

Report of the Outcome of Discussions Held at Mlowe Primary School On 19
April 2013 Between Malawi Ngwira And The Community Representatives

By

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1. BACKGROUND

In late March I had advised the interim committee of *Support Mlowe Primary School (SMPS)* that I would be making a work related trip to Malawi but that I will spare a day or two to visit Mlowe. The committee enquired if I would, on its behalf, be prepared to meet the community leadership and groups at Mlowe in connection with the proposals that have thus far emerged from *SMPS* deliberations. I had acceded to the request. A meeting was therefore scheduled for 19 April. The following is a list of participants; issues discussed; and the outcome of the deliberations held.

2. PARTICIPANTS

- The groups and their respective representatives that attended the meeting included the following:

Group that Attended	Representatives
Operations Committee	Mercent Gondwe (<i>my classmate!</i>); Nyasulu (treasurer); F. Vinkumbo (Chairman); Moses Mwandindi Mnthali; Chimbalingali Kalua (Secretary).
Auditing Committee	R.J. Mzukulu (School Cttee Chairman); Bernard Mtawali (PTA Chairman); Yotam Kalua (Headmaster and ex-officio).
School Committee	R.J. Mzukulu (Chair); Joseph Mtawali (Secretary); Catherine Thindwa (Treasurer); Mark Gondwe (Member); Yotam Kalua (Headmaster and ex-officio).
Parent Teachers Association	Grace Nkhwazi (Treasurer); Lucy Chihombo (member – <i>my classmate!</i>); Mark Kanyenda (member); Meck Nyasulu (member); Bernard Mtawali (chairman)
Women's Association Committee	Mabel Nyasulu; Esther Nyasulu; Tones Mwasinga; Maina ?; Rose Nyirenda.
Representatives of Village Headmen	GVH Mandevu; Madukabweka; Mkwечи
Teachers	Ms Mzumala; Tabu Chinyengo; Juliet Nhlane
Community Development Officer / Leader	Green Kasauka Nyasulu

Plates 1 and 2: Mlowe Primary School Teachers And Their Pupils

Plate 1



Plate 2



Plates 3: Community Representatives

Plate 4: Some of the Participants (of course Mlowe kids being who they are, they have to get in on the act)



3. WELCOME ADDRESS

R.J. Mzukulu (School Cttee Chairman) opened the meeting. He reviewed all the contacts SMPS had with Mr Kalua and the request by myself that I meet the community to pass on what I had been sent. This was followed by introductory remarks by representatives of the various organisations that were in attendance.

4. ISSUES DISCUSSED

The issues discussed at the meeting could be put into three groups:

- informing the community about SMPS including its genesis, objectives, operational structure, suggested project proposals and proposed operational strategy;
- Confirm the available, if any, level of support available;
- to ascertain whether the community had achieved the short term goals proposed by SMPS through its interim committee to open a bank account, form two committees, and project identification had been accomplished

The following is a summary of the discussions relating to each of the above three items.

4.1 Informing the community

It was important that the community knew about SMPS especially its genesis, objectives, its operational structures, its proposals about projects and the envisaged operational strategy. The community was informed how the grouping came about. Specifically that concerned Mloweans, spearheaded by Jaster Nyasulu, felt concerned enough about the state of the primary schools at Mlowe and Nkhombwa to suggest that it would be a good idea that something was done about it. Through social media the idea was popularised to other Mloweans. It was agreed that a debate through facebook should ensue and participants were asked to reach out to as many Mloweans as possible. The online debate culminated in a consensus that an Interim Committee needed to be established in order to properly capture what had been discussed and to steer the debate forward. The Interim Committee was duly setup and was cross cutting in its inclusivity comprising Jaster Maduka Nyasulu as Chairman (USA); Simeon Dausga Kalua as Vice Chairman (RSA); Malawi Makaranga Ngwira as Secretary (UK); Silvarosa Nyirenda as Treasurer (Lilongwe); Yikherdh Mbulanyumba Kalua as Cttee member (Blantyre); members all in Malawi also included Dorothy Chauya, Alan Chimalilo, Theresa Mwachipoka Nkhwazi and Mercy Mhango. *(I felt that it was necessary to name the individuals as well as where they resided in order that the people at Mlowe appreciated that the initiative is widely supported).*

The community was also informed that the group sees the overall objective of SMPS as helping to improve the school facilities in order to create an environment conducive to effective learning. Through reports and on site evidence people had become aware of the unacceptable physical school condition and the environment surrounding it.

