

Rays of Hope

World Relief Malawi Newsletter

September 2008

Stubborn Survivor



Elizabeth: Defying the odds

Steel nerved Elizabeth Koneliyo is a rising star in her small remote village in Ntchisi District. She has dared the odds to become the first girl in her clan to complete high school. Most of her peers have dropped out of school to get married and bear children.

When you meet her it is so easy to see fire in her eyes. Elizabeth, 19 years old, is determined to study hard and become a nurse someday.

In a rural community where literacy levels are very low, Elizabeth receives pressure from her broke mother and unschooled relatives to drop out of school and get married. "My dream is to finish school and become a role model for my family and village," declares Elizabeth, half crying-half laughing, "That's why I have stood my ground that I will continue with school though my relatives do not approve of my hunger for education."

Elizabeth says she craves to become a nurse someday because she wants to play a major role in providing health care to her needy village. "Most of the people in my village do not seek medical attention when they fall sick. Usually they visit a witch doctor because they associate illness with witch craft."

Elizabeth's father died of malaria a couple of years ago, leaving behind her mother with a scary task of feeding eight kids on her own. "My mother struggles to feed us," says Elizabeth, "She is a peasant farmer and our small garden does not produce enough to feed us all. This is the reason why she wants me to have a man so that I can assist her in taking care of my family."

Elizabeth will be sitting for her Malawi School Certificate Examinations (Final High School Examinations) this year at Mawiri Community Day Secondary School. She is so excited that World Relief Malawi has assisted her with school fees for her final year in high school.

"I will have more time to study for my examinations this year. Previously my grades in school were not good because I spent most of my time raising school fees through piece work. Sometimes I used to collect and sell firewood. But the most painful experience from the past is that I was sexually harassed by my school teacher whom I was working for as a domestic worker."

Elizabeth walks a distance that takes her about five hours to get to school.

On the road to recovery



Hellena uses her grandmother's old sowing machine for her small business.

Nineteen year old Hellena Kambuzi of Ziwiri Village in Ntchisi district, Malawi, has a sense of pride. She is no longer buried in deep poverty. Today, unlike in the past, she earns roughly \$10 per month from dressmaking. She makes –by rural standards-pretty dresses, colorful blouses and fashionable shirts. Actually she makes more money fixing patches on worn out and sometimes dirty outfits which needy neighbors regularly bring to her.

“I am happy that I am able to take care of myself. I am earning a decent living through tailoring. I don't need to go around chasing men for financial support,” declares soft spoken Hellena.

Hellena's story is a long walk to economic freedom. She has endured a very rocky life. With the death of her parents more than four years ago came a period of severe hunger and a childhood of hardship and emotional suffering. The passing of her parents meant she was out of secondary school, illiterate, deprived and frustrated. She and her seven younger siblings ended up being a heavy and life diminishing load to her old and feeble grandmother-denying the old lady the privilege of enjoying her advanced age in peace and tranquility.

“I feel sorry for my grandmother. She has suffered a lot in order to feed eight hungry mouths from subsistence farming,” Hellena explains.

Obviously it is a touch of relief that Hellena Kambuzi, equipped by World Relief Malawi with valuable skills in tailoring a couple of months ago, is now able to buy her own food, soap and clothes. More deeply satisfying is the good news that she is seriously considering going back to school.

“My desire is to save some money from my tailoring which will help me go back to school and finish my secondary school education. I am certain that with higher academic credentials I can get a good job and manage to support my big family,” shares Hellena.

Her much cherished dream is to lessen her grandmother's yoke of providing for her seven siblings in her old age.

Free At Last!



Lazarus after undergoing an HIV test

It is mid-morning and 22 –year- old Lazarus Nkhata is scuffling with a severe fever. Lazarus has had perpetual bouts of malaria since January this year. This specific morning he has defied the chilly ‘Embangweni’ weather to seek medical help at Kalikumbi Health Center in Embangweni, Mzimba district. Last night he heard from his village chief that World Relief Malawi in partnership with Grace Chapel Church of United States of America will today, July 2, 2008, be treating sick people suffering from various illnesses.

When we bump into Lazarus, we find him groaning with confusion-his face a shadow of agony. He is weighing up whether it is sensible for him to take another HIV test. He took three tests in 2004 and was diagnosed HIV negative.

“I have suffered a lot from malaria this year,” utters Lazarus, “I have been advised to go for another HIV test. But I am scared of the outcome.”

Lazarus who dropped out of school a year before completing High School is married to a 19 -year - old girl who did not finish primary school. They got married on July 30, 2007 and do not have a kid right now.

“I left my spouse at home. I want to know my status first before I urge my wife to come here for an HIV test too.”

An hour later we do a follow up on sad, anxious eyed Lazarus. And guess what? This time we find him incredibly joyful. A smile blossoms on his lips.

“I plucked my courage to go for the test. I am happy that I am HIV negative. I will now take good care of my life and that of my wife.”

Tight with Anxiety

Joyful Bandrina after testing for HIV.



A scruffy woman with a deeply sorrowful look dawdles into the room. Her face is tight with anxiety. She is stepping into the unknown. She is not sure of the results she will collect from the HIV test she is about to take.

Fifty-seven-year-old Brandina Nyirenda is just one of several hundred mothers who have trekked for hours to be tested for HIV at Kalikumbi Health Center in Mzimba district during 2008 Grace Chapel Mission Week.

Her soul mate, chained to his old beliefs of polygamy, has refused to join her.

“My husband is not interested to get tested,” confesses Brandina, “He is afraid that an HIV positive result will stop him from marrying a third wife.

We are not surprised to hear that Brandina, a mother of six, is a second wife. In Mzimba, polygamy is nothing special, even in established churches. Brandina shares her spouse with another lady who has a brood of five. So far Brandina’s husband has fathered eleven children from his two wives.

“I am here to get an HIV test because I want to know my status so I can plan my life better,” shares Brandina, “This is my third time to come for an HIV test.”

After waiting with anxious eyes for ten to fifteen minutes Brandina receives her results from the

medical technician who did her test. She is overjoyed to hear that she is HIV negative.

“I am happy that I will have a long life. I will take good care of my precious life. I will continue sweet-talking my husband to come for an HIV test. I don’t want him to pass HIV to me.”

Thank you so much for creating time in your tight schedule to go through our newsletter. May God Almighty bless you abundantly.

