

Isabel and Lars Nielsen's visit to Malawi 10 June to 07. July 2012

Introduction

Isabel and Lars travelled to the BLOOM center in Malawi on 09. June 2012. The purpose of the trip was mainly to supervise the water drilling and to install solar panels for electricity at the Centre and at the same time spend some time in Malawi as part of our summer holiday which we never had.

We arrived in Malawi on 10 June after spending a night in Nairobi due to flight connection problems, and in Malawi we had a rented car for ease of transport. We spent the night at Capital Hotel in Lilongwe because we had made appointments before leaving Norway to buy solar panels and discuss with a firm on how best these could be installed and delivered.

Before leaving Norway we had made solid arrangements and appointments with I and K drillers to start working on a new well on 12 of June. We spent Monday 11 of June in Lilongwe acquiring the necessary knowledge and buying equipment and parts for the solar panels. We left Lilongwe with a car full of solar power equipment around 16.00. On our way we were told that the borehole drillers had already started off from Blantyre in the company of the Art Teacher, Mr. B. B. Maneya who was directing them. We were informed that the drillers wanted to set up their equipment and needed help with locating the new location of the borehole and wanted to start working early in the morning Tuesday, 12 June. We arrived at Isabel's family place in Ntaja around 19.30 hours in the evening. We had to leave the next morning at 08.00 for the Bloom Centre to meet the borehole drillers. Lars wanted to be there when they started so that he could follow up and give support to the drilling team if needed.



Drilling for water

We arrived at the Centre around 09.30 in the morning and went straight to work. The drilling went well the first day, but on the second day the drillers met clay soil with a rock under. This slowed down the drilling and caused some trouble for the workers. After several attempts, they managed to reach the agreed depth of 40 meters on the third day. They found a lot of water on the way but when they tried

to insert the usual pipes that would control the conditions in the well, the clay soil collapsed and clogged the pipes. It was not possible to penetrate the soil, or even to take out the pipes again. The perforations on the pipes also got clogged and the pipes could not breathe which meant clay soil had sipped through and made the hole under too shallow and basically closing large parts of the hole. The owner of the drilling company Mr. Ishmael asked for a meeting and told us that there was no way he could manage to make this hole work properly. Mr Ishmael is a fine young man and honest businessman, and we made good contact with him. He offered to drill a new hole at no cost to BLOOM. This was his loss and a

very fine treatment. He had to go back to Blantyre and Mangochi (a town by the lake side) to collect more special stones for the new well and to obtain special drilling equipment, more pipes and fuel. This delayed our project and other plans, because we wanted to stay at the Centre for only one week.



Installing solar power

While this was going on, Lars had started making drawings and preparing for the installation of the solar panels and the other equipment to get good light at the center. We had to travel to Blantyre several times to buy special cables and equipment. Because we had another week on the center we managed to install all the solar equipment apart from a few of the LED lamps. These lights are very efficient but were not readily available in Malawi.

We had agreed to install lighting the main house only so that children could have more time to read in the evening. But after considering the pros and cons, we decided

to extend the wiring for the lights into the Assembly building and the kitchen. The women usually come around 0400 am in the morning to start cooking the porridge for the kids. This means they work in darkness, and they really have a great need for working light. Lars decided to extend the electricity to the Assembly building in the kitchen and inside the Assembly hall. This meant more work and more materials. We travelled to Blantyre to purchase the additional equipment. We engaged some local guys to dig trenches so that the cables could be buried in the ground for safety and security as this is very expensive cable.

The work went according to plan and by 23 June 2012, we had lights at the Centre. Because we had too few 1 watt bulbs from Norway, Lars ordered more, but it took some time before they were available in Malawi. We will have to find someone to go and install them in the kitchen and Assembly building but all wiring is completed so we will manage that.





While we were busy looking for the lights in Blantyre, we were parked near one of the shops. A reckless driver reversed into our rented car, dented it and ran away. But we were lucky in one way. Another driver standing beside the car saw what happened, and he waited for us to come back. He gave us the registration number of the car that bumped us. Then we had to go and report it to the police who promised to investigate and find the culprit. Luckily after one week, he was found and fined and asked to pay for the damages to our car.

The installation of solar power has made the Centre beautiful and safer because the yard has light now at night. And it looks very nice at night. We asked the coordinator to start charging mobile phones for the villagers around at MK20 per charge. Isabel brought a barber machine and asked the older boys to start hair cutting for the children at a fee of

MK10 as a way of learning life skills. The money from this should be used as petty cash at the Centre to buy tomatoes, maintaining bicycles, milling maize and rice etc.

Organizing BLOOM and visiting the chiefs

Isabel was running up down between buying rice for the Centre organizing daily things and helping out with the solar and borehole and also being the hostess for Lars and the drillers.



