

FINDING YOUR LIFE MISSION CLOSER TO HOME



EEP Africa 2020
**RISING ENERGY
LEADER**

PRISCILLA SANI-CHIMWELE

Founder and CEO,
Wala Ltd (Malawi)

Before turning her focus to clean energy, Priscilla spent more than a decade working to advance equality and sustainable development at the national, regional and global levels.

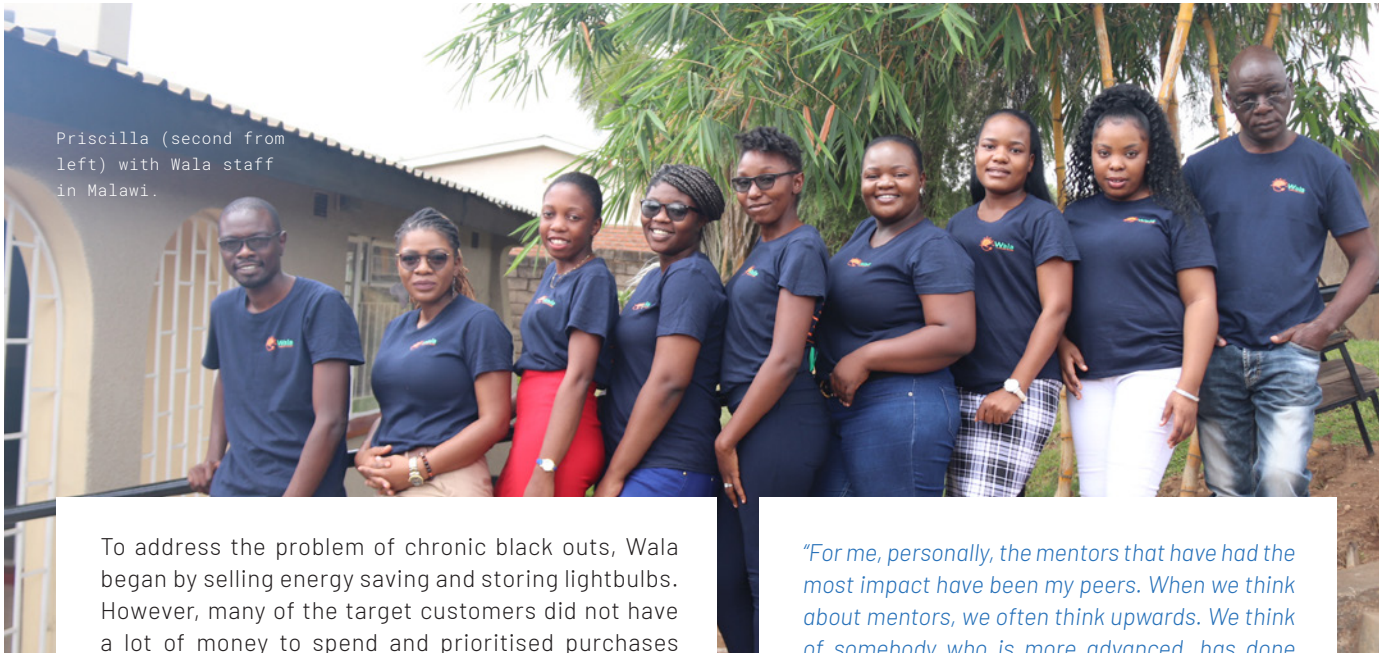
During university, Priscilla conducted research on equity in health and health programs for women and girls in Malawi. This and her other work led to a full scholarship for a graduate degree in development management at a university in Germany and a job at GIZ, the German development cooperation agency.

In 2011, Priscilla returned to Africa to work for the United Nations. Over the next few years, she built a successful career in policy development and technical support, including programme positions with UN Women in Malawi and UNDP in Ethiopia, where UNDP's Regional Service Centre for Africa is

located. By 2018, Priscilla was a specialist in the UNDP Private Sector Unit, promoting inclusive growth and sustainable development through, amongst others, youth entrepreneurship across Africa. Although her work was making a difference, Priscilla wanted to apply her skillset to a local context and have a more hands-on impact.

"After a while I felt a disconnect. I was helping others to do the things, but I was not doing them myself. The UN is a very big organization and I felt like a cog in the machine. I was not necessarily pushing myself to do the best that I could do, so I made the bold choice to exit the system."

After resigning from the UN, Priscilla returned to Malawi and dedicated herself to Wala, a social enterprise she had founded with a mission to increase access to innovative renewable energy technologies and products in a socially and environmentally conscious manner.



Priscilla (second from left) with Wala staff in Malawi.

To address the problem of chronic black outs, Wala began by selling energy saving and storing lightbulbs. However, many of the target customers did not have a lot of money to spend and prioritised purchases based on cost. After conducting more research, Priscilla realized that to penetrate the off-grid low-income market, Wala should focus on productive use of agriculture, thus helping customers generate the income needed to purchase solar products.

Wala now specializes in solar-powered technologies for irrigation and agricultural processing. In the past two years, the start-up has grown to 15 employees and mobilized over USD 400,000 in financing from EEP Africa and other sources. It is the only solar company in Malawi that has been founded and is led by a local woman.

“When thinking about the future, a lot of us think about defining our goals. But I saw a TED Talk that focused on defining our fears instead, and asked the question ‘What is the cost of inaction? What is the cost of staying in the same spot, of never taking that jump to see how far you can go?’ That really helped me change my mindset. I had a skillset that I had gathered over my years with the UN. I just had to take that skillset and apply it to a local context to fulfil my life’s mission.”

Since returning to Malawi, Priscilla has become heavily involved in national development processes. She is a regular contributor to the Parliamentary Committee on Trade and Industry, an active member of the Youth Core Advisory Panel of the National Planning Commission (NPC), and part of the core team formulating Malawi’s Transformation Plan 2063.

“For me, personally, the mentors that have had the most impact have been my peers. When we think about mentors, we often think upwards. We think of somebody who is more advanced, has done a lot more in the sector, with years and years of experience. But your peers that you start with actually have a lot to teach you as well.”

Priscilla wants to be part of an agricultural revolution that propels Africa as a global leader in food production. Her goal is to grow Wala into an outstanding market leader in productive solar for agriculture, with an inclusive business model that generates high income and creates decent jobs beyond just Malawi. Her vision is a cross-border company that develops its own technologies and innovations, which are responsive to the needs of local people because they are developed by local people.

“Priscilla is so entrepreneurial and selfless. Not many educated young women would do what she did, leaving a promising international career to pursue social entrepreneurship in support of the needs of her country. Companies like Wala go beyond profit-making and support inclusive wealth creation. As a member of the Youth Core Advisory Panel, she has also helped develop a new vision for our country. Priscilla was an important champion of the clean energy strategies included in the recently launched Malawi 2063.”

Dr. Thomas Munthali,
 Director General, National Planning
 Commission of Malawi

