



Quarterly Update

Fall 2002

Dear Friends,

GAIA is working with church-based development specialists in Malawi to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the hunger-AIDS nexus.

Our GAIA group visited orphanages where children cannot count on getting minimal nutrition ever. Some better-funded places can provide children with one balanced meal a week, if they have outside funding help.

In this issue, GAIA visits Malawi.

William Rankin



*A woman at Mua Mission in Mtakatata, Malawi.
Photo by Ellen Schell*

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More from the GAIA Team visit to Malawi in June 2002:

Young People in Malawi



Students at Katete II primary school in Chimwaye, Malawi battle hunger and AIDS. Photo by Ellen Schell

Chimwaye is a remote village at the end of a dirt road that winds and bumps through dry maize fields. Here are the Katete II Primary School, many orphans, and major famine. In the center are 3 brick school buildings (one with the tin roof partially blown off) and a brick church. This is a rectangle with small peaked window openings along the side and a brick pulpit up front — no doors or glazing. The pews are concrete benches. Weekdays the sanctuary serves as a classroom for the overcrowded school.

We are guests of a youth anti-AIDS club we've supported as HIV prevention educators. The young people are African Traditional, Christian, and Muslim. They teach peers about HIV, life skills, and home-based care.

Upon exiting the vehicle we are surrounded by school children in blue school uniforms — see the photo below. They are fascinated, and want to shake our hands. Greyson is a young teacher. This is his first post and he is proud of his 27 students.

The village chief is, surprisingly, a woman — one of a very few women chiefs. Idah is more than gracious, and educated. She is Yao, a mostly Muslim tribe, but she was raised as a Presbyterian. She walked 40 km to her school, was trained as a nurse aide, and worked at the local health center for 20 years. Three of her 8 children

have died of AIDS. She is very committed to educating the youth of her village about this disease.

A soccer game is under way on the dry field behind the church. The youth play in bare feet, with a real soccer ball (not the usual wadded newspaper) purchased with GAIA funds. Because soccer attracts many children and young people — there are around 400 for this contest — post-game HIV discussions occur with a large audience once the game is concluded.

After the game, Youth Club members sit with us to translate speeches, dramas, and choir music. Without TV, in a semi-literate culture, these are primary means to convey information. In one skit a man was unfaithful to his wife and contracted AIDS. He became sick, his wife took him to the hospital, but he wouldn't follow the doctor's instructions and instead sought a witch doctor. The shaman was paid much money for a supposed cure, wiping out family resources. The audience gets the point.

After the actors come choirs. One song is entitled, "Have you seen the animal that destroys people?" Another describes a "beautiful young person who was here and then died. Little by little they are dying."

Several young people read poems about HIV and how it affects their lives. They address the HIV risks faced by pubescent girls in some traditional initiation ceremonies, the problem of farmers dying of AIDS and aggravating the famine, the need for HIV testing, and they insist that HIV is "not from God."

We urgently want to help these young people of the Matindi Youth Club reach many more villages with their exciting, relevant, urgent messages. We believe in these lovely, creative, dedicated young people — in Jones, in Mphatso, in Hannex, in Greyson, and in Peter and Clifton (who both want pen pals).

Food Crisis in Malawi

Before seeing this for myself in June, I received an e-mail from a nurse at Zomba (Malawi) Central Hospital:

"Before I came here I used to help with a small amount of money from my salary for snacks at the nursery school. They are planning to suspend the school temporarily because they cannot give the children something to eat. There is a food crisis in Malawi and the food shortage has been declared a National Disaster."



Hunger affects HIV and vice versa since physically weakened people will die of AIDS faster than otherwise, and since dead farmers cannot grow food.

Basic prevention in rural areas

We saw at first hand how absolutely without resources people are in remote villages. A few bicycles but mostly walking lots of kilometers will get you closer to a population center and its limited services. Mostly you are dependent upon your village neighbors, who have nothing either.

We made a small grant to a local United Religions organization in Bvumbwe, Malawi, for HIV / AIDS youth education, HIV testing, and orphan care. This community is in the remotest part of Malawi, and they are working very hard to reach young people with life-saving information.

Women and education

GAIA is helping a talented, motivated Malawi woman finish her training at Chancellor College in Zomba. She will eventually be certified as a health educator of young children.

In June she gathered a group of women students to meet with GAIA Project Director Dr. Ellen Schell and

Dr. Sally Rankin, Associate Professor, UCSF School of Nursing, meets with women from Chancellor College in Zomba. Photo by Ellen Schell

with Dr. Sally Rankin at the College to talk about women's susceptibility to HIV / AIDS.

Recently an e-mail message came to Sally and Ellen from two of the students. It reads in part, "Thank you so much for your visit to Malawi, and especially to Chancellor College. We do not take your coming for granted. Your meeting with us will help us as Chancellor College students, and Malawi as a nation. We are doing a project on Free will versus determinism and the AIDS crisis in Malawi: The case of Malawian women.

Your visit enlightened us so much on some of the issues that we overlooked in our research. Most of the issues we discussed have enriched our paper. Your visit had a positive impact on Chancellor College students for we have started a club on sensitization of H.I.V and AIDS among Malawian women." S/Patrice and Elta

We are grateful for everyone's help.



Too Many Orphans

We have just returned from a lengthy trip to Malawi. We met with the country's Vice President and with government and university health officials. We visited urban projects for street children and rural village programs working with youth on HIV prevention. And everywhere we saw orphans—so terribly many orphans.

We have collected crucial information, which we are rapidly collating and analyzing. We met with many wonderful, dedicated, brave, hope-filled people.

But just now I would like you to see part of a group of 27 children, all AIDS orphans, in a tiny village at the end of a dirt road in southern Malawi. A wonderful woman, her elderly mother, and a few teenagers care for these kids. No funds come from outside. Every second day the children receive a cup of Nsima, a maize product that is a staple of Malawi.

Otherwise they get only sugared tea or sugared water.

This photo shows some of the children with two older girls and the grandmother. When I was there I saw no child in motion, nor did any of them speak.

Take a few minutes. Look into the faces that look into ours.



A Malawi woman, her mother and a few teenagers care for these AIDS orphans in Southern Malawi.

Photo by William Rankin

*Thanks for your interest and your help.
—Bill Rankin*

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