

January 2012

Dear Family and Friends,

Greetings from the Warm Heart. The New Year has begun with a great variety of activities that have provided wonderful opportunities to see God at work. One is a group of 17 from Eckerd College in Florida who has been visiting projects at Blantyre Health and Development Commission (BHSDC), the social ministry branch of Blantyre Synod. I have traveled with the group each day and then hosted them for lunch at my house, to save on fuel, since the BSHDC offices are just behind my house. Most of the projects the group has worked with are ones I am familiar with, but on Tuesday, I had the opportunity to see in action a program I had only heard about, an SHG, a Self help group. This program is a testimony to the strength and vision of the women of Malawi.

SHGs work as a group savings and loan. The groups, more than 19 of them in this one township of Blantyre, are made up of 20 women each from a neighborhood. They join together to save money and then loan it to one another for beginning small businesses. BSHDC provides the initial teaching and ongoing support to the groups, but the women run the group themselves. The women agree on how much each will contribute every week. The group we visited agreed that they could each afford MK100 a week (about 60 cents). They meet weekly to make their contributions. When they have enough to make loans then they loan money to women who have a plan for how to begin a small income generating business, like cooking and selling small fish, selling plastic bags at the market to shoppers, selling homemade donuts, selling roasted maize or selling charcoal. They must pay back the loan plus 10% interest, little by little each week. They cannot take another loan until the first is paid back. They have a transparent accounting system. The women sit in a circle on the ground and place 3 bowls in the center of the circle, one for the weekly fee, one for the loan repayment and one for welfare (MK20 – 11 cents – for caring for those within the group who become ill.) Two of the women serve as recorders. The treasurer has the master book, which accounts for all the income and disbursement and the other has individual books for each member with her personal transactions. These individual books must match with the master book each week. Each woman takes her turn contributing, announcing to the group what she is giving in each category and the contributions are recorded. This small group has managed to collect, distribute and repay MK300,860 or \$1,790 since May of 2010. These small businesses have allowed them to earn income to provide food for their families, to pay school fees for their children, and to further their businesses. The women are proud of what they are accomplishing. They are becoming self-sufficient. What an encouragement to be with them and hear their success stories. This is a key to long-term development. We hope to adapt this program for our Skills Development classes at Chigodi



Please pray for these women and their futures as they build up their businesses and their families. Please pray for Chigodi as we learn from them and empower our students to put their skills to work. I hope the New Year is bringing you such encouragement in God's provision.

Yours in Christ,  
Kay