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School Name: Skidmore College

Partner Institution: Ndodani Orphanage led by Temwani Chilenga

Project Duration: May 28th to July 1st 2022

Country: Malawi

Title of Project: Creative solutions for sustainable designs

Background

Malawi is ranked 172 out of 189 in the United Nations' Human Development Index, with over 71% of Malawians living below the poverty line¹. Poverty in Malawi is very high, and it manifests itself in various indicators, such as in the economy, education, and healthcare, rendering it one of Africa's poorest nations. In addition to the fact that an estimated 1 million² Malawians are living with HIV/AIDS. HIV/ AIDs has caused so many deaths in Malawi, leaving children parentless without a home sometimes. Having lived seeing many people including family and friends suffer from HIV/ AIDS, it has always been a passion of mine to create a future for the children who are left homeless and show them that the world is their oyster. I would like to see children who are orphans grow and fulfil their dreams in Malawi.

The Rationale Behind Setting up a creative centre for sustainable design

I propose to create a centre for sustainable designs for orphans in Lilongwe. This will be a vocational learning space where the children will be able to learn how to design clothes and use African fabric to make clothes for themselves, learn design skills which will be an additional skill set for them and very valuable in Malawi. This will be an extra-curricular learning activity and will be open to the children who are interested in sewing. Since the orphanage does not have a donor, the children struggle to survive. The Creative Centre for sustainable design will allow the children to make clothes for themselves, reuse fabric and design clothes.

I am going to be implementing this at Ndodani Orphanage. This is an orphanage that has 95 children aged between 6 to 18 years old. The orphanage is run by Temwani Chilenga and located in my city, Lilongwe. One of the challenges the children face is lack of food, and clothing and sometimes writing equipment for school. Currently the orphanage does not offer any extracurricular activities. The Centre for sustainable design will be the first to offer a huge learning opportunity for the children to opt in and learn a new skill and teach each other how to design clothes using local fabric.

The centre for sustainable designs will be a space that will be built and fully equipped with 12 tailoring machines, fabric, and drawing materials. Where the children can learn how to design clothes. The orphans will be able to make clothes for themselves. Temwani already has a volunteer who is a designer, who will be teaching the children how to make clothes. The children will opt in voluntarily. The children will also be able to make traditional Malawian clothes which will be used to teach them about some of the indigenous Malawi traditions.

I have been in touch with Temwani the orphanage owner (*Letter of approval to work together attached*). I will work closely with Temwani in ensuring that the facility is built and equipped with the appropriate materials.

Having studied at the United World College Red Cross Nordic in Norway and then spending the past 4 years of my life here at Skidmore College, I have learnt that Malawians we have a rich culture which is in fact being eroded by Globalization. I would like to also take time to teach the children some ancient Malawi dress codes such as "Chilundu". The children will also use the learning centre to make some of these clothes, which will be very beneficial in their learning about their Malawi heritage.

Qualifications

In 2018, I was awarded the Go make Difference award in UWC, Red Cross Nordic. Where I went to back to Malawi and renovated classroom blocks that had been left dilapidated for several years, at Ntenjela Primary school the year prior to that, I built a new girl friendly toilet as many girls at the school, were dropping out because of missing so

¹ 2022. [online] Available at: <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/malawi/overview#1>> [Accessed 20 January 2022].

² Avert. 2022. *HIV and AIDS in Malawi*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/sub-saharan-africa/malawi>> [Accessed 20 January 2022].

many classes during their monthly menstruation. The school did not have girls' toilets, so my project encouraged girls to stay in school. These two projects at Ntenjela primary school in Malawi, exposed me to project management and fostered my passion in working towards poverty reduction in my country.

Personal Values

Growing up, I saw many children my age in the streets, begging for food, my mother was a primary school teacher just like Temwani, who taught at the Malawi government schools. Every Christmas we run clothes drive and shared clothes with the students who were taught by my mother. These children never had a home, many even dropped out of school because they came to school on an empty stomach. I want to help these children who are supported by Ndodani Orphanage to create a bright future for themselves by ensuring that they have a space after school where they can acquire design skills. In addition, children in Malawi need to wear school uniforms when going to school, they will be able to make their own school uniforms and ensure that they have well-fitting clothes at all times.

Educational Goals and Sustainability

The orphanage currently has one tailoring machine and there is a local tailor who teaches the children how to make clothes. With an addition of 12 sewing machines, the children will be able to use second-hand clothes to redesign their own clothes, use new fabric to make their own school uniforms.

The orphans, at Ndonani, will be able to make clothes and dress themselves for school, I want to highlight that many Malawians, buy second hand clothes known as "Kaunjika". Kaunjika is imported second-hand clothes, usually these clothes come from the US, China, UK and is sold at cheaper prices which benefits many Malawians as brand new clothes are expensive. However, due to the pandemic, Kaunjika is limited as there is minimal imports. Which has made buying clothes very expensive in Malawi. This has also affected the orphans at Ndodani. They cannot afford to buy clothes. The centre for sustainable designs will enable the children to make new clothes that fit them and they will not have to worry about the impact of imports due to the COVID pandemic in Malawi. Most importantly designing and making clothes is a skill the children can have forever, in the event were they are older and have left the orphanage, they will be able to use the skill and even earn an income from it. This centre will serve the current orphans and all the other orphans who are coming in the near future.

Project timeline

May 28th to June 13th

- Travel to Malawi
- During this time, I will be working with two builders to construct the centre. I will be buying the materials from Area 25, where the orphanage is located. I will hire a car to help us transport bulky items such as cement, bricks, wood and the chairs. The total cost of the whole construction is

June 14th to June 20th

- Allow the building to dry before we furnish it. Because we use bricks to build in Malawi.
- During this time, I will be meeting with the children for two hours daily to explore the Malawi culture dress codes mainly by utilizing the local library and inviting Historians from the University of Malawi in Lilongwe whom I have already connected. This will be very fundamental for the design centre because we not only just want to make clothes or learn how to be tailors, we want this to be a learning space about our Malawi culture that is at threat because of globalization.

June 20th – July 1st

- Furnish the building with chairs, sewing machines, and fabric.

Following July 1st:

- Since this centre will be an extra-curricular, the students interested in using the centre will be allowed to use the machines after 2 Pm that is when classes are over. The designer will be coming during the weekend to teach the students. After that, the students who have performed well, will then partner with another student who is willing to learn and then they will be teaching each other. For the children's safety there will always be an adult supervising the students between 2Pm and 5Pm every day.

During the weekend the centre will be open from 10AM to 5PM. The children interested will be scheduled for the weekend this is when the designer will come and during the week will be their practicing time. Once every quarter, the orphanage will be hosting a social event known as "Culture day" where Temwani and her colleague at work will be teaching the children the history of several other African tradition outfits.