RIPPLE NEWS

Providing a hand up, not a hand out!

RIPPLE News — March 2010

Aldenham School visit

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EDUCATION — March 2010

Kapanda Secondary School

The teachers' office is finished

Andrew Manda is in charge of landscaping the school grounds and setting up the experimental gardens

Amos (RIPPLE Africa funded teacher)and Sally (Headteacher) in Kapanda's small library and storeroom

RIPPLE Africa volunteer teachers

Due to a shortage of funds over the past year, we stopped all additional building work at Kapanda Secondary School, but we were able to complete the teachers' office building which incorporates a small library and storeroom. We have now also installed a safe in which examination papers can be kept securely so that the school can be used as an examination centre. Kapanda has proved very popular with our volunteers, and they teach at the school regularly. During their placement early in 2009, two volunteers (Joe and Sarah) employed Amos who has proved to be a great asset to the school, teaching maths and science subjects. Joe and Sarah are continuing to support Amos now that they are back in the UK and are in full-time jobs.

One of our dreams is also becoming a reality — we have had some funds from a donor in Hong Kong, and we are now able to start the landscaping of the school grounds and the experimental garden project. The donor has asked for the garden to be called the "Norske Hagen" which means "Norway Garden". David Newman has been working closely with Andrew Manda and, next year, we should see some interesting results.

New books for Kapanda, and great exam results

Proud teachers open boxes of new text book donations

New text books donated by the ETWA (Europe-Third World Association) at the European Patents Office, and Philip Green, a teacher at Aldenham School who raised money by running the London marathon

Improved pass rate for form 2 Exams

Text books are always in short supply in Malawian schools, but Annabel and Sibel, who work at the European Patents Office (EPO) in Munich, were able to secure some funding for text books for Kapanda through ETWA (Europe-Third World Association), the EPO's staff club. In addition to this, Philip Green, a teacher at Aldenham School, ran the London marathon and wanted the money he raised also to go towards text books. As you can see from the pictures, we had a wonderful opening ceremony at the school, and the books are now being used by the students. However, we will shortly be needing more books for Form 4 which will be starting in September 2010.

Just before we left Malawi in December 2009, the Form 2 JCE (Junior Certificate of Education) results were announced, and the students at Kapanda attained a 68% pass rate. This is an excellent result for a Community Day Secondary School as, typically, the pass rate is between 45% and 50%. To maintain and improve these results, we really need to build some more teachers' houses to attract additional teachers to work at the school. If you feel you can help, we need £16,000 per house. We would love to be able to continue with this building programme.

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New library extension

New library extension (left) for Mr Longwe's "clients"

Andrew, the builder, and his team preparing the floor

There is a storeroom at the back and an open area at the front for reading

Every time Mr Longwe, the Librarian, has a meeting with Geoff, he has a long list of requests, and a reading shelter for his important "clients" has always been at the top of the list. Although Geoff and Mr Longwe have not always agreed on the design of this building (Mr Longwe wanted high walls to give privacy to the important clients!), it was decided to have low walls that people could sit on and to make the shelter spacious, light and airy. The building has been completed thanks to Brian and Lilian from South Africa who provided money for some books and for the shelter. The building is rather more elaborate than originally planned, but the finished product will be a great success.

The library continues to be very popular, and Mr Longwe and Japhet, his assistant, who is rapidly becoming a younger Mr Longwe, keep it immaculate. There are now over 4,000 books, and we have invested in more secondary school text books. There is always a number of people in and around this facility. The new Chief Chibunya from Matete is rarely seen without a novel from the library — he is one of the library's most regular clients and reads a new book every week.

Now that the reading shelter is finished, we need some additional money for chairs and for shelving in the storeroom.

Helping Mazembe Primary School

Frank and Lisabeth funded and organised painting of the classrooms

... and the construction of 93 wooden desks

New bricks for the planned double classroom block

Eight forms and only four classrooms means classes are held outside

We have been working with Edward Mphande, the headmaster at Mazembe Primary School. Frank and Lisabeth, volunteers from Holland, raised funds and painted all four classrooms at the school. They also paid for the construction of 93 wooden desks. The school is very under-resourced and has 466 students, eight forms, but only four classrooms. But help is at hand — two inspirational young Americans, Cassie and Dan, who have started a not-for-profit organisation called Taking Back Lives in Florida, visited us in June 2009 and decided to partner with us. They are currently raising funds to build a double classroom block at the primary school. The headmaster has already made the bricks, and we are all looking forward to Dan, Cassie and their team coming out to make this school block a reality.

