

Contact

Diependaalsdrift 32
1213CR Hilversum
The Netherlands
Tel. +31-(0)35-7721758
info@mlambefoundation.org

Bank

Account no.. 61.25.38.400
ABN AMRO, Hilversum
IBAN: NL 48 ABNA 0612538400
BIC: ABN ANL 2A
CoC no. 32110120

Honorary Chairman

Prof. dr. J.M. Schoffeleers s.m.m.

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Director for Culture, Malawi
Mrs M. Sacranie
Netherlands Consul in Malawi
Prof. dr. R.M.A. Bedaux
*Former curator of the National
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Prof. dr. R. van der Ploeg
*Member of the UNESCO World
Heritage Committee*

Ongoing Projects

Tisunge! Lower Shire Heritage Centre
Founding and continued support
Book and web publications
Heritage conservation measures

Newsletter 2, November 2006

It has been a long time since our last newsletter was published and in that time a lot has happened and a lot has been achieved with generous financial aid of Impulsis and WWF-Netherlands.

With funding from Impulsis we have been able to produce the first brochure for Mlambe Foundation (both in Dutch and in English). These will be distributed among museums in the Netherlands and Malawi and will hopefully expand the Foundation's horizon and attract donors and volunteers. At the same time it will increase public awareness of the richness of Malawi heritage. Those interested in receiving copies for distribution can contact us.

Early August we packed a container with goods meant for our Tisunge! Lower Shire Heritage Centre and for our Malawian partner, the Catholic University of Malawi. It contained books, computers and office supplies and furniture donated by Visio, University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, Brill Academic Publishers, Africa Studiescentre, Gemeente Wijchen, Read-to-Grow and various individual well-wishers. The container was due to arrive September 10, 2006, as a result of various delays it is now expected later this week.

Tisunge! Lower Shire Heritage Centre

Thanks to generous donations by the Dutch Embassy, World Wildlife Fund (Netherlands), Impulsis (ICCO), and Jambo Africa the construction of the Tisunge! Lower Shire Heritage Centre at the gate of Lengwe National Park has become a reality. With the enormous efforts by Max del Bufalo of Jambo Africa, the staff of Nyala Lodge and Lengwe National Park, our director and our volunteers, Martine van de Does and Rianka Nap the heritage centre is currently under construction. The exposition building, the arts and crafts shop and the ablution block are all completed and currently all involved are working hard to finish the store room, two offices, the library and the meeting area before the rains start in December.



Figure 2 Offices under construction



Figure 2 Frontal view

The Centre not having been completed does not mean that it has not started operation. At present two programs are being implemented: Reintroduction of traditional weaving and spinning, and ethnographic object collection. Both these projects were funded by Impulsis.

Mr. Pelekamoyo and Mr. Twayah, both employed by Chichiri Museum in Blantyre, have started teaching people in the various villages surrounding Lengwe National Park the art of traditional weaving and spinning. Their lessons were well attended and received with such enthusiasm that some wonderful results have already been reached. Requests are now coming in from other villages who also would like to be taught. What we hope to see is the return of an age old industry that disappeared at the beginning of the 20th century. The products will be sold at the Arts and Crafts shop of Tisunge! and hopefully in many more shops in Malawi and outside.



Mlambe Foundation

Malawi Heritage Conservation through Education

At the same time we have started the object collection in rural areas of Chikwawa District. Old spears, gourd flasks, grinding stones and the like are being collected –with compensation- and documented for later display at the Centre. As we are reaching remote areas this program also allows us to increase public awareness of the heritage centre and its goals of cultural and natural resource preservation. Some wonderful antique objects have already been obtained. Mr. Kayira of the Department of Antiquities is assisting in this endeavour.

As part of the realisation of Tisunge! the Nkhomedzi River has been dredged to prevent future flooding which endangers not only the centre but more importantly the villages around Lengwe National Park, the park itself, and the National Parks offices and residences. The dredging of the river has been made possible by funds provided by Jambo Africa, WESM and funds that were donated for that purpose to the Foundation by WWF –Netherlands. To combat siltation in the future a tree nursery was started. After the first rains the seedlings of indigenous trees can be planted on the riverbanks where the river moves outside of the park boundaries. In these areas there has been massive deforestation due to lack of both land and firewood.



Figure 3 Weaving training



Figure 4 Grinding stones



Figure 5 Nguludi Fathers House

Nguludi Fathers House

One of our volunteers, Martine van der Does, is a restoration architect. She has drawn some wonderful plans for the renovation of the Nguludi Fathers House, which was built in 1918 by the Dutch Montfortians. It is our aim to restore this building and manage it as local information centre in collaboration with the Department of Antiquities and the Catholic University of Malawi. We are currently developing a restoration and management plan, after which we can look for donors for this project.

Publications

Alas we have fallen a bit behind schedule on our publications. We are still hoping to publish the reprint of Land of Fire, by Prof. Schoffeleers and Prof. Roscoe, before the end of the year. The dissertation of Prof. Schoffeleers will also be published as soon as possible. The final proofreading is being conducted at this moment and the introduction is being written. Thanks to Jochem van der Blom the cover of the book looks absolutely wonderful.

Director and treasurer of Mlambe Foundation living in Malawi

The director of Mlambe Foundation – Menno Welling – has emigrated to Malawi where he is setting up the first Department of Anthropology in Malawi at the Catholic University of Malawi. Last month he was elected Dean of the Faculties of Social Sciences and Education. As of the end of January 2007 he will be joined by the treasurer Lilian Steffens, who will be working at the Centre for Legal Studies of the Polytechnic of the University of Malawi as of February. Both the director and the treasurer will spend their spare time giving guidance to the projects.

A new Salima for Mbona

A final news item with regard to Lower Shire Heritage: after more than fifty years the shrine officials in Nsanje have identified a new wife for the guardian spirit Mbona. According to tradition the spirit needs an elderly woman to live at his shrine to act as his wife. The elderly woman will be taken care of by the chiefs with assistance of local government. She therefore does not work the land for her subsistence hence her name Salima, 'S/he who does not till the soil'. The new Salima is an elderly widow who as a young girl was a maid to the last Salima.

