REPORT
To Tiyeni Trustees
October 16th – December 4th 2014

By John and Elizabeth Crossley after their visit to Tiyeni in Malawi

1.) In spite of the evident failure of management at national level, one cannot fail to be impressed by the reserve of competent and committed people, such as members of our own staff and leaders of the communities with whom they work who go about their duties in a responsible and purposeful manner, proving that Malawians indeed have the qualities necessary for success. It is the privilege of Tiyeni to equip people of this sort to improve the lives of their countrymen.

2). JUBILATION AT DOROBA. Tiyeni has been working with the Doroba group since 2005 and has seen the situation, and the fortunes of the members of the group transformed – although the piece of ground provided for the demonstration garden has remained a challenge. Each member of the all-woman team at Doroba has an extension garden and this, together with the pigs which they are rearing, has altered their lives for the better – a fact which was emphasised when we visited on 4th November with singing Tiyeni songs and dancing.

3). VERIFICATION OF THE TIYENI METHOD. Field Manager Godfrey is carefully recording details of inputs and yields from most of the demonstration and extension gardens. (See October Field report). Furthermore, with the release of the analyses of the soil samples taken by the staff of the Lunangwa research station, and the continuation of the sampling which they have promised, it will be possible to determine the long term effects on the soil of the Tiyeni method.

4). MEANS OF EXTENDING THE TIYENI METHOD. Obviously the increase in the number of centres and their network of extension farmers will lead to extending the method. An additional 10 centres are proposed for opening in 2015. But there must be a limit to the number of centres that can be supported under the present management structure.

During our visit we were impressed by the extent to which the Tiyeni method of soil care was gaining acceptance. A number of factors other than the opening of new centres were contributing to this. These include:

**Direct farmer-to-farmer contacts.** For instance, star worker Tevious Banda of Choma centre, who is a Lead Farmer trained to use a line level and who understands the importance of the deep bed, had responded to the requests of three of her neighbours and marked out their gardens for them. Indeed on a subsequent visit to Tevious, we met other neighbouring farmers who had come to consult her. *Tevious’s garden at the roadside is a beacon.*

*Pickaxes are made available by Choma centre for deep digging.*

One of the enquirers came from a village between Choma and Doroba called Nyatwa and, while this villager will open his own extension garden this season, Nyatwa is a proposed site for a new centre in 2015

**The demonstration gardens.** When we visited Matuli Centre – now called “Chipapa” – there was a stranger, Miriam Niyerenda, among the group, who had come from the village of Kadiketchi 10 kms distant and who had been working with the international organisation Total Land Care (TLC) but had become disenchanted and had turned to Tiyeni seeing a better chance for improving her livelihood with us. *Her village Kadiketchi has been ear-marked for a new centre in 2015,* and meanwhile I authorised Field Assistant Jimmy Luhanga to mark out Miriam’s garden for development this season, which he was happy to do in addition to the other 45 new extension gardens in Pod C which he is dealing with. Without this help she would have had to wait until 2016 for her extension garden.
Lead farmers training. This has proved to be a most effective way of spreading the deep bed method. Lead farmers are trained in using the line level for contouring and pickaxes are made available through the centres. The technology appears to be well understood. When we called at the EPA (Ministry of Agriculture Extension Planning Area) centre at Chikwina we saw the garden of Mr H Kumwenda, a keen farmer who had been to the training session held by Tiyeni at Honga in July. He thoroughly understood the deep bed system. Previously a client of TLC two of whose methods he had used, he has switched to Tiyeni’s deep beds and had contoured his land and prepare deep beds to an immaculate standard nearly all heavily mulched. A farmer to watch (and emulate)!

Jumping the gun. Field Assistant Mkumbwa reports that at Kahanjwa in his pod B, three of the members, seeing the demonstration garden completed. They will receive monitoring and advice from Tiyeni staff, but not at this stage any inputs from Tiyeni

Advocacy by Tiyeni lead farmers. There is a network of Development Committees presided over by Govt agric staff at the EPAs, and Tiyeni farmers and our staff are generally invited to these, and our lead farmers are particularly effective advocates of the Tiyeni method at these gatherings.

