



Peter's April Report

@Farmers Club, Zomba, Malawi, Africa

DI: Chen Yuepeng (Peter, YID March team 2010)

DI's Monthly African Report
DI: Chen Yuepeng(Peter) Date:30/04/2011

Hi, my dear friends, Mulibwanji!

Wish you all the best for the upcoming Labour's Day holidays.

I have been in Malawi, Africa for a whole month. So far so good, everything has gone quite well. I landed in Lilongwe on March 29, then I was picked up by a taxi driver who took me to the bus station from where I took a National bus to Blantyre. Upon arrival, I was greeted by Cedric, the General DI responsible in DAPP Malawi. I spent my first night with Jokubas and Aija, two European DIs who has been working in Second hand cloth fund raising project in Blantyre. Then the next day, I was picked up by my roommate, Stone, my fellow Chinese DI who is from YID September team 2009. Then I arrived in Zomba, a lovely, evergreen town, the former capital city of Malawi.

Starting from April, I began to get familiar with the city and my project. I've tried my best to find a specific position that I can fit in. Thanks to my effort and a little bit luck, I found my specific position in the project pretty soon. The cooperation among project coordinator, DI responsible, project leader and me is quite good.

The following report will be divided into two main parts: About my work and my life, describing what I have been doing so far and what my life looks like in details.

I am looking forward to your active feedbacks. Thank you in advance.

Yours Faithfully
Peter Chen
April 30, 2011

Part I: Regarding my work in Farmers Club

Actually, before my arrival, I was told that it is difficult for a DI to find a specific position in the project in Africa, unless you are creative and take the initiative. Originally, I thought this was only applicable to Chinese DIs, for traditionally and culturally Chinese are shy, passive, less ambitious and poor in communication. After I finished reading several reports written by former European and American DIs who once worked in farmers club, Zomba, I realized the situation of "there is no specific job for me" is quite universal.

I am a city guy, I've spent most of my life in the Chinese super cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. To be quite honest, I know nothing about farming, poultry raising or composting. I even can't tell crops from one to the others. What an ironic story, I was sent to farmers club and supposed to help farmers to raise their productivity. The farmers might have a high expectation on me. I was scared. What am I going to do. I might ruin the farmers expectation and project leaders trust.

At the first meeting with George, an EU Project Coordinator, Cornex and Mary, two DI responsables, I put my worries on the table honestly. Fortunately, they were considerate and quite understanding. They didn't assign me to any positions or work with a specific project leader immediately. On the contrary, for the first week of my job, they arranged me to follow their weekly plan, participating in different activities and public events, working with different project leaders, getting familiar with the whole project. Then, after the first week experience, I could choose which specific area I was interested in and which project leaders I'd like to work with.



Chicken Farm started by Max. an Argentinian DI

I started my first field visit on April 1st, visiting Project leader Shyreen's and Cornex's club respectively. Before I came to Malawi, I was told to take over Max's job, an Argentinian DI from Saint Vincent DRH School, who started running a chicken farm. The farm is in Shyreen's area. I visited the farm. There are 110 chickens in the farm. Actually, they are the second batch of the chickens. The first batch

were sold about half a month ago. The profit was cutting, for the price for purchasing new-born chickens has been rising. The club members were well trained and knew how to maintain the farm. The only thing I could do regarding chickens farm was to copy the mould, establishing a new one somewhere in the same area. Since whether or not the first

one going to be profitable is still a question, it made no sense for me to take the risk establishing another one. Therefore, I didn't take over this job.

After one week's visit, observation, thinking and discussion, I made up my decision that I'd like to focus my efforts on one club, Chisomo Club in Kimu village, working with project leader, Panganani Daudi.

1.1 The structure of farmers club in Zomba

Strictly speaking, Farmers Club Zomba can be divided into two projects, depending on their funding.

The EU side: this part of Farmers Club is funded by the EU and is running now since the beginning of 2008.

The US side: this part is funded by the USDA(United States Department for Agriculture) and started in the beginning of 2007.

I am in the EU side. The name of the project is: **Green Health** -- Back Yard Gardening to increase Food production among vulnerable household in Zomba.

