

# The Gift.

THE ELIZABETH BAKAT PROJECT STORYBOOK.

Page

13

## A story of devotion.

How the legacy of Elizabeth Bakat continues to inspire hope for women like Lizinet to beat poverty.



# The Gift.

THE ELIZABETH BAKAT PROJECT STORYBOOK.

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The Gift is a free publication that shows the power of selfless support provided to advance God's call to care for the underprivileged. It does this by giving people information, inspiration, and ways to help, as well as connecting people far away with vulnerable communities and families through Lydia Action.

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# Contents.

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## **Executive Message**

A letter of gratitude

Page 3



## **Cover story**

A story of devotion.

Page 13



## **Develop**

Lifted to lift many others

Page 5



## **Inspire**

Dreams to reality

Page 16

The power of enabling tools in driving meaningful change.

Page 7

An inspiring hope for the future

Page 16



## **Empower**

As far as grace will lead you.

Page 9

A miracle enough to awaken broken dreams.

Page 11



## **Progress**

Women economic empowerment project

Page 17

Youth development and leadership project

Page 17



# A letter of gratitude.

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In March 2021, we heeded God's calling and embarked on a journey of faith. Without enough money for operations, without an office space, and without supporting staff members or volunteers, we did not have a name, no privileges, and no partners, but we marched into the unknown with passion and undying commitment, knowing that we were called to something bigger than ourselves. All we had was a legacy of hope passed on from our godmother, Dr. Rachel Nyagondwe Fiedler. Her work for over two decades with the Lydia Foundation was turning a new chapter as she began her work with Lydia Ministry. However, she gave us a stepping stone to unfold the greatest of miracles. Lydia Action was born from the divine breath of life and the remarkable work

we inherited from Lydia Foundation under the leadership of our first Executive Director Joseph Banda.

We registered an organisation without enough resources; we only had five loaves of bread and two fish. God works in mysterious ways—the Bakat family was our miracle. Midway through 2021, we received the most monetary support for our interventions. Since then, the support rendered has helped Lydia Action embark on Dream30, our 10-year (2021–2030) strategy.

Through our strategy and with the support of the Bakat family, we have supported vulnerable women in marginal-

ised communities through COVID-19 to remain resilient and overcome shocks. We supported the most impoverished women in Zomba and Lilongwe to benefit from self-tailored social economic activities and access to enabling business environments in Malawi. In addition, the Elizabeth Bakat youth programme empowered prospective university students from Malawi Assemblies of God University, Exploits University, and DMI-St. John the Baptist University in Lilongwe through skills development and leadership capacity building.

The support from the Bakat family enabled us to strengthen the implementation of Lydia Action's programmes and enhance our commitment to quality programming. Additionally, we strengthened our partnership with different stakeholders, especially the government of Malawi. Through the support of the Bakat family in 2021, we sponsored the district's first education technical working group, signed our first memorandum of understanding for the Women Empowerment Programme with the Lilongwe District Council's Gender of-

fice, assisted the Lilongwe District Council in the October 2021 Whirlwind disaster verification process, and supported the 16 Days of Activism campaign. We also sponsored the 2022 International Women's Day commemorations.

The support also enabled us to improve our financial systems and compliance, refine our monitoring and evaluation systems, and repurpose numerous jobs as part of our human resource overhaul to create functions that are fit for purpose. These and several other accomplishments occurred during a period in which the Bakat family fund enabled it to adjust to very unfavorable conditions.

We would like to thank the Bakat family for the unwavering support provided to Lydia Action. Your support enabled vulnerable communities and the most impoverished households to have hope and access the necessary tools for resilience in the most unstable and unprecedented times. Receive our heartfelt gratitude.



A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of vertical strokes followed by a long horizontal stroke.

**Matthew Kamaliza**  
Executive Director  
Lydia Action



A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a stylized 'S' and 'M'.

**Samuel Mbiri**  
Board Chairperson  
Lydia Action



***Humble beginnings and undying passion  
for helping the most vulnerable.***

An inspiring story of Francis.

BY FRANCIS MWAMLIMA



**Lifted to lift  
many others.**

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In 2024, I will be twenty-four. It felt like I was ready to start planning for the next chapter of my life, but I had no idea where to start. I was far from home, and I was going through the most hectic time of my life as I was nearly closing in on completing my master's studies at Chancellor College in Zomba. During this time, I started thinking about life after school career-wise and what impact I could bring to the world around me. The level of theoretical knowledge I had attained so far lacked the real-world experience to match it, thereby creating a gap in my skillset in converting theories into practical knowledge. There was also a lack of necessary resources that caused a level of distress that pushed me to look for something worthwhile to do.