Mazembe Primary School only has two government teachers. RIPPLE Africa currently pays for two trainee teachers, but there are also three Malawian volunteer teachers who we would like to be able to employ. However, we need some regular donations — the cost is £40 per month per teacher. Also, at Matete Primary School, there are two additional volunteer teachers whose salaries we are also wanting to fund.

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Outstanding results! Two Mwaya students in the top 100 in Malawi

Lael has just completed his MSCE and came second at Viphya School

Francis achieved great MSCE results too and is now doing voluntary teaching at Matete Primary School

Matt, a RIPPLE Africa volunteer, holding a graduation lunch at Chifira Secondary School

Teaching on the deck at Mwaya

For the past seven years, we have been sponsoring 40 students per year to attend local secondary schools, and we also ran a scholarship fund where we paid for the brightest students to go to expensive boarding schools. Unfortunately, we have now had to withdraw this programme due to a shortage of funds. However, this year, two students really stand out from the others: Lael, who was the best student at Mwaya Primary School five years ago and is Yalerd's brother, came second in the MSCE (Malawi Secondary Certificate of Education) results at Viphya School. Francis Banda, who was sponsored by Brenda, Dick and Stewart, also achieved good results, and both students are in the top 100 students in the whole of Malawi. They both want to go on to university, and we know that Lael wants to become an architect. It would be wonderful if we could find a sponsor for each of them, and, from past performance, we can guarantee that they would not let you down.

Some previous volunteers will remember George, who we sponsored through secondary school. He worked at the library after leaving secondary school and before he started university, and he is now in his fourth year at the Polytechnic in Blantyre studying Business Administration and Accountancy. He has been sponsored by Darren for the four years of his course, and he is one of the top students in his year. He won the Total Malawi-Polytechnic Best Student's Award at the end of 2009, and he is also the Financial Controller of the Students' Union.

The nursery schools are constantly improving

A happy, fun atmosphere at the Chiomba nursery school

Jimmy, the nursery schools coordinator, has established a great team of teachers

We need help to build a new nursery school at Matete 2 as the church building they are using is about to collapse

The nursery schools are going from strength to strength under Jimmy's leadership. He really takes his job seriously and is always full of energy and enthusiasm which rubs off on everyone he meets. Our volunteers love working with him, the teachers and the children in all the nursery schools.

We are still looking for funding to build a nursery school for Matete 2. The current building, an old church (shown above), is in a dreadful condition and is currently propped up with poles. It will be quite a mammoth undertaking to construct a nursery school building on this site as it is about five miles from the main road, and the track is impassable by vehicles so we would need to organise some temporary road construction to get materials there. We estimate it will cost about £9,000 to build the school and provide suitable vehicular access.

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ENVIRONMENT — March 2010

Forest conservation project

A total of 34 chiefs have signed up to the conservation project

The beautiful forested hills in Nkhata Bay District are really worth saving and the chiefs are fully behind the project

A community tree nursery at Tungwe Hill

Nkhata Bay District has beautiful, large forests, some of the last in Malawi, but these forests are under threat due to a fast-growing local population and also because Malawians from other districts where land is at a premium are moving into the area. Wherever there is an abundance of resources, man rarely values it until it is gone and, in the dry season during October and November, we are increasingly aware of the smoke from the many fires in the forested hills behind the lakeshore. The farmers use poor agricultural techniques and, consequently, exhaust the nutrients in the soil, and so, every year, more and more farmers indiscriminately cut down large areas of forest and burn the trees where they fall to clear land for new farms. For a number of years now, we have been helping communities to plant trees, and it is heartbreaking to see somebody planting a few small tree seedlings when just metres away his neighbour has cleared, cut and burnt an area of virgin forest.

