

# NCHIMA TRUST NEWSLETTER

## Summer 2008



*You must all be wondering what on earth has happened to Nchima Trust's newsletter. Josie Quinn entrusted me with the writing of the next issue and I failed to meet the deadline. So to make amends, here is an extra big edition with some comments from others – Sue McAlpine (Editor).*

### ***From Rosalind Richards, the Trust's Chairman after last year's visit to Malawi***



There appeared a palpable change for the good in the physical and social atmosphere, almost as if a sea change was creeping up unawares: so many shoots of new growth appearing. We were not bothered by beggars, we waited for no funeral processions, detected few obvious signs of dire need (except of course in hospitals). People appeared for the most part well fed, relaxed, confident, busily getting with their lives. Small businesses are starting up in places where previously one saw coffin shops. Markets flourish with ample fresh produce and trade. We were not harassed in the streets and were often greeted warmly like equals. How has this all come about?

It is partly due to economic recovery. There have been two years of 8% growth following long zero years. The maize harvest has been a success thanks to good rains and the essential fertilizer subsidy. But there is something else triggering radical change: cell phones and access to the internet have hit Malawi, making global communications possible. Internet cafes have opened up in humble villages, providing a sense of equality and belonging in the world. Malawians have taken to I.T. like ducks to water.

Of course this rosy picture belies the reality of the dark aspects which surely persist: HIV and a renewed plague of syphilis continue to wreak havoc. Growing child abuse is causing deep concern. Rabies is prevalent. Poverty has certainly not been eradicated. The old problems of bare hills stripped of their trees; over- population, systemic corruption, women's illiteracy and abuse remain unresolved.

Orphans abound, though many gain some relief from feeding programmes.

One of the saddest things is the need for the tobacco industry to make such heavy inroads into the dwindling timber resources of the country. The industry is renowned for its failure to replace the trees it fells - unlike the tea estates which practice sustainable fuel replacement. It is ironic that such a harmful, noxious industry is essential for Malawi's economy.



I returned home feeling clearer in my vision for the Trust. Our projects are nearly all hitting their targets and going well. I now believe we are on the right track. If we can develop our links with tertiary education, get the TCC working smoothly, find a viable way to support micro credit, and go on helping places of excellence where we find them, we will without doubt justify our claim to be 'a source of help to the people of Malawi'.

November,

2007

***From Josie Quinn on meeting the students:***

What a treat to meet such outgoing friendly young people. The University put a room at our disposal and we were able to have a long chat with them. Amidst lots of laughter, they regaled us with tales of life on campus, their trials and tribulations, and their hopes for the future.



What became apparent was the desperate shortage of books in the college library. The students told us of the scramble every morning to be the first in the queue.

We asked them what family pressures they had, and they all agreed that they were expected to help their families and pay school fees for younger siblings. Their pocket money (MK25,000) was stretched to full capacity. The one thing they all stressed was how grateful they are for the help we give them, and were quick to point out that we were not only educating them, but other family members, too. Not once did any of these students ask for more money.

This visit made me realise how important tertiary education is to Malawi.



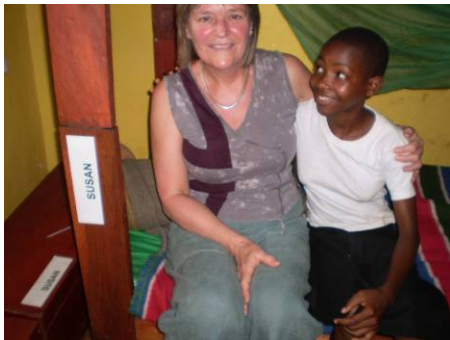
***This from Janet Hanlon, the Trust's representative in Malawi***

For me, the most moving moment of the whole trip was Brother Gilbert's comment about the work done at Lunzu by himself and Brother Jonas.

He told us about the programme, and the support given to the students and then, when asked how is it all achieved he said, 'With love'.

June, 2007

**My visit in January this year:** (Sue McAlpine)



Last year I applied to become a trustee. Quite rightly, the committee turned me down as I had no experience of Malawi and little to offer, except a rather naïve desire 'to go to Africa and help'. However, their next wonderful response was to give me the opportunity to go there, spend some time with Janet Hanlon and find out about the work of the Trust.

