



Tawonga and her family in Malawi.

[Watch Tawonga's film](#)

Tawonga is a 10-year-old girl, living with a disability. She lives in a village in northern Malawi in a region that has faced food insecurity and poverty. For most of her life, her parents have struggled to put meals on the table. Tawonga often had to miss school because she was too sick from hunger. The family also faced discrimination in their community due to her disability.

Since participating in a Caritas Australia supported program, Tawonga's life has transformed. Her family now grows enough food to provide three meals a day, ending the struggle of malnutrition, and helping her thrive at school. The programs have also helped spread greater acceptance of her disability and with her community's support behind her, Tawonga has the confidence to pursue her dreams.

Tawonga lives in the Rumphi district of Malawi. She is the youngest of six children and was born with one weaker leg, so she walks with the aid of crutches. Her siblings used to push her three kilometres to school in a donated wheelchair.

Tawonga, whose name means 'thank you', says her community is blessed with many resources, like rivers, fertile soil and hills. However, with dry spells followed by floods, army worm infestations and crop failures, her parents struggled to make a living.

"If we harvest less maize, we do not have enough

food to last our family for the whole year," said Tawonga's father, Simon.

Although Malawi's food security has improved, in a country of 19 million people, 6 million still need food aid*.

The family cut back on their meals, sometimes going without food for four days and they were excluded from food distributions, as community members favoured more vocal and better-connected households.

"People living with disabilities were not regarded as important and they thought they did not deserve such things," Tawonga's mother, Agnes says. "We were considered as people who cannot contribute anything to the development of the community."

Tawonga was often sick due to hunger, a lack of safe drinking water and poor sanitation.

"Sometimes we had one meal per day. And when we are hungry, we do not attend classes," Tawonga says.

Her parents also found it difficult to afford school fees. Sadly, when she did make it to school, other students would insult her about her disability.

An estimated 2.4% of youth in Malawi are living with a disability, and around 90% of them are in rural areas**. School attendance is much lower for people living with a disability like Tawonga, mostly because schools aren't equipped to meet their needs.

Tawonga, Malawi

In 2016, Tawonga's parents heard about the A+ program, run by Caritas Australia's partner, CADECOM (Catholic Development Commission in Malawi). They learnt irrigation farming and were given fertiliser and high-yield seeds. With these new techniques, their production of crops almost tripled.

As part of the program, the community also learnt how to better support people living with disabilities. Through the reduction of stigma and discrimination a new culture of acceptance and collaboration flourished. Tawonga's community banded together to develop a seed bank and dug boreholes to enable access to safe water at shorter distances. This led to a reduction in waterborne diseases.

Tawonga's parents are now able to harvest twice a year. Her mother joined the village savings and loans group and was able to start a small business, selling fish, rice and vegetables. Now they can eat three meals a day. They can also afford to send Tawonga to a school with a live-in campus and disability-friendly facilities, for a better education.

"Tawonga is a very positive person and very enthusiastic," says Anita Mahata, CADECOM's Project Director. "She is now able to interact with her friends and is now going to school daily."

Tawonga works hard and dreams of becoming a

nurse when she grows up, so she can help people in her community. Thanks to the program, she now feels like part of her community, which gives her the confidence to reach for her goals.

It gives me hope that I will finish my education. My community now understands that my living with a disability is not inability. Although I sometimes face discrimination, most of the community has realised my value as a person.

Tawonga

"I would like to thank the people of Australia for their support they provide to my community. Your support has brought a positive change in my family and community."

* [Relief Web](#)

** [UNICEF 2013, International Institute for Environment and Development, The Conversation, WFP](#)



Tawonga in her family's vegetable garden.

Tawonga, Malawi

1. Read and discuss/write your responses:

- Identify four key challenges Tawonga's community faced. How are they related?
- Explain how Caritas Australia and their partner in Malawi is supporting Tawonga and her family to overcome some of these challenges and become more resilient for the future.
- What changed in the practical sense? What changed in terms of community cohesion?
- What are two facts you learnt about poverty and injustice from Tawonga's story?

Curriculum: English ACELY1701, ACEY1703, ACEY1713

2. Food Crisis board game

Read [these slides](#) about the 2017 food crisis in the region where Tawonga lives.

