema(right), Form 3 students and head girls at Umbwi Secondary School

Jacqueline Chikalema, also a Form 3 student, was inspired by Dr. Chitanje's story and aspires to become a medical doctor. She plans to work extra hard and follow Dr. Chitanje's advice. She noted that science careers are often avoided by girls due to their challenging nature and societal perceptions. She suggested that science camps and increased awareness could help change these mindsets. Her message to fellow girls was to dream big and believe that science is for everyone The initiative expanded to two more schools: Sadzi Community Day Secondary School in Zomba District and Liwonde Community Day Secondary School in Machinga. Here, the girls were introduced to two more inspiring mentors:

Dr. Alice Mbewe from Welcome Trust Malawi and Dr. Priscilla Maliwichi from the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST).

At Sadzi CDSS, the students heard from Dr. Mbewe, who shared her path from a curious young girl to a scientist with a PhD in Viral Immunology from Oxford University. Her story of perseverance in the face of failure inspired the girls, as she emphasized that there is no limit to what they can achieve with hard work and determination. Dr. Maliwichi, on the other hand, spoke about the opportunities available at MUST, encouraging the students to consider applying and reassuring them that financial barriers could be overcome with available government loans and support.

The day concluded at Liwonde CDSS, where the mentors reiterated their messages of resilience and ambition. The students listened intently, soaking in every piece of advice on how to succeed in their studies and future careers. The mentors' stories were more than just narratives; they were lifelines of encouragement for these young girls, showing them that their dreams were within reach.

The final session took place on July 1st, 2024, at Mtangatanga Community Day Secondary School in Mzimba District. Here, the students were welcomed by Dr. Naomi Banda from Mzuzu Central Hospital.

Dr. Banda's story mirrored the struggles and triumphs of many girls in rural Malawi. Coming from a humble background in Mchinji, she worked tirelessly to overcome the challenges that came her way, eventually earning her place as a medical doctor.

Dr. Banda spoke passionately about the importance of persistence and choosing the right friends, emphasizing how these choices had shaped her own journey. Her message was not just about science; but also about life. She encouraged the girls to aim high, to be resilient in the face of challenges, and to keep their dreams alive no matter the obstacles.

From previous page

Dr Naomi Banda talking to students at Mtangatanga CDSS

Girl Students exhibiting their Science project

Dr. Naomi Banda expressed that the experience was rewarding to her as she rarely shares her life story but found it fulfilling to inspire the students. She related with the girls and hoped her story would benefit them. She highlighted the challenge of girls being discouraged from pursuing science due to societal mindsets.

She advocated for more mentoring sessions to bring young role models to inspire girls to take science seriously, which could significantly impact their future and the country's development.

The mentors' stories and advice addressed the challenges these girls faced—whether it was the pervasive gender stereotypes that cast science as a male domain,

the lack of female role models, or the confidence gap that many young girls struggle with. But the sessions also offered solutions: early exposure to science, mentorship programs, workshops, and a strong support system that included parents and communities.

By the end of these sessions, the NCST had reached out to an estimated 300 girls in four schools. The girls left these sessions with more than just inspiration—they left with a blueprint for success, laid out by women who had walked the path before them, the impact was undeniable.

As the NCST reflects on this initiative, the vision is clear: this is just the beginning. There is a recognition that more needs to be done—more girls to be reached, more stories to be shared, and more dreams to be ignited. The goal is not just to inspire a few, but to create a movement that will lead to a more diverse and innovative scientific community in Malawi.

These sessions have planted the seeds of change in the hearts of these young girls, and with continuous support and encouragement, they will grow into a new generation of scientists who will help shape the future of Malawi, driving the country closer to achieving its Malawi 2063 vision.

Group photo at Sadzi CDSS together with Dr Alice Mbewe (MLW) and Ms Priscilla Mwaluwichi (MUST)

Media Training Enhances Biotechnology Reporting in Malawi

Lyson Kampira
Director of Research and Technology Development

In an effort to enhance accurate and informed reporting of Science and Biotechnology, The National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST), engaged with journalists on May 28, 2024, at the Victoria Hotel in Blantyre. This was a continuation of NCST's ongoing commitment to equip the media with skills in Science reporting and to provide them with technical information about Biotechnology and Biosafety. This session was followed by a similar event in Mzuzu on July 26, 2024.

