



Improved access to safe water enhances the safety of people with albinism. The case of Phalombe District, Malawi  
**Session 6b**

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# Background of Albinism in Malawi

- Albinism is a rare genetically inherited condition which is common in sub-Saharan Africa, including Malawi.
- There are over 10,000 people with albinism in Malawi, of which 75 live in the Phalombe (PE) District.
- Since 2015, there has been an upsurge in the abduction and killing of people with albinism in Malawi.
- The danger people with albinism face is more severe in PE because it borders Mozambique where their body parts are believed to be sold.
- Some people believe that certain body parts of people with albinism can transmit magical powers and bring about prosperity; this belief is fuelled by witch doctors.

# Background to the Project

- United Purpose (UP) is implementing an integrated and holistic WASH project in Phalombe District in Southern Malawi.
- The project aims to strengthen the capacity of change agents to lead and manage WASH & other projects in the district.
- The project applies the GESI framework, specifically targeting women and vulnerable groups, including people

with albinism.

# Background to our work with people with albinism

- Our analysis of target populations identified the challenges faced by people with albinism in accessing clean water safely.
- UP was requested by local structures to develop strategies in consultation with key stakeholders to address safe access to clean water for people with albinism in the Phalombe District.

# Challenges faced by people with albinism to Access Safe Water

- Walking long distances to fetch water compromises the safety of people with albinism
- The discrimination people with albinism face result in some community members unwilling to share water points with them.
- Exposure to sunlight for a long time, for example when walking to collect water or queuing at a water point, is dangerous for people with albinisms' skin

## **Factors that deter systemic responses to address issues faced by people with albinism**

- Limited capacity of available structures (govt, community-based and associations) to effectively support the specific needs of people with albinism, including WASH needs.
- People with albinism lack voice to demand for services as they are often left out of decision making for WASH.
- Lack of understanding and awareness of issues faced by people with albinism.
- Entrenched societal stigmatization and discrimination.
- Lack of proper policies and structures to protect them.

# UP's Approach

## Capacity Strengthening



# UP's integrated approach with GESI

- UP built upon the GESI framework to develop an integrated approach to supporting people with albinism throughout the project, including:
  - i. Mapping people with albinism in the target area and prioritising WASH needs there.
  - ii. Establishing partnerships with different stakeholder groups to collaboratively analyse WASH access challenges for people with albinism and developing strategies to address them
  - iii. Strengthening the capacity of local governments and structures.
  - iv. Raising awareness designed to de-mystify stigma and discrimination against people with albinism.
  - v. Increasing the voice and meaningful participation of groups of people with albinism in WASH decision making.



## Evidence that our Approach is Working

- Improved collaboration between the district social welfare, local structures and local leaders in collectively supporting people with albinism.
- Increased awareness of the challenges people with albinism face, initiating national discussions on inclusive policies and systems to service delivery, including WASH.
- Strengthened community policing capacity and willingness to ensure a safe environment for people with albinism.

## Evidence for successful approach

- ✓ All 75 people with albinism living in the district have access to water.
- ✓ More acceptance and less fear, with no cases of the abduction of anyone with albinism.
- ✓ People with albinism from Mozambique have access to WASH services from the project.
- ✓ Recognition of the rights of people with albinism by service providers.
- ✓ Participation in decision making processes.



Onisha Mnyanya, a 19 year old girl with albinism collecting water.

**But, it has been (and continue to be) a learning journey!**



# CHALLENGES

- Lack of participation in community meetings/gathering precludes albino from being elected into committees.
- The project is not able to provide other critical needs like protective cream, sun glasses hence some of them loose interest in WASH activities.
- Lack of trust and fear within the albino communities
- The gate keepers such as chiefs sometimes do not allow CSOs and other development agencies to work with the albinos directly for fear of being targeted and abducted

# Recommendations

- Service cannot always be demand-driven as people with albinism cannot make their demands known openly to outsiders and therefore facilitation is key to ensuring access to services, including WASH.
- People with albinism must be deliberately targeted with WASH interventions to increase their engagement and access to WASH and other services.
- Collaboration is critical to ensure broader issues faced by people with albinism are holistically addressed.
- Capacity building for service providers and people with albinism is key to improving policy and systems.
- Addressing the issue of stigma and discrimination require more time than just providing WASH services.

# Resource recommendations

- Malawi constitution.
- National Government Policy on Gender and equity.
- Guidelines and data from the office of District Community Development and Social Welfare on categories of vulnerable people in the district.
- Reports on cases of the abduction and killings of people with albinism at the District Police Office.
- News paper articles on the killing of people with albinism –to attach.