



MEL Newsletter

Spring 2016

Dear supporters,

You may have heard of the drought, starvation and food insecurity threatening southern Africa, with Malawi topping the list... it's very real, here. Maize has tripled in price, if it's available at all. An inefficient, corrupt distribution system hinders getting the Maize where it's needed. The government is doing too little too late, and what it does do is poorly effected. I've been into several villages in the Ngala area where villagers are down to a small bowl of poor quality condole per day (cooked cassava flour which looks like grey mashed potato and has zero nutritional value). The poor diet having an immediate negative impact on energy and health, as well as causing longer term problems, especially for children. The maize harvest looks like being good – but that's some months away, as yet.

Projects

Water

Drinking water has been a huge problem: (Below) was the only source of potable water for Juisa's village.



(Above) But we've several success stories! Ted's borehole project is underway – see over – and his borehole maintenance project has meant that 7 village boreholes in the area are back to providing local people with safe and reliable water when little is coming from the sky and the lake is the lowest I've seen it in 30 years.

Other projects

At this time of year, with rains usually impeding progress, we do no building, but we've been active in several other areas.

Albinos

Thanks to ongoing funding and a local sensitisation campaign, our support of albinos has continued, sending 4 adults & children to Nkhotakota Hospital. We've continued providing high SPF sun creams, hats, sunglasses, long-sleeved clothing. Sadly, albinos here are now facing discrimination and even being hunted for body parts used in witchcraft so the sensitisation campaign is crucial to restoring tolerance and understanding. We support a total of 8 albinos, with more arriving as word spreads.

Teachers / Nursing

Working with Ngala Beach Lodge, we've gained funding to pay the three volunteer teachers at Ngala Primary School. The government trained them but lacks the money to pay their wages, despite pupil:teacher ratios in excess of 100:1.

These donors are also funding Margret Mudyanaye as a volunteer at Ngala Health Centre. When she gains a place to train as a nurse, they've generously offered to fund her. Previous to this her only choices were marriage or find a (non-existent) job, despite truly excellent secondary school results.

Her gratitude and her enthusiasm for what she's doing in the Health Centre are touching and gratifying.

Sponsorships

Other sponsorships continue as long as 'sponsees' show: they are making progress, benefiting from what they are given and, where required, feeding back to their sponsors.

In collaboration with Ngala Beach Lodge, we've restarted the Ngala Litter Army of young boys who clear rubbish along the lane to the Lodge & Basilis House (Caroline's home). We provide the wherewithal for this to happen including incentives (like lollipops!) and potential sponsorship in the local secondary school in due course. The Lodge will reward good attenders.

Donations

A large proportion of our funds now come from direct donations and via 'engines' such as The Giving Machine. Please look at our website (www.malawieducationlink.co.uk) for the most efficient, easiest and most profitable (we get Gift Aid automatically!) methods of donating. Many thanks to those of you who continue to make regular payments: it greatly aids our planning.

The Big Give Christmas Challenge 2015: A huge thank you from MEL to the 29 supporters who answered the call and donated online a magnificent £1725 over the two days of the Challenge, 4th and 5th Dec. MEL had raised £1000 of Pledges to match donations and this was used up by the end of the first day. We shall have to work harder on raising Pledges for the 2016 Challenge, to make sure ALL donations are matched. With most donations having Gift Aid added, the Big Give Christmas Challenge is a good fund raising opportunity for MEL. Thanks to all for your support, Sheila and Campbell.

We'll be running another MEL Quiz in Needingworth, shortly. More info to follow, if you're nearby!

If watches are your thing, there will soon be the chance to acquire one donated by the Benton family. We are hoping to raise £1000+; details will follow once everything is completed.

Any other fundraising ideas or help gratefully received! We're also hoping to set up a system allowing us to ship a container of clothing, teaching & learning resources, other items of use here... watch this space and we'd love to hear from you if you can help with the logistics.

Many thanks for your on-going support and interest... we couldn't do all this without you!

Caroline



The Micro-Well Project

As supporters will know, Ted Crampton has joined MEL as a trustee and has now made 3 visits to Malawi, the most recent one in January / February this year, resulting in the birth of this worthwhile project. His regular blogs are now linked to our website. Any enquiries can, in the meantime, reach him via our website. What follows is a report on progress to date!

Project Micro-Well Malawi builds on the experience of putting small diameter low cost irrigation boreholes in the Suffolk coastal strip in the UK where the geology is very similar to that of the Malawi lake strip, namely sand with layers of shingle and some medium hard rock.

Very fortunately in Malawi, some enterprising businesses have developed ways of putting in fairly deep boreholes but without having to use large compressor-driven rotary percussion rigs, with a consequent huge saving in costs from about £5000 per borehole down to about £800. Additionally, Project Micro-Well can take advantage of the manual labour drilling methods and use free volunteer labour from the benefitting villages. This and buying the necessary plastic pipe in bulk can further reduce the cost to £400 per borehole.



The end result is that a village can get an irrigation borehole for a cost that can be met by relatively small UK donations. The village will also help to build a water storage tank, supplying bricks and sand and labour and thus taking the cost down to perhaps £100, which they can borrow from the project and repay over 10 years, interest-free. Along with the borehole, they get a very reliable and low cost EMAS pump to lift water from the borehole into the storage tank and an irrigation tool to inject water below

ground, reducing water requirements by 50% by avoiding surface evaporation.

Ted Crampton is personally funding the two pilot villages boreholes, which are being put in during this rainy season and so their boreholes are being drilled by a paid team. The villages will still help to provide the water tanks. Arthur Banda is being trained up as the local project manager and is going through an intensive series of apprenticeships and learning classes, including weekly report writing and emailing with attached photos of crops and measurement of irrigated and non-irrigated crops in both villages.

Much advice has been gratefully received about crop varieties, inter-planting, soil improvement, optimum fertiliser use. All of this will be tested in the pilot villages over the next twelve months in order to get sufficient data to go for big funding.

In the meantime, we will try and get sponsorship for more villages, Ted's goal is one a month! By the end of this time, Arthur should be well enough trained to operate on his own with the manager of the drilling team becoming a consultant when required. Costs should then reduce further still.

The village chiefs, including the Senior Group Village Headman, have identified five villages in priority order to benefit, once the two pilot village projects have been completed. We already have donations promised for the first of the community boreholes. Additionally the UK Rotary Club has teamed up with the Lilongwe branch to donate and import and ship two very large boxes of tools for the project, costing well over £1000 and of a quality unobtainable here.

It is very early days: drilling the first borehole has proved challenging and it's not finished yet, but everyone knows that hundreds of people are depending on us, literally, as a way out of starvation. We have a good strong team and with skills, experience, ingenuity and some luck at times, we will make this work!