

Malawi Visions Newsletter July 2023



We are Changing the World

It has been a very busy year for Malawi Visions, and suddenly July is upon us! Alas, this newsletter has been sitting on my desk for months, but it's celebrations from our team's return to Malawi after 3 year's of pandemic absence must not to go unproclaimed!

Paul



From the Director



Dear Friends of Malawi Visions,

This year's return to Malawi reconfirmed to me that Malawi Visions is bringing unprecedented changes in six remote villages there. Our projects are replacing ongoing "relief" to chronic poverty and hopelessness with ever growing sustainable development. The accomplishments made over the past 8 years are providing an alternative and clear path from generational stagnation.

Irrigation: This year we completed our 3rd solar powered irrigation system at Selengo, with it joining the systems we've built at Matapila and Chimwang'ombe. While on-site we purchased an adjacent plot of land and a month later Jimmy, Selengo's director, was farming a full acre vegetable garden! Because solar powered irrigation systems facilitate multiple growing seasons, annual production of food increases substantially, which greatly reduces the otherwise recurring purchase of staples to quell food shortages and starvation during the annual "Lean Season". Our dream is that "lean season" fundraising can someday be all but eliminated!

While in Malawi we were asked to evaluate construction of still another, our 4th, solar irrigation system, at Khwamba. And yes, once the price of an available $\frac{3}{4}$ acre plot of land was successfully negotiated by Daniel Moyo, a member of the Malawi Visions Team purchased it. We will fund drilling a borehole in July, and complete Khwamba's irrigation project when we arrive in September, with far reaching and lasting benefit. That's sustainability!



From the Director

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Education: The six libraries Malawi Visions has built to hold the 45,000 books our members at home work hard to collect, 5,000 books each year, and ship 8000 miles, alone are proving responsible for doubling the success rate of students MoH's donors supports each year! In a country where public educational "graduates" only 40 percent of village children from primary schools, and 10 percent from secondary schools, tragically statistics have changed little over generations! Books and libraries introduce children to the outside world, places they've never seen, and subjects they've never been exposed to. It gives them, perhaps for the first time, a reason to go to school, a desire to learn and to read, and in so doing a vision for the future. A reading culture is, for the first time, developing!

And that is just the beginning. For as the Teen Life Internship Program (TLIP) is expanded, an after-school enrichment program we introduced and MoH adapted from the concepts of the New City Kids Program, the growth of village children academically and developmentally will exponentially add to the impact of the libraries! We believe our programs are not only bringing individual growth, but regional change! With TLIP flourishing now after two years at Khwamba, a second program just underway at Matapila, and a third is poised to commence in 2023, we are anticipating change heretofore unimaginable! In 2022, we constructed our 3rd and 4th learning centers in Selengo and Chimwang'ombe, and we've already begun to build our 5th at Mponela in 2023.

And education toward sustainability can take many paths, including vocational training. A quickly developing program we have begun is sewing and tailoring, employing the 12 treadle sewing machines our home teams have lovingly restored, and shipped to the MoH centers.



From the Director

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Feedback we love: This past years' trip allowed our team the opportunity to meet with village head chiefs, education and church leaders, and the youth themselves. *"Don't slow down", "do more", "expand the program", "we want the entire village community to be educated and literate",* and most of all *"thank you Malawi Visions and Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church",* were comments heard at each of the villages in which we operate.

The Road Forward: We are tremendously excited and encouraged by the revolutionary changes we see growing each year. The synergy among the solar installations, lighting and irrigation, libraries, learning centers, and groundbreaking TLIP, enhances the impact of our program. Children are staying in school, and the number of them passing elementary and secondary school "leaving exams" is increasing in dramatic fashion. But we are acutely aware of the cost connected to this success. Alone, we cannot financially support all that we feel called to accomplish. Should we pause, or stop expansion of TLIP to additional centers? We feel strongly that is not the right thing to do . . . for the children's sake!

Sustainability doesn't come without cost. We are calling for partners to join with us, to sponsor or participate in the one-time capital investments for learning centers, and solar powered irrigation installations, as well as the ongoing operating costs of the TLIP centers.



But it is not only Malawi Visions that is facing an avalanche of financial challenge. Every success story of children engaged in our programs will lead to their seeking the opportunity to keep going: on to a good secondary school, or to secure a place in college. Every success story adds to the list of scholarship support MoH must face! What could be worse than to encourage, equip, and then to allow them to be left behind?

For years we've been lamenting the never-changing of poverty and dependence in Malawi. We've all been praying for God's intervention into the lives of these vulnerable children, and the remote villages in which they live. We know sustainability is the answer. Now the opportunity to achieve permanent change is upon us all. Now it's up to the broader community to answer the challenge that, for the first time, lies before us.

Paul

Allow me to introduce you to Dave Frey, who brings most valuable insights, from an experienced external perspective, into our MV TLIP activities underway within MoH.

