

March 2026

## 2025 Update: Malawi Fish for Tomorrow project

### Quick summary

- The Fish for Tomorrow project supported 474 Beach Village Committees along 736 km of shoreline – ~75% of Malawi’s shoreline on Lake Malawi. These have been key to the reform of what has been a highly unsustainable fishery.
- Confiscation of illegal fishing gear included 300 kilometers of monofilament netting; and fishers are increasingly using larger mesh nets, which is bolstering fish recruitment
- Education, outreach, and enforcement of district bylaws remain the most effective interventions for preventing ecological collapse of the lake.

### Background

November and December are critical months for the fish of Lake Malawi. The fishing season is closed then, and it is a period of recovery and growth for fish stocks. It also represents the collective recognition that sustainable resource management benefits everyone.

The two-month window coincides with fish breeding and spawning—a time of year when juvenile fish are particularly vulnerable to certain prohibited gear like beach seines and drag nets.

The problem of overfishing in Lake Malawi has been exacerbated by a lack of government funds to enforce sustainable management practices (such as a closed season). To address this problem, the national government adopted a co-management model under which the Department of Fisheries, traditional leaders, District Councils, and Beach Village Committees share responsibility. Collectively these groups govern Lake Fisheries Management Areas (LFMAs).

Beach Village Committees (BVC) play the largest role in co-managing each LFMA. Each fish landing site or beach has a BVC whose members act as local stewards and honorary fisheries officers. National law gives BVCs authority to act locally under the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act. They develop and enforce bylaws and conduct community outreach. They carry out regular beach inspections along with Ripple Africa and/or Fisheries extension workers to monitor fishing gear and confiscate illegal gear. The BVC membership consists of local fishers, gear owners, processors, traders, and even non-fishers who care about sustainable fisheries. This broad representation is mandated under national regulations.



*In the past, the use of mosquito nets for fishing meant that fish were caught before they had a chance to grow and breed and some species are now classified as endangered or vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.*

## Results in 2025

### Beach Village Committees

Over 80 percent of BVCs are now generating income for their operations. Income generating activities include beach landing fees, vegetable and maize farming and bee keeping. The project is aiming to promote chicken farming as well.

In 2025, 416 meetings were held with BVCs and Fisheries Associations and were attended by 3,707 committee members, 995 of whom were women. The meetings reinforced crucial messages including the ban on monofilament nets, closed season messaging and sharing ideas on income generation to fund patrol activities. As Mangochi District joined the project more recently, many of the meetings there were to gauge the understanding of committee members of the reasons for the new system and to ensure that they fully understand their responsibilities.

### Illegal fishing gear

This year, BVCs between Nkhata Bay and Mangochi **confiscated nearly 300 kilometers of monofilament nets**. Monofilament nets are illegal due to their short lifespan and likelihood of becoming ghost nets (lost nets that continue to catch fish indiscriminately). Despite being illegal, fishers continue to use the nets because of their low cost. This year there was a real push to remove monofilament nets where possible.

While monofilament nets made up the largest volume of confiscated gear, they were not the only type. BVCs also confiscated 20 unlicensed Chilimira Nets, 17 Beach Seine Nets, and 30 mosquito nets, which are particularly destructive.





## Community Awareness Meetings

Malawi is a country where formal meetings are the norm, and they are vital to reinforce key project messages. In community meetings, the types of illegal fishing gear, the closed fishing season, protected fish breeding sites, and bylaws are all discussed as perennial topics.

Over the past year, 364 meetings were attended by 19,109 fishers and local leaders. These were held across the four districts (Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota, Salima, Dedza, and Mangochi) and are well received. There is a clear willingness of fishers to work in partnership with the BVC. Local fishers understand and support the community-devised fishing regulations.

Undersized seine nets nevertheless remain a persistent issue. Small-mesh seine can harvest greater biomass and quickly deplete fish stocks. BVCs continue to promote the use of larger-mesh nets, which catch fewer juvenile fish and permit recruitment of young fish into the population. In 2025, more fishers voluntarily invested in larger-mesh seine nets to catch Usipa. This voluntary uptake signals a paradigm shift that will bolster fisheries. Over time, fishers can expect healthier fish stocks and better income.

