

**PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE WALKING TRACTORS FOR CHILUPULA VILLAGE
AND SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PROJECT BETWEEN MWACHILELE PRIMARY AND
BIRMINGHAM-COVINGTON SCHOOLS.**

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Date: 24th March, 2015

BACKGROUND

About early 2013 , The Zambian Community Action on Poverty and Environment(COPE) Association and The Birmingham Covington School (**BCS**) of Michigan (USA) had entered into a mutual partnership to work together on common interests.

This action had culminated into the development of two(2) major developmental programs namely; the agricultural and school pen-pal projects.

Therefore, the year 2014 saw two(2) walking tractors being procured by COPE Project in Zambia to be handed over to the Mushalesa multipurpose co operative society limited which is based at Chilupula village, Rufunsa District of Zambia.

But prior to the handover of the two tractors, COPE-Zambia project had prepared and undertook a series of trainings for the Chilupula village farmers in order to enhance their capacities in the areas of village banking (Savings and credit), and sustainable gardening, respectively.

The Mushalesa multipurpose co operative is a registered peasant farmers group formed by villagers within and around Chilupula village for the sole purpose of working together to try and uplift their livelihoods and to help them also solve numerous problems that bombard them year in and year out. People in and within Chilupula village, like the majority of villagers who live in rural Zambia face challenges like high levels of poverty, lack of farming equipment and long distances to schools for the children. This is the main reason why in 2015 the two tractors were given to Chilupula village co-operative society to boost their agricultural activities and increase food production.

Mwachilele Basic Primary School is the nearest School to Chilupula and other outlying villages in the area . The School was built in early 1950`s and has barely changed since then in terms of infrastructure development. There is no electricity and the entire School compound has only one hand pump bore-hole as the source of water.

The School also has so many challenges like, lack of information and communications technologies (ITC)`s and is but just one of the myriad of such schools in rural Zambia. Both teachers and pupils lack these important skills.

However, the School through partnership with BCS received two(2) brand new tablet computers with all necessary accessories, and a solar panel.

Apart from the two computers donated to Mwachilele Basic School, cylindrical solar lanterns were also given out to School going girl children to enhance their studies.

Girls in most rural parts of Zambian Schools rarely find enough time to study at home because they have many chores to do before and after School period unlike their male counterparts. After chores, it is too dark to read. Their families cannot afford high quality light and use candles and some kerosene lanterns. So, this is the main reason why only girls benefited from the solar lanterns.

Finally the Executive Director of COPE-Zambia was given an assignment to look for another village and a

rural based School in Zambia in order to start another partnership with Berkshire Middle Basic School of United States of America(USA).

1. SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

Under the School partnership program, Mwachilele Primary School of Zambia and the Birmingham Covington School(BCS) of USA had partnered in quest to exchange ideas, educational programs and pupils writing letters to fellow pupils.

The BCS School staff in conjunction with their pupils embarked on ambitious projects in order to fund raise some money to help the people of Chilupula village to purchase two(2) walking tractors and other accessories. The fund raising activities took more than a year to raise the required amount of money to buy these two tractors along with some implements. The funds also covered one year of fuel, seeds, and fertilizer.

In June 2014, Mr. George Sherman who is based in the USA, and who is also at the same time one of the Directors of COPE-Zambia visited Zambia. His main mission was to come and oversee the handing over of the tractors and to deliver the two tablet computers that were donated by the BCS with the help of MICROSOFT incorporation. Apart from the two computers, a solar panel and a battery were also donated to the School.

1.1 Tablet computers

The two computers that were donated to Mwachilele primary school was put into good use by the School staff. The School had developed lesson plans for both teachers and the pupils to learn basic computer skills. The first ones to undertake these lesson were pupils in upper grades (7-9). This year the lessons would be extended further even further to those pupils in the lower grades (1-6).

Pupils learn about the basic functions and software of the computer, and learn how to use basic applications like word, presentation and excel among others. According to the teachers, many pupils have expressed keen interest in working with computers.

Although, the computers had brought a lot of joy among the School staff and pupils, they were unable to use Internet and other social media because the computers are not compatible with other gadgets for Internet, such as cell phone flash drives. The Surface tablets do not connect except for Wifi wireless or where there is a hot spot (Airports).

So basically, there has not been any form of communication between Mwachilele Primary School and The Birmingham Covington School through e-mails or on social media due to this problem. Therefore, the COPE-Zambia proposes that the BCS contacts MICROSOFT incorporation about this challenge to consider replacing these tablets computers with the ones that could facilitate the smooth communication using ordinary Internet link, especially using cell phones, since there is some cell reception near the school, but no Wifi.

In Zambia rural areas do not have hot spot that one you find at the Airports or Hotels, but only depends on external devices like dongles or Internet modem through Internet providers, like **AIRTEL, AMTEL** and **MTN**.

However, the School had decided to buy a much bigger solar panel to reduce on charging time.

