



Journey to Malawi

March 15, 2006

"The land is vast and breathtaking, and the people are full of such joy and happiness..."

Several years ago, documentary photographer and Plan donor Diana Barnett decided to change her life. Moved by the daily struggles faced by children around the world, she needed to find a way to tell their stories. In the process she sought to shed light on ways to make their lives better.

With camera in hand, she began traveling the world documenting these stories. And the Faces of Tomorrow project was born, conveying the voices of children in developing countries to the world.



Plan helps distribute yellow split peas, cooking oil and maize as part of the World Food Program's Food Relief Distribution Program. (Photograph: Diana Barnett)

Recently, Diana traveled to Malawi, where a severe food crisis has impacted communities for over three years. She visited Plan program areas to see what is being done to address the immediate and long-term food needs of children and their families affected by the food crisis:

...My experience in Malawi was so very memorable! The land is vast and breathtaking, and the people are full of such joy and happiness. Even with all the challenges that they live through daily, I witnessed no pity and no doubt, but a tremendous amount of hope and determination to make their lives better. Their attitudes were fantastic! And their enthusiasm for working with Plan was an honor to witness.

They have so much joy and happiness and truly have faith that their lives will get better. They do not want to be pitied; they want people to believe in them, as they believe in themselves.



As for addressing the food needs of children and their families, Plan has a short-term and long-term plan.

The short-term is the **Food Relief Distribution program** organized by World Food Program (WFP) and distributed by seven non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the area. Plan covers an area in the North called Mzimba. The program started in December and lasts until March.

I went to observe this distribution with Patrick Zgombo, Plan Malawi's Communications Director. As we pulled up to the area, I saw a huge crowd of people waiting. Plan was given food supplies to feed 564 households in 33 villages, only reaching a small number of people.

Many people walked up to two hours only to wait until distribution was organized. Plan staff started feeding community members at 8:00am and (with a short delay from rain showers) finished at 1pm. Each household was given a 50kg bag of maize, 10kg of yellow split peas and 1 liter of cooking oil.

The WFP and the Malawi government have applied very strict rules to make this program a success. I must admit that it was very well organized and fast moving. There are 30 Plan Food Distribution Monitors (FDMs) for the Mzimba District. They are rotated each month to organize the distribution and supervise the area. There were five FDMs with us the day we visited the operation.

The long-term is part of the **Race against Hunger Campaign**, a three-year project to support and promote the production of drought-resistant crops among families in Plan's communities.

This program is called winter cropping and is a process where farmers plant drought-resistant crops like cassava (yucca) and beans in the winter months (April—July).