Contacts with other organisations. It should be possible to feed the Tiyeni method into other organisations such as Total Land Care which claims contacts with 40,000 farmers, but so far no positive response has been forthcoming – only a steady trickle of disappointed TLC farmers switching to Tiyeni. Gvt. agricultural staff, on the other hand, have become increasingly positive in their approval and encouragement of Tiyeni’s work since our meeting Chikwina EPA head, Mr Msukwa at the Open Day held in March. We have been asked to open demonstration plots at all four EPAs within which Tiyeni is working.

Field Manager Godfrey is arranging a meeting with staff of the Japanese agency JICA (from whom we got the bokash method of compost making) in January.

5). PERCEPTABLE TRENDS IN THE FIELD.

a) Balancing out of genders: whereas Doroba is an all-female group and women have been very predominant at the earlier centres, we are now seeing a more even spread of women and men and even a predominance of men as at Chipunga and Chigwere where we found 5 women and 9 men, and 5 women and 8 men respectively. This is significant since women have traditionally been assigned the less important tasks while men have engaged in the key areas, such as trading and warfare. Is Tiyeni imparting a more hopeful image to farming?

b) Less migration? We were entertained on our visit to Matuli to a “comedy” at VH James Mbeya’s house in which two young men acted out a dialogue drawing attention to the various predicaments that confronted them, but ending on a note of hope with one of the actors pronouncing, “now that Tiyeni has come to us, we will not have to go to South Africa to make a living!” This is a hopeful sign since migrant working has always been socially disruptive and has drained the country of youth and energy. This point of view was backed up by a conversation with a young man, son of Fyness Chirwa a founder member of the Doroba group who told me that he was no longer planning to go to the town in search of work but would stay and assist his mother to develop her flourishing small holding with its productive piggery and deep beds. The Chirwas are fortunate in having quite a lot of land in which to extend their work. Again at Kahanjwa, when we met the people there – 7 women and 13 men – Mary called out a young man from the group which met us and we heard the same story. Tiyeni has brought hope to the villages.

Is it time to start the Tiyeni Young Farmers Club?

6). THE NEW CENTRES. The situation at the new centres – Ekayiweni, Jalanthowa, Kadambo, Mthelere, Chigwere, Chipunga, Kapirmtende and Kahanjwa – is encouraging, and more ‘jumping of the gun’ can be expected as the new demonstration gardens take shape and enterprising farmers decide not to wait until the year after next to take Tiyeni method to their own gardens. The co-ordinator for the group at Kahanjwa said:
“This group takes this project very seriously... because 1) The group will learn modern methods of farming which will give us more yield on a small scale of land. 2) The group or club intends to assist the dire needy, the orphans, the sick and the elderly from the produce so far to be realised. 3) Your visit to this demonstration garden is an indication that you care for us. We are not taking this opportunity for granted....”

Kapirimtende (“Little Hill of Peace”) is an off-shoot of the neighbouring Honga centre peopled by a group who are determined to do even better than Honga under the leadership of Mr Bobby Katsonga, formerly a Lead Farmer in the Honga group. The determination of the group was indicated by the impressive labour expended for the demonstration garden in clearing the site of huge tree stumps now aligned as a barrier protecting the garden. Under the guidance of Field Assistant N Phiri, they have prepared the deep beds and are now marking planting stations for the crops and these will be filled with compost in time for planting.

We were at Ekayiweni new centre on 21st October and were impressed by the work which has been done here under the guidance of newly employed Field Assistant Khalani Longwe. The 7 men and 9 women present were making bokash compost having completed the structure of the demonstration garden. The piece of land had been given by a local resident Richard Jere who warned that it had been farmed for a number of years and was now of low fertility, a fact born out by crop residues from an adjoining piece of land under the same ownership consisting of spindly maize stalks and some meagre cobs. The land owner explained that, in spite of the use of fertilizer the crops had been sparse. Such declines in fertility are widespread and it will be a real challenge for Khalani and the Tiyeni team to show how this tendency can be reversed.