1.2 SOLAR LANTERNS FOR GIRLS

The School also had an opportunity for solar lanterns. 100 solar lanterns that were donated by the BCS were distributed to the girls children of Mwachilele Primary School in the presence of the government officials(District Governor),the teachers, Headmen/Head women,and Mr. George Sherman.

During the handover of the solar lanterns, clear instructions were issued by Mr. George Sherman that the solar lanterns were given exclusively for the girl pupils to use at their respective homes for studies and homework purposes. However, not all the girl children benefited from these donations, a lot of them were left out.

1.3 Benefits of the solar lanterns

The solar lanterns brought a lot of benefits to the girl children of Mwachilele Primary School in the following ways:

- According to the School teachers` girl children are now able to complete their homework at home, unlike in the past.
- Girl children now are able to read and study more hours than previously
- Households whose girl children have benefited with the solar lanterns are also able to cut down costs of buying candles, kerosene and diesel.
- Solar lanterns have greatly assisted many households in the provision of cheap source of lighting in their homes.

1.4 Challenges of the solar solar lanterns

Although the solar lanterns have brought many joys to girl children of Mwachilele Primary School and in their respective homes, they do not come without challenges or drawback. The following are some of the challenges that the solar holders have experienced or encountered;

- Some of the lanterns were discovered with some defects. Some had their wiring loosened up.
- Some had a short lifespan. They just stopped abruptly working but still look very new .

Nevertheless, the solar lanterns have more advantages compared with challenges or drawbacks.

1.5 PEN PAL PROGRAMME

The main aim of this program was to ensure that School pupils of both Mwachilele primary and Birmingham Covington each get a partner and start corresponding with each other through letter writing, and social media, like Internet and Facebook.

About 78 letters from the BCS students came with Mr. George Sherman who gave the letters to the Mwachilele Primary Head Teacher for onward distribution to the selected pupils. The letters were distributed

at a later date while awaiting careful scrutiny of the grades of both pupils.

The selection process was not an easy undertaking, but something that took the teachers including the COPE-Zambia Director, Mr. Victor Phiri several months to arrive at. After the completion of the selection exercise, then came another process of supervising the students to respond to the letters. By then all those selected students from Mwachilele Primary School knew their pen pals' names and what they looked like through the pictures that came with the letters.

The biggest challenge was for the Mwachilele Primary School students was to respond to specific questions that were asked by their counterparts from the BCS regarding general information of Mwachilele School and also about the Chilupula village and COPE project operation.

The students would not have answered all the queries had it not been for the help of the teachers and the COPE-Zambia Director's immense contributions in providing deep insight in the operation of the COPE project in Chilupula village.

Another challenge that faced some students in responding to the letters was the fact that not all of them came or live in Chilupula village and as such their parents or they had no or little knowledge of the COPE project, vis-à-vis the walking tractor project.

After identification and pairing of selected pen pals, COPE-Zambia director then took pictures of all of them. When pupils had their letters written COPE-Zambia Director collected them and posted them through DHL courier express mail to the USA.

The letter writing exercise has shown that it has the potential to increase the vocabulary comprehension skills of Mwachilele Primary School students because rarely do they write letters. Even the parents of the students are also taking part one way or the other since they are helping their children to construct good sentences in the letters. So in other words parents are also involved in lifelong learning.

All parents have been advised by the School authority that no single parent shall write the letters for their children, but can help with sentence construction and wording. The School authority want the students to learn how to think critically.

Under the pen pal programme, the girls from the Michigan also donated some clothes they sewed .

2. AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME

Chilupula as a Village also received help to boost its agricultural production output so that it can assist in uplifting its people's livelihoods and live a better life. Through their cooperative society, the Birmingham Covington School(BCS) worked very hard to raise some funds to enable them buy farming equipment and other supplies.

2.1.Walking tractors

In June 2014, the people of Chilupula village were a very happy people when they received two brand new walking tractors from the BCS through Mr. George Sherman. The tractors were bought in Lusaka, Zambia

when Mr. George Sherman arrived in the country.

When the walking tractors finally arrived in Chilupula village where the handover ceremony was taking place, there was joy and jubilation and the villagers who came in numbers to witness the handover. Government officials, teachers and headmen and head women had all gathered for the long awaited occasion.

Since the tractors came with the fuel already in their tanks, everyone wanted to have a feel of what it was like to drive the walking tractor. These two tractors were much lighter compared to the first tractor that COPE-Zambia had procured. The previous one was about 16 horsepower, but these two were 10 and 9 horsepower.

Particularly interesting in this case was the ability for the village women and young ones to be able to handle and control this piece of equipment. Many women had queued up to try the tractors.

The first tractor(16) horsepower was extremely heavy for most people to operate, let alone women and the young ones. Even among men, only those who were extraordinarily strong could manage to operate the tractor.

The basic difference between the 16-HP and 10-HP is that the later has no provision for a water pump, while the former has an outlet were to insert delivery pipes for irrigation. At the same time the 16-HP has also a provision for a hammer mill and a trailer for hauling which can be fixed behind it.

