

PARTNERPLAN

Gary Brough - Malawi February 2022

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Dear Friends,

Malawi has been in the headlines once again following tropical storm Ana. Thousands of households are currently displaced, floods have destroyed crops and livelihoods, and, tragically, 37 people have died. The scale of the destruction is great, but its patterns are familiar to Malawians and are played out on a smaller scale week to week without the headlines. Rains are a sign of hope for this farming nation, but they arrive with greater uncertainty and increasing cost.

Rains also mark the beginning of tree planting season, perhaps the most visible part of Malawi's fight to become more resilient in the global climate crisis. Restoring woodlands helps capture water which prevents the degradation of farmland and reduces the risk of landslides and flooding.



However, Malawi's woodlands have been lost as farmers clear the way for more arable land. As it becomes harder to eke out a living from the land, they often feel forced to expand the land. Moreover, without accessible and affordable fuel sources for cooking, woodlands are lost for firewood and the production of charcoal. And so, the battle to preserve and restore essential forests becomes entrenched with issues of poverty.



Our field office in Karonga has been working with lakeside communities in the neighbouring Rumphi district to help them recover from landslides and prevent future disasters. Forests play a big part in that effort, and community tree nurseries now drive tree planting. To avoid further deforestation, the trees are protected by bees and chickens. Communities are starting into honey production, so the forests are the factory floor for their worker bees and, as such, are worth protecting. In addition, chickens improve household nutrition and income, deterring poverty-fuelled tree cutting.

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Storm Ana is Malawi's latest headline in the growing climate crisis, and sadly it will not be the last. But the work is done between the headlines to build resilience and make recovery in the future quicker. COP-26 may be a long-forgotten news flurry, but the promises (such as they were) need to become action, and that will require all of us.

Not all of Malawi's headlines have been so tragic, though those filled with hope don't travel so far, so let me share a few. First, Malawi reached the 'round of 16' stage of the Africa Cup of Nations for the first time (Go Flames!) and can hold their heads high as they defended a goalless draw with Senegal, who went on to win the tournament.

According to Transparency International, Malawi has made headway in the fight against corruption and was one of only 25 countries to make improvements this year. The government is increasingly vocal in its anti-corruption stance and has made some key appointments to back that up, but there is a long way to go.

There are signs of hope in the face of the COVID pandemic as recent research has shown that Malawi could be nearing endemic status. Malawi-Liverpool-Wellcome Trust data suggests as much as 80% of the population might have had the virus before the Omicron wave even began. Hospitalisations and fatalities in the recent surge may also reflect this growing resilience. It may take much longer for more prosperous nations who've been hit harder by the pandemic to change their priorities when considering COVID in Malawi and Africa as a whole, however.



As a family, we ended 2021 in COVID isolation, but thankfully our cases were mild and passed without event. That was followed by a break over Christmas and New Year and a chance to relax and fully recover. Unsurprisingly it took a little while to get back into our usual routine for school and work, but we're in full swing again.

After a period of uncertainty, we're getting some clarity over what God might have in store for the months and years ahead. We're in a busy season just now as we

prepare to be in the UK from April/May until September.

Our home visit is more extended than we'd usually plan for deputation and leave. That's because, God-willing, our family of four is set to become a family of five in mid-July. Jacqueline is in good health, and the girls are very excited about their promotions to big-and big-big-sister.

All being well, we plan to return to Mzuzu in September. For me, there will be yet more change. I hope to start a new role within Church of Central Africa Presbyterian which will involve working between its three synods in Malawi. I look forward to sharing more about that in due course and as the details become more apparent. We have time set aside during May and June for deputation (in-person and online) where we can share more

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about what we've been doing in Malawi and a little about the future plans too. Please look out for correspondence from the Faith Impact forum on that, or feel free to get in touch.

The changes and uncertainty have been unsettling to say the least. However, I am reminded of this verse in Deuteronomy 7:9 about the God who calls us out:

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.

What a reassurance! So, we continue striving for obedience on our part. Thanks, as always, for your friendship, encouragement and prayers. I'm sure you can easily find inspiration for your prayers in the updates above.

Together in His work,

Gary, Jacqueline, Eilidh and Morven