The persisting need to advance my career led me to research organisations that could allow me to volunteer my skills. I later on applied to Lydia Action, where I began my tenure as a volunteer in August 2021. I was attached to the Elizabeth Bakat women's economic empowerment project until March 2022. When my initial volunteer tenure ended, I wanted to volunteer for a few more months, but things were about to change in the most amazing way. As per requirement, I was evaluated based on my performance and level of responsibility, and I guess my contributions were enough to make me part of the purple team family.

I was appointed as the program's quality and resource mobilisation officer. I had no idea what the immediate future had in store for me. After three months in my new post, I was appointed the regional coordinator, working from the Zomba office, where I have worked to this day, coordinating all programmes in Zomba



Francis with co-workers during a field visit in Malonje village in Zomba, Malawi.

and surrounding areas.

I remember working on my first project here; it's not a stretch to say I was in over my head and as nervous as I could be. Instead of coming down hard on me as I feared, my superiors gave me advice that helped build my confidence and experience. My performance today is a culmination of the organization's patience, trust, and positive work environment. Working for this organisation has been very enjoyable, and I have learned and grown a lot. That's why I have looked forward to coming in to work here every day. The monthly stipend also helped me out of my financial distress, allowing me to complete my master's programme without lacking the necessities.

I am very appreciative of the Bakat project, which kick-started my career path, and for giving me a means to earn a living as well as the opportunity to use my skills to support vulnerable communities in finding lasting solutions to their challenges to achieve meaningful change.





# The power of enabling tools in driving meaningful change.

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How a conducive environment for ideas and aspirations to thrive results in transformative change .

BY MATTHEW KAMALIZA



I started my work with Lydia Action as a volunteer during the Lydia Foundation days. A year later, I was offered a contract as a social work officer and as a programme officer responsible for community engagement in the year that followed. I am now the Executive Director after four years of managing the country programme as a National Coordinator. In my experience, development work requires a conducive environment for ideas and interventions to thrive. All commitments and efforts directed towards finding sustainable solutions for the challenges faced by vulnerable communities require the necessary tools to support practical interventions.

There are limits to how mere hard work can achieve development results for vulnerable communities, as there is only so much that people can do if they do not have the necessary tools to support their efforts.

The Bakat support provided the necessary tools for both Lydia Action and the communities it works with to strengthen the capacities necessary to work together and achieve collective results. On the one hand, Lydia Action was capacitated with resources to improve its work force, systems, procedures, policies, and strategies that provide an enabling institutional capacity to manage projects. On the other hand, the support made it possible to give vulnerable communities the skills and tools they needed to find and take advantage of lucrative opportunities that changed their lives.

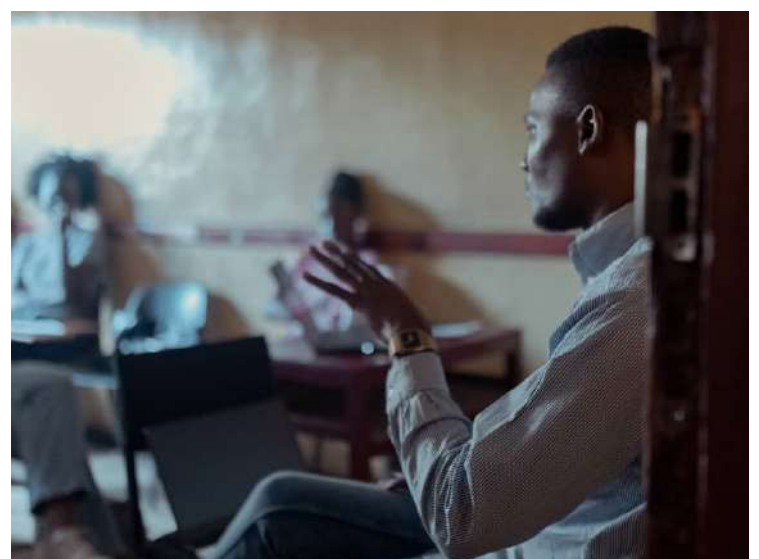
Having appropriate support for rural communities allowed for the advancement of both empowerment and poverty reduction. Through the Elizabeth Bakat project, women were given the chance to show how strong they could be. This gave them control over resources and decision-making, which led to real change.