Just over a year ago, we took our Traditional Authority (TA), Chief Fukamapiri, and a number of chiefs up into the hills to witness this problem. We discussed ways of controlling the rampant deforestation and, although we have literally no money for this, we decided to start a forest conservation project. Chief Fukamapiri is fully behind this project, and Force Ngwira, our Environmental Projects Manager, and his team organised meetings with the TA's 47 chiefs. As it turned out, all of them were passionate about reducing the deforestation but they just did not know how to go about it. Since then, each chief has selected a conservation committee comprising 10 members of his community, and these people, together with the chief, are the major stakeholders of this project.

Our aim is to conserve and protect hundreds of square kilometres of forest. The first step was for the chiefs and their committees to identify land they wish to protect in their areas. Typically, these are steep hills either with existing forest or with areas that have been deforested and need to be rehabilitated. So far, we have received sketch maps from all 34 chiefs — the remaining 13 chiefs are in the lowland area by the lakeshore and do not have any hilly areas to conserve.

In October 2009, Geoff and David Newman (a horticulturist working as a consultant with RIPPLE Africa on a voluntary basis) attended a very encouraging meeting with all of the chiefs, and a simple set of bylaws were proposed and agreed. The next stage is for the protected areas identified by each chief and his conservation committee to be registered with the District Assembly, and then these areas will legally become protected. Once this is done, the real work begins. We have already been holding meetings with communities to discuss the effects of deforestation, namely, erosion, land degradation and climate change, and some areas are already experiencing less rainfall due to the reduced number of trees on the hills.

This site was cleared by a farmer last year and maize was planted, but it was a disappointing crop

Travelling in the rural areas can be very slow and difficult, especially during the rainy season

One of the deforested hills near Lilongwe — we want to prevent this happening!

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Deforestation at Tungwe Hill

Deforested Tungwe Hill — these areas need to be protected from erosion

Deep gully erosion on the cleared hill

A meeting with the chief and his conservation committee

We went to visit Village Headman Kakhongwe at a place called Tungwe Hill. This chief and his conservation committee are very aware of the devastating effects of deforestation on Tungwe Hill. We all walked to the hill to see the problems for ourselves. There is extensive erosion, and very few crops are being grown successfully on the steep slopes. The soil is rocky, and large areas of ground are just bare earth where nothing grows. The chief wants to rehabilitate this area by planting trees and also protect other areas of forest which fall under his jurisdiction. It was very encouraging to see that it is the local people who want to preserve their environment, rather than just a group of people from the West. The whole conservation project will only work if the chiefs and the people really want it to happen. It is, after all, their land, and the key to the success of this project is motivating people to value their environment so that their children and grandchildren can benefit from it in the future.

New RIPPLE Africa step-by-step guide is helping

Measuring and estimating on a football pitch

Force's environmental projects team at one of the the training days

A well deserved lunch at "Mum's", a restaurant in Chintheche

Our tree planting project has always been very ambitious, and Force Ngwira, our Environmental Projects Manager, has been keen to deliver large numbers of tree seedlings for our donors. However, we only have a relatively small team and very limited resources, so it has been difficult to maintain high standards in all of the community tree nurseries.

One of the best ways to learn is by experience and by making mistakes. For some time now, we have been wanting to have accurate records from all of our community tree nurseries, including the quantities and types of trees at nursery level plus information on the trees that have been planted out. It has been difficult to gather all of this information, and this is complicated further by limited computer skills for documenting it.

On our visit in May 2009, we observed a number of weaknesses in our programme — the main weakness being that there really is a shortage of land on which to plant trees. Although trees were grown at nursery level, there was often insufficient land to plant them out, and there have been cases where seedlings have been left in the nurseries. There have also been issues where newly planted trees have been burnt due to inadequate care and maintenance of the planting site. Initially, we had wanted to plant a large number of indigenous trees — this is very often what our donors wanted — but the reality is that the vast majority of trees that are being grown are for consumption, i.e. for firewood, timber, or fruit.

