

THANK YOU UNICEF !!!

December 12 and 13, 2011 saw a conference at The Malawi Sun Hotel in Blantyre, sponsored by UNICEF. Invited participants included about 40 people primarily representing "Institutionalized" type orphan care centers from southern Malawi. One of the main thrusts heard by this participant was that Institutionalized care homes need to prepare to be phased out as soon as possible. There was some limited discussion in regards to who the 6000 plus children in the homes would be placed with. The focus seemed to be, place them with relatives. In our experience on the ground, so to say, many of the relatives would not have brought the orphaned children to care centers had they the finances, willing and cooperative family members, space in their homes and all that is required to raise the child along with their own children and please keep in mind, often it is more than one child involved. A question begs us... If relatives are not impoverished and are able but... **do not want to care for the orphaned children**, will those children be raised in a safe, healthy and loving environment? Will the courts of the land be able to force such people to provide what has to come from the heart? Has any court anywhere in the world successfully decreed what heart, conscience and character need to author? It is proper to mention that conference speakers made several statements of gratitude and appreciation recognizing the sacrifices many of the "Institutionalized" care-center operators made in order to assist orphaned children. It is a sadness, that it seems likely, in most Child Care Homes there are children who should be with relatives and that in fact robs other children who are really in desperate need of a home where they would be cared for.

So why a thank you to UNICEF? Firstly, what a wonderful facility to be hosted in! True, with the financial constraints most of the participants operate under it may have seemed incongruous, but what a great facility and from what we saw enjoyed by all! Including ourselves! Excellent information was brought forward as to legalities and responsibilities on both Government public servants and the home operators (truly servants in their own right).

For this writer it promoted an internet search to discover what UNICEF was about in regards to orphan care, answers were found in an in-depth document published by UNICEF in 1999.

THE EXCERPT BELOW IS FROM THE UNICEF DOCUMENT IT IS AVAILABLE IN ITS ENTIRETY ON THE INTERNET UNDER: "[CHILDREN ORPHANED BY AIDS](#)" Author: UNICEF 1999.

Strategic action should:

- **Ensure access to basic services.**
- **Provide assistance through specially targeted programs**
- **child-care services, income generation, credit/loans, food production, psychosocial support.**

Families provide the best environment for bringing up children and if adequately supported they will best able to provide the care that children orphaned by AIDS require. **This support must encompass improved access** to basic services, including health care, safe water and sanitation, and education, as well as assistance with childcare. Policies need to be designed to prevent families with orphans from sinking into deep poverty. These may entail support for income-generating activities, small business cooperatives, vocational training and micro-credit schemes. *Only by investing in poor communities can the AIDS challenge be met, as AIDS disproportionately affects the most poor and disadvantaged in developing countries.* Keeping orphans in school is especially crucial in breaking the poverty cycle.

3. Stimulate and strengthen community-based responses

Strategic action should:

- **Support NGOs and community based partners with – technical assistance**
- **policy and planning guidance training – resources.**
- **Identify and strengthen community-based care and support to – substitute or foster care**
- Families – **child-headed households – orphanages, which play a transitional role.**
- **Make use of the formal welfare system.**
- **Promote exchanges of information about experiences.**
- **Bring small initiatives to larger scale.**

*****END OF QUOTE **** (please read the article for full context it is worth the time!)

*** **Our Comment:** While the objectives and goals put forth by the above article are definitely good and with funds and training, feasible, we submit, from our limited view, it is not the present reality on the ground. We base this on living (for the past 8 ½ yrs) in what we understand to be one of the most impoverished areas of Malawi. It would seem that the implementation of those excellent programs is years away, in terms not only of funding but of qualified teachers and equippers. We gladly welcome correction. The article would seem to birth the question ..."**If the above programs are not in place and functioning, would it be wisdom to support and encourage the existing orphan care facilities with the goal of transition in the future when the above**

programs and even better are in place? If impoverished relatives are forced to take orphans into their homes what will the end result be for the child? Let's not blame the impoverished relatives; many have every desire to take in their brothers, sisters, orphaned children. UNICEF put the aforementioned documents out in 1999. Let's see the programs implemented that will allow the *relatives the welcome ability and dignity of caring for their families orphans*. As our President has said "Look at the work of my hands not my words." (paraphrased badly perhaps)Our apologies Mr. President if we have misquoted you.

A question again cries out ... "Would it not seem sensible to provide training, resources where possible and qualified sensible oversight (with adequate budget) to what is now in place and caring for 6000 plus orphans. It does not matter what system is in place; there will be abuses and heartbreaking stories. It does matter what the care givers are like... their character, their love, their training, their motives, be it relatives or foster homes or whatever else. "Institutionalized" care: it comes back to what are the caregivers like! A thought to consider if families have the resources to care for their deceased relatives children and they do not do so... are the children not better off with people who have a proper heart motive to care for them?

