





BLOOM's centre in Chitimbe village, February 14-18 2007

BLOOM (Bringing Life to the Orphans of Malawi)

By: Lars Bache Nielsen, Board member BLOOM, Norway

During their vacation in Malawi BLOOM's founder Isabel Maguja Nielsen and her husband Lars Nielsen visited the BLOOM feeding center. Isabel spent larger parts of her 2-month vacation there, while Lars visited for some days. To meet 350 active and smiling orphans and vulnerable children was a fun and moving experience.

The welcome to BLOOM's centre

Isabel spent most of her 2 month vacation in January and February working for the BLOOM center in the Chitimbe village in the Zomba district south-east in Malawi. Here BLOOM is feeding 350 orphans from ten local villages. The children are selected by the ten village chiefs, to make sure that the needing ones are chosen.

This was my first visit to the BLOOM centre and I spent some days there. I have seen poverty and children in trouble all over the world, but to finally meet "our" children in the village was a fun and very touching experience.



(4283) Warm welcome to mzungu (the white man)



BLOOM is working in the village

Placing the BLOOM centre in the village was never disputed. Many organizations give their assistance in towns, but we believe that orphans from the villages are better off "at home". Then their sense of belonging and remaining personal contacts are maintained, and important roots are kept intact although the parents are gone. Some children have aunts/uncles, sisters and brothers or grandparents who may help them. If the children are moved from their villages, then they lose those important contacts and helpers.

(5010) Chrissy is 16 years old and head of her family

Everybody is helping

BLOOM is helping orphans from ten villages and because the children are cared for nearby, the locals are very positive and helpful. The village women are cooking for the orphans on a weekly basis, one week at the time and rotating between the villages. The women are working unpaid to help "their" orphans. That saves cost, and generates both pride and an important sense of local ownership to the project.

Because the village has no electricity, the food is prepared in the traditional village way and by local ingredients like maize beans, meat, fish and vegetables from local suppliers.



(4584) Lunch preparations. Volunteering ladies from the villages



Food is a serious thing

Food is a serious thing to the children. They line up in different age groups for their meal. The younger ones get it first, and then the older ones are served before and after school.

(4505_A) Eating alone -



Some alone – others together

Some of the children come alone, but others are together with their sisters, brothers or friends.

(4924) - or eating with friends



(4457_b) In line for a meal



Water is life – we share it

Even before food was on the way, we needed fresh and clean water. BLOOM has drilled a 35 meter deep well for our own supplies. The locals are of course also very welcome to use it. In this way the children and the local population have activities in common, and our project becomes a natural part of the local community. Meeting people from “the outside” is also important to the orphans. Young people with no grown-ups to lead them have clear needs for guidance and references to both their behavior and activities.

(4872_A) Sharing the water by BLOOM's new well

Children proud to help

Whenever it is possible the children are activated and involved in the small jobs at the centre. They should learn to wash their own clothes, wash pots and dishes after eating, clearing the place and simple cleaning tasks.

Fetching firewood is one job that is not too difficult if it is distributed on many heads or shoulders---. And the children are both willing and proud to show that they can manage a good piece of work.

(4815) Fetching firewood



Local shopping is popular

Most food purchases are done at the local market like in Jali trading centre nearby. Paid work is done by local workers if at all possible.

In this way the cost of food and work is kept as low as possible, and the growing local activities results in local optimism, a better life for the villagers and a positive view at BLOOM's activities.



(4372) A volunteer shopping vegetables



(4354) Shopping tilapia (small fish)



Records of the orphans

Our local co-coordinator Mr. Tchale works in the BLOOM house in coordination with the storekeeper Mr. Gibson Makupe. They are responsible for the daily organization of work, purchases and economy. They are visited on regular basis by the Malawian board members like Ms Rosta Msaka for good moral and practical support. Mr. Tchale keeps detailed records of the children to make sure that everybody that needs help will get it. The days of our visit 350 orphans were registered. They are aged from 1 year to 17 years when they are considered "grown up's".

(4526_A) BLOOM's who-is-who

Warm welcome to a stranger

In the village it is a tradition to receive a stranger with something important and valuable.

In three places I visited a live chicken or rooster was presented to me as a gift. It was a great honor, but a bit messy in the car during the next days. But they tasted fine in the end ----.

Here I am presented a rooster and some fine local handicraft by the ladies Mrs Mpoto and Mrs Fanny Makupe from Mpoto and Chitimbe villages.

(4523) Presents presented



*(4536_A)
Present received ---*

The shower

The BLOOM centre lies far out in a remote village. There is no electricity and only small roads there. Still the living conditions for luxury travelers like us are very good. The house and bed is fine, and I cannot remember when I ever saw so many stars. Listening to the insects and enjoying the night was really an experience. Because we have plenty of water the washing is not too difficult, and for a short while quite fun really.



(4643) Lars in the shower

(4739) The shower



(4336_A) Isabel and village chief Mr. Namalira

Administration and contact

We have good relations with the senior chiefs as well as local chiefs like Mr. Namalira who lives in Chitimbe village where BLOOM is located.

Without all our active Malawian Board members like Mrs. Rosta Msaka the project would not have been possible. Thank you to you all.

(4341_A) Mrs. Rosta Msaka BLOOM board



Housing and storage

Because we are a small organization with limited funds, we have spent very little money on buildings or transport so far. BLOOM's activities are centralized to a house owned by the mother of BLOOM's founder Isabel Maguja Nielsen. The house has rooms for safe storage of food and equipment, space for cooking and a large space for the children to rest and to play on.

(4598) Cooking behind BLOOM's house



(5618_A) Bloom's house, front yard and water pump



350 lives in our hands

Sometimes we fail to realize that 350 “orphans” between 1 and 17 years of age are individual people each with their own separate qualities, fears, dreams and joys. Then we may have to stop in our busy tracks and just watch the beauty and fun.

Many of these little children look after their sisters or brothers. I am deeply impressed and moved when a 5-10 year old child patiently and readily carries the burden of much younger sibling – and still manages to smile. Please - let’s all try to give them a hand – they deserve it.

(4554_A) A helping ha

BLOOM is a small organization
Rooted in Norway and Malawi.
As a small, lean and transparent
organization it is easy to see
the results of our work, and
the help from our donors.
Thank you so much.

www.malawi.no



(5114_A) Look at this one ---



Picture 4508_A



Picture 4830_A



Picture 4839_A



Picture 4841_A



Picture 4923_A



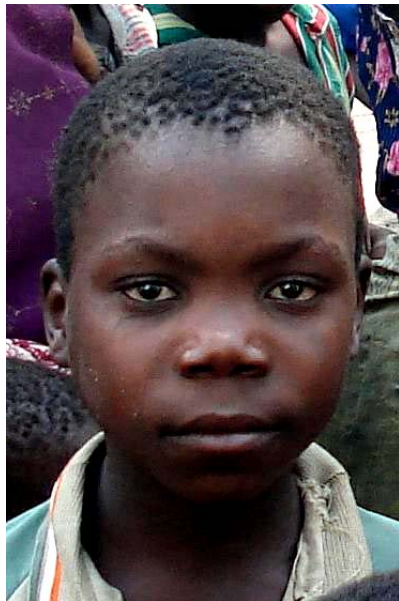
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