Dave has been involved in MV for several years and made his first trip to Malawi in 2022. He brings extensive experience in international missions, as for the past 7 years he has been principal leader of the Honduras mission of LCPC, and also the Honduras Foundation. He has also been intimately involved with New City Kids, a teen internship focused organization for many years and led the implementation of a similar teen internship program at the Hearts for Honduras school in 2018. Dave helped implement our TLI program in Malawi, and now brings valuable and experienced insights from his 3 weeks with the TLIP leaders and program activities at the Khwamba, Matapila, Chimwang'ombe centers.

Dave Frey recently retired from a 32-year career on Wall Street in investment banking and management and has been a member of LCPC since 2002.

Reflections of a Recent Traveler

by Dave Frey



In many ways, my trip to Malawi was what I expected. With a per capita income of \$642 per year (according to the World Bank), I knew I would visit a country with unimaginable poverty. Looking around you can see the needs are endless. Less than half of the children wore shoes. Their clothing looked like rags, largely torn and often ill-fitting.

Housing conditions are shockingly difficult, especially during the rainy season when occupants try to sleep standing up to minimize the body surface getting wet from rain pouring through the leaky roofs. Women and young girls must travel a mile or two several times a day with heavy buckets on their heads to bring water back to their homes. Our empty water bottles were in high demand as they enable a source of drink away from the well throughout the day. Men and women plow and toil in dusty fields with nothing but a simple hoe, like those used in the 1600s when farming began in the US.

I was able to see huge crowds of smiling, grateful children receiving food, and I felt a strange combination of gratefulness and sadness. I am grateful that Ministry of Hope is there, feeding over 6,000 hungry children a day across their six centers. I am grateful for the smiles of these loving children as they eat their only meal, many having walked several miles to the centers. But I am also sad that these feeding centers are necessary, sad knowing many more hungry children and adults need to be served, and sad with the knowledge that after the day's feeding, 6,000 hungry children will arrive again tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, and on and on. And that the numbers and need are likely to grow, not shrink, over time.



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This is why it was particularly rewarding to see the clear and direct “cause and effect” impact of the Malawi Visions programs toward self-sustainability and permanent change, which should result in less need and dependency over time.

There is no electricity in the rural areas where the feeding centers are located. When the sun goes down at 6pm, there is nothing but darkness. It isn't safe, but also leaves hours of nothingness. There is nowhere to go, nothing to do, and nothing to engage the human mind. Just empty time until the sun rises the next day. However, the solar powered lights have transformed the feeding centers into community centers, where people can gather after dark and students gain precious additional study time.



The solar powered irrigation has been even more transforming. With a modest investment, solar powered pumps can provide water to irrigate fields to enable three growing seasons instead of one. The gardens at Chimwang'ombe and Matapila are providing vegetables to feed the children and for sale to raise money, reducing the need for foreign funding and creating long term sustainable change. When we installed the solar irrigation project at Selengo, many local villagers came and volunteered digging trenches and providing other assistance. Other volunteers work in the gardens and prepare and serve meals. It is incredible that only six weeks after our trip, the Selengo garden has been fenced, planted, and is already growing vegetables.



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Simply by making books available in the libraries, English competency and test scores have improved among the children and older students. But beyond that, books expand the mind, and students learn about things they would never otherwise learn or even know existed. I asked many of the teens what their favorite books or subjects were. One teen answered that a chemistry book was his favorite, and he went on to give me a lesson in chemistry. He taught me about acids and bases, and that if there is too much alkalinity in the soil, crops don't grow well. He told me that by adding acid fertilizer to the soil, growing conditions and crop yields can be greatly improved. He said he wanted to be a chemist and help improve agriculture practices in his country. It was quite an impressive lesson by a teenager in a mud brick room in a dry and dusty, impoverished village in Malawi.



Reflections of a Recent Traveler

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The Teen Life Internship Program (TLIP) is already demonstrating its tremendous potential. Shaped by Daniel's and Milca's past experience and incorporating similar concepts as the New City Kids program, TLIP hires gap year leaders and high school mentors who teach 5th, 6th and 7th grade students English, Math and Science classes to supplement their public school education. They also lead Bible study, devotions, and Faith development. Daniel and Milca provide ongoing guidance, support, leadership development, and Faith development to the mentors. Local schoolteachers, church leaders and village chiefs contribute to the selection process for students and mentors, and are intensely supportive of the program. Khwamba implemented TLIP two years ago, Matapila began 6 months ago, and we hope to begin at Chimwang'ombe next year, and eventually have TLIP at all six centers once funding is secure. Because the national exams are in English, the test scores and the percentages of those passing the exams, and thus being eligible for further study in high school, university, or trade school, have skyrocketed at Khwamba, both for the 5-7th grade TLIP students and the high school TLIP mentors, directly because of TLIP. Given this success, the chiefs and community leaders are pleading for Malawi Visions to extend TLIP to more students and younger grades as well.