The Blantyre session highlighted the importance of media involvement in biotechnology discourse. NCST Acting Director of Research, Lyson Kampira, emphasized that the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and that accurate reporting is essential in combating myths and misinformation that often surround biotechnology, particularly in the context of food and crop production.

“We wanted to engage the media so that they should be well-informed and capable of interpreting these messages for the benefit of consumers,” Kampira explained. He expressed optimism that the journalists would now be better equipped to disseminate accurate information about biotechnology products, the regulatory framework in Malawi, and ongoing research, such as the genetically modified maize trials at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR).

“We feel you should know more about bio-technology because you are key players in information dissemination,” Kampira said, adding that there was need to inform Malawians on safety of the bio-technology products and its contribution to sustainable agriculture and small-scale farming.

The training sessions featured presentations from leading experts in the field such as Professor James Bokosi of LUANAR and Professor Wisdom Changadeya of the University of Malawi. they provided an update on Malawi’s current research on genetically modified maize designed to resist fall armyworm attacks as a response to the critical challenges facing critical crops such as maize which have a major contribution on Malawi's agriculture sector. They also detailed the benefits of biotechnology products, such as the Bt cotton variety currently in use, which has proven to be a valuable asset in the fight against pests.

The two experts however agreed that there is limited investment in the sector which hampers research and development. Another challenge they raised was that Malawi's biotech sector is underfunded, resulting in slow progress and low public awareness.

Effective communication was another key focus of the training highlighting the importance of clear and accurate communication, especially when dealing with complex issues like biotechnology. strategies for identifying and countering misinformation, such as demanding evidence and building a network of reliable sources were provided.

Journalists who attended the training, including Augustine Mulomole from Mlimi Radio, expressed their appreciation for the insights gained. Mulomole noted that the knowledge acquired would enhance their ability to report accurately on biotechnology, helping to clarify misconceptions and inform the public about the safety and benefits of biotech products.

Both training sessions in Blantyre and Mzuzu were well-received, with active participation from journalists representing major media houses in Malawi, including Malawi News Agency, Nation Publications Limited, Times Group, and Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, among others. The sessions reinforced the need for continued engagement between the NCST, media, and other stakeholders to ensure that the public receives reliable information on scientific issues such as biotechnology.

As Malawi continues to explore the potential of biotechnology in improving agricultural productivity and sustainability, these training sessions are a crucial step toward building a well-informed media that can effectively educate the public and dispel harmful myths. The NCST's ongoing efforts to train journalists are not just about improving reporting—they are about empowering the public with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about Science in Malawi.

Ekalite LED Bulbs: A Bright Future Powered by the NCST Grant

The National Commission for Science and Technology provides various grants aimed at fostering technological innovations, research and development. These grants are typically targeted at promoting Science Technology and Innovation (STI) to enhance economic growth.

Bulb assembling equipment acquired under the grant

This year, 2024 NCST under the Technology Innovation Grants (TIGs) provided 10 million kwacha each to different innovators across Malawi. Daniel Kwizombe of ekalite led bulds and Smith Nkhata of dehydrators are some of those beneficiaries. Before receiving support from NCST, Kwizombe shared that Ekalite LED Bulbs operated on a small scale, struggling to meet demand. "We had ambitious plans to expand, but we lacked the necessary funding to grow our operations and upgrade our technology. These limitations held us back, and despite the rising demand for eco-friendly lighting, we were unable to scale our production effectively," he explained.Kwizombe identified several challenges such as limited access to funding, inadequate production capacity, and high energy costs as having impeded his company's growth. **production output was too low to meet the increasing market demand for our LED bulbs, and inefficient production processes led to high energy consumption, hurting our bottom line and reducing our ability to compete in the market,"** he said.

