

# 5. MALAWI

(30 December to 14 January 2011)

## 5.1. Hard at Work (Linda; Malawi; January 2011)

We see every single day African men and women go about their business. They live their lives industriously. They work from early in the morning till late at night. On hillsides they carve out pieces of land to plow, to plant, to tend and to harvest. From waters they lure all sorts to catch, to collect, to preserve and to dispatch. Along roadsides, they briskly cart and carry as much as can possibly be attached to bicycles, to carts and to trucks. At markets they bellow specials, haggle in whispers and hope to return with empty baskets and full pockets.

I read that 65% of Africans rely on subsistence farming to make a living. And we see it. Women bend at the hips and work lands that seem too flat and hillsides that seem too steep. Men propel their bicycles from tiny paths and swerve onto tar roads in front of us with huge loads for markets near and far.

And this, day after weary day, despite a lack of material possessions, higher education and a whole bunch of opportunities and goods we take for granted.

### *Why is it that we rarely see these images of Africa?*

Yes, pictures of a starving toddler, a weeping mother or a child soldier will leverage charitable millions but it can't do much for the self esteem of all the tireless hard-at-work men, women and children we see all over the place all the time!

I take these photos, but I feel like an intruder in the honest lives of people. I try but I can't bring myself to take a single picture of the thousands of women we see working their fields. Who am I to stop, to snap and to roar off again on my flashy machine! At least these fields belong to her and her and her and her.







## MALAWI

### 5.2. Millions in Lake Malawi (Linda; Malawi; January 2011)

Every evening a multitude of long-boats powered by small engines leave the shores of Lake Malawi. Three traditional dug-outs, together with its own man and a set of silvery paraffin lamps, perch on each long-boat. They head off for the deep center of the lake as the sun sets. The dugouts are left three abreast on the water and fishing net is spun between them. All night long the paraffin lamps lure the tiny kapento fish into the nets.

As the sun rises the long-boats return to collect the dug-outs, the men, and millions of kapento fish. When the nets are empty the boats are full to the brim. Villagers at the lakeside receive the fishermen with cheers and clamour and pay for the kapento by the bucketful. The kapento are immediately spread out on huge netted tables to dry. The next day people throughout Malawi buy dried kapento in small roadside and large city markets.

Our departure from Malawi is affected by a shortage of petrol (insufficient government foreign currency). All pumps in the district are dry and a day or two later even black market sources fade away. We simply leave a little later, but the kapento fishing activities reduce visibly. This devastating 'domino' effect on fishermen, netters, dryers, transporters, sellers seems to be borne quietly.

And oh, please see, the army of black 'petrol' marketers that rise from the tar roads in times of petrol crisis! Young fit men on bicycles strapped high and wide with huge yellow and blue containers filled with petrol. They pedal their petrol from places of supply to places of demand. They free wheel down hills and push up hills. We see them ply their trade throughout Malawi and Tanzania. Just check these guys out ..... *what's not to love!*





### 5.3. An Example set by Mayoka Village (Linda, Malawi, January 2011)

Lucky me! I select Wangari Maathai's 2009 book "The Challenge for Africa" to take on our journey. Kenyan born Wangari Maathai is the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, most specifically, for her Green Belt Movement activities. She provides me with so many insights!

She tells a story of a group of macademia nut farmers in Kenya. Her story reminds me of Naipaul's "A House for Mr. Biswas" or Steinbeck's "Tortilla Flats". These I find amusing, but her story disturbs and haunts me. I suppose because it plays out on our home continent.

Here is her story:

*'The group of macademia nut farmers sold their nuts into the Japanese market through a Kenyan processor who appears not to be corrupt. The nuts bring a very good price per kilogram and the farmers should be earning a decent income. They are however unhappy and approach me for assistance. They explain that because there is so much potential money to be made in macademia nuts, the farmers' neighbours, who are also farmers, had begun to steal them. Macademia nuts need to be fully ripe to be ready for processing, so farmers wait until they fall to the ground. However, the farmers told me, some people had started shaking the trees before the nuts were ripe. Then others had begun climbing the trees and picking the nuts before they were ripe enough even to be shaken from the tree. Finally, the greed became so enormous that some*

*individuals had simply crept onto the farmers' land at night, cut down the trees, and hauled them away, so they could harvest every single nut for themselves. Of course, because the nuts were not ready, the thieves needed to find ways to make the nuts look ripe. I was told they would boil the nuts with tea leaves to change their colour. But when the nuts arrived at quality control in the market outside the country, they were discovered to have rotted, and the middleman told the farmers he didn't want any more macademia nuts from them.'*