We spent a long time really exploring all of these issues and decided to put together a simple step-by-step guide, after which we held a two-day training course for Force's staff. The guide illustrates dates when

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Measuring, and improved nursery management

First, the planting site is cleared, and then planting intervals are measured

Community tree nursery management has been improved

These seedlings are the same age, but the tree on the left had fertiliser applied two weeks earlier

Communities are now investing in the future growth of the trees by applying manure

various activities should take place, so each stage can be planned. It also lays out the methodology of the hows and whys for each process. David Newman gave us a very simple but highly effective tip which was to select and then measure the areas to be planted even before the seeds are sown in the nursery. This process is quite unheard of in Malawi, and we had great fun demonstrating how to measure areas on a football pitch in Chintheche. The result of this training and the introduction of the step-by-step guide, which has been given to all the RIPPLE Africa coordinators and also to all the community tree nurseries, is that there has been a dramatic improvement in planning, nursery management, and planting site preparation. This year, we have reduced the number of trees that have been raised in the nurseries, but the quality and level of care and management has been considerably better.

Kalwe Forest is cleared for a new District hospital ... possibly!

Pristine primary forest at Kalwe

Money was promised to build a new hospital, so the forest was cleared

Alternative sites could easily have been found and, to date, no building work has begun

On the road between Nkhata Bay and Mzuzu, at a place called Kalwe, there was a beautiful forest reserve. We visited it several times as it was the best example of primary forest that we have ever seen in Malawi. Although the forest only covered an area of about 40 acres, one could see how Malawi used to be in years gone by. In fact, in many places where there are hardly any trees now there used to be a canopy right across the road, and people can still remember this. So we were very sad to hear the news that the area had been identified as the site for a new hospital to replace the old District hospital in Nkhata Bay. It seemed crazy to us that this area had been selected because there were so many other locations nearby that would be far more practical.

Unfortunately, however, there was nothing we could do about it. The chain saws and bulldozers arrived, and the pictures above show the terrible destruction. We are not sure who is funding this project, but we understand that no money is forthcoming at the moment to start construction of the hospital, so the loss of trees may have been for nothing. Not only has there been destruction on the site, but now it is a free-for-all for the local people who are cutting down the trees in the remaining forest. The government keeps talking about conservation and tree planting, but activities like this have to stop to show people that the government of Malawi is serious about conserving their forests.

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How are the RIPPLE Africa trees growing?

Dan at the Mvwalumane community tree woodlot

David Newman inspecting the rapid tree growth

Trees planted at a primary school are growing well

Force and Dan proudly showing off the results of the tree planting project

Well, growing trees is a slow process. There is a saying that the best time to plant trees is 20 years ago, and how true that is. But we are pleased to say that there is good evidence on the ground that RIPPLE Africa's trees are growing successfully. We estimate that we have grown 3 million trees to date and, although some will have failed, it is very rewarding to see our trees growing and to see well managed woodlots. When we first started tree planting, we put a lot of emphasis on the community tree nurseries and really did not appreciate how much time it takes to prepare and maintain the planting site. This needs to be done for the first three years, and then the trees should be large enough to look after themselves. We have estimated that each tree takes about 20 minutes' preparation time when it is planted out. Although this does not sound very long, it adds up to a lot of minutes when there are 3 million trees!

One problem we have had in this respect is that community members give their time for free and, as with many of these types of projects, it is only a few people who do all the work. This year, we have tried to encourage individual farmers who are members of the community tree clubs to prepare their own land and grow their own trees from which they will be able to profit at a later date. This system is working far better as there is real ownership. In addition to this, we have piloted a programme to give the farmers an incentive to prepare their land in good time by providing groundnuts which can be planted between the trees. These will not only produce food and seed for the following year, but they are also good for the soil. We will be seeing the results of this initiative on our next trip in May 2010.

Improvements with the fruit tree project

There are many problems for the young fruit trrees

Field training to raise nursery management standards

Improved mulching of an avocado tree

The improved tangerine and orange trees will be ready to provide budwood

Although all of our 100 community tree nurseries are growing some fruit trees, we have decided to nominate 20 specialist nurseries in key locations to really develop the fruit tree programme. Each fruit tree club has planted a budding orchard with about 60 tangerine, orange, and mango trees. These trees will provide budwood and mother trees for grafting in the years to come. We had to roll this programme out quite quickly and, when we visited these fruit clubs in May 2009, we were rather disappointed with the results. The citrus trees were suffering from poor management — good compost had not been used, there was no mulching, trees had whitefly and caterpillars, and they were not being watered regularly. We spent time with our environmental projects team who then went out to the clubs and provided detailed training. We have also put together a simple step-by-step guide for fruit tree production.