However, for tilling purposes the 10-HP is much better than the 16-HP because it is very light such that even women and young people can easily use it without much struggle. 16-HP is a heavy machine and it is very challenging for cultivation.

The majority of the people in Chilupula village have recommended the 10-HP tractor rather than the 16-HP. And many have expressed a keen interest to own the 10-HP because they said that it does a better job than using oxen.

2.2 Equipment

Each of the walking tractors had accessories bought separately and had various functionality. For the following were some of the accessories that were procured, like plow, ripper, and harrow disc.

The water pump was procured previously by COPE, but has not been yet used because extra irrigation pipes ought be procured too. It takes about K15000.00 to purchase irrigation pipes to water a one hectare of land.

Diesel and money for grease was also given to the cooperative society.

2.3 OTHER AGRICULTURAL SUPPLIES

2.3.1 Maize seeds

Two(2) x 25kg bags of maize were also procured and given to the farmers(cooperative), alongside with K4000=00 cash to purchase fertilizers.

However, during the 2014-15 farming season the cooperative society only used about one(1) x 25kg bag of maize seed. They have reserved the other 1 bag for 2015- 16 farming season as they are still planning on how to effectively utilize the tractors. At the moment, there is a hot debate on how to move forward especially as regards to the two walking tractors.

One School of thought thinks that the tractors be used as the entire cooperative, while the others felt that the tractors be run into two groups of ten people each. But by the look of things, it seems the majority feel working in groups is the best, rather than to leave it open to the cooperative. Leaving it to the cooperative, many argue that some people have the tendency of not working hard but at the same time they want the benefit of any proceeds that would come out of the sweat of others.

The ones who are advancing the idea of working in groups say one tractor will cater for about three to four villages where they are members of the cooperative society instead of just one.

So far two distinct groups have been drawn as follows;

1. One group will be headed by Chilupula Headman himself and
2. Another group will be headed by Headman Mwachilele were the School is situated.

Therefore, one tractor would cater for Chilupula village, Mulobela village and Chamankhamba village, while the other one will cater for Mwachilele village, Mwabilwa village, and another nearby village.

So in order to maximize production and reduce costs among the two groups, they have all agreed that they would be able to work collectively in their farms together as a group, weeding, harvesting and tilling. By so doing they would be able to work extra land that lies dormant due to insufficient workforce or funds.

3. 2014-15 Agricultural farming activities

This farming season, being the first time to use the tractors and in the advent of not having a full widely acceptable working plan, the cooperative only managed to cultivate about two and a half hectares of land for the cooperative.

Some members also had an opportunity of using the tractor in their respective farms as a familiarization. Although rains in this season came rather late and went early, we are yet to see the crop output. However, plans are underway to diversify on crops so as to grow cash crops as well as maize for the coming farming season.

Many members of the cooperative have already started preparing their respective fields in readiness for this farming season. The walking tractor will only work in well cleaned field with few or no tree stumps. A clean field will save fuel and a farmer will not tire easily and as such he or she will be able to work more hours.

4. CREATION OF A VILLAGE BANK

Before the end of 2015, the cooperative is planning to complete the formation of the village bank or credit and savings(SACO).The village bank will enable farmers save money and also borrow at a relatively low interest rates. The bank will also enable farmers buy things that they could not have thought of buying in the past, like animals.

Village bank will also encourage rural people to be saving unlike the culture at the moment where saving among the people is very low. Long distances from the Towns and Cities where banks are found discourages many farmers to save.

Interest rates on loans from the commercial banks are high, and there are some associated charges when saving money with the commercial banks.

The advantage of creating a village bank is that rural people can also save in buying farm products, e.g 50kg of maize. This is so because many people in rural areas rarely keep cash to make the purchase at a lower price.

4.1 Credit Committee

The credit committee was formed in 2014 for the cooperative society in which some members were elected to various positions.

5 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COOPERATIVE SOCIETY LIMITED

Prior to receiving the presents from the BCS , the COPE-Zambia organized a series of training opportunities to empower the cooperative society at Chilupula village to enable them deal with pertinent organization problems.

Four one-week training programmes were designed and delivered to the cooperative society.

5.1 Village Banking Training:

A one week training session was conducted at Chilupula village for the entire cooperative society in village banking. Under this training, farmers were taught everything from running a business to organizing formal cooperative meetings

5.2 Sustainable Gardening Training.

For gardening another two training sessions of one week each were also conducted at Chilupula village to train the farmers in modern and sustainable gardening.

The last one week session was devoted for crop monitoring on the demo plot that farmers from Chilupula village had grown.

6. CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATION

The Chilupula village cooperative society have made a contractual agreement on how best to utilize the tractors.

One of the agreements is that the cooperative society limited must work very hard and purchase one tractor

that would be taken to another village. The main aim of this idea is to produce a exponential results to expand to other villages as well.