

# Safeguarding of Nkhonde, Tumbuka and Chewa proverbs and folktales

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## An Insider's View: Ms. Chimwemwe Sumani

### Role in the Project

Ms. Sumani has been the Information Technology Specialist and Head of ICT, Audiovisual and Culture Departments for the Malawi National Library Service (MNLS) since September, 2009. She served as technical personnel for the UNESCO project's activities in Malawi. In addition to her computer and networking responsibilities, she is committed to collecting, digitizing, documenting, and disseminating the valuable and rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Malawi.

### Why The Malawi National Library Service Storytelling Program?

"Folktales are **central to the customs and beliefs** of the people of Malawi. When I was 6 years old, my family and I happily sat around the fire listening to folktales told by my Mother. This oral tradition is **all but vanishing** in recent years due to the advent of technology—TVs in my case, aging of community figures who can deliver live performances as well as changes in lifestyle... This is what made us start storytelling sessions at the library, with an aim of **bringing it back to life**.

"Basically, a storytelling session encompasses an array of activities that **enhance children's knowledge** of traditional African Storytelling. Children answer the W3H questions [who, what, when, and how] to analyze the narrative structure. The narrator tells 3 stories per session."

### How has the program grown?

"At first, we used to go and collect the children from different points [around the city]. **Now they come to the library on their own** and the number of children per session has been gradually **increasing from 20 to 250**. We document every storytelling session to preserve it for the next generation."

### How has the program enhanced childhood learning and education?

"By introducing storytelling programs at the library, children have become more and **more interested in reading**.

"MNLS has Storytelling programs every Saturday. These sessions start at 10:30 and finish at 12:00, but children arrive as early as 7:30AM. As soon as they come, we take them to the children's section where they are assisted to select books to read according to their classes/grades....After that we take them to the room where storytelling sessions are done. In this room the kids are given chances to go in front and read aloud, narrate poems, dramas, songs, riddles, word games, etc. This is facilitated by the early childhood reading program librarian.

“As this is being done, the storytelling session moderator interviews the ‘*agogo*’ (granny) in order to learn lessons and relevance/importance of the stories before they are told to the children. Every session has 3 folktales, and at the end of each story children raise their hands (without being asked...) to respond to the first question which is: **“what have you learnt from this story?”**”

“At the end of each storytelling sessions **we give prizes to winning teams**, individuals in different competitions some of which include drama, read aloud and look, spelling bee, singing, dancing, word games, drawing, poems, stories. Finally, we give them juices and let them go home or continue reading in the children’s library.”

“Once a month, we organize prizes for **story writing competitions** where children are asked to write folktales they have heard in that month or their own stories; illustrate the story and write the advice they got from that particular story. This helps the children to be creative, attentive as the stories are being narrated to them, and it also **improves their writing and language skills** (such as grammar, vocabulary, prediction, sequencing, comprehension, story structure and recall) as much as it helps us evaluate our program.”

### What broader impacts has the program made on children and families?

“It has brought a new and better [mode] of entertainment in their homes.” **As one child said, “To us storytelling is like TV in our minds.”**

“It has **brought peace within families by bringing them together**. It has brought peace in families that always used to quarrel about children’s whereabouts. These children used to attend local cinemas where children are often exposed to uncensored movies—nowadays when they come back from school, they are either preparing/perfecting themselves for story writing competitions...or at the library simply to study.”

“There are no more street kids in City Centre where the library is situated. This is because the storytelling team went around collected them and introduced them to storytelling sessions. Now they are **working hard to learn how to read and write** so that they can win prizes. Eighty percent of the children have been enrolled in government primary schools, 15% are too young to be enrolled, and the remaining 5% are waiting for the next academic year because they came too late [in the schoolyear].”

“We are also hearing of **local storytelling competitions**.”

### How has the program impacted the library?

“We now **provide facilities** for the study of, and training in, the principles, procedures, and techniques of identifying, collecting and handling Indigenous Knowledge in audiovisual formats. We now can **organise, preserve, and make available the nation's folktale** material in oral form for the benefit of scholars, researchers, advanced students, government personnel and the general public. [The program has also] promoted regular visits to the library by the children and their families and other patrons enquiring about the availability of folktales in different formats.”

## Why is it important for the storytelling to continue?

“To us as Malawians, storytelling is integrated into everyday life and as such, it plays a major role in shaping people’s lives. Storytelling not only entertains; **it also helps the children, in particular, to discern the good values of life.** As an adult, despite the advent of television, storytelling is a better and more humane **community builder**....[The program helps] to bring back the Storytelling Tradition in Malawi by collecting, preserving and disseminating traditional forms of folktales in all the languages spoken in Malawi. My wish is that the program should not only continue but it should also spread out to the remaining parts of the country.”