Also discussed with the community was how SMPS proposed to programme any projects that might be initiated to deal with the identified problems. Specifically the community was advised that there are proposals for setting up the operational structure, projects proposals, and the strategy for operationalising any projects.

As regards the operational structure, it was made quite clear to the attendees that as expected the interim committee is only performing a care taker role. The idea is to have a formally constituted committee to run the initiative. The composition of any such committee cannot be predetermined at this stage but will be informed by the collective views of all participants both at Mlowe and elsewhere. However, what was being discussed was that in the lead up to the formation of any such committee consideration should be given having in place sub committees to be located in strategic places e.g. Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Blantyre, and possibly one for those in Diaspora. Any such sub-committees should report to the main committee.

It was made known to the community that SMPS had tentative ideas about what could constitute likely projects to be dealt with. For instance the group had come to appreciate the problems associated with: dangerous access areas into classrooms; less than acceptable blackboard conditions; poorly landscaped and dangerous outside play areas; insufficient or lack of teaching resources; and many other shortfalls or unacceptable conditions. Nonetheless, SMPS was acutely aware that it needed to be informed by the community and teachers at Mlowe as to potential projects. The community was therefore asked to suggest which problems they considered most pertinent physical problems that needed addressed and around which projects could be set up.

Finally, I concluded the discussions by informing the attendees that SMPS had a proposed strategy for implementing any suggested projects. I explained that what we had in mind was that after a project has been identified and appropriately described an appropriate project plan will be prepared. The project will be fully budgeted. The group's (SMPS) proposals for identifying funding are that this should be a combined effort by the community at Mlowe, those outside Mlowe who support the initiative and any well-wishers. Following identification any such project, a call for resources to support it will then go out. People will be asked to either donate cash, materials or indeed expertise. Expertise could be in form of appropriately qualified individuals at Mlowe and elsewhere donating their know-how whether it is

carpentry, plastering, brick-laying, landscaping, architectural services etc. Besides, there is a long tradition by the community at Mlowe of in-kind contribution through such activities as moulding bricks, carrying sand, water etc.

It was made clear to the community that no one amongst the initiators has an identifiable source of funding but that all what people have is willingness and motivation to do something.

4.2 Assessment of Community Support

It was put to the community that it was critical that SMPS is assured that the proposal to improve the primary schools had community support. I made it clear that I will want to take back to my colleagues the community's position about the proposal whether there is community endorsement or not.

4.3 Establishing Whether *Short Term Goals had been accomplished.*

I reminded the attendees that SMPS interim committee had been in regular touch with the headmaster, Mr Yotam Kalua. It was agreed along with Mr Kalua that as the very first step, short term goals needed to be met. The agreed goals were that the community should:

- identify a project;
- open a bank account; and
- form two committees - Operational Committee and Auditing Committee;
-

5. OUTCOME OF DISCUSSIONS & RESPONDING REMARKS

By way of response, these were provided by R.J. Mzukulu (School Cttee Chairman); the Head teacher; the representative of the TA Mwamlowe and all local chiefs; and a question and answer session.

5.1 Contribution by School Cttee Chairman (R.J. Mzukulu)

- Said that on behalf of the school committee the initiative is very welcome and the community is fully behind it. The community had become anxious in recent years that following the death of Green Nkhwazi (sorry guys he was my dear uncle!), who did a lot to improve the school, that perhaps no one else would emerge to pick up from where he left off. Therefore seeing that there are so many Mlowean ex-pupils who shared that vision, it was very heart-warming for the community and therefore welcome the initiative with both hands.

- To attest to the community support behind the initiative, By-Laws have been set up by the community to regulate any project activities. For instance those community members who do not get involved in arranged activities will be fined K500 per individual and if a VH does not participate, he / she will incur a fine of K1000.