I have also witnessed young people being supported for their potential, efforts, and commitments under the Elizabeth Bakat Youth Project. The Elizabeth Bakat youth project empowered prospective university students from Malawi Assemblies of God University, Exploits University, and DMI-St. John the Baptist University in Lilongwe through skills development and leadership capacity building. For skills to be developed, there needs to be a good learning environment and access to real-world experiences.

That has been the beauty of the Elizabeth Bakat project; it sowed possibilities that will be reaped for a long time and that will allow the aspirations of vulnerable communities and young people to be realised.

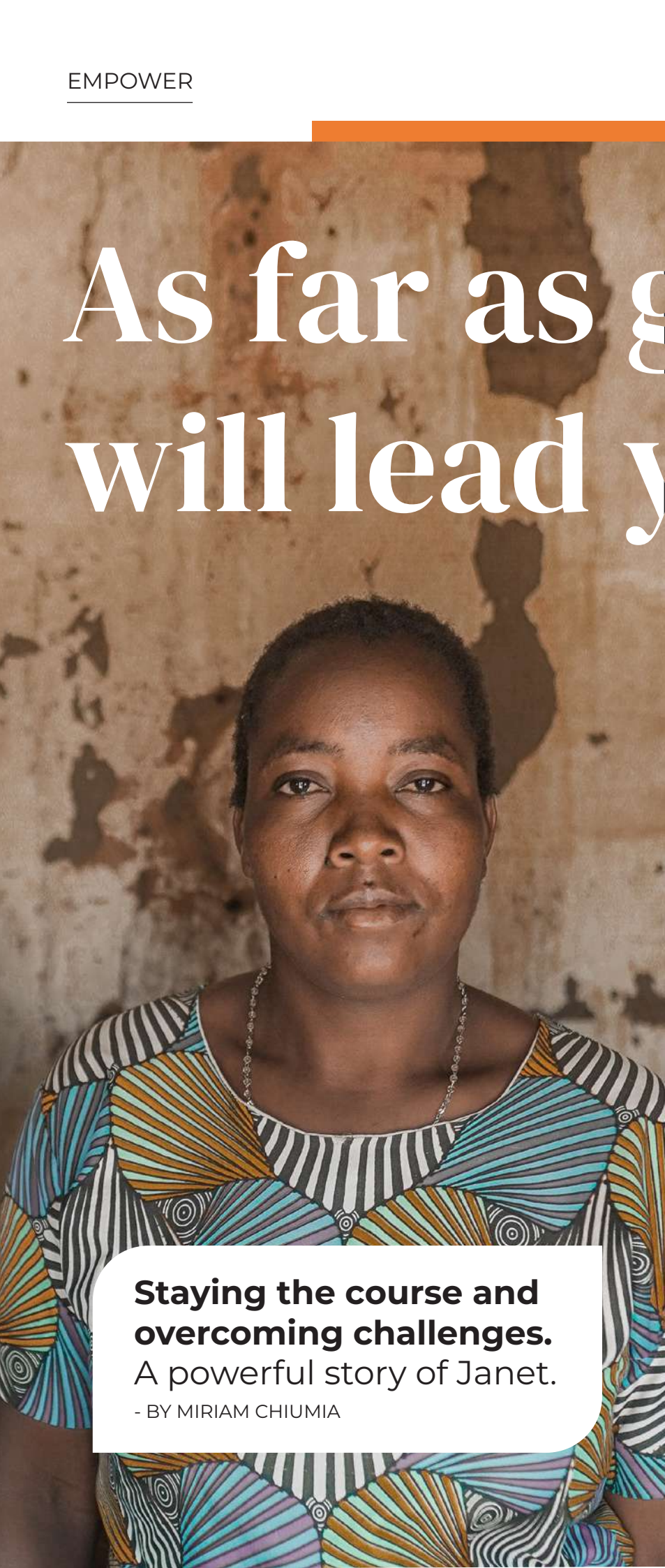


Matthew at a Lydia Action beneficiary business kiosk during a field visit at T/A Chadza in Lilongwe.



Matthew during a youth mentorship session at Exploits University in Lilongwe.

