

# Water

The major ongoing challenge is water supply.

In the months after we left last November, both the local borehole and community piped system were often dry, and even after the rainy season, most days there was little water available in taps.



There are various plans to improve supply:- re-siting the current system's intake higher up the mountain, and a new pipeline from Phala River which will extend water to 5 extra villages (3090 people), both of which we are eager to support to benefit the local vulnerable communities.

However, water shortage on our own site was threatening our success, so we erected 2 x 5000ltr water tanks as a storage facility, generously funded by **The Chembe Water Project**. If water is still only flowing during the night as in recent months, the tanks ensure water is available next day. However, this is just a local short-term solution, we need to help develop plans to re-construct the current community system, as the first phase towards providing continuous water for thousands.

# Building



As the work grows, so does the need for infrastructure - buildings, security, and maintenance —not to impress, but to safely house, protect, and improve our service to the vulnerable.

This trip we managed to build the security wall along the front of our

Centre, erected water tanks on a huge cement platform, replaced the rabbitry roofing, and began "Evans House" - accommodation for training teams, visitors and volunteers.

Expecting to quarantine our saanen goats when they arrived from South Africa, we also extended one of our goat kholas to an advanced design for maximum hygiene, bio/physical security and effective management. All this development involved benefitting the local community (and economy) with employment for 13 building teams—builders, assistants and water carriers—engaging local craftsmen, suppliers, market traders and businesses.

# Ongoing activities ...

AIDS medication transport—boreholes repaired—distribution of milk, fresh veggies, chickens, eggs, rabbits, emergency maize, seeds, moringa seedlings, books, blankets, quilts, medical supplies—small business grants—developing a solar fridge—managing community gardens—education & training—health funding—and practical help of all kinds.

## Help us help them

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# FAQs...



## Any technology in the bush?

Only a tiny minority of homes have electricity—supply is erratic anyway, and hardly any have running water. However- many, even in the bush, have a mobile phone! We are developing a solar fridge, and use every piece of technology at our disposal to serve the poor - training aids, medical equipment, and IT, as well as "the old fashioned way" - manure and compost instead of fertilizer, and indigenous seeds rather than expensive hybrids that can't replicate quality in successive years.

**Open Hand Projects** is the local working title of **AID AFRICA** and transforms thousands of lives in the remote rural areas of southern Malawi

## AID AFRICA

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# Aid Africa

the amazing work goes on...

by Lynda Mills - Summer 2011



It's been another productive trip to rural Malawi. We've met extreme weather conditions—from searing heat and drought in the early weeks, to tempestuous thunder storms, lightning, high winds, torrential rain, mini whirlwinds, and even an earthquake! And now as the UK warms up into summer, the temperature's cooling in Malawi. As winter approaches all the children's jumpers, quilts and blankets lovingly made by friends in the UK are received with grateful thanks.

# Life in Malawi...

The weather has once again taken its toll on the fields. The annual rains were short-lived and drought decimated the maize harvest in many areas. 27% of local subsistence farmers harvested absolutely nothing. Many are already hungry....

This year's maize distribution programme went well. From Christmas 2010, through till March, hundreds assessed as most vulnerable benefited from the 10.5 tonnes of maize we bought in early last year. Many others were helped too with token amounts.



In April, 2011 we bought in 250 bags of maize—12,500kgs. We rented a maize mill for two weeks, and the whole process:- buying, milling, transporting back to our Centre, drying, measuring moisture content, weighing & packing took 3 men 6 hard weeks to complete. We use special bags to protect grain from the invasive weevils. The total is potentially the basis for 40,000 meals, but some will be reserved as a key ingredient for livestock mix. Milled maize will be given out freely to families assessed at risk according to our distribution plan, mostly during the hunger period (Christmas 2011 to March 2012).

**Individuals** make up society—and individual stories make up "Life in Malawi". Like little Thokazani (her name means "we give thanks") who was brought to us by her aunt. She was just one week old, and her mother died in childbirth—probably due to her husband's beatings causing birth complications. Tiny Thokozani was just wrapped in rags, and her aunt had no way of feeding her, so we gave clothes and a blanket, and included her on our milk programme. Hopefully she'll survive.



Thokazani & aunt

# FAQs...

(frequently asked questions)



## What are homes like?

In the rural areas, most are mud brick with several small rooms, and a grass roof—corrugated iron roofing is a rare luxury, as is a cement floor.



## What do people eat in the bush?

The staple diet is "nsima"—a thick maize porridge, with "relish", a vegetable, or meat based accompaniment if you can afford it, all cooked over an open fire. Generally, no dairy nor processed foods. Snacks are sugar cane, peanuts or tree seeds. Most food is home-grown or bought in the twice-weekly local market—the nearest supermarket is an arduous 7 hour round-trip away!

# Milk Programme



Our goats' milk continues to nourish orphaned, AIDS-affected and other vulnerable infants at nutritional risk. We deliver milk to villages, to assessed babies, and some collect from our Centre. Any excess milk is frozen for storage. Sadly, we lost 5 babies on the programme in recent months, which is not uncommon as we serve the most vulnerable. Triplets were born near Thamanda, and they joined the scheme, as the mother was too severely malnourished herself to produce milk, but just the little girl survived. HIV+ mothers struggle to wean earlier than normal for the culture, as still recommended by health officials in the rural areas, so our milk is a lifeline to many.

