

Shaping the future of Dzama orphans

NURSERY schools are important foundations for one's education. However, this is not the case for every child in the country, especially the disadvantaged and those in rural areas. It's for this reason that UNC Project established Dzama Orphan Care to enable orphans in Dzama village access quality nursery education. UNC Project Communications Officer **ZAINAH LIWANDA** writes:

ACHIEVING universal primary education by 2015 is goal number two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This requires concerted efforts by all stakeholders including the Malawi government.

Increasing enrollment in schools and ensuring quality education are vital to achieving this goal. UNC Project has not been left out in this movement to ensure that every child has access to education.

The UNC Project is a biomedical research institution whose mission is to identify innovative, culturally acceptable and relatively inexpensive methods of reducing the risk of HIV/STI and infectious disease transmission through research, to strengthen the local research capacity through training and technology transfers and to improve patient care for the people of Malawi. It has been conducting HIV/STI research in Malawi since the early 1990s.

However, as part of its social responsibility, UNC Project runs Dzama Orphan Care, providing the orphaned children with nursery education, among others.

The orphan care was established in February 2004 with funding from the SCHARP group based in the USA. This followed a visit by the SCHARP group to UNC Project catchment area.

The SCHARP group was touched by the plight of the orphans and when they went back to the USA, they mobilised resources for the orphans in Dzama village, hence the Orphan Care. Dzama village is situated about 25km from Lilongwe City.

Prior to the establishment of the Orphan Care, villagers in Dzama had organised themselves and were providing voluntary services to the orphans. The women for example had a small garden where they grew crops such as maize to feed the children. Two voluntary teachers were also teaching the children.

However, the children were still faced with a lot of problems such as lack of clothes and food. They were learning in a dilapidated building with no windows. Whenever there was a heavy down pour, the children would not continue learning.

The women also lacked farm inputs like fertiliser. The yield was mostly not enough.

But some of these problems became history when UNC Project established the Dzama Orphan Care. A brick school block was



THE PATH TO THE FUTURE - Dzama Orphan Care equips children with knowledge as Malawi strives to achieve universal primary education by 2015.—Picture courtesy of UNC Project

constructed with solar energy installed. UNC Project is also paying salaries for two teachers at the school.

Every day, children are provided with porridge. This strategy has worked well as the number of children not attending school due to hunger has significantly decreased. The high number of children have been retained at the school. The situation has motivated more children to start school. A borehole and pit latrine were also constructed to ensure hygiene at the school.

A committee comprising members of the community oversees the operations of the Orphan Care.

According to Doris Nyalungwe, a teacher at the school, the total enrollment is 134. The pupils are between two and 10 years.

She said they give an opportunity to older orphans to access nursery education, because they don't believe in rushing children to higher classes because of age.

Apart from the nursery school, UNC Project also empowered Dzama community with a goat Project to generate income for the Orphan Care. The Project is also run by a committee comprising members of the community.

Every year, UNC Project organises a Christmas party for the



children. And 2008 was not exceptional. The children were given rice, meat, orange squash, biscuits and kamba puffs, making the party their most memorable event of the year that just ended.

After the meal you could tell that the children were satisfied and happy. They shouted on top of their voices when their teachers

Nyalungwe and Aida Tambala asked them to sing a song to express their gratitude to the organisers of the party.

To show that they at least grasped something in class last year, the children recited the common nursery poem of *Rain Rain go Away* with vigour and confidence.

"We teach them English,

Chichewa, Mathematics and Religious Education. When you greet them in English they are able to respond. They can also write, but as is the case with other schools, you have fast and slow learners," Nyalungwe said.

The school committee and UNC Project Community Department staff prepared the food.