However, everything changed when the NCST grant came through. This financial boost allowed Kwizombe to take his business to the next level, resulting in significant benefits for both the business and his personal life. With this grant, Kwizombe upgraded his production technology, increasing production capacity by 30%. This allowed him to meet customer demand while improving the overall quality of the products, reducing defects by 10% to ensure customers received the best possible LED bulbs. The new technology also enabled further innovation, making the products even more energy-efficient and positioning Ekalite more competitively in the market.On a personal level, the grant brought him peace of mind. The stress of uncertainty about the business's future faded, and Kwizombe now has greater confidence in his growth prospects. The improved financial stability has provided security, allowing for future planning with greater assurance. Beyond personal gains, the grant allowed Kwizombe to give back to the community. He created five new jobs and provided training opportunities for existing staff, fostering a stronger, more capable team. Additionally, by cutting energy costs by 3%, he made the operations more sustainable and environmentally friendly, contributing positively to the local economy. The NCST grant has truly empowered Kwizombe, transforming not only his business but also providing personal peace of mind and an opportunity to positively impact the community. Thanks to this support, Ekalite LED Bulbs is now stronger, more innovative, and ready to continue growing in the years to come.

NOURICEUTIC FOODS

When Smith Nkhata, founder of Nouriceutic Foods Company(The Cabinet Dehydrator) received the NCST Grant he immediately invested into upgrading and expanding his business. Before receiving the grant, SGN Foods was a small operation focused on a single product—dehydrated cooked beans—using just one small dehydrator. Despite the growing demand for his product, Nkhata faced significant challenges that limited his ability to scale up and meet market needs. The Cabinet Dehydrator is currently used to dry processed beans at Nouriceutic Foods Company The dehydrator can also be used to dry different products such as flour, spices and other powdered products. It is currently used for manufacturing a novel Nouri Instant Beans, tomato powder, chili and sweet potato the products the company produces and sells.

The business was constrained by several obstacles: inconsistent drying processes that led to spoilage, high energy consumption driving up costs, and a limited production capacity of just 18 packs of beans (500g each) per day. These issues kept SGN Foods from growing and reaching its full potential. With the support that he got from NCST, he upgraded his equipment by fabricating two new dehydrators—a single cabinet dehydrator capable of processing 40-45 kg of wet cooked beans in just 10-12 hours, and a double cabinet dehydrator with a capacity of 80-90 kg, also completing drying in 10-12 hours. These new dehydrators transformed SGN Foods' production capacity. The business can now produce 30 packs per day with the single cabinet dehydrator and 60 packs per day with the double cabinet dehydrator. When both machines operate simultaneously, the daily output reaches 90 packs—five times the original capacity. Not only has production capacity increased, but product quality has also improved. The new dehydrators ensure uniform drying, eliminating the spoilage issues that previously plagued operations. Additionally, the more energy-efficient design has reduced power consumption, cutting production costs and boosting profitability.

An unexpected result of this transformation has been the strong interest from other small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the new dehydrators. This demand has led Nkhata to plan the launch of SGN Machinery, a business dedicated to fabricating and selling dehydrators to other SMEs. This opportunity was not part of his original business plan, but thanks to NCST, Nkhata now has a new and exciting path to explore.

With the improved production capacity, SGN Foods has been able to introduce more products and expand its reach. The company now supplies over 35 outlets across Malawi, dramatically increasing its market presence. The enhanced production and distribution have significantly boosted sales, and SGN Foods continues to see strong growth.

Products from a food dehydrator

Upcoming Innovation Portal Set to Connect Malawi's Innovators with Financiers

Malawi has long recognized the importance of science, technology, and innovation (STI) in driving economic growth and wealth creation. However, the country has struggled to effectively transfer technology from research and development institutions to the industry, hindering the commercialization of innovative products. To address this gap, the National Commission for Science and Technology is launching the Innovation Portal. This platform will connect researchers, innovators, industry players, and funders and will facilitate, collaboration, networking, and information sharing to accelerate the transfer and commercialization of STI products. This initiative was unveiled during validation meetings held in Blantyre on 22nd to 26th July and Lilongwe on 13th August 2024.