5.2 Contribution by Head teacher

- Again shared the same sentiments as the School Committee Chairman. He emphasised that I should convey to SMPS that we have “planted chigomezgo” and the community was in an anticipatory mood.
- He responded to the request to establish short term goals as follows.

a) Identification of Projects

On behalf of the school committee and the community he outlined the following areas around which *projects* could be developed:

- ✓ Junior Block – steps in very poor condition. *(see photographic evidence)*.

Plate 5: Sight of very Unsafe Entrance Areas



Plate 6: Sight of very Unsafe Entrance Areas



Plate 7: Sight of very Unsafe Entrance Areas



- ✓ Teachers' Houses – Teachers houses are in very poor condition (see photographic evidence). Besides there are not enough houses (only 5 houses available). These issues are preventing teachers from coming at Mlowe.

Plates 8.: Poor state of Teachers' Houses



Plate 9: Poor State of Teachers' Houses



Plat10: Poor State of Teachers' Houses



Plate 11: Poor State of Teachers' Houses



- ✓ There is need to electrify the facilities
- ✓ Need for a library with video / audio equipment
- ✓ There is need to have desks in classrooms. Presently pupils still sit on the floor (see photographic evidence)

Plate 12: Classrooms in very bad condition



Plate 13.: State of Classrooms in very bad condition



Plate 14: Poor state of classrooms



Plate 15: Poor state of classrooms



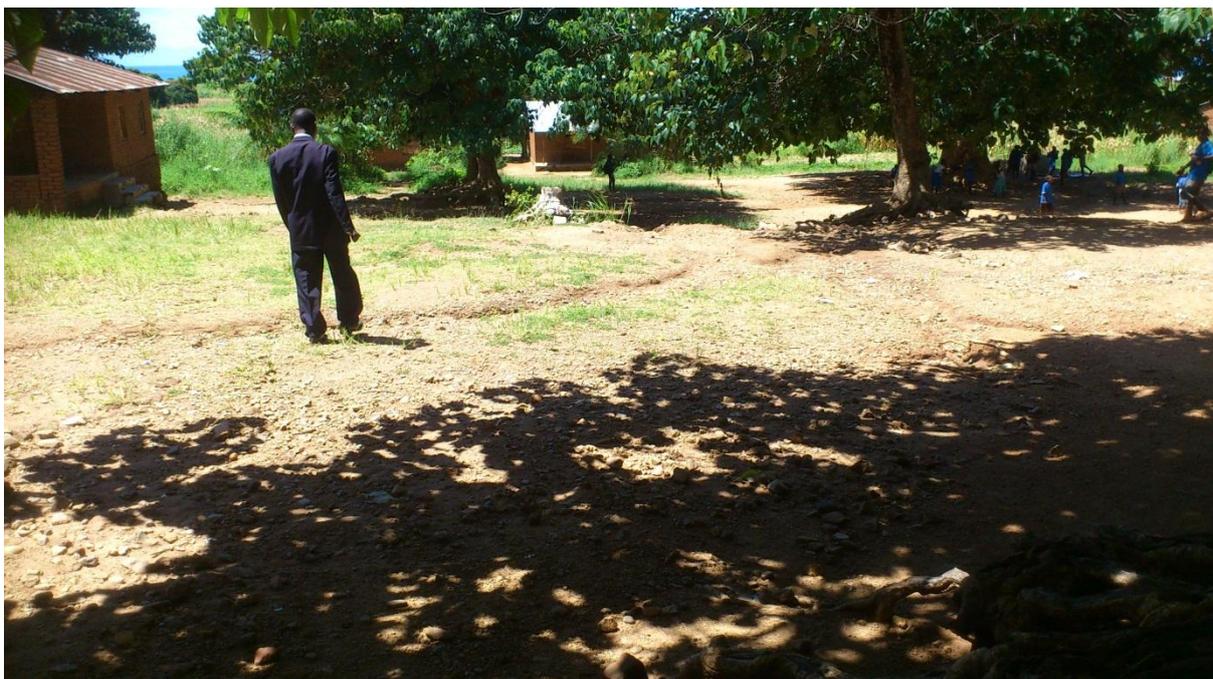
- ✓ Class room doors need secured. Current state is unsafe
- ✓ Blackboards need renovation (see photographic evidence)