Based on this information about food crises, and Tawonga's story, create your own board game to educate others about the links between disability, food security and access to education. Use [this board game](#) as a model. Create your game layout in PowerPoint or Publisher.

Curriculum: Geography Year 9: Biomes and Food Security, Year 10: ACHCS102, Civics and Citizenship: Year 9 ACHCK079, ACHCK091

3. The impact of Hunger

Can you remember a time you have been hungry or thirsty for a long time?

What physical symptoms did you experience?

What emotional effects did hunger have on you?

How long did you have to wait before you could eat again?

What impacts did hunger have on your life?

EXPLORE this interactive graphic 'What hunger does to children'. <http://food.caritas.org/what-hunger-does-to-children/>

Hover with your mouse over the stomach, brain and throat tags to compare your answers. What are three impacts of hunger you didn't know before? What questions do you have?

Curriculum: Health and PE Food and Nutrition

4. Food Aid- Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF)

This is a peanut paste that is often distributed to severely malnourished children. The ingredients are usually a combination of a protein, carbohydrate, lipid and vitamins and minerals. For example: peanut paste, vegetable oil, powdered milk, powdered sugar, vitamins, minerals. It does not need to be refrigerated and has a shelf life of approximately two years.

What do you notice about the design of this food item in relation to:

- *the packaging*
- *the ingredients*
- *the shelf life.*

What do you wonder about RUTF and how it helps child nutrition?

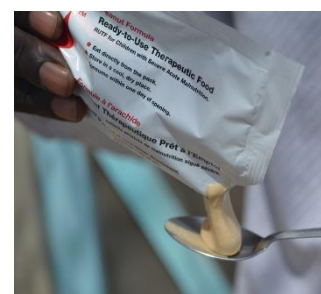


Photo Credit: Trocaire (Caritas Ireland)

Curriculum: Design and Technologies Year 9 & 10: ACTDEK045

Tawonga, Malawi

Engage with the Country Study [Thinglink](#) and do some of your own research to find out the information below. Suggestions for reliable sources are included on the Thinglink and below..

<p>Predict life expectancy in Malawi and Australia. Find out the correct answer. Does this surprise you? Why/Why not What has changed? https://ourworldindata.org/life-expectancy</p>	Prediction:	https://www.britannica.com/place/Malawi https://dfat.gov.au/geo/malawi/Pages/malawi.aspx	
	Actual:	What are the official languages?	
		What is the main religion?	
<p>What is the population of Malawi? What is the population of Australia? https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth</p>	<p>Malawi: Australia</p>	What system of government does the Malawi have?	
<p>What is the poverty rate in the Malawi? https://data.worldbank.org/hdr/undp.org/en/data</p>		<p>In what region of the world is the Malawi located?</p> <p>What direction is it from Australia?</p>	
<p>List three major factor/s affecting poverty and wellbeing (E.g. access to clean water, sanitation, education)</p>		Describe the ways Australia is connected to Malawi? E.g. what trade occurs between the two nations, what services are exchanged, immigration, etc.	
<p>Summarise Caritas Australia's support to improve wellbeing</p> <hr/> <hr/>		<p>Select two relevant Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>Why did you select these? www.globalgoals.org</p>	

Tawonga, Malawi

“No single person is more valuable than another, especially when it comes to those with disabilities.”

Pope Francis

Reflection questions:

- How does this quote relate to Tawonga’s story?
- In what way does inclusiveness promote the common good?

ACT

How might you raise awareness in response to what you read and thought about in Tawonga’s story?

What are you compelled to do? It might be a personal, group or community action. Write your thoughts and plan below.

Tawonga, Malawi

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION THEMES

Year 7 & 8: Initiation and belonging: Imagine you are Tawonga. Write a diary entry explaining how the events in her life have impacted her sense of belonging in her community.

Year 9 & 10: Catholic Social Teachings/ Human Dignity: Watch '[CST in 3 minutes](#)' animation. Discuss the ways in which Tawonga and her family have been discriminated against and how this defies the principle of Human Dignity as a Catholic Social Teaching.

How is the principle of Human Dignity upheld in your school?

How do you uphold the principle in your own life?

PRAY

Complete this prayer with your own words:

God of creation. Thank you for the gift of creation, that nourishes our bodies and is our common home.

TAKE AWAY AND SHARE

One thing that surprised/challenged or stood out for me in this story, that I will share with others: