

Isabel Maguja Nielsen, the founder of BLOOM spent her 2011 vacation visiting Malawi from April 13 to May 12. During her trip the assembly building was upgraded and painted inside, and the library was refurbished. A goat house was also built, because working with the goats is considered useful to teach the children how to care well for animals. Ten pieces of luggage were checked in before the flight, and KLM had given additional space for 100 kg of free luggage to BLOOM. Customs officials in Malawi were also very friendly and accepted the free import of the gifts for the 351 children at the Centre.



Isabel brought toys, educational materials and knitting yarn donated to BLOOM by Dale Garn AS in Norway. Bloom is now registered in Malawi by a local organisation named Association for Early Childhood Development to improve networking in Malawi. They will teach the BLOOM children to create dolls and other objects with the yarn. They will also give instructions in knitting and enable other handicrafts by using the donated materials.



Painting the assembly building

The assembly building was put up in 2008 and needed some upgrade and maintenance. BLOOM Norway decided to paint the inside, and Isabel spent quite a lot of time teaching the older children, local helpers and the village committee members how to paint a large building inside. Water based paint was used on the walls and oil-based paint for the doors and window frames. During one week the whole 250m² building was painted and in the following weeks it was also improved in many other ways. Finally curtains were installed. A lot of challenges, but a very nice result.

School attendance

Primary school is for free in Malawi. BLOOM helps children at secondary level with school-fees, uniforms, shoes and educational material. This group has now grown to 28 children. It is very important for BLOOM that the children are not only kept alive, but also given a chance to grow and become educated and useful members of society. In the end they should live their own lives, and perhaps be able to help younger friends or relatives.



Isabel visited schools, paid fees and met the administrators. She also surveyed distances from the BLOOM centre. Some of the students walk very far to school, and when the day is over they have to return to the BLOOM centre to eat and to study in the library. This is important because most schools do not have enough books. The children also requested assistance and guidance in their school work. This will greatly improve their possibilities to move on based on good results in the national examinations, and it is a necessary base for proper education. BLOOM Malawi therefore employed a part-time teacher. He started his work first week of May, 2011. An arts teacher was also included in the activities at the BLOOM centre. He will be teaching in painting, drawing, needlework and other artistic activities. He also made the alphabet-drawings on the wall in the centre that can be seen below. This is done to widen the activities and knowledge of the children at the centre.



Updating library and study

Isabel also updated the library. The room was painted and new shelves installed and painted. More books were purchased and chairs and tables acquired, so the children can study in clean and practical surroundings. We have mainly educational books, as well as some other literature. The idea is to build a base for the school work as well as giving general assistance in personal development for the children. The books are in Chichewa or English. To protect the books they are only used in the library or in the study, and cannot be taken out of the building.



Establishing the goat house

To teach the children care for animals we built a goat house. It was a large project, where several village chiefs were involved by finding, cutting and transporting the building materials to the centre. Two Billy-goats and 8 females were purchased. Later on we will get hybrids too, because they are supposed to give better offspring. The children have started the work with the goats. They are from 10 different villages, and each group has the responsibility for one week at a time. Then they learn how to look after the goats without too much hard work.



Food storage

Food is stored in a separate room at the end of the assembly building, beside the separated areas for handing out food and for returning the dirty dishes. Food may be stored for many months, because rice, maize and other types of dry food is better purchased in the season when prices are low. In this way the food expenses are greatly reduced. With large and long-term storage it is important to keep the bags clean, dry and high to avoid losses or damages by humidity or insects. Solid shelves and sennits were built to enable safe storage of food bags for 6-12 months.



Home visits

The children live by friends, relatives, friendly families or alone in houses inherited by their deceased parents. Isabel visited several homes to get an impression of the living conditions of the children. Most children in secondary school are missing basic things like soap, candles or oil for simple lamps. This is a region without electrical power, so BLOOM will help the children to cover the most basic needs. In this way we improve their abilities to study and to succeed in school. Issues like safety and security were also discussed. Some children were helped by addressing and handling more serious personal problems.



Plans for the future

Some of the older children would like to start a football team. We would like to give them training gear like clothes, footballs and maybe boots if possible.

We also want to build a new building including rooms for a future health centre, part-time school, and good space for pre-school children. The small children have very little attention and really need to be activated and prepared for school and life. Swings and other equipment are expected to develop strength and good moves for the younger children. Toys, small mattresses and children's books in English are also needed.

The development of the BLOOM centre is far from ended, and we have future plans including a health centre, better washing facilities, farming including irrigation and uncomplicated vocational training. BLOOM has developed from just an idea to the useful centre that we see today, and we look forward to improving even more during the years to come.



Thank you so much to all our wonderful donors, volunteers and helpers

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