

A Deeper Look..... looking into the lives of people and projects that are making a difference in Malawi.....

Always Wanting To Change Things For The Better

Wanangwa Chisenga, President of College of Medicine Student's Union, talks to Thengo Kavinya about his life, career and challenges as COMSU President.

Wanangwa Chisenga at 24 years of age is not an ordinary Malawian young man, he is a man with a vision taking challenges head on. Born on 18th April 1983, Wanangwa is the first born in the family of five. He attended primary school at Chigoneka in Lilongwe otherwise known as St. Kizito and proceeded to Chaminade Secondary School before joining the College of Medicine (COM).

Asked why he chose to run for the presidency of COMSU despite the tight schedule students at COM have, Wanangwa reveals that he is a courageous and ambitious person. Wanangwa always want to see things change for the better. He has held a number of positions of responsibility, at secondary school he was the entertainment prefect, in his second year at COM he was the entertainment director and he has also held the position of President of College of Medicine AIDS Counselling and Testing Society (COMACTS). COMACTS targets the youth in various communities, offering counselling and testing services and buys and distributes food to the needy. He feels that he delivered a lot as President of COMACTS and this made his fellow students have confidence in him and they encouraged him to run for this position. He does admit that it wasn't an easy run.



Wanangwa outlined one of the roles of COMSU is to act as a link between management and monitor the welfare of students. They ensure sick students are taken to the hospital and the responsible authorities are informed. They present any issues students are having to management and give students feedback. "Our motto is that we shouldn't act as firefighters. We try to ease situations that can be a source of potential conflict between management and the students".

The COMSU President believes his tenure has been one of the successful ones because it coincided with a lot of construction and they were influential on several issues that arose from this. One crucial area he focused on when he entered office was the cafeteria. When he started his tenure, the students were using a makeshift tent as a cafeteria but after discussions with management, they were soon able to move into the new cafeteria. They also persuaded management to buy new equipment for the cafeteria. Wanangwa further convinced management to buy library books especially for the newly introduced programmes (Pharmacy and Medical Laboratory Technology).

He points out that students activities have increased at the college citing the proposed construction of a chapel as one such project. The donors response to this and other fundraising activities has been encouraging. Funds raised will be used to source medical equipment, which will be on sale next year at a subsidized price to students.

He reveals that the greatest challenge COMSU faces is when

the College management imposes on students "Management usually have a final say on things affecting students so you seem like you are doing nothing on your part if things do not change the way the students want". He further says there a number of things management has promised and wonders if they will ever deliver.

He also discussed factors which are affecting the medical practitioners in the country. "It takes almost three months for the government to start paying the doctors and the flats built to accommodate the junior doctors were built long time ago when the college had a smaller intake, we tried to raise this issues with the Ministry of Health but nothing has been done so far".

Wanangwa says another area of concern is the students index fee introduced by the Malawi Medical Council, "It is quite difficult to comprehend because as students we are not registered with the council. We have approached them to come and explain the benefit students would have from this".

The President says that the College of Medicine has more strengths compared to other colleges which is evident by the number of computers and consistent free internet. He commends the residential rooms and meals that are better than other colleges and universities in Africa. As for weaknesses, Wanangwa points out that most of

the time COM management do not plan according to their capacity. Notably, the students intake has increased with two classes being introduced without any resources such as class rooms and labs being allocated for these programs.

As for the future of COMSU, the President did not mince words, that it will be increasingly challenging, "As the college is growing the pressure on issues shall also grow so it would be advisable to choose strong leaders," he says.

The president applauds the management of COM for not taking part in the on going strike by the University lecturers. "I am grateful to the management of COM for understanding the situation we are in and at the same time I feel sorry for our fellow colleagues who are affected by this and I would like to urge the government to resolve the matter soon before the worst comes to the worst".

Despite his busy office, during his free time Wanangwa likes chatting, "I believe that a person gets ideas and solutions from fellow friends, so I interact a lot with almost everybody here and this helps me to get advice from different people".

Asked why he chose to study medicine, he reveals that he has always been passionate about helping people. "I feel I have taken a lot from the society and I want to give back, I want to work as a doctor and as a youth advocate on HIV/AIDS because I have seen how the pandemic is affecting the youth at large".