Plate 16: Blackboards in very poor condition



- ✓ Renovate the football ground to make it safe
- ✓ School grounds need properly landscaped (see photographic evidence)

Plates 17: Poor State of Outside School Grounds



Plates 18: Poor State of Outside School Grounds



Plates 19: Poor State of Outside School Grounds



Plates 20: Poor State of Outside School Grounds



Plates 21: Poor State of Outside School Grounds



Plates 22: Poor State of Outside School Grounds



Plates 22: Poor State of Outside School Grounds



b) Opening of a Bank Account

An account has been opened and bears the following important details:

- ✓ Bank: Malawi Savings Bank.
- ✓ Name of Account: Support Mlowe FP School
- ✓ Account Number: 202-4545120-001
- ✓ Signatories: Chairpersons of the School Committee (RJ Mzukulu); Head Teacher (Y. Kalua); and PTA Chairperson (B. Mtawali).
- ✓ Opening Amount: K5,000. It should be noted that SMPS assisted with the funding (about K15,000) for the initial deposit (K5,000) plus transport and other costs.

c) Setting up Operational and Auditing Committees

Both have been set up and are constituted as follows:

- ✓ *Operations Committee* – V. Vinkhumbo (chair person); Mercent Gondwe (member); Nyasulu (Treasurer); Moses Mwandindi Mnthali (member); and Chimbalingali Kalua (Secretary).
- ✓ *Auditing Committee* – R.J. Mzukulu, School Committee Chairperson; B. Mtawali, PTA Chairperson; and Y. Kalua, the Headmaster.

5.3 Contribution by Representative of the TA Mwamlowe and all local chiefs

- Mr Chivutu, represented TA and all chiefs, remarked as follows:
 - ✓ That on behalf of all the chiefs in Mlowe and indeed the local community he felt the community had been blessed and are profoundly grateful for the initiative by own Mlowe kids to consider doing something about the plight of the schools. He recalled that Mlowe has very proud and honourable past where the school at one time operated as a boarding establishment. It is sad therefore to see the school reduced to its present circumstances. Therefore the proposed initiative is very much welcomed and has the support and backing of the chiefs and the local community is ready to get involved in any project activities.

5.4 Question and Answer Session

The session though Q & A, in actual fact it also included commentaries and suggestions. Here are some excerpts:

- Mr J. Kalua: Himself a teacher, stated that there are only 2 qualified teachers. The lack of houses is a major deterrent to attracting teachers.
- Mr Sosole: Stated that as a youth, he warmly welcomes and fully endorses the initiative and implored other youngsters and the community to do likewise. He asked that I extend appreciation to all those behind the initiative.

- Women's representative: In a follow up to Mr Sosole's remarks, she especially appealed to the youth not to focus on likely monetary rewards as the catalyst for participation as has tended to be the case where projects of this nature are introduced.
- Mercent Gondwe: Asked that I should please encourage colleagues behind SMPS not to be discouraged by detractors as they surely will emerge. She cited as an example at Hara where a similar initiative was stopped midstream with only four blocks completed because of the discouragements from detractors (the usual: *bakukhumba kuti bajiwoneske kuti mbanjani sono! Panyakhe bakukhumba u MPI!*).
- Mr Vinkhumbo: Welcomed the initiative and asked that amongst the projects, consideration should also be given to:
 - ✓ Possibly erecting a separate hostel for boys and girls. It is unsafe at night for kids to go home after they are through with evening studies at school.
 - ✓ Attend to cracks in the newer block
 - ✓ Revamp / rebuild the headmaster's office.

Plate 23: *State of Headmaster's Office*



Plate 24: *State of Headmaster's Office*



- ✓ Asked whether it is proposed to demolish and rebuild the junior block or refurbish it. I responded that that decision is out of my authority. It is a decision to be made by all who will be involved in the decision how to attend to that building (the community as well as those outwith Mlowe).
- ✓ Made special appeal that those behind the initiative needed to be prompt and to ensure that there is close liaison with the Headmaster. He otherwise asked that I extend special warm gratitude to all behind SMPS.

6.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Meeting was called concluded on what I can only describe as a very upbeat note and with a lot of expectations. It is therefore incumbent on all to see to it that what we have commenced is successfully progressed.