# As far as grace will lead you.

A portrait of Janet, a woman with short dark hair, looking directly at the camera. She is wearing a colorful, patterned top with stripes and geometric shapes in blue, orange, and black. The background is a textured, light brown wall. An orange L-shaped graphic element is in the top right corner.

Growing up in Ngala village of Traditional Authority (T/A) Chadza in Lilongwe, Janet was enthusiastic about school. She always considered school the only way to overcome poverty. Growing up in a poor home has its surprises. At the age of twelve, her father decided she should stop going to school and support the family business of selling vegetables. As one of the eldest of ten children, she was expected to help her parents provide for her siblings. As her parents struggled to provide for her family, she witnessed her father's violence growing due to frustration and depression.

**Staying the course and overcoming challenges.**  
A powerful story of Janet.

- BY MIRIAM CHIUMIA

As she turned thirteen, the situation in her household had worsened, and her parents divorced. Her mother took custody of Janet and six of her siblings. Together they moved to Chipchaka, the village of the Traditional Authority Chadza in Lilongwe in Malawi's central region. While there, her mother continued to struggle as she had no financial means to support Janet and her other



six siblings. Janet gave up all hope of going back to school and became her mother's helper in providing for her family through piecework on farms. A life of living hand to mouth became the norm, and the hope of a better life was a far-fetched dream. However, her story was about to take a strange turn.

At the turn of the century, Janet met Brighton, a young man who moved to her village from Mzimba, north of Malawi. Brighton moved there in search of greener pastures. He hoped to learn the trade by working for tobacco farmers, with the goal of eventually starting his own business. At this time, Brighton was also working part-time at a tea room as a helper. Janet was lured by Brighton's ambition, they fell in love, and they got married a year after meeting.

In their new marriage Jane and Brighton struggled with poverty and this persisted for seven years. Despite working hard together with her husband, the money earned was not enough to support their basic needs and their growing family as they have a first-born daughter and two young boys. The challenges started to push their family to the brink of divorce, but a miracle was about to unfold.

In 2021, Janet turned 34. Around the same time, the tea room in which her husband used to work went bankrupt. As fate would have it, Janet was also around the same time identified as one of the seventy women beneficiaries of the Elizabeth Bakat women's economic empowerment project from Chikanga of T/A Chadza in Lilongwe. After undergoing the Lydia Action income-generating capacity-building workshops, Janet was one of the fifty women out of the seventy identified to qualify for the Lydia Action financial support in April 2022 after satisfying all required criteria.

Janet and her husband invested the money they received from Lydia Action to reopen the tea room that his husband used to work in. "The tea room has been a success since we reopened." She said. "The support we received from Lydia Action has changed

our lives as we are now able to provide for our children's basic needs and their education so that they can have a better future," she added. "I loved school as a child but I couldn't finish, but now my children will get the chance I never had. I am grateful."



Janet with her husband Brighton in their tea room in Chiphaka village of T/A Chadza in Lilongwe in Malawi.