How it works

First, the Project leader has to bring together farmers in a particular rural area. If he/she is able to organize 30 farmers he/she can establish a Club. The members of a club have to search for a suitable "Demonstration plot" which is normally provided by the chief of an area, where they can get training in sustainable agriculture or back yard gardening.



Routine gathering of Chisomo Club, Kimu Village

Each project leader is responsible for 10 Clubs with a total number of 300 farmers. He is directly supervised by a project coordinator.

The objective of the EU project

The overall objective is to improve the livelihood of poor and vulnerable families in Malawi by alleviating the current pressure caused by increasing food prices.

The specific objective is to increase the agriculture production and capacity through promoting backyard gardening to 6000 People Living with HIV/AIDS in rural areas of

Zomba District.

1.2 My work detail

As soon as I got familiar with the project structure and the objective, I started to design my work plan and put it into operation, with the help of my project leader, Panganani Daudi.

From 11 to 15 April, Week 15, I did a small social survey in Kimu village. I did five home visitings among Chisomo Club members. The purpose of the survey is to get a general picture of how people are living in the area, so that I can get a direction of how to help these farmers.



Conducting survey in Kimu village

The farmers are really poor. There is no electricity and tap water in the village. Most people are living in small huts made by mud bricks and hays. Except staple food - maize, they hardly have any personal belongings: no furnitures, no industrial products, no stoves. Using the word "Primitive" to describe the situation may not be the best, but without any exaggerating.

Considering these people are HIV positive, an incredible fact is that most of them don't even have a mosquito net. Malaria is a leading epidemic in the area. These people's immune system have been weakened by HIV virus. If they don't pay attention to prevent from mosquito bite, they are easily infected by Malaria which can eventually lead to their death.

Therefore, reinforcement of HIV positive prevention education is a feasible option for me to carry out in the future.



Poor living conditions of the villagers

From 18 to 22 April, Week 16, I conducted two demonstrations on how to construct a firewood saving stove in Chisomo Club, Kimu Village and Zinenani Club, Chilampha

Village respectively.



Learning by doing: Constructing a firewood saving stove in my own back yard

Actually, before this week, I didn't know how to construct a firewood saving stove either. Fortunately, I got a book *40 Green World Action*, which is really a great book guiding how to make a conservation farming based on real experience gathered from Africa. And I saw a live demonstration during the first week visit.

According to the principle *Learning by Doing*, before doing the demonstration, I did an experiment, making a

firewood saving stove in my own back yard, and it really worked. This gave me confidence and the first -hand experience.

The two demonstrations went very well. The farmers appreciated it and applauded to me. They danced and sang surrounding the stove to express their greeting to the little efforts that I made. I was really moved by these kind people.

From 25 to 29 April, Week 17, I made a main presentation in the *Health and Hygiene Campaign for PLWHA* and assisted Stone teaching cooking Chinese dishes in her Club.

The campaign was initiated by Panganani Daudi, my project leader and me. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness of personal health and hygiene among the 10 club members. The



Demonstration on building a stove in the project field

campaign was conducted in Chamba Health Centre on Tuesday, April 26. I did the main presentation on topic of HIV/AIDS basic knowledge and information, positive prevention and how to improve immune system by taking balance food and herbs. Beside the presentation, I also led participants play a game on teaching how HIV virus attack Human immune system and did a demonstration of using condom properly.

Around 60 participants including club members, local community chiefs, Heath workers and local heath officials attended the campaign.



I am leading a game teaching how HIV virus attack human immune system

and local heath officials attended the campaign. Quite different from what I have experienced in China, people here are open to the topic of Sex and HIV/AIDS. They took part in the event actively and passionately. They talked and discussed, they danced and sang, they laughed and learnt.

Besides the event mentioned above, I went to Stone's project area twice. First time, to learn how she has guided constructing the

toilet for local community and taught manure using. The second time, it was more interesting. We taught local villagers on how to cook Chinese dishes. Villagers were quite interested in looking at us preparing raw food materials, mixing the food and cooking them.

People in Africa know little about cooking vegetables. Actually, in the old days, they seldom eating vegetables. By sharing our Chinese cooking method, we hope that people living in the village could eat more vegetables in order to improve their health and nutrition level. As a reciprocity villagers shared their method of cooking nsima, a local staple food made by maize.