The innovation portal aims to address the quality of innovative products produced in the country, which have often been criticized by industry representatives as being of low quality. Isaac Chingota, Acting Director for Technology Transfer at NCST emphasized the importance of providing support and mentorship to innovators, stating, " with this portal, we hope to push for the development of quality innovations that will enhance our competitiveness as an industrialized nation". During the meeting, Chingota, expressed optimism about the portal's potential. "We've seen a rise in the number of innovators in Malawi, especially in fields such as energy and health". He however stated that most of these innovations often stall at the prototype stage due to a lack of funding and technical support and that the Innovation Portal will play a crucial role in tracking the progress of these innovations and connecting them with the necessary resources to succeed.

The initiative received enthusiastic backing from local researchers and industry representatives. Tabitha Nindi Chigwe, a research fellow at the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST), expressed her excitement about the portal, stating, "Innovation is the key for development and this portal has the potential to help innovators, companies, and researchers." She noted that MUST has already developed innovations in energy,Information and Communications Technology, and arts, which could significantly benefit from the new platform

NCST engaging with PPPC, one of the key stakeholders

Kumbukani Namanja, Operations Manager at Imosys Limited, a company that offers ICT solutions, also praised NCST for bridging the gap that often prevents innovators from connecting with industry stakeholders. He pointed out that funding has been a persistent challenge for many innovations, saying, "Sometimes we come up with fantastic ideas, but they never materialize due to a lack of financial backing. This portal could be a game changer.

According to Vincent Mbisa from Mzuzu E-Hub the portal will serve as a one stop shop for innovators, providing them with the necessary support and resources to commercialise their innovations, as it will also facilitate collaboration between stakeholders in the innovation ecosystem.

The launch of the innovation portal is expected to boost entrepreneurs in Malawi, creating new opportunities for economic growth and development. Innovators and entrepreneurs have welcomed the initiative, citing the challenges they face in accessing funding and resources. "This portal will help us to know who is available to fund, what kind of funding to choose, and it will also help us to learn a lot from what others are doing," said Joshua John, an Innovator

Zackie Kantchowa showcasing how the Innovation portal works

As Malawi continues to nurture its innovation ecosystem, the Innovation Portal stands as a beacon of hope for aspiring innovators seeking to make their mark in various fields. By fostering connections between innovators and financiers, the portal aims to propel the country toward a more competitive and industrialized future.

National Commission for Science and Technology Hosts a Sub-Regional IP Training for SGCI participants

The National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST) has taken a significant step towards promoting innovation and intellectual property (IP) in Malawi. The NCST, in collaboration with the Scinnovent Centre and other partners, organized a capacity building workshop for Science Granting Councils (SGCs) from August 26-30, 2024, at the Sunbird Capital Hotel in Lilongwe, Malawi.

The workshop aimed to enhance the capacity of SGCs to develop and implement institutional IP policies, private sector engagement strategies, and infrastructure sharing protocols. The event brought together participants from various councils across Africa to share experiences, benchmark best practices, and learn from each other.

During the workshop, participants discussed various topics such as types of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) in African countries and protection of IPRs through legal frameworks and registration bodies. Additionally, the gathering shed light on the Institutions that are involved in funding research and innovation. The Bayh-Dole Amendment Act and Victoria Commonwealth Triple Helix approaches were discussed.

The participants also identified challenges faced by institutions in promoting IP, including cultural change inertia, lack of motivation for frameworks, technology push, and lack of comprehensive policies. To address these challenges, solutions such as incentivizing innovation, capacity building, technology transfer, and developing policies to promote IP were proposed.

The workshop also explored strategies for identifying and commercializing IP potential in research projects, protecting IPRs in collaborative research and innovation, promoting IP policies and strategies, and building capacity and awareness on IP among stakeholders.

In her opening address, the Director General of the National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST) Gift Kadzamira, highlighted the importance of IP in fostering innovation and economic growth. She emphasized the need for SGCs to develop institutional IP policies and strategies to harness research and development investments.

The NCST's initiative to promote IP and innovation is expected to have a positive impact on Malawi's Research, Development and Innovation sector. Through capacity building and promoting IP policies and strategies, SGCs can play a crucial role in driving innovation and economic growth in Africa.

This workshop was a significant step towards promoting innovation and IP in Malawi and Africa as a whole. NCST's leadership in this initiative demonstrates its commitment to driving research and development in the country. As the African continent continues to grapple with the challenges of innovation and economic growth, such initiatives are crucial in promoting sustainable development and prosperity.