### Brighton's comment

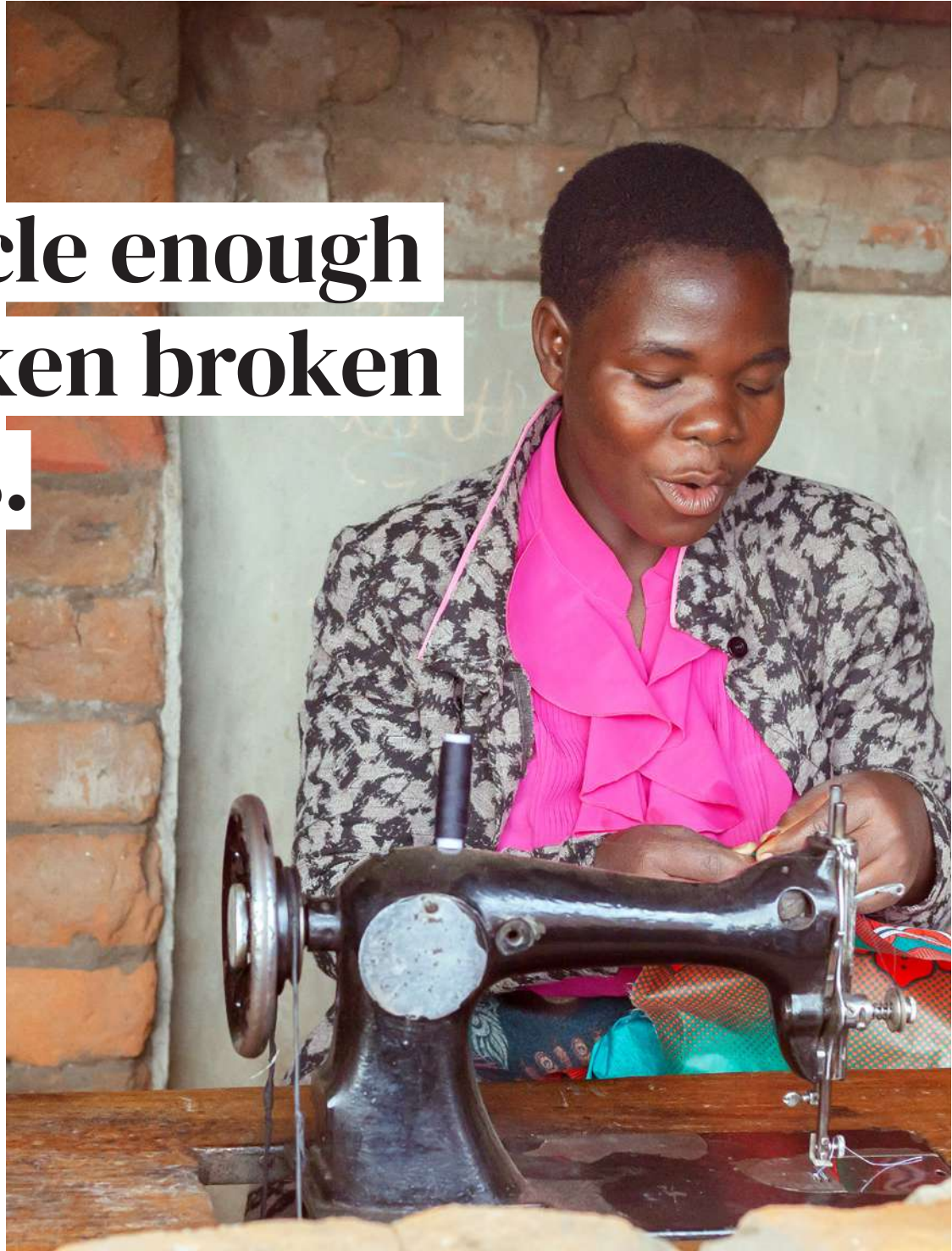
*"Our family struggled for the longest time to a point where it wasn't a happy place, but having a strong-minded woman lifts a lot of pressure," explained Brighton. "Her determination has helped us build a future for our family," he added. "The tea room has been a huge success since reopening due to the experience that I attained during the time I worked as the helper at the tea room," he explained. "It's like all the years we struggled were preparing us for this moment," he reflected.*

# A miracle enough to awaken broken dreams.

**A woman  
rising from  
despair to  
rebuild the  
future.**

A story of  
second  
chances for  
Sophie.

-BY LAUREEN LIZI



In May 2020, as the harvested fields marked the turn of a new season, Malawi opened its markets. This period from May to September is called “season time.” Sophie was set to begin her tailoring work early on a crisp morning, just after the last rooster crowed and the upper rim of the sun beams over Dimusa village in Zomba. She had a lot of outstanding garments and cloth to work on for her clients. Clients are always ready to pay fast during the harvest season, as money is readily available from selling their

harvests. Sophie was ecstatic about the prospects ahead. Unfortunately, life was plotting a terrible turn of events.

She pulled out her antique Singer sewing machine, ready to start her work. She checked everything from thread tension to her take-up lever before commencing the work, but her machine was not working. It was the first time the machine had failed her since she began using it. The machine was bought with her harvest sales money in 2017 from a tailor who had been teaching her sewing in her village. She had been



a tailor on her own for six months, and the only tool for the success of her business was failing her. At first, she thought it was a small problem that could be fixed in a day or two, but after consultations with the repair guys, she was told the machine had a big fault. She did not have money to fix the sewing machine as she was waiting to finish her client's deliverables so she could receive payments. All her clients terminated all arrangements, and in a blink of an eye, Sophie was out of business.

Sophie was not able to fix the machine for a year and a half. As a divorced mother of two, Sophie, 28, has always struggled to make ends meet. The broken machine compounded their family's struggles as she was unable to provide for the basic needs of her children.

