

## Malawi Skills Share Report 2015

Mike Down

The fifth education skills share visit took place between 9<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> August 2015 with a team of 7 teachers from Birmingham. Our aim was to deliver curriculum and school improvement workshops for our Malawian colleagues of Anglican schools across the country. For some of the team, it was a return to 'the warm heart of Africa' for a second time, for others, it was their first time on the continent. The UK team of Lucy Ward, Dave and Angie Atkins, Ian Shelley, Caroline Porter, Jenny Christie and Mike Down, brought with it a diverse range of school experience and expertise.

We were based in the Lay Training Centre in Nkhokotakota, a town on the edge of Lake Malawi in the Lake Diocese. In total, we were able to host 63 teachers and head teachers from the four diocese of Malawi. We were also joined by the acting director of the LTC, Jesman Seva and Education Secretaries from three of the Malawian dioceses. Oscar Mponda (DLM) was instrumental in the success of the visit; his passion for high quality educational provision, his gentle assertiveness and organisational skills were invaluable.

### Week 1

During the workshops, we covered English, maths, science, RE, games, art, music and school leadership. A variety of teaching methods and ideas were explored; talk partners, mind mapping, phonological awareness, and the use of drama in storytelling among many other things! We were able to arrange a visit for all the teachers to a local school to explore the ways in which common problems for head teachers may be addressed. We were delighted to visit the school of Chrispin Dakalira, Jalo Model School in Nkhokotakota. One of the themes that came from this visit and reappeared during the week was of 'starting small'. Sometimes starting small can lead to a resolution of a problem that in the beginning may seem unsurmountable. We were very keen to include our Malawian colleagues in the delivery of some of the leadership aspects of the workshops. Chrispin, very kindly (and bravely) allowed himself to be questioned as to the running of his school and how he has begun to deal with some of the problems he faces. One of the other head teachers remarked that, "he is a man that starts things". We also gave all the teachers an opportunity to share their good practise during one of the afternoon sessions. This was a dynamic and free flowing session in which the teachers shared, challenged, questioned and supported each other.

For the UK team some of the highlights from the first week included meeting inspirational and devoted Malawian teachers, rousing singing, enthusiastic acting during the RE session and Dave's dancing!

*"Education is changing the world. In this case I am changed. The workshop has helped me a lot. In the past I could make my lessons boring because of not involving activities such as games. This time there shall be good lessons and classes as a result of the skills, knowledge and games learnt." - Freeman*

*"The workshops were brilliant in that I have acquired a lot of new skills...The workshops have also led to the formation of relationships and friendships among the participants and facilitators and this teaches us that in a class there must be good teacher-learner relationship." - Arthur*

### Week 2

It was lovely to see some more old friends from previous Skills Shares. The week started with a visit to Linga Primary school in Nkhokotakota. Problems faced by many of the teachers were evident; lack of desks, lack of teaching resources and poor condition of classrooms. Another often raised complaint was the poor toilet facilities at many schools. At one school, Chitenje, one toilet was supposed to serve approximately 660 children. Apart from the obvious impact this has on the general hygiene of the

school population, it also meant that older girls, coming to the age of puberty, were forced to spend time away from school during their period due to the lack of privacy and facilities. The team felt strongly that this was something that should be addressed. A double toilet block has now been put up at Chitenje using funds contributed by team members.

Jesman Seva was asked to speak on his experiences as a leader; his '20 minutes' lasting for more than an hour! His talk was eloquent, confident and delivered with the authority of a dynamic and inspirational leader. "A leader knows the way, goes the way and shows the way". Oscar Mponda took the opportunity to instruct the head teachers, reinforcing the idea of teaching as ministry and the importance of dedication to the role.

For the UK team, building relationships with the teachers and their willingness to engage with all the activities were the highlights. We also loved the opportunities to join in with some Chichewa singing and dancing!

*"My overall experience of the workshop is that it has actually changed the way I was running my school and the skills gained will help me run the school effectively." - Benson*

*"It has been very helpful in all aspects of teaching. The introduction, the delivery and everything was marvellous and inspiring. It is our wish that it continues in the near future in order to benefit a lot of teachers." - Leonard Chirwa*

The highlight of our final weekend was a visit to St Thomas' in Lilongwe and some time spent with Fr. Francis Takillima and his family.

### Feedback

The feedback from the teachers was very positive. I was able to have a conversation with Oscar regarding the Skills Share and its impact. He recognised the passion in the team for teaching and education for all. He felt that the strategies we had delivered were useful and that the skills were transformational despite the lack of resources locally. He felt that the workshops had been challenging and had led to his discovery in gaps in the understanding in some of the teachers. One of the most obvious was during the phonics workshops in which some the teachers struggled to read simple CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words without support. He valued the time we had given for the Malawian school leaders to share their experiences.

Mike Down – September 2015, revised

**Postscript, September 2016:** We are currently reviewing the education skills share programme. Our hope is to develop a more sustainable model for the future, while producing the maximum benefit for Malawian teachers.