When we re-visited the sites in October 2009, there was an amazing transformation. Fumbani, who is the

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20 specialist fruit tree nurseries

The environmental projects team with an improved mango

The improved orange trees are being well cared for

There is already fruit on the guava trees

www.fruitfuloffice.com
Each basket of fruit sold pays for one guava or pawpaw tree

RIPPLE Africa fruit tree project coordinator, had really improved standards. Trees had been sprayed for whitefly, and they had also been fertilised, mulched and watered. We cannot wait to see the trees in May 2010 after the rainy season has finished.

SInce 2007, Alupro has been our main sponsor for the fruit tree programme. Cherry Hamson, the Communications Director, has been incredibly supportive of our projects and has visited us twice. We could not have started this project without Alupro's fantastic help. To date, over 300,000 fruit trees have been grown. Unfortunately, however, due to a reduction in funding, Alupro are unable to continue with this project after June 2010. We hope that they will be able to fund this project at some time in the future when they will be able to see the amazing results following their initial input.

We have also been lucky to be supported by a relatively new company called Fruitful Office. They are based in London and, as the name suggests, they supply baskets and boxes of fresh fruit to offices throughout the UK. They have had a programme of planting a fruit tree for every basket or box of fruit sold, and the fruit trees planted have been pawpaws and guavas. If you work in an office in the UK and would like to benefit from eating fresh fruit, go to their website — www.fruitfuloffice.com. They are a really friendly team and have a great product.

Fruit tree production at Mwaya

The greenhouse is really well organised now that Catherine is in charge!

Growing hardy lemon root stock — these will be budded with improved orange and tangerine varieties

Preparing a new fruit tree nursery at Mwaya

The fruit tree nursery at Mwaya, which is now being managed by Catherine, is far better organised than it has ever been. We are specialising in fruit tree production, particularly citrus, and we have also purchased some land locally to set up more orchards.

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Mbaula (fuel efficient wood stove) news

One month's supply of wood for a three-stone cooking fire

One month's supply of wood for an mbaula — a huge saving!

Catherine and an mbaula cooking demonstration

Happy customers — 45 sold in one day and orders for another 140

We are still very passionate about the mbaula (fuel efficient wood stove) project, and they are very popular — as you can see in the pictures above, there is a marked difference in the amount of wood used in a month on a three-stone fire and on an mbaula.

Although we have set up a number of groups making mbaulas, our major problem is still marketing them to the local people. This is because, firstly, there is still plenty of free wood and, secondly, people are either reluctant or unable to pay for them. We decided to spend time with the local Mwaya mbaula group and, while we were there in July 2009, we organised a demonstration and sale at a nearby CCAP church meeting. We were astounded by the results. We said to Catherine that she could have a MK3,000 (£12) bonus if she sold 50 units. The demonstration went really well, as they always do, and because many of the people at the meeting were from south of our area where there is less wood, she managed to sell 35 units and gave five to the church to use for the meeting. When she returned, she was so excited to tell us the result, and then she told us that she had got orders for another 140 units. She has been continuing to sell more mbaulas in this area.

Recently, we have been doing some research into a simple fuel efficient wood stove that anybody can build at either no or minimal cost. We have discovered a solution to this, but you will have to wait to read all about it in the next newsletter!

Beekeeping and fish farming

Andrew and Dalife showing one of the beehives near Kafuli Hill

We are persevering with the fish ponds, but the results ae still poor

The experts, Nola and Nyadira, who will be helping us with our project

Our beekeeping projects have not developed very much this year because there has been so much to do with all of our other projects. However, beehives are hanging at Kafuli Hill, and bees have colonised many of these. On our next visit, we will be able to see how this project is progressing.

Likewise, the fish farming project is still producing poor results. Although we have had thousands of fish, the feeding programme has been insufficient which has resulted in stunted growth, and we are told that these fish will not grow to maturity. We have also had a problem with the ducks we purchased for the ponds because, according to Hedges, the person looking after the ponds, a python living close by has eaten several (we are not sure, however, if the python is a human one!).