In 2021, Sophie was identified as one of the seventy women beneficiaries of the Elizabeth Bakat women's economic empowerment project from Dimusa Village under Traditional Authority Ngwelero in Zomba district in Malawi. After undergoing the Lydia Action income-generating capacity-building workshops, Janet was one of the fifty women out of the seventy identified to qualify for the Lydia Action financial support in April 2022 after satisfying all required criteria.

Sophie invested her money in fixing her sewing machine, and it started functioning as if it were brand new. Using the knowledge gained from the Lydia Action income-generating capacity workshops, more especially on market research and savings, she started traveling to nearby markets deemed to have high demand for sewing services during busy market days by booking a motorcycle to carry her and the sewing machine. This helped her boost her sales, and she invested the money into poultry farming. She has managed to purchase ducks, local chickens, and Guinee fowl. She also sells fresh eggs, fertilised eggs, and chicks from her rearing.

**“Lydia Action was a miracle for me because all hope was fading away and I was even considering selling my broken machine at one point,” she said.**

“The money I received from Lydia Action gave life to a dying opportunity, and the benefits from fixing my sewing machine are unlimited possibilities for my family,” she added. “I am now able to provide basic needs for my family, and I can manage to pay the school development fund and buy school materials for them, which was a struggle when my sewing machine was broken,” she explained.

Sophie believes that she will be able to buy affordable inputs in 2022, which she has not been able to do in previous years, and that she will be able to farm maize to feed her household and sell some.



Sophie feeding a raft of ducks and a guinea fowl in Dimusa village in Malawi.



# A story of devotion.

How the legacy of Elizabeth Bakat continues to inspire hope for women like Lizinet to beat poverty.

- BY MATTHEW KAMALIZA





As the world commemorated International Women's Day around the world in March 2022, Lizinet was busy helping her fellow women practice how to write a business plan. Lizineti, aged 41, is from Lilongwe's Chiphaka village of T/A Chadza. She is the chairperson of the Chikanga Lydia Action women's economic empowerment group under the Elizabeth Bakat project. The group had only a month left to be conversant with their business planning and bookkeeping lessons from the Lydia Action income-generating capacity workshops. They were to be assessed in April 2022 to determine if they qualify to receive financial support from Lydia Action, scheduled for May 2022. She was determined to see all her fellow women qualify for the financial support. Lizinet knows the struggles women face in rural areas, and it breaks her heart to see women languishing in poverty. That's why the opportunity to receive the financial support was not one to miss, as she knew how much women and their families would benefit from the support.

Lizinet, like most women in rural Malawi, grew up in poverty, and her struggles were persistent in her marriage as well. As a mother of four and a wife, she has witnessed their family go through persistent hardships that have caused a lot of despair and disruption to their children's education and farming endeavors. This motivated her to look beyond her farming endeavors as a means of income generation. In 2018, she started volunteering for several non-profit organisations that were looking to imple-

ment women's economic empowerment projects in her village and needed access to financial support. All of her efforts, however, left her frustrated, and she even lost money to some fraudulent organizations.

"A number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had previously been here with similar programmes, some of which were primarily frauds and others of which even took our money in the guise of helping us," she stated. "Most of them promised us loans, but they simply vanished after the trainings," she added. "This has ingrained a neg-



Lizinet with her group members receiving the Lydia Action financial support under the Elizabeth Bakat project.

ative impression in many women, who are no longer as motivated to engage in NGO work, and they assumed in their minds that Lydia Action is also one of those organizations," she explained.

Lizinet has the experience of engaging in various local development interventions in her area, and as Lydia Action introduced itself in her village, she was the point of entry recommended by government officials working in her area. "I was convinced that Lydia Action was not here to steal from us when they first communicated their plan," she said. "They did not force predetermined business ideas on us, but they proposed we



learn how to improve what we are good at, and that was practical for me,” she added. “The relationship that Lydia Action built with us has been instrumental in building trust, and that also convinced me to lead this group because everything was set up for us to benefit,” she further explained. “That’s why I have devoted myself to this group because Lydia Action is committed to walking with us all the way, and in my years of working with NGO’s, that’s different,” she said.