7). REVIEW OF THE OLD CENTRES -- Doroba – Susa – Honga – Choma – Bula – Lusangadzi – Kajiti – Matuli. We were able to visit all the old centres except Susa. When we arrived at Matuli we found most of the group at work at the garden marking planting stations in the maize growing section and applying compost manure. The garden had performed well during its first season yielding 163 kgs of maize from half of the plot measuring approximately .02 of an hectare which is equivalent to 8 tons per ha, a respectable yield by commercial standards, and about four times the average for village lands currently – hence the interest aroused by this roadside plot. The Matuli group, who now call themselves the “Chipapa Centre”, are near the top end of our centres in terms of commitment and maturity of judgment and we propose to hold the 2015 Open Day there.

The people at Choma are also doing well and the group now has 26 members.

At Honga, there are now 40 extension farmers attached to the centre. The success of Honga has been an inspiration leading to the establishment of several other centres such as Bula. The Honga people, under the leadership of the Kamanga family, father and son, are aware of this and ask for an office to be established at their village where training can be carried out – a proposal for trustees to consider when we meet. They also made other requests for trustees to look at.

Susa has always been a bit of a disappointment – ever since the day when the demonstration garden which they had opened was taken back by the jealous donor who had offered it unaware of its potential! The area does not lend itself to agriculture due to the steep gradients, and the enthusiasm characterising other centres is hard to detect. (We have never been offered a meal at Susa!) The opinion of our staff is that we should continue supporting the centre at Susa and its extension farmers on a low key basis while concentrating more resources on other areas.

8). BUILDERS AND BUILDINGS. With a commitment to give all our centres a Nursery and a Piggery, we can anticipate a substantial building program. Hitherto, policy has been to assist the communities to realise their own programmes by providing the resources which are beyond their means. They build by their own standards and Tiyeni supplies roofing materials etc. This has worked reasonably well. The Honga nursery school was built three years ago by members of the group with walls of single brick thickness and mud mortar. The fabric of the building is still in good
shape (picture), though termites have got into one section of the roof. (Repairs will be effected by the school committee of Honga group).

_**Susa** nursery is in a similar state. However the piggery under construction at _Matuli_ is a near disaster! The building work is being done by a local builder, a member of the group, and supervision by Tiyeni staff has been inadequate—they have their hands full with more than 40 extension gardens to contour and mark out. As a result, when I visited, the walls were being built with mud mortar and were a foot higher than on the plan while the floor slab had not been extended under the walls leaving an inadequate ant course for walls protection. This is unsatisfactory.

At the nursery school at _Bula_, which will be paid for with the £1,500 contribution from Norwich Lions, steps are being taken to achieve a really professional job. The plan has been modified to meet the need for a two classroom structure and a competent builder from Mzuzu has taken the contract. The community will still make a 25% contribution to the project by providing the bricks and other services. We expect a really sound building.

Mary and Chance are taking an active part in supervising the work at Bula, but it is clear that, with an extensive program of works ahead, a professional Master of Works is going to be required.

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10). **TRANSPORT.** This essential commodity accounts for over half of the cost running Tiyeni (2014 figures). The deployment of two motor cycles has greatly assisted the extension of the programme during 2014. The proposal is to purchase two more for 2015. This will mean that each of the four pods will be able to have one field supervisor living at a convenient location in the pod and one equipped with a motorcycle living in Mzuzu in touch with the office.

We continue to rely to some extent on hired transport (taxis) Mary drives a hard bargain with car owners in an effort to keep costs down. This is easy at the present time as most taxis in Mzuzu are standing idle due to the fact that few can afford to hire them. But the result is predictable: frequent breakdowns due to poor maintenance.

11). **CONCLUSION.** This report has been written during the latter part of the dry season (though there have been some heavy showers in Mzuzu), and the gardens have not yet been planted (15th Dec.). However rains can be expected in due course, and with the rain, the landscape will be transformed. Tiyeni farmers in particular will be watching their crops coming to fruition—often on land where harvests had previously been dwindling. Trustees who can spare the time in the February to April period, should visit Malawi and share the gratification of our staff and the farmers as they see the improvement in people’s lives which has been achieved with Tiyeni’s assistance.

JC 19th Dec 2014.