We want to persevere with this project, and we are very grateful to Julian who visited us in June 2009. He was impressed with the project and gave us an envelope with US$1,000 in it as he was leaving Mwaya at the end of his stay. We are now employing an expert who is running a successful fish pond project to the north of our area. He is advising us on feeding regimes and water treatment. It would appear that the

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cost of inputs, i.e. food, etc., is about the same value as the amount received when the fish are sold, but money can be made on selling the fingerings (baby fish), so we will have to see.

We have also received a donation from the Herrod Foundation for both the beekeeping and fish farming projects, so we are hoping to produce some good results for them.

Ruben's garden and his brilliant irrigation system

The beds and water channels are prepared

Friends and family pump the water and channel it to the beds ...

... and hey presto! Each bed is watered individually

It was hard work, but Ruben made a good profit and is inspiring other farmers

We have also been persevering with various vegetable projects over the years with disappointing results, but this year Ruben has developed a fantastic garden with a proper irrigation system using channels and a treadle pump. He has grown maize during the dry season and also special true-to-type seeds provided by David Newman. These seeds are generally from older varieties of vegetables and fruits, and you can successfully grow the same type and quality of produce from their seeds. So far, we have had some good success from melons, pumpkins, and courgettes. For the first time, the vegetable garden has generated a good profit for Ruben and has attracted the interest of other local farmers which is what it is all about.

We have identified some really good land for farming for a future project. The key to successful farming in this area is to grow plants in different places at different times of the year, so the higher, drier areas can be planted in the rainy season and the lower, wetter areas can be planted in the dry season. This will also have the benefit of giving the soil a rest between growing seasons, and the lower areas will benefit from new soil deposited by the rivers during the rainy season.

The whole family use the treadle pump to water the beds

True-to-type melons, pumpkins and courgettes. Seeds have been saved for next year

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The new community health clinic

A meeting with the chiefs at the site of the new community health clinic

Works starts and volunteers from Aldenham School dig the foundations

Andrew and his team get cracking with the foundations

Work is progressing

The new community health clinic got off to a flying start in July 2009. Originally, the intention was to build the clinic at Matete, but plans were changed and a rather better site close to Mwaya Primary School was chosen by the chiefs. Fondation Eagle, who provided the funds for this project, have been very patient and have even added to their original donation due to the increased costs after the collapse in the value of the pound. We waited to start the project until Aldenham School arrived, and the teachers and students dug the foundations, much to the amazement of the local people who have never seen foundations dug so quickly! After the recession hit at the end of 2008, we had to make the majority of our builders redundant, but we have kept two small teams of builders employed for all the subsequent building jobs, so they have been moving from site to site depending on what stage the buildings have reached and on the weather conditions. The clinic is rather larger than we had originally planned for, but it will be a tremendous facility for the local communities.

The building is larger than originally planned, but it will be a great asset for the community

Malawi scaffolding!

Cement is £12 per bag, so building is more expensive than you think!

Hopefully, the facility should open during 2010

Health news from Kachere Health Centre

The two main complaints at Kachere Health Centre have been the lack of water and the urgent need for a microscope, and we are pleased to say that both of these issues are being resolved.

The water issue has been an ongoing saga. Some years ago, a borehole was drilled close to the heath centre and an electric submersible pump was installed. This pump never really worked properly and could not keep pace with the demands for water, and then it was struck by lightning so there has been no water at the health centre for the last two years. There was only one active borehole in the whole of Kachere which has a population of probably over 1,000 people. Various volunteers have suggested very expensive solutions to the problem, and we had been told by everybody that it is a hit-or-miss affair as to whether boreholes at Kachere will work because of the geology of the area. Unfortunately, we have not been able to spend much time solving this problem but, on a visit to the health centre in December 2009, Geoff decided to have a good look at the borehole and discussed the issue with the Health Surveillance Assistants. Purely by chance, he visited the health centre with Amos, our teacher from Kapanda who is a trained electrical engineer. They checked the borehole at the health centre and found there was plenty of water in it. Then, to Geoff's surprise, they were told that there are a number of manually pumped boreholes close to the health centre which were not working, and they were shown an old Climax pump. They felt sure there would be water and, the following day, Amos returned and took

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the pump to pieces. He was able to reconnect the system, and the pump is now producing lots of water. Another Afridev pump even closer to the health centre has since been renovated and paid for by Bev, a previous volunteer. So, for a cost of £500, there are now three boreholes working at Kachere rather than only one.

