

Today's Woman:



Susan Silika Empowering girls, women

SUSAN SILIKA is the National Director for Campaign for Female Education (Camfed) Malawi. The organisation supports the most vulnerable girls and young women to create the future they imagine for themselves, for their communities, and for Africa. Her main role is to ensure the success of and upholding the reputation of Camfed Malawi, ensuring seamless team management, staff development, and programme delivery. She is a qualified chartered management accountant and holds a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) with Eastern and Southern Management Institute (ESAMI). **MATILDA MAJAWA** caught up with her.

Tell us about yourself.

I am Susan Silika, National Director for Campaign for Female Education (Camfed) Malawi. I am married to Henry and together we have two kids. I grew up in Blantyre and Thyolo. I went to several primary schools in Blantyre and I did my secondary school at St Michaels Girls in Mangochi. I was later selected to the then University of Malawi, The Polytechnic now Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (Mubas) to study Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. Thereafter, I enrolled with Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) and qualified as Chartered Management Accountant. I also hold a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) with Eastern and Southern Management Institute (ESAMI).

How was it like growing up?

My mother was a teacher, so it was strict academic training. She ensured I got extra support from part-time teachers to supplement normal class work. She instilled a love of education at an early age. I also was privileged to spend some of my time with my grandparents in Thyolo, with lots of siblings. It was great fun as I got to experience rural living. That also makes me feel closer to the girls and young women Camfed supports.

Did you have everything you wanted growing up?

I always envied friends who were able to go to the best private schools



Susan Silika with primary school students at a CAMFED partner school in Mulanje.

but I am grateful that we had enough resources to live a comfortable basic life - shelter, food, and the chance to go to a public school. That is something we should never take for granted. Only 13 percent of girls complete upper secondary school here in Malawi, and among the poorest children this falls to two percent.

Tell us about how you got started in your career journey.

Straight from university, I was recruited as a Management Trainee in a telecommunications company. This helped to expose me to a diverse working environment as we were made to do all the work in the organisation, especially clerical ones, to appreciate what others do. This has always been my focus when I go into any organisation: learn as much as possible what everyone else is doing.

Tell us about your current job, duties and responsibilities.

Currently, I am the National Director for Camfed Malawi. We support the

most vulnerable girls and young women to create the future they imagine: for themselves, for their communities, and for Africa. My main role is to ensure the success and uphold the reputation of Camfed Malawi, ensuring seamless team management, staff development, and programme delivery. I work in close partnership with the Ministry of Education and with our unique "Camfed Association" - women leaders educated with Camfed support, who join forces in a peer support network with elected representatives from local to national level. I support this powerful network of passionate change leaders (there are 29,385 members in Malawi and 208,000 members across Africa) on its governance structures, as well as supporting the network's activities and creating the eco-system for young women to thrive and become independent and influential. These young women are now philanthropists in their own right, supporting many more children through school with their own resources, volunteering with Camfed to mentor students in schools,

supporting each other in business and climate-smart agriculture, and lending their expertise to Camfed's programmes, so that they are truly grassroots-led. This is exciting work, and so important if we are to give every child their right to education, and achieve gender equality in our society.

How did you manage to climb up the ladder?

Determination, passion and commitment for the work, especially in my current role. I ensure that I put the girl-child and young woman at the center of all I do. I also got mentorship support from fellow women, including my current boss. What are some of the major challenges you had to defy to be the career woman you are today?

Lack of mentors/role models, which is a common challenge for most girls and young women in Malawi

Do you think women are given enough opportunities when it comes to leadership positions?

Generally in Malawi, most



Susan Silika (right) with the all-female executive leadership team of CAMFED across (from left) Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Tanzania, and Malawi together with CAMFED Executive Director Angeline Murimirwa (3rd from right)

girls/women are not given equal opportunities to leadership, they are considered less capable to lead. Culturally, most women take 'behind the scenes' roles, mostly home-based roles, rather than leadership positions. In Camfed, we train young women to rise up and take leadership positions in their communities and country.

How can women brace themselves and demand a seat at the table?

By believing in social justice starting with educated girls, supporting each other to become independent, influential women working together with communities to provide equal access to tools and opportunities for all. They should also form peer networks and play guide roles and be relatable role models to those coming behind them.

What are some of your greatest milestones to this date?

Leading an organisation that empowers girls/women to reach their highest potential. Attaining the education qualifications so far.

Getting married to my husband, who helps me to be a better version of myself

At what point will you say I am everything I wanted or even more? When I have been able to impact as many women as possible to discover their potential and reach for leadership heights.

What advice would you give to young girls pursuing their dreams and at the same time having doubts if the world will ever give them opportunities to prove themselves?

Believe in yourself, you can be anything you want to be, and be able to live a life of impacting others to reach greater heights.

What do you like to do during your free time?

Serving in the Student Christian Organisation of Malawi (SCOM), providing counseling and guidance to others, and spending quality time with my family. I also love supporting newlyweds.



Susan and husband serving in the Student Christian Organisation of Malawi (SCOM)



Susan Silika (left) outside a CAMFED partner school in Mulanje with (from left) a CAMFED Association member trained as a Learner Guide (life skills mentor), a CAMFED-trained Teacher Mentor (protecting vulnerable children) and CAMFED staff members