## School Visits

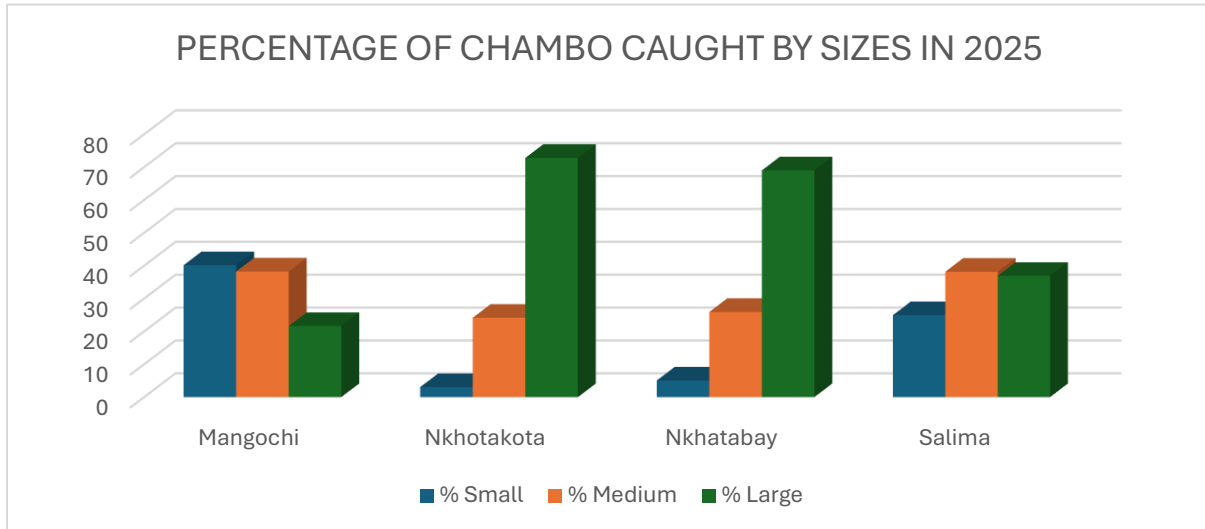
Community outreach also occurred in primary and secondary schools. The Fish for Tomorrow teams gave 45 school talks about fisheries management. Talks sought to inspire youth in environmental conservation and sustainable fisheries management, emphasizing student responsibility and stewardship.

## Monitoring of Lake Fisheries Management Area

A key aspect of the project is to ensure that all the LFMAs carry out their roles effectively and that each BVC is visited regularly and is assessed on their understanding of the fishing regulations, their relationships with their local communities and their effectiveness in carrying out patrols and enforcing the bylaws in their area. During the year, 23 BVCs (out of 431) were revamped. Ineffective members were asked to resign and new ones were re-elected. Newly elected BVC members were supported with training.

## Evaluation of project outcomes

Project catch data shows that more larger fish are being caught now. In the figure below, Mangochi District is shown to have smaller fish as the project was started more recently here.



Collecting data on the catch size (i.e. numbers) of the two principal species, Chambo and Usipa, would be a very expensive exercise as it would have to cover such a large area of the lake. However, the empirical evidence is impressive and there have been many reports that species previously thought to have become extirpated are now being seen again, indicating that the project is benefitting more species than those that we are targeting.

Many of the BVCs are now generating income to fund their patrols through activities such as the installation of paying toilets for fishers on the beaches, bee keeping and the sale of vegetables and other crops that they are growing as a group.

Below are two appendices, one with annotated images of project activities, and another with "case studies" — profiles of individual fishers and BVC members.

## Looking ahead

Biome has budgeted US\$370,000 for this project in 2026, which, due to budget constraints, is about three-quarters of what was requested. We have a high regard for Ripple Africa and we hope that they can attract additional funding to expand their important work.

**Thank you for your support for this project!** Please let us know if you have questions or would like to discuss this project or receive further information.

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