Water at last! RIPPLE Africa has mended two boreholes close to Kachere Health Centre

Joyce, a RIPPLE Africa employee worrking at Kachere Health Centre

RIPPLE Africa volunteers are increasingly working at Chintheche Hospital

Hugh Graham, director of Inverclyde Biologicals, and one of his daughters presenting a microscope to Megan

The other major complaint at the health centre has been that they do not have a microscope. Although Fletcher, one of the Health Surveillance Assistants, had been trained to use a microscope, the District Health Department had not supplied one as promised. This means that blood tests cannot be done for malaria, and most patients suspected of having malaria will be given the new malaria treatment Coarthem regardless with the result that the malaria parasite will build up resistance to it. We have been wanting a microscope for some time and, after a chance meeting between Megan, our UK Projects Manager, and Hugh Graham, director of Inverclyde Biologicals (www.inverclydebiologicals.co.uk), at a Rotary Club function, Hugh very generously agreed to donate a microscope to Kachere Health Centre. This will be shipped out to Malawi shortly, and we are very grateful to Hugh for his help.

About a year ago, we employed Joyce, who had been working at the health centre but was made redundant by the District Health Department. She lives at the health centre and has been a valuable asset. One of her important tasks has been delivering babies late at night when the other health centre staff are off duty. She also is responsible for collecting the water each day for the health centre and so has benefited from the renovated boreholes.

A number of our volunteer doctors and nurses have been spending one day a week at Chintheche Hospital, and they have proved to be of great use to the chief clinician there, Hastings Skotti.

Aldenham School visit to RIPPLE Africa in July 2009

A warm welcome from Kapanda School

Eleven students and four teachers visit Malawi and work on RIPPLE Africa projects

No shortage of little friends!

Like many people, Geoff had not returned to his old school for 30 years. However, in 2007, he had an opportunity to attend a reunion for Old Aldenhamians who were at the school at the same time as him. Little did he know that a strong association was about to begin. Soon after the reunion, Dan Bond, the chaplain, contacted Geoff and asked him to give a talk to the whole school. The school raised money for RIPPLE Africa in 2007/2008 and adopted us as their international charity.

As our association developed, the school decided that they would like to send some students out to Malawi to experience RIPPLE Africa's projects firsthand. Four teachers and 11 students flew to Lilongwe in

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Setting up camp at Lowani Beach

The first sunrise over the lake

Building Mary's toilet

Andrew, Emily, and Jacob were the Malawian guides

July 2009 and, after going on a safari to South Luangwa National Park in Zambia, they then travelled up to Mwaya. The group camped at Lowani Beach for the duration of their stay.

We wanted this trip to be a really amazing experience for both the students and teachers and also for the local people. There was a busy itinerary of visiting nursery and primary schools, and several visits to Kapanda secondary school where, on one occasion, there was a presentation of new secondary school text books.

The Aldenham group were involved in two building projects — the first was to renovate Mary's house (Frank's wife), one end of which had collapsed in the previous rainy season, and to build her a toilet, and the second was to prepare the foundations for the new Mwaya community health clinic. As soon as the Aldenham group arrived at Lowani Beach, word got round, and it was a pleasure to see students and local people sitting and talking on the beach, exchanging knowledge and ideas.

Forest walk to see the effects of deforestation

Richard using the treadle pump at Ruben's garden

A fun morning at Chiomba nursery school with Jimmy

Raising money at a recent concert at Aldenham School Chapel

We had a team of staff at Lowani, managed by Robinson, our wonderful manager, who looked after the group, and we employed three local guides — Andrew, Emily, and Jacob — who were responsible for taking the groups of students and teachers to the various projects. They also took them for walks to introduce them to the communities and to show them local life in rural Africa.