# Livestock

Our **goats** are doing well—we've thinned down the numbers, keeping the most productive milk-wise, and releasing others to trained personnel. This retains the best for our breeding programme, benefits local families with good nutrition and the basis of a small business, and relieves the stress of finding enough fresh greenstuff during the dry season.

The 9-month ongoing saga of trying to import registered saanen goats (*high milk producers*) raged throughout the trip. All was progressing until foot&mouth was found in South Africa so an export ban was introduced, which meant our three goats were trapped there. The ban has since been lifted, and Permits sorted, but an extra level of quarantine has been introduced so the goats have to be held both in South Africa before leaving, and in Malawi on arrival. It's been a long and difficult battle, but when these goats finally arrive on site, not only will they improve our stock's milk production, but their bloodlines will make our flock of national significance.

*Pirate—our current primary stud*



**Chickens** - Aiming to improve local village stock, we kept several flocks of Black Australopes. We visited cockerels that we'd placed with vulnerable families in the community, who were delighted with bigger eggs and huge clutches of chicks. However, the stark truth is that it will be more economical for us to buy in young birds to give away, than breed them ourselves, so after careful evaluation it was decided to close this project, giving away all our stock to the needy.

**Rabbits** - Initially, results were disappointing. We'd put a grass roof on the rabbitry for coolness, lined with plastic sheeting against the rain. But rats/mice perforated it and water leaked through, soaking the youngsters in their breeding boxes—we lost several litters. So we replaced the roof with two layers of corrugated iron, to maximise ventilation. 2 more litters soon arrived and thrived!

A major difficulty facing this project is not being able to move rabbits on into the community fast enough, because of difficulties sexing at a young age. Need to overcome this, but the project still has great potential.

# FAQS ...



**Any wild animals?**

*Not the impressive kind usually associated with Africa - plenty of bugs in the rainy season, vibrantly coloured lizards, birds and alarmingly, an increase in snakes!*



**Has the BUV arrived?**

*No—not yet. Our Basic Utility Vehicle is due to reach Malawi mid-August. It's like a motorbike with fixed trailer, designed for tough terrain, and will be invaluable in our community work.*

# Agriculture

Despite adverse weather conditions, the trial maize plot planted according to the "Farming God's Way" initiative harvested 15kgs maize (= 6250kgs per hectare)—an excellent result!

Fresh agricultural ideas tend to be resisted in Malawi, however, visible results are starting to impress. Compost made last year according to FGW principles was superb.

Winter is the time to plant vegetables, tomato nurseries were established, indigenous veggie beds prepared, manure constantly made, and moringa seedlings (a tree with exceptional nutrients) planted to replace those lost in the drought.



*Moringa*

**Community Agricultural projects.** Our 13 "gardens" in the rural areas— inputs supplied by OHP, manned by volunteers, and serving the poor— had mixed results due to the weather. We gave some groups soya seed, for community cash cropping, and most have brought their harvest back to us to buy for our goats, with the income going to help the needy in the villages.

## Forthcoming Agricultural Show

Great opportunity for local farmers to learn in a social atmosphere. We've been asked to display our work, so our stand features laminated photos of our projects, moringa, lucaena, manure, and milk—but no animals to avoid cross-infection with local stock. We've also donated 10 watering cans as prizes (much sought after), and we'll have a laptop running FGW training for crowd appeal!

# Training

We are presenting the FGW DVD series on a weekly basis with relevant scriptural teaching, soft drink, then technical/management training. Participants have been challenged to make their own framed compost from local residue, and if accomplished, we'll send out a team to help prepare some of their field as part of the ongoing support/training process.

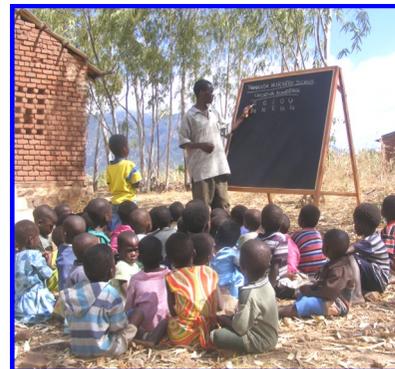
*Grateful thanks to **Rotary** for supplying 150 chairs and **IATP** for providing the projector!*



*Projected agricultural training course*

# Education

We paid Term 3's school fees for the 85 children, in 7 Secondary Schools, whose education we sponsor. We were invited to visit various primary schools, particularly



Resource Centres for Learning Disabilities. They were a bit of a misnomer really, in one local school, they had no resources beyond a cracked blackboard, a caring teacher, and bottle-tops to teach counting. Even though there were 100 children identified, only 18 were on the programme due to lack of funds. The other 82 are still in main stream, distractive, and hard to handle. The primary school itself has **995 children and just 2 toilets!**

Malawi's needs are staggering.... Friends donated a blackboard for Thamanda's nursery school, the voluntary teachers were delighted, and the children mesmerised!