

Young Soko -- Director of Livingstonia Primary Health Care



After visiting the Macduff shipyard where the marine ambulance "Good Hope" was built and being present for the commissioning service of the boat, Young Soko, director of Livingstonia Primary Health Care, and Lovemore Mkandawire, the Livingstonia Engineer, visited the Raven Trust office at Strachur. His visit to the UK was funded jointly by the Raven Trust and the Church of Ireland

The Primary Health Care Unit at Livingstonia began work in 1987 with FM Msisika as co-ordinator and Richard Kerr of Northern Ireland as an advisor. Its aim was to improve their health of people living in the Livingstonia catchment area which extends to 1300 km² and has a population of around 90,000. Young Soko took over in 1994.

Young explained the numerous areas of work that the PHC undertakes.

1. Water and sanitation

Provision of a clean water supply and safe disposal of waste is of the greatest importance in the health of any community.

Livingstonia PHC seek, through the provision of wells, boreholes and gravity fed water systems to provide clean water for communities. Funding is a limiting factor with the digging of a shallow well costing around £250 and a borehole costing up to £5000. The PHC also seek to train the community in the upkeep of the water system, each family contributing 500 kwacha (approximately £2) per year for the upkeep of the community system. This encourages local ownership and, therefore, local responsibility for the upkeep of the system.

2. Agriculture and Food Safety

The PHC encourage the production and safe storage of food. It is involved in the production of honey, the growing of maize, rice, beans, wheat, vegetables and fruit and the raising of goats, chickens and guinea fowl. It has increased production of maize by advocating a change to growing 2 crops a year using irrigation systems. It also maintains mills for grinding maize.

3. Malaria prevention

PHC seeks to educate communities in the prevention of malaria by providing and explaining the importance of using treated mosquito nets, the draining of stagnant water and safe refuse disposal.

4. HIV/AIDS

There are more than 7500 people who are HIV-positive in the Livingstonia area. PHC seeks to prevent the spread of HIV through education of the population.

It also seeks to support those who are HIV-positive by helping to provide food and developing income generation skills, e.g. it could provide seed and teaches the skills necessary to produce maize. When the crop was brought in, one 10th is given back to PHC to provide a revolving maize fund.

5. Care and Support of Orphans

There are around 6500 orphans (birth to 18 years old) in the area. There are no orphanages -- the aim being to provide care and support for the child and the extended family in the community. Families and orphans are supported with food, clothes, and bedding. Many orphans are the heads of their own household, perhaps responsible for younger siblings. In some cases it may be necessary to build a house for these families -- usually of mud brick with straw roof, although tin roof is better as it doesn't leak but it is more expensive.

PHC also seeks to support education for all children -- helping to maintain school buildings and teacher's houses, and Provide books, writing materials and equipment. It helps to pay school fees for orphans to attend secondary school and also provides vocational training for older orphans so that they can support themselves and families by becoming drivers, painters, carpenters, plumbers, etc.

6. Mother and Child Care Programme

This programme seeks to provide health screening and treatment, nutritional advice and help, and education for mothers with young children and general support.

When asked how he managed to run all these programmes, Young praised his team of committed programme managers. He explained that the Mission Station receives no government funding for these programmes and depend on funding on the Churches in Scotland and Northern Ireland, EMMS, and other charities such as the Raven Trust.

I asked, "What can we do to help? What do you most need?" Young answered:

1. Pray for us and with us
2. We need money for -
 - a. education - supporting a secondary school student costs £100 per year
 - b. clean water projects -- to dig a shallow water well costs around £100
 - c. Child support -- feeding a child costs around £7 per month
 - d. malaria prevention -- a treated mosquito net costs around £5
 - e. shelter -- a basic house cost around £2,500 to build
3. We need goods -- blankets, children's and adults clothes, and household goods especially cooking utensils.

If you have more funding which areas of your work would you most wish to spend it on?

1. Care and support of orphans -- especially funding of education.
2. Water and sanitation -- this is of the utmost importance in disease prevention.
3. Mother and Child Care - to be able to provide fuel.