There were visits to tree nurseries, the health centre at Kachere, the fish ponds, and Ruben's garden, too, and it was interesting to discuss with everybody their feelings about what they had seen. In the evenings around the dinner table, Dan would ask all of the students individually what had made the most impression on them that particular day, and there is no doubt that the experience was life changing for all of them. We have been amazed and thrilled by the support that Aldenham School has given to RIPPLE Africa, and we are looking forward to another visit by the school in July 2010.

Zed, the new night watchman

Robinson, our wonderful manager with Ellen and Agnes, the cooks

Chancey, the head gardener — he has a real passion for his job

Gedess and Lapkin help out with the washing

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Progress at Lowani Beach

The temporary restaurant

The new central building — it will have a kitchen and storeroom, and a dining and lounge area

The old kitchen has been renovated

The new washroom

Since Geoff and Liz purchased Lowani Beach with their friends David and Gabrielle Newman, development here has progressed steadily but slowly. In the last year, we have completed the washroom block, constructed a temporary thatched dining shelter, renovated the kitchen, and the new thatched central building which will incorporate a kitchen and storeroom, and a dining and lounge area, is largely built. Chancey, the head gardener at Lowani Beach, has planted over 1,000 trees, and there are good fruit tree orchards which we are using as examples for local farmers.

Help at last! and Megan will be working full time from April 2010

Ali, who is in charge of the volunteer programme, came out to Malawi again in July 2009

Megan, UK Projects Manager, visited Malawi in November 2009

David Newman, who is providing valuable help with the tree planting and agriculture projects

Stephen and Anne, and Nicolas at a recent RIPPLE Africa meeting

After many years of Geoff and Liz running the charity by themselves on a voluntary basis, they are delighted to have help at last. Ali, who has been working part-time for the charity for the last year and manages the volunteer programme, came out to Mwaya in July 2009 to re-acquaint herself with all the people and projects. Megan, who has also been working part-time, will be working full-time for RIPPLE Africa from April 2010. This is a huge step for us, but it is vital that the charity has new blood and is able to fundraise more actively in the future. Megan also returned to Mwaya for two weeks in November 2009. We feel it is really important that key RIPPLE Africa staff are in close contact with what is happening on the ground in Malawi so that they can communicate effectively with donors, potential donors, volunteers, and any other interested parties.

David Newman is rapidly falling under the spell of RIPPLE Africa and is now visiting Mwaya twice a year. He works on a voluntary basis and pays for his own air fares to visit Malawi. His expertise in horticulture is a great asset to the charity, and we hope he will be able to spend more time at Mwaya in the future, together with his wife, Gabrielle.

Stephen and Anne, who visited Mwaya in December 2009, are also keen to help with fundraising, and Nicolas, a previous volunteer, will be organising a large fundraising event in London in the spring of 2011.

Michael Wenborn, who has been very supportive, maintains his contact with RIPPLE Africa although he is very busy with his environmental consultancy business.

We would also like to thank all of our donors and volunteers who have supported and continue to support the work we are doing ... we couldn't do what we do without you.

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RIPPLE Africa staff news

Stanley has taken over as our Lead Coordinator of the environmental projects team

Force has opened a shop and bar at the old People's supermarket at Chintheche — ever the businessman!

Geoffrey, our wonderful carpenter, has retired. Everyone loved him, and he will be sadly missed. Thanks, Geoffrey.

Agnes, our bread lady, is now working in the kitchen with Harry, replacing Nephia who has gone to South Africa

More news

Previous volunteers will be very jealous of these new volunteer bikes. Thanks to Kathy for the donation

The old chicken house has been converted into a house for Lawrence, our driver. He is now close at hand for emergencies

We have built a house for Mr Longwe, our librarian, on a loan basis. Can anyone contribute towards this?

Jimmy designed his new house and, with a loan from RIPPLE Africa and help from Marc and Rachel, the house is now finished

Kate and Dom (www.responsiblesafaricompany.com) are contributing to our forest conservation programme. Contact them for a tailormade safari experience

Early morning swims. Volunteers will remember being woken up with the fog horn ... but it is worth getting up for!

Maggie, a previous volunteer, and her group Yo Como have launched their debut album "Give a Sunrise". All proceeds are donated to RIPPLE Africa. www.yocomo.co.uk

Sarah with another batch of Tilley's kittens at Mwaya!

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We have 16 videos on YouTube
(search for RIPPLE Africa)