SOME FACTS:

- There has been a registered "Institutionalized" care centre in Bangula, Nsanje District, T/A Mbenje since 2003. This Care Center, has been funded by the founders thru gifts given to them by family, friends and friends of friends even in rare cases strangers, all are those who have heard of or seen the good efforts being made by the founders (with much help from their staff) over the years. Eight and one half years of caring for orphaned children in this "Institutionalized" care centre has not dimmed the founders' desire to see family-oriented care for the children. One of the greatest changes to the child care system used over the years has been developing two teams of caregivers, each team working one half of the month. Yes, the labour laws have been followed and all is in order. The ladies have found not only much more community with each other, but more importantly, their hearts have opened much more to the children they care for. No longer do they work eight hours and then go home to work even harder for how many hours... carrying water, making meals, washing clothes, finding firewood ... all the issues and efforts of village life. This is a tested and happening thing for 18 months now. It has changed the centre in attitude and increased levels of love and care.

- There is also a preschool and full primary school from which the standard eight students have for four years scored amongst the highest in the district. The goal now is to do the same with secondary students, beginning with Form One. As one would expect the Malawian Curriculum is used.

- Play is such an important part of a child's development. These kids are experts at play. Swings, rubber-horse-ride swings, the portable net ball nets, not to forget the airstrip immediately outside our gates which is used regularly for football, netball and games. A much enjoyed teeter totter and a wonderful big yellow slide with curves. Also board/card games, creative activities that they come up with. Pushing each other in wheel barrows, rolling tyres, making mud cell phones, mud dolls, wire cars... Healthy, happy, lively children are the result!!! A couple of years ago a visiting professor of psychiatry remarked " I don't see any signs of institutionalization ... keep doing whatever you are doing!! ".... As long as we are permitted too we will! The place is always improving as funds and circumstances allow.



- **SO WHAT NEXT???** So glad you asked! It is called "The Village Project". The founders and the management committee are working towards **CRUCIAL Government input and approvals** for this project. This is along with managing the care center, continuing in the upgrading of staff and facilities, dealing with the trials of normal life in The Nsanje. The need to plan and prepare for the future is now.

- **PROPOSED VILLAGE DESIGN** The plan is to have Malawian house-parents with their own 3 to 4 children and 5 to 6 of our children housed in 18 to 20 individual suitably-sized homes complete with garden space, a Football/Soccer field and equipped

playground, a multi-purpose meeting hall, possibly a pre-school depending on numbers, offices and supply storage areas, water tower, bore hole and delivery system, a sewer system with septic and field, power supply and electricity to each house.

- **PROPOSED VILLAGE OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE:** In brief, Care families supported by one “Equipper” for each ten families to disciple, teach parenting, budgeting and life skills. They will also monitor the houses as to how our children are treated. The hope is each village will move towards self-management. The expectation is that the children will be raised in, at the least, a family headed by a working dad and nurtured by a stay-at-home mom. Contact and interaction with relatives from outside will be encouraged as well. The children will then have a pattern for their future relationships as a spouse and parent and for home village relationships. With this design, the limitations on the numbers of orphans to be assisted will be the availability of qualified house parents and the number of sites large enough (3 acres) to facilitate villages that are within walking distance to the main Care Center School. There are considerable entreaties from the community to allow their children to attend the school.
- **RELATIVES DAY** has been instigated at this Care Center. It is a time when relatives of the children, are invited to come for interaction. It is also a time for them to come to understand the children’s progression in terms of education, world view and hopes for the future and achieving those hopes as they become feasible goals. The overall purpose is to ensure the children stay connected and interactive with their relatives for future relationship and extended family ties to remain strong. After all “It takes a village to raise a child”: a healthy village not one decimated by HIV and / or divorces and the resulting, single mums and destitute mothers with multiple children, most or all with different fathers. When the devastation of multiple divorces/marriages is seen, who would not want to teach their children the value of God centered marriages and the wonderful blessings. It is such a simple



solution to see HIV stopped dead! Do Malawians want to emulate the West or Europe, UK or other African countries with their divorce rates and resulting heartache for all, or to build a God-loving country free from corruption and the cruel life-draining HIV and STDS? Do Malawians want **to be free from poverty and the hopelessness** that it engenders! Of course! Let’s do it!!!

- **So all in all a sincere THANKYOU UNICEF!!** Thank you for the strategy trotted out so many years ago. It looks great! Now to see it done!!!. In the meantime, where the strategies have not been developed to maturity, would it be helpful

to support “Institutionalized “ care centers with training and a good cooperative attitude towards them? Hopefully funds can be found to not only initiate and maintain the UNICEF programs but also to provide finances for the preparation and equipping of trainers to teach the “Institutional” care givers how to do a better job. So to the UNICEF people and the Government of Malawi authorities responsible, “Please continue with your efforts to ascertain accurately where we are now in terms of preparation for orphans to be placed with impoverished families.” “**Who would not want** orphans to live with caring and equipped family members?” Isn’t it also true “It takes more than one man to hold up a roof!” Working together the “roof of care and protection” for the orphans of Malawi will be strong! It does not seem that there are fewer orphans expected, by most, in the years ahead. Are we part of the problem or of the solution?

- The above has been prepared and submitted with a definite bias towards desiring the best for the children of Malawi who have suffered much. Sincerely, with regards to all and no offense intended: Will and Pamela Phillips, Tiyamike Mulungu Center, Bangula, Nsanje District , T/A Mbenje.