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But beyond the numerical data, the impact of TLIP is also clear when interacting with students at the various centers. Enormous potential is unleashed when teens are given the opportunity and responsibility to lead, they are challenged beyond their comfort level, they use skills they didn't know they had, they are accountable for their actions and performance, and they learn that hard work pays off. They become leaders, and develop confidence, maturity, and a sense of a larger purpose for their lives. They also become role models for the younger students, providing a vision and igniting aspirations of what they too can become, creating a virtuous circle.



At Khwamba, we were greeted by a presentation of singing, dancing and skits entirely led by TLIP mentors and students. We sat in on classes taught by high school mentors with complete control of the classroom and an impressive level of confidence and capability. We saw mentors lead and care for younger students, and they spoke very good English. They really care about the TLIP program and helping those coming up behind them.

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Even more noticeable was the confidence, assertiveness, maturity, and English ability of the 5-7th grade students. This is in stark contrast to the TLIP students and mentors at Matapila, whose confidence, presence, initiative, and comfort speaking English were noticeably weaker given the shorter time with the program. There was an even greater difference with the students and teens at Chimwang`ombe and the other centers, who come across as shy and immature, and don't speak or understand English well, but the potential is there. High school students regularly gather at the libraries on their own even without a structured program, and seek every opportunity to read and learn. We met several students repeating their last year of high school for the second, third or fourth time, having been previously unsuccessful in passing the national exam but demonstrating the resolve to try again. They know that education is the key to a better life. Otherwise, they will have the same life and living conditions that the others in the village have had for generations-somehow obtain a small plot of land and live off of whatever you can grow from it.

The hope is that as more TLIP mentors pass the national exams, they will be admitted to universities or trade schools, and find good jobs to support themselves and their families when they graduate. Even if their jobs are located in cities far away from the feeding centers, it is likely they will visit and send money back to their families and those in need and lift up those who come behind them. A program like TLIP has the potential to break the cycle of generational poverty and create lasting, sustainable change.



Selengo Irrigation is Completed !

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Returning to Malawi after a 3 year COVID interruption, the solar powered irrigation system at Selengo was finally completed and brought into operation! Our Malawi Visions Team, along with Daniel, Frank, and Peter, and many village volunteers, put in several days of hard work to accomplish the long awaited completion, joining our other solar irrigation installations at Matapila and Chimwang'ombe.



Designing the system for 2019, on that year's trip we installed the solar capacity to produce the needed 500 watts of additional power, and purchased the required borehole pump. While at Selengo that year, we became aware a ½ acre plot of land was for sale, fertile and directly adjacent to the Selengo center, vastly superior for

farming than the leased and distant plot previously used. We immediately agreed to purchase that land, and later San Marino Community Church graciously provided the funds for the land purchase. The Selengo project was discussed in detail in our August 2020 and September 2021 newsletters, as well as our steps in developing systems such as these .

Unfortunately the pandemic hit before we could complete the project in 2020, as travel and progress were put on hold. This was particularly troubling for acquiring enough vegetables is often difficult at Selengo due to it's remoteness.

Selengo Irrigation is Completed !

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Once again able to return this September, the solar powered down-well pump was installed, two 1,300 gallon tanks were purchased and set in place, and long ditches were excavated by tireless villagers for the necessary piping and electrical wiring. Finally, as the sun rose one morning, pumping began, filled the tanks, and irrigation could begin. While we were there, we learned that another $\frac{1}{2}$ acre plot of land was available for sale, adjacent to the first, and a MV team member quickly purchased it for Selengo.



Selengo Irrigation is Completed !

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Two weeks after we returned home, we began receiving the most exciting photos from Jimmy, Center Director of Selengo. Wasting no time, Jimmy had immediately fenced the now-full acre garden plot, cultivated and planted it, and now well-watered vegetables were rapidly growing! The solar irrigation at Selengo will

join Matapila and Chimwang'ombe centers with multiple growing seasons to provide much greater production of nutritious vegetables to supplement the children's diets and significantly, and permanently reduce the quantities of food supply that must be purchased for the Lean Season Feeding Program.

This was noted by Peter Barbano: *"Every year the progress with the irrigation has significantly reduced the amount of Maize, Beans, Soya and Vegetables that are required to be purchased for the Feeding Program allowing me to direct funds to those more vulnerable. That irrigation work along with the solar projects has started these centers on the path of self sustainability which in my mind is the end goal. I pray for the day that I'm not needed there because they have what they need."*

Teams working together in synergy . . . Is what missions are all about!

Now with a dedicated and owned spacious garden directly adjacent to the Selengo Center, with full powered irrigation, Jimmy's long awaited desire to create his own training and demonstration center for advanced agricultural techniques and technologies has been realized . This is the sustainability that will grow to change the villages of Malawi!



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