Demonstration on how to use a condom

1.3 My work in the next month

EU visitors will conduct their evaluation from 9 to 16 May. This visiting is crucial for the project. The result can decide whether or not the project can continue. Therefore, my main job of the first half month of May is to assist my project leader in following up all the project

activities and make sure everything is ready for the evaluation.

After the EU visitors' evaluation, I would like to take the initiative to construct two double-pit latrines in Chisomo and Zinenani club respectively as a demo-action. The introduction of a new type of toilet can improve local sanitation as well as promoting manure composting. The good news is that I got oral support from the EU project coordinator, Christopher Mangwande. The project might support my initiative by providing two bags' cement freely.

Part II: My life in Zomba

2.1 About Accommodation

Probably, DI house in Zomba is the best one in Malawi. We have almost everything for living a good standard: big rooms, indoor kitchen and bathrooms, a back yard garden with brick walls surrounded, two full-time guards, electricity (though always out of service) and tap water, furnitures and utensils for cooking.

The house is big enough for holding at least 5 DIs. But now, we just have



The Zomba DI House



Women are cooking Nsima

two living here. Stone and me. After May, Stone will end her six-month programme and go back China. By then, I will be alone in this big house.

The house is not far away from the Zomba office and the city centre. It takes only 3 minutes walk to reach the office and about 15 minutes to the downtown where markets and bus depot are located.

2.2 About Food

Fortunately, my stomach has a various adaptability to any type of food without any digestion problem. In villages, I ate nsima provided by villagers. In DI house, we cooked Chinese dishes by ourselves. Sometimes, we went to local restaurants to enjoy local leisure

time.

In addition, Stone is a good cook. Normally, she did cooking things. Finishing eating, I did washing things.

2.3 About transportation

Going to my project area, I need first take a minibus from Zomba to a small town, Jali. The journey on highway takes about 40 minutes. Then, I need meet my project leader in Jali and ride a bicycle to the village which normally takes another 40 minutes.



Inside view of a shabby minibus

Riding bicycle in the countryside is really a enjoyable journey. The view is just stunning, and the people you pass by who greet you are nice. But the journey in a minibus is always frustrating.

From my observation, all minibuses are originally scraped vans imported from Japan. The bus is almost a empty steel frame, rusty and shabby, in poor operational conditions. The most frustrating issue is you always have to wait in a van without doing anything until it is fully filled with passengers. The waiting time depends on your luck. Sometimes, it just takes a few minutes; but sometimes, it can take you an hour and a half.

The bus is in poor condition which means it can break down anytime at anywhere. If you are unlucky, you probably ruin all your time because of a break-down bus trapping you in between of Zomba and Jali.

Pay attention to bus conductors. Try to have the right amount of money because the conductors "always" don't have changes. You know what I mean, because you are an "Nazungu" (White man) from a rich country.

2.4 About gathering

An old Chinese saying says: Lao Xiang Jian Lao Xiang, Liang Yan Lei Wang Wang Which means Fellow countrymen meeting each other far away from their hometown, they are moved, tears enriching their eyes.

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Meeting with other Chinese DIs in Africa is always an exciting moment. Upon arrival,



We are enjoying the roasted chicken

Stone greeted me in Blantyre. When we arrived in DI House in Zomba, Penny was there and gave me a surprise. She just finished her six-month programme in Zambia and was on her travelling in Malawi.

Half a month later, the three May team 2010 members arrived. They are Victor, Apple and Yanzi who are about to work at Second Hand Cloth Fund raising project in Blantyre and

possibly later on in Lilongwe and Mzuzu. We gathered twice in Blantyre and Zomba respectively.



The stunning landscape on the way to villages

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In a short conclusion, the landscape in Malawi is beautiful and stunning, the people are nice and always supportive. I enjoyed my work and life in the first month of my staying in Zomba and hopefully I can contribute as much as what I can achieve in the following 5 months in Malawi.



If you want to know more about my life and work in Malawi, please explore my blog @ [Http://blog.sina.com.cn/peterchenyuepeng](http://blog.sina.com.cn/peterchenyuepeng)
(Only available in Chinese, but you can google translate it)

Thank you for your attention!