



Bio: Martha Phiri is the Acting Deputy Director of JCED where climate justice and action go hand in hand. The work of JCED embodies Laudato Si – calling on all of us to hear the cry of the poor and the earth. Her work with JCED focuses on restoring eco-systems, reforestation, training smallholder farmers in climate smart agriculture and green business, producing eco-stoves and responding to natural disasters such as flash floods and cyclones which are becoming ever more prominent in Malawi. Martha plays a key role in advocacy at district and national level in Malawi. She is also a representative for Malawi at COP events – providing frontline experience of the effects of climate chaos on smallholder farmers. Martha is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in Climate Change and Sustainable Development.

CLIMATE JUSTICE IN MALAWI

– Martha Phiri

The 80th anniversary of IJI marks not only a celebration of IJI's longevity but also an opportunity to reflect on the profound impact their work has had across the globe, particularly in Malawi.

The Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) in Malawi, is an organization that has had the privilege of working closely with IJI for over a decade. Being invited to speak at this event is a testament to the strong partnership between IJI and JCED, as well as to the incredible work we have accomplished together. It is also a recognition of the shared vision and values that unite us in our mission to serve the most vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Our work is not just about projects or programs – it is about people, their stories and their resilience in the face of adversity.

This invitation is deeply meaningful, not just for me personally, but for the communities in Malawi whose voices I bring with me today. It demonstrates IJI's commitment to amplifying the perspectives and experiences of those on the ground—the farmers, the families, and individuals whose lives have been transformed through our collaboration.

This commitment aligns profoundly with the Jesuit ethos of being “men and women for others,” a call to serve and uplift those in need, inspired by the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is also a living embodiment of our late Pope Francis’ powerful message in *Laudato Si’*, where we are reminded of the interconnectedness of all humanity and calls for a “preferential option for the poor.”

Our late Pope Francis urges us to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, emphasizing that true development must prioritize the dignity, stories, and struggles of the marginalized. This invitation reflects that very principle—it is a reminder that our work is not just about projects or programs; it is about people, their stories, and their resilience in the face of adversity.

This platform allows me to share not only the successes we have achieved together but also the hopes and aspirations of the communities we serve. It is an opportunity to celebrate the incredible work of IJI while also looking ahead to the future, where our continued partnership can bring even greater impact and transformation.

IJI’s commitment to supporting the most marginalized communities in Malawi has been both inspiring and transformative. Through our partnership, we have been able to address some of the most pressing challenges faced by vulnerable communities, particularly in

the areas of food security, environmental sustainability, and climate resilience.

One of the most visible impacts of IJI’s support is food security. In the Kasungu District where many families struggle to produce enough food to sustain themselves, IJI’s interventions have brought tangible change. The successful fundraising campaigns have enabled us to provide critical resources and training to farmers, helping them adopt sustainable agricultural practices that improve crop yields and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

JCED has also been able to establish ecological villages, which serve as models of sustainability and resilience. These villages are not just about survival; they are about thriving in harmony with nature. By promoting practices such as agroforestry, organic farming, and water conservation, these communities are now better equipped to adapt to the changing climate.

Another area where IJI has made a significant difference is in promoting sustainable cooking practices. In rural Malawi, where 91% of the population of rural communities relies on fuelwood for cooking, the environmental and social costs are immense. Deforestation, soil degradation, and health issues caused by indoor air pollution are just some of the challenges associated with traditional cooking methods.



Mary, a Champion Lead Farmer, waters her cabbages at Chimbulu, the village where the “Tasintha” eco-farmer project began in Malawi.

We have been able to introduce energy-efficient cookstoves to communities across Malawi. These stoves use less fuelwood, significantly reducing the pressure on our forests while improving the health and quality of life of rural families. This initiative is a perfect example of how small, practical solutions can have a ripple effect, creating benefits that extend far beyond their immediate context.

Farmers have been empowered to adopt innovative practices that harmonize with nature. Our partnership has strengthened the local economy and inspired neighboring communities to adopt similar sustainable practices. In Kasungu, our farmers, are embracing ecologically friendly businesses, also known as green businesses. These initiatives include apiculture, banana farming, Eco stove production and fish farming. Such initiatives are not only transforming the lives of our farmers but are also making a significant contribution to environmental sustainability.

The green businesses championed by IJI are providing our farmers with sustainable livelihoods. These initiatives exemplify IJI's commitment to creating a greener, more sustainable future for our community. Local farmers are being empowered to become agents of change within their communities. Through the provision of bicycles, champion lead farmers are now able to travel more easily to provide extension services to their peers.

This has improved knowledge-sharing and collaboration among farmers, fostering a sense of community and collective responsibility for sustainable development.

Additionally, IJI has opened doors for us to connect with new partners and expand our reach. For instance, through IJI's network, we have been able to collaborate with Dublin City University on a livelihood research project that is making a meaningful difference in the lives of marginalized communities. These partnerships are a testament to IJI's ability to bring people and organizations together to achieve common goals.

We have also successfully advanced key initiatives, including the establishment and promotion of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). Communities are empowered with business management skills and are provided with farm input. These initiatives have been instrumental in equipping and empowering communities affected by climate change to build resilience, expand economic opportunities, and secure a more sustainable future.



Martha Phiri, JCED Deputy Director, Aishowarza Malik, Promotion of a Consistent Culture of Protection (PCCP) Administrator and Philip McDonagh, Director of the Centre for Religion, Human Values & International Relations at Dublin City University (DCU)

Looking to the Future

As we reflect on the past 80 years of IJI's mission, it is also important to look to the future. The continued challenges we face today, climate change, poverty, inequality, require even greater collaboration and innovation. IJI has already laid a strong foundation, and I am confident that their work will continue to inspire and empower generations to come. In this spirit, I would like to propose a few areas for future collaboration and expansion:

Scaling Up Climate Resilience Projects

Given the growing threat of climate change, there is a need to scale up projects that enhance community resilience. This includes the need to expand our ecological village initiative to other districts and incorporate renewable energy solutions such as solar power.

Youth Empowerment Programs

Investing in the next generation is critical for sustainable development. We need resourcing in vocational training, entrepreneurship opportunities, and environmental education for young people in Malawi.

Advocacy and Policy Engagement

While grassroots initiatives are essential, there is also a need to engage with policymakers to create an enabling environment for sustainable development. We need to continue our key role and encourage other agents like Irish Aid to support advocacy efforts aimed at influencing policies on climate change, food security, and education.

To sum up, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Irish Jesuits International for their continuous support and commitment to making a difference in Malawi and beyond. Your work has not only transformed lives but has also inspired hope and resilience in the face of adversity.

As we celebrate this incredible milestone, let us also renew our commitment to working together to create a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. JCED looks forward to further collaborations and mutual plans that will continue to bring positive change to the lives of many.

Thank you! Zikomo!