I discovered that it is flourishing and, in its quiet way, is a tremendous force for good and for progress in Malawi. I began to see how this kind of help really works; on the ground, through individuals and most significantly through funding education.

In ten days we packed in a huge amount. Janet, intrepidly, drove across country and in a haze of windscreen wipers, past men balancing anything from pineapples to sofas on their bikes, and women walking with babies and great piles of tea branches balanced on their heads. This was my first and abiding impression of Malawi. On the 'Granny run', we drove out to Likulesi on the main road from Mulanje during torrential rain. There were at least five lorries up to their axles in deep mud, blocking the road. Janet, casually turned the car, drove across a narrow dilapidated bridge, along a muddy track lined with six foot high maize, and brought us triumphantly to the Likulesi Home Care Centre to meet Henry Julius and Philip Mtobwa. Very dignified, the grannies appeared from the bush, sang and danced to us while we gave them oil, sugar, tea, blankets, cloth and matches.

**Malawi's children**

Margriet Sacranie, the Dutch consul in Malawi, showed us a little school with very small children who ran out to greet us, and proudly sang Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. At the next school for older orphaned children, we found ourselves in a sea of waving hands and smiling faces delighted to see the *azungus*. At both these schools are feeding stations with 'Mary's meals'; now the children have stomachs full of *likuni phala*, an enriched mix of millet powder, fat, minerals and ground nuts before they start their lessons. We visited the orphanage near Luchenza set up by Margriet and found clean bright dormitories, a kitchen with its new rocket stove, goats, vegetable plots, a library and classrooms. Nchima Trust will help towards malaria nets, medication for the children and towards extra tuition in the holidays by the Nchima funded students. I met a little girl there called Suzen and we immediately formed a bond owing to our shared first name.

**Our Students**

The Nchima Trust has always wanted those students it funds to interact as an effective and supportive group. Up till now they did not even know each other! The marvellous news is that they have now set up an organisation known as the Association of Nchima Trust Funded Students. This is made up of students from Chancellor College, the College of Medicine and Mzuzu University. They plan to help each other, assist the Trust to find





suitable students for funding, open up educational opportunities for Malawian children, particularly girls and offer voluntary services, such as adult literacy or legal or medical advice as well as acting as role models and career advisers to children. They are keen to encourage Malawian professionals to stay and work in Malawi. We are all very impressed with their dedication and commitment.

**Adult Literacy**

One way of showing their gratitude for funding their studies and a way of giving back to their country is their suggestion that they volunteer to teach literacy during their holidays. Frank Mkumba has been teaching literacy classes in Chichewa at the Tholyo Community Craft Centre and it has proved very popular.

**Tholyo Community Craft**

You may remember from the last newsletter that the papermaking centre is producing handmade decorated jewellery and wire possibilities for bags, stencilled or boxes filled with tea. are happening now and



**Centre**

the last newsletter that the getting off the ground. Beautiful cards and papers, fine bead decorations are continuing to be locally. There are all sorts of making other products, such as calico silk screened, or attractive wooden Plans to extend the centre even further its future is exciting.

Dave Sayward, Manager of the Nchima Tea Estate is very supportive. He is sure that there is water on the site, in spite of the unsuccessful search to drill a borehole last year. Water is, of course, vital to the community, for growing vegetables, making paper and for washing. Dave has planted blue gums on 7 hectares of the land, (3 hectares belong to Nchima Trust).

A vegetable plot has been fenced off and seeds sown. New building has started with plans for a manager's house, a new shop and display area for products. A rocket stove is to be installed so that workers can have a good midday meal. A compost toilet, the *ecodome* is planned.

All these improvements are to encourage its members to work towards establishing a self reliant, sustainable and economically successful centre. We hope they will see it as a place of safety and shelter with strong community links where they can learn skills, grow in self-esteem and feel confident that they will be able to support themselves and their families in the future. The only problem is the name! There is already a Thyolo Community Centre in Thyolo but adding the word craft to that makes it a bit of a mouthful. Any ideas?

**Thanks**

Finally, in spite of the delay in producing this newsletter, we do want to keep in touch with all our donors, and most of all to thank them for their continuing faith in the work

that is happening in Malawi. I saw it first hand, and was deeply affected by the way the Trust changes people's lives. It seems to do it gently and sensitively without a lot of trumpet blowing, but with great impact. How marvellous that we are all able to share in its plans and contribute to its success.

*Sue McAlpine – June, 2008*