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Ongoing Projects

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

Newsletter Mlambe Foundation Vol. 4 No. 1 – June 2009

It has been a busy year and time flies. Our last newsletter was distributed in October 2008 and it is high time for a follow up. There have been a lot of developments and we hope you enjoy the news that we have for you after this long period of silence.

Personal news

In our previous newsletter we mentioned that one of our board members, Kim Spijker, had moved to Malawi to join the Foundation's team there. We omitted to mention that she also joined Max Del Bufalo, the director of one of our partners in the Lower Shire Heritage Trust, Jambo Africa. On the 13th of February 2009 Max and Kim got married in Malawi and they will repeat their vows in the Netherlands in August of this year. Congratulations to both!

Publicity

Together with Mr. Mike Gondwe (Education Officer of Chichiri Museum in Blantyre), Menno Welling wrote a presentation paper on the re-introduction of the traditional weaving skill, which was presented in South Africa. Menno Welling recently gave a presentation on the heritage of the Lower Shire Valley and Tisunge! for the Blantyre Rotary Club, which was very well received. After the first publication on Lengwe National Park in "Ulendo" (the inflight magazine of Air Malawi), in which Tisunge! featured, the editors of the magazine came back for more. At the end of 2008 a substantial article appeared in "Ulendo" completely dedicated to Tisunge! Lower Shire Heritage Centre. On the 28 November 2008 the Foundation's (legal) advisor, Lilian Steffens, received a Diversity Leader Award in the area of culture. During the awards ceremony, which a lot of Malawian dignitaries attended, the master of ceremonies talked extensively about the projects and purpose of Tisunge! and about the other activities that Lilian Steffens has undertaken in Malawi. The local press gave a lot of attention to this function.

Projects – Tisunge!

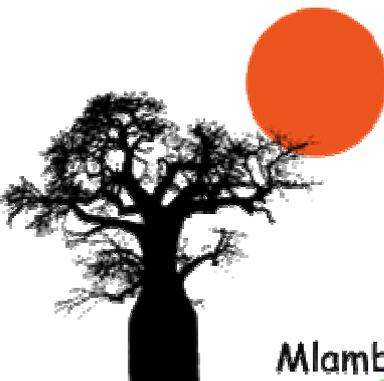
Distinguished Guests

On the 22nd of February we received 3 distinguished guests at Tisunge! Lower Shire Heritage Centre: the Dutch ambassador to Zambia and Malawi, Mr. Harry Molenaar, his wife Dr. Loes Nas and the Dutch consul to Malawi, Mrs. Margriet Sacranie. The weavers and spinners showed their skills under the newly constructed weaving area (see below) and explained how their lives have improved due to this income generating skill. Menno Welling gave our guests a complete tour of the project and explained our future plans. Both the Ambassador and his wife and the consul were very impressed with what the Foundation and its partners in the Lower Shire Heritage Trust had achieved in the past few years. Of course Tisunge! would not be what it is today without the initial support by the Dutch Embassy in Lusaka and the Dutch Consulate in Blantyre/Limbe.



On a tour around the Tisunge!

Left to right: Menno Welling, Connex Mbewe (Administration Manager, Lengwe National Park), Paramount Chief Lundu, and Ambassador Harry Molenaar



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Two major Project Proposals and a substantial donation

Two important project proposals have been submitted in the months since our last newsletter. These are the first two major project proposals that have been submitted by the Lower Shire Heritage Trust.

The first project proposal was submitted to the Dutch Embassy in Lusaka in January 2009 for the construction of the maize mill, up to and including making it operational, the water tank and the manager's house. This month the Embassy informed the Lower Shire Heritage Trust that its proposal had been accepted and that the full amount requested was approved. This project proposal is one of only three proposals in Malawi that will be receiving funding from the Dutch Embassy this year. All the partners in the Lower Shire Heritage Trust are extremely grateful for this great donation. It means that the construction of the maize mill can now be completed. As the funding from the Embassy also includes the building of the manager's house, Tisunge! will soon be able to employ a Malawian manager to run the heritage centre. ZIKOMO KWAMBIRI!!!



Foundation of Manager's House



Planned site for Dzicolatha bush camp



Planned site for Kanzimbi bush camp

The other proposal that has recently been submitted is for the construction of two community bush camps inside Lengwe National Park. The Trust submitted an initial introductory proposal to GEF (Global Environmental Fund of UNDP) which was approved by GEF and which allowed the Trust to submit a full proposal. It is intended that the bush camps will be built in two places within Lengwe National Park; one near the village of Dzicolatha and the other near the village of Kanzimbi. The Trust will, together with the Community Based Organisations in said villages, manage the bush camps and profits will be shared equally between the Trust and the CBO's. Local villagers will be employed and food and drinks will all be purchased from the surrounding villages. Jambo Africa will market the bush walks through Lengwe National Park to these bush camps. Not only is this an amazing walking experience which will take visitors to the extension area of the park (currently hardly accessible) but on the way back through the villages surrounding Lengwe National Park the guests will be treated to various cultural experiences organised by the Trust in cooperation with the villages. Another benefit will be presence in the now remote extension area of Lengwe National Park and thus in the long run a better chance of conserving this beautiful area of the park. The Trust patiently awaits the results of its submission of the proposal to GEF which is expected in October of this year.