All of the women under the leadership of Lizinet received financial support under the Elizabeth Bakat women’s economic empowerment project. In October 2022, twenty-one out of the twenty-five women in Chikanga Lydia Action’s women’s economic empowerment group had fully paid back their loans. They had also undergone transformative change, from asset accumulation to providing for their family’s basic needs to supporting their children’s education. They had done more with the little they were given. There is no doubt that helping women improve their lives helps everyone else, from making the local economy more productive to giving families better ways to make a living.

As a woman, Elizabeth Bakat was a God-fearing wife, a craftswoman, a business-minded person, and most of all a mother. Throughout her life, like Lizinet, she was devoted to helping women overcome poverty. She knew what women go through to support their families. She used her money to contribute to God’s mission on earth. She was an angel in the fresh air, God’s hand manifested as everyday miracles, touching vulnerable families with her generosity from millions of miles away. However, the effects of her selfless love feel like she lived close with them in their homes, their groups, and their personal struggles. The evidence is in the pudding. The financial support provided by the Bakat family has enabled women like Lizinet to overcome absolute poverty and hope

for a better future for herself and her family.

Elizabeth Bakat’s legacy continues to touch the poor, and her spirit of selfless love ignites passion in women like Lizinet to passionately care for other women, using the resources provided by the Bakat family as a tool of hope in fighting poverty. Elizabeth Bakat’s life has inspired women to continue doing God’s work of ensuring that people live dignified lives and realise their God-given potential. Elizabeth Bakat, like Lizinet, is forever on a mission to ignite the power of women to create a better future.



Lizinet attending to her pigsty behind her house in Chiphaka village of T/A Chadza in Lilongwe.



# Shaping the *future* through competent *leaders* .



**TREVOR**

A fourth year student from Exploits University in Lilongwe.



**HELLEN**

Fourth-year student from DMI St. John the Baptist University.

## Dreams to reality

“Getting to know the people in rural villages has opened my eyes as a student who only learns about these concepts in theory,” he remarked. “Lydia Action has provided me with the chance to experience my ideal job and get an understanding of how things operate so that I may work efficiently and effectively with vulnerable communities.”

Trevor got the opportunity to volunteer for one month with Lydia Action under the Elizabeth Bakat women’s economic empowerment project. He visited two Lydia Action women’s economic empowerment groups in Chikanga and M’nongwa under T/A Chadza in Lilongwe during his tenure with Lydia Action.

“This was the best period of my life as a student, and it has motivated me to work hard toward my profession,” he explained.

## An inspiring hope for the future

Hellen experienced significant challenges and repeated setbacks, which she credits with shaping her journey to academic excellence at DMI St. John the Baptist University. Rising up from these experiences has helped to drive her motivation to use her education as a way to inspire other young people to aim high despite life’s challenges.

“Lydia Action gave me confidence in knowing that I deserved to be chosen for such an important programme,” She stated. “After all of the rejections I’ve received, I want to utilize this chance to establish my career in the development sector and open doors for other young girls in the future,” She continued.

**The Elizabeth Bakat supported youth development and leadership project aims at providing young university students on the verge of graduation with knowledge, skills, and tools that will enable them to make a meaningful contribution to the humanitarian and development sectors in Malawi**



## Women economic empowerment project

94

The most impoverished women benefitted from self-tailored social economic activities and access to enabling business environments in Malawi.

96%

Credit recovery rate from all women economic empowerment groups in Zomba and Lilongwe combined.

414

Indirect beneficiaries benefitted from women income generating activities in Zomba and Lilongwe in Malawi. The average household size in Malawi is 4.4 (Malawi IHS5 2019-2020) members.

August 2021

Women economic empowerment project beneficiary verification exercise.

October 2021

First women economic empowerment project income generation capacity building workshop.

April 2022

Final women economic empowerment learning outcomes assessment and support session.

May 2022

Provision of Lydia Action financial support to women with viable business plans.



## Youth development and leadership project

78

Prospective university students benefitted with practical knowledge, skills, and tools to meaningfully contribute to the humanitarian and development sector.

September 2021

First youth development and leadership project engagement meeting.

October 2021

First youth development and leadership capacity building workshop.

August 2022

Final on-campus youth development and leadership mentorship session.

October 2022

Graduation of Lydia Action youth development and leadership exponents.





*Whoever is generous to the poor  
lends to the Lord, and he will repay  
him for his deed. - Proverbs 19:17*

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[www.lydiaction.org](http://www.lydiaction.org)

A better world  
for **everyone.**