The workshop was facilitated by experts from the Scinnovent Centre and other partner organizations. Participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to learn from each other and share

Some of the participants at the workshop

Capacity Building

MEL Workshop

The National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST) recently concluded a pivotal Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) workshop aimed at enhancing its capacity to drive sustainable growth through Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) in Malawi. Held in collaboration with Evi-Pol 2, the workshop focused on refining NCST's MEL framework, aligning it with ongoing initiatives, and integrating it within the Government Management System (GMS). Key activities included finalizing results chains, frameworks, and a theory of change, alongside digitalization training for MEL processes. The workshop's outcomes are expected to significantly improve NCST's effectiveness in promoting Research, Technology Transfer, and Innovation, ultimately contributing to Malawi's socio-economic development. The final MEL plan is set to be completed by mid-September 2024, with a follow-up virtual meeting scheduled for October to ensure alignment and readiness for implementation.

Innovation Portal Training Empowers Staff with New Skills

On June 25, 2024, staff members participated in an engaging training session focused on the Innovation Portal, a cutting-edge platform designed to manage innovation projects and enhance collaboration. The session aimed to introduce participants to the portal's key features, including navigation, connection functionality, and reporting functionalities. Attendees received hands-on experience, allowing them to familiarize themselves with the portal's capabilities, such as creating accounts, uploading innovations, and generating detailed reports. The training also included interactive elements like group discussions and case studies to deepen understanding and practical application.

Feedback from the session highlighted high levels of satisfaction with the comprehensive coverage and hands-on approach.

Participants appreciated the relevance of the content to their roles and the practical exercises that reinforced their learning. Suggestions for portal improvements were noted, and plans for ongoing support and follow-up training are in place to ensure that staff can fully harness the portal's potential. This initiative marks a significant step forward in streamlining innovation management and fostering effective industry collaborations.

Open Conference Systems (OCS) Training Workshop

The National Commission for Science and Technology recently organized a two-day training workshop, held from August 5th to 6th, 2024, aimed at preparing the newly appointed Open Conference Systems (OCS) management team. The workshop was meticulously designed to equip the team with the necessary skills to efficiently manage the OCS platform, which is crucial for the success of the upcoming 5th National Research Dissemination Conference. Through a blend of live demonstrations, hands-on exercises, and expert guidance from ICT section, participants were introduced to key functionalities of the OCS, including user registration, submission, review processes, editorial workflows, and conference metrics reporting. This comprehensive training ensured that the team could confidently handle the various technical and administrative tasks required for seamless conference management.

This initiative marks an essential step toward ensuring the successful management of the OCS and the conference itself.

Training on Online Grants Management System (OGMS)

The recent training on the Online Grants Management System (OGMS) successfully equipped staff members with the essential skills to manage grants efficiently. The session covered key aspects of the system, including navigation, user roles, the grant application process, and communication strategies for public grant calls. Delivered through a blend of presentations, hands-on practice, and interactive discussions, the training ensured comprehensive learning and practical experience. Participants responded positively, appreciating the detailed coverage, though some expressed interest in further sessions on advanced features. Overall, the training met its objectives, and ongoing support will be provided to ensure staff can fully leverage the OGMS's capabilities.

Stakeholder Engagement Meeting, Innovation Bridge Portal validation workshop

The Stakeholder Engagement Programme, held on July 25-26, 2024, at Crossroads Hotel in Blantyre,was facilitated by NCST ICT Officer Zach Kantchowa and brought together innovators, funders, and industry representatives to provide their input on the portal. The engagement aimed at introducing the National Innovation Bridge Portal to the stakeholders. Key discussions centered around innovation criteria, portal usability, intellectual property protection, and support for grassroots innovators. To ensure the portal's sustainability and effectiveness attendees recommended integrating gamification, enhancing security, and exploring partnerships with UNDP for incubation hubs and industrial parks.

The National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST) was established in 2008, to provide Science and Technology advice to the Government and other stakeholders on all matters related to science and technology in order to achieve a science and technology led development in Malawi.

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