Construction

The environment friendly cement pressed bricks, we have been producing the past year, have been put to good use in the now completely finished weaving area and the almost finished double staff house.

It is amazing to see how fast a building can be erected with these bricks. They have the volume of five normal fired bricks and are perfectly rectangular which makes the laying of the bricks easy and fast. The only reason why the double staff house is not yet finished is because of the delay in finding the right thatching grass for the roof. Once the roof is up we can start on the interior. The path has been extended to include the staff house. As mentioned above we have also started laying the foundation for the manager's house.



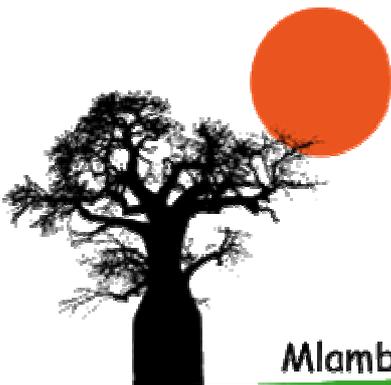
The weaving area



The double staff house

The Arts & Craft Shop

Thanks to a generous donation of Carlsberg Malawi Brewery Limited the shop is now housing a brand new cooler for cold drinks!! Zikomo Kwambiri Carlsberg! This means that guests of the Centre can relax on the veranda of the shop with a cool drink. Apart from cool drinks the range of products that are being sold in the shop is dynamic. Our main products are still traditional woven items and the product range has been extended with wall hangings, bath mats and rugs.



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Sales, however, must improve over the next two years as we are still spending substantially more on stock than we are earning on sales. This has meant that the shop is currently only buying from the weavers on order, which means less income for them. The good news is that Toyota Malawi has placed a big order as it wants to use the traditional woven products as gifts for its relations. We have furthermore received another order from Nkhotakota Pottery Lodge and Pumulani. If any of our readers has marketing tips please let us know. Tisunge!'s woven products are uniquely Malawian, traditionally made and coloured and of a high quality. Our weavers deserve this recognition now and in the future.

Weaving and Spinning

In our previous newsletters we reported that traditional spinning was not taking off. As a positive result of the fact that the shop is, temporarily, buying less woven products, a small group of weavers has taken up the traditional spinning. The quality of the hand spun yarn has now reached a point that the weavers can start weaving with this yarn. The first trials with the hand spun yarn have turned out to be of good quality and the cloth has the ultimate traditional hand made look.



Traditional spinning



Cloth traditionally woven from hand spun Malawian cotton

Tree projects

The indigenous tree plantation at Singano Village is developing. The new nursery set up by Chigoda CBO contained almost 10,000 seedlings, most of which have now been planted. Hellen Zalira and Christopher Mankhokwe of the Catholic University visited the plantation last weekend and made an assessment of the trees and the plantation. They reported that this year promises to be a green one!

The Tisunge! nursery, sadly, is not doing so well. None of the 5000 tubes filled with ebony seeds has sprouted. The seeds used were most likely expired or of bad quality. We re-used the tubes and planted Acacia trees instead. These seedlings are doing much better. But due to a shortage of seeds only a small number was planted.

Planting along the Nkhombedzi and the Tisunge! Football League

At the beginning of this year only five teams came to collect seeds for the new planting season. All the teams have constructed their nurseries, only two, however, have planted the seedlings along the river. The teams that failed to plant have promised to take care of community nurseries. We are very pleased that these five teams are keeping up the good work but for now the Tisunge! League cannot be continued. We hope this will change in the future.

Tisunge! is however not giving up on the project of planting trees along the Nkhombedzi river. Hellen Zalira initiated talks with the heads of 17 schools around Lengwe National Park in the villages bordering the Nkhombedzi. The meeting with the heads of the schools went well and we hope that the school children, together with the enthusiastic football teams, will continue this project.

Library

The library received a donation of 80 children's books from America. Ross, our local Peace Corps Volunteer, had arranged to collect books from friends and family back in the USA. A big thanks to Ross and the generous donors back in the USA! These books, as you can imagine, are all in English. The library is still desperately in need of children's books in Chichewa.

Study and Education Fund

Thanks to our loyal donors to the Study and Education Fund, the Foundation is currently supporting four students at the Catholic University of Malawi. Each of these students is doing well in their studies. In their spare time they do valuable volunteer work at Tisunge!

Thank you

At the end of this newsletter we would again like to thank all our loyal and new donors, without your support the Foundation could not support the projects that you read about in this newsletter. We would also like to thank all our volunteers. We cannot thank you all enough.



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