Because Isabel is more accustomed to the conditions of the villages she was coordinating everything, and making sure that the drilling boys were as comfortable as possible. She was also visiting all the chiefs in their homes to discuss with them the way forward. This is the custom in Malawi in order to get their continued goodwill and support, and the chiefs are very happy about our efforts

Visit to the BLOOM Girls at Mlatho Secondary School

We also visited the five BLOOM girls at the boarding school. They were so happy to see us. We brought groceries to them and a little pocket money. Some of them had no good blankets and Isabel donated these items to the girls. Some of the girls suggested that they repeat form III due to the fact that they had been introduced to new ways of learning and had difficulties in catching up. They wanted to have good foundation so that they could do



well in their O levels examinations. It is clear to us that the type and level of education in the village is quite different from the level at the boarding school, so there is probably very good reasons to give them another year to get things right. Schooling without good results is nobody's advantage. It also is very good to see that the girls from the center grow up and become much more mature when they go to the boarding school. It is clearly an improvement for them in addition to the better safety there.

The second borehole

The drilling at the second hole started four days after the first borehole was abandoned, and it took almost five days to be completed. The drillers worked day and night. The conditions were difficult but they never gave up until everybody was happy. Lars followed through the whole drilling process. He was involved in every stage and the driller sought advice where he was in doubt. There was lots of water, and the cost of the bore was 1, 5 million Kwacha.





Repairing the old well

Meanwhile the old borehole completely broke down, so we got stuck. I and K drillers suggested rehabilitating the old well so the villagers and center would have enough water while drilling took place. They offered to rehabilitate the old well for 100,000 Kwacha. We discussed it with Lars and decided to agree to his offer. They used a compressor to blow out all the sand and clay soil that had clogged the old well. As a result water started to come again, and

everyone was happy. We found out in the process that the old well was not deep enough and that the first driller had missed his target. The source of the water was missed by a meter hence the present problems with the water table in the old well. The new borehole was finalized on 25 June 2012. It is a great advantage to have a main borehole and the old as a backup when there is need for maintenance, even if the old hole will probably run dry during droughts because it is too shallow.



Opening Ceremony

As a way of encouraging local participation and village commitment, the board and local chiefs requested that the borehole should be officially opened by the Member of Parliament in the area Hon. Kwepeya. He suggested coming and opening the borehole on Thursday 05 July 2012. There were traditional dances and all the 15 chiefs were there. Local people from the villages also came in their large numbers. Bloom (Isabel donated) a traditional drink

brewed locally called Thobwa and we bought soft drinks for our honoured guests and the chiefs and committee members. There were speeches praising the people of Norway for the development taking place especially now that the young boys and girls can see the light burning in their lives. We engaged a reporter from the local known newspaper to cover the occasion. The opening ceremony was a success and the article appeared in the newspaper.



At the opening ceremony the chiefs asked for a kinder garden for the young ones. The Member of Parliament asked for project proposals so that he could present it the Constituency Development Fund under his District Development Programme so that Bloom could be assisted and helped with projects. They were so impressed with what Bloom single handedly has done to the people of Traditional Authority Mwambo. The representative of T/A Mwambo was also present

including the Sub Traditional Authority Kimu herself. Everyone including the local politicians was impressed with Blooms achievements. They actually mentioned the initiative by the chiefs in molding bricks single handedly.

MP commissions K1.6m borehole in Zomba

JOYKHAKONA
CORRESPONDENT

Zomba-Likangala Member of Parliament (MP) McRonald Khwepeya on Saturday commissioned a K1.6 million borehole at Bloom Orphan Care and Feeding Centre in Traditional Authority Mwambo's area in the district.

The centre of attraction was Chitimbe Village where the borehole was drilled with funds from volunteers of Bloom Norway.

Speaking during the ceremony, Khwepeya urged the community to be development-oriented and support Bloom's initiative. He also hailed the initiator of the project, Isabel Maguja-Nelson.

On her part, Maguja-Nelson singled out Bloom's initiative of promoting girls education as one of the major achievements. "We are paying tuition fees for five girls from this orphanage doing their secondary school at Mlatho Girls Private in Liwonde. But, I would like to ask government through you our communities," she said. Bloom, short for Bringing Life to Orphans of Malawi, was founded in 2006 to promote community participation, caring and sharpening the future of the needy as well as equipping them with life skills. ■

Khwepeya sampling the borehole during the launch

PHOTOGRAPH: JOYKHAKONA

BLOOM was in the news when the Member of Parliament in the area Hon. Kwepeya opened the well.

Lars left Malawi on 28 June, and Isabel left for Lilongwe on 06 July and left Malawi finally on 07 July for Norway.

Isabel and Lars
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