

MALAWI

Hope of becoming a medical doctor restored

For the first time in two weeks, 12-year-old Bina Amadu manages a smile, knowing that his dream of becoming a medical doctor is not far-fetched. Today, Bina has hope for his future as he watches the men put up the framed tent that will now serve as his new school. Torn between helping and watching, Bina circles the tent instead. Watching him from afar, one would think he was the supervisor; talking to him however, one realizes he just wants to make sure that nothing goes wrong.

Not even a call for lunch from his mother moves Bina from the site. He looks at her, as if debating whether to go or not. He finally answers that he will have his lunch after the construction is finished. He moves to the other side paying no attention to his now frantic mother. Bina obviously has more important issues to attend to than lunch.

Bina Amadu has always wanted to become a medical doctor from the time he was nine and suffered from malaria. The doctor who treated him inspired him to become a doctor and confided in him the easiest way of becoming a doctor. Three years later, his dream remains the same. Bina knows that the secret to being a good doctor is working hard in class.

“If I don’t go to school, I cannot become a doctor. Now that we have a new school, I can work hard to become one,” says Bina.

Today, his dream is closer as he watches his new school being put together. Just like nine other schools in the area, Kaombe Junior Primary School was washed away after heavy rains and flash flooding. Nsanje District, at the lower tip of southern Malawi, experiences floods when the country’s largest river, the Shire, breaks its banks following heavy rains and runoff from hilly areas.

This meant that over 1,000 children from different schools in southern Malawi were unable to go to school. Some 22,000 households were affected by these floods, losing in the process houses, livestock and crops. With UNICEF’s support, most of these schools will reopen and the households will get an emergency pack.

“Getting children back to school after a disaster is part of returning the children’s lives to normal,” says UNICEF Representative in Malawi, Aida Girma.

The new Kaombe Junior Primary School is made of two framed tents, provided by UNICEF as an interim measure to ensure that, even in this emergency, children still have access to education. Classes will be held in shifts to ensure that all pupils can attend. The school has 400 pupils living within a radius of 40 km. The nearest primary school is too far away for the children to walk to. Without this intervention, many would have simply dropped out.

“When they drop out, it is hard to convince them to return to school. The girls would have been married off, and the boys working and earning money,” explains the Headmaster of Kaombe Junior Primary School, Winston Chakufa.

In a country where half the population lives on less than a dollar a day, choices have to be made on whether to send a boy or a girl to school. Most parents would rather see the boy gainfully employed and contributing to the family. The girl on the other hand would be married off. In Malawi, 40 per cent of all marriages involve one partner under the age of 18. If not supported, emergency situations like these are a trigger for child labour and early marriages.

This intervention therefore will make it possible for children like Bina to realize their dreams.

UNICEF has also supported the affected 22,000 households with emergency supplies so that families can start afresh. Supplies include tents for shelter, hurricane lamps, jerrycans to carry water, plastic buckets, chlorine and soap. Extra supplies have also been distributed countrywide to all areas that normally experience flooding in the rainy season to ensure that, should it happen again, women and children do not suffer.