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## An Insider’s View: Mr. Ephraim L Gwazanga Nkhoma

### Role in the Project

Mr. Nkhoma is a Storyteller at the National Library Services Headquarters in Lilongwe, Malawi.

### How did you become involved with the National Library Services’ Storytelling Programme?

“It was in 2015 when the Malawi National Library Services advertised for Storytellers. I applied, got shortlisted, called for the interviews, attended the interviews and, fortunately for me I got successful.

“Thereafter, I was offered the task of Telling Stories to children of different ages at the Malawi National Library Services Headquarters in Lilongwe, the Capital City of Malawi, from 1st August 2015 to date. Since then, I bring three Folktales per Session to the children.”

### What led you to become a storyteller?

“I come from a Christian family, and I spent most of my childhood with my Maternal Grandparents who were both strong and dedicated Christians.

“Despite both being educated and progressive farmers, each evening after our last meal, my grandparents could take turns in telling us different Stories about human character, animal behaviour and language, nature and so forth.

“They also had herds of cattle and goats, chicken, dogs and orchard. Many times they could also use what they had to tell us different Stories so that we, the Grandchildren, could easily understand their Storytelling.

“In each Storytelling, they made sure the Stories were so exciting so that we could participate or take part in the Storytelling. As such, each one of us developed the desire to listening to Storytelling from our Grandparents and anyone who could be able to tell us Stories.

“But we were also given the condition of reporting back to them how many people we had shared the Stories we learnt from them. Sometimes we could also be asked to meditate the Stories which they had already told us just to test our memory status.

“At the end of each Storytelling, we could be asked questions and lessons learnt from each Storytelling. Because of this, we were able to keep the Stories and narrate them. And for me that’s how I became a Storyteller. My family background has it.”

### Can you describe a typical Storytelling Session at the Library ?

“Yes. In March 2017, within the Storytelling I told a story in which I mentioned three characters which made a King’s Daughter get healed from a very long illness when nobody expected her to recover. The characters were:

‘**PITA**’ meaning ‘**GO**’

‘**BWERERA**’ meaning ‘**COME BACK**’

and

‘**BWEREZANSO**’ meaning ‘**REPEAT**’

“The children liked this story very much and asked me to repeat it during the next Storytelling Session. And since then especially those children who listened to that Storytelling, chose to address or nickname me as ‘**AGOGO BWERZANSO**’ meaning ‘**GRANDPA REPEAT**’.

“In that Story they learnt that even **an honest smile** can heal a person as it happened with the King’s Daughter.”

### Can you share a memorable storytelling experience?



“Yes. On Tuesday, 9th April 2019, I had a Storytelling Session to one of the Private Schools in the Capital City organized by the Malawi National Library Services.

“I had told them a Story about how three Brothers escaped death one by one from the wrath of their own community. The features I mentioned for the Storytelling and the way the Story was narrated made the children to be so excited including their teachers.

“At the end, both the pupils and their teachers asked and invited me to come again for another Storytelling Session. What I discovered was that in their School Curriculum they did not have Storytelling Sessions. And so they found this very good and incorporative in their class lessons.

“The other moment is when we had the commemoration of the International Day of Storytelling which in Malawi was held on Friday 12th April 2019.

“Due to the cross section of the people and dignitaries who were invited for the function, it gave me the impression that children of all ages need to be impacted on knowledge even through Storytelling.

“Parents have the duty and responsibility to advise their children. And the other viable way is through the Storytelling. I was so touched and really impressed. Wherever necessary, I also dramatize the Storytelling like what I did on this day.”

## Why is it important that the folktales are shared with the children?



“Any activity that happens it’s **passed from generation to generation**, so it’s very, very important that parents or the elderly continue giving stories to their children. Because if this is not done, it means we are not passing the information from the generation to another generation. So I feel that it’s very, very important that folktales must continue to be shared with the children. In addition to that, storytelling **closes the gap** of relationship between parents and their children. It also helps them to unite and understand each other as a family.

“Children are the generation which takes over any activity from parents. Previously, our Grandparents relied on oral tradition, remembered history and, later with the introduction of books due to modern technology, a lot of Folktales have been put into books.

“But Storytelling helps to close the relationship gap between parents and their children since it gives a platform of participation and interaction. It helps families to unite, understand each other and to prepare children how to be responsible when they grow up. It has to be passed from generation to generation.”

## Is there anything else you’d like to share that you feel people should know or understand about the importance of Storytelling or Storytellers in Malawi?

“Yes. Malawi needs to identify more Storytellers, even conducting trainings for capacity building. In the very past during the time of our Grandparents, there were Periods during Classes for Storytelling in Primary Schools.

“But today it’s no longer there. It mostly relies on those parents and people at home who have the zeal to carry on with the Storytelling for their children and different groups just like what The National Library Services is doing in Malawi.

“We encourage the Malawi National Library Services to continue conducting and offering the Storytelling Sessions so that this can be restored into our children as it were.”