Wangari Maathai goes on to explain:

*These farmers have little or no knowledge about the crops that they grow. They have little or no formal education and therefore maybe functionally or actually illiterate. If they are able to read or write, they do not have access to written materials or the internet in order to inform themselves about the crops that are their primary source of income. They may never eat or drink what they harvest, since they do not process what they are selling. Their government makes little effort to put in place an extension service to educate the growers, or to empower them to advocate for themselves, through a collective, in the international marketplace. What keeps these*

*macademia nut growers in poverty, amid the riches of a valuable nut, is not only the failure of the government to protect them from local exploiters but also their failure to understand the consequences of their self-destructive actions.*

Her story lingers on and on and then we stumble upon a hearty and heartening example!

We stay at all types of camp sites, budget hotels and lodges but *Mayoka Village* stands out head and shoulders!

We find Mayoka Village at Nkhata Bay, three-quarters of the way up Lake Malawi. It is a tourist lodge owned on a cooperative basis. In 1999 a young UK couple approached the local land-holders of this very steep but breathtakingly beautiful site with an idea.

Their cooperative starts off with 21 people, of which 18 remain active. Eight traditionally built mud and stick houses, with a tiny kitchen and bar, slowly evolve into 25 chalets with extensive communal areas all in an attractive 3 tone of stone, wood and reed. Today, the cooperative has 52 members; of which 8 hold a financial stake, some are permanent residents, others are family members and employed, with an occasional traveler that volunteers for free board and lodging. Each of these 52 persons, stop us each day to shake our hands. They ask after our day, offer help and suggest fun things to do.

***Their sense of belonging asserts them! Their sense of pride arrests us!***

Mr.Kallanje and his wife, Eavis, are the parents of Mayoka. He has laid every single stone in the village. Eavis is an amazing chef and has a bevy of girls eager to learn, to experiment and

to please. There is a young wizard behind the bar peddling and swirling his cocktails. Mr. Finlayson Nyirenda comes from a family of chiefs and at night tells his stories and sells his delicious chocolates to sated dinners. The UK couple, Catherine and Greg, mentor, administer and market quietly.

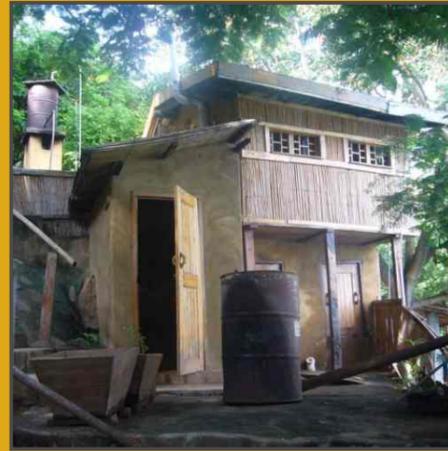
Our days are full of activities 'on the house'. Michnus, Elsebie, Harry and I have no need to leave the village. Captain 'Jack' captures us for a whole half day of laughter on his long-boat. He whistles and feeds his fish eagles; 'Tony Blair' and 'Condaleeza Rice'. He coaxes us to throw ourselves down a 7m cliff into the lake (and I did!). He monkeys around on a tree with a mango in his mouth and dives with much ado into the waters. He creates the space for a local long jumper, a singer and a poet. On other days we snorkel, we wobble around on traditional dug-outs, we play with local children on the beach, we enjoy their kitchens, their vegetable and herb gardens, their mango trees, the hot water donkeys, outside showers and the compost toilets.

Mayoka Village provides a better way of live for all its wonderful members; homes for their families, school fees for their children, and most importantly a brighter future and perhaps even more importantly a good example to the rest of us.

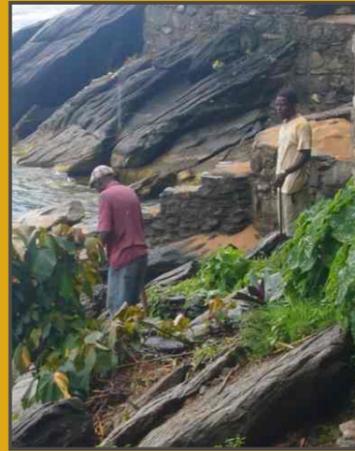
We see and understand, Wangari Matthai.



*The chalets.*



*The communal ablutions complete with compost toilet, outdoor shower and water tanks.*



*This man has laid every single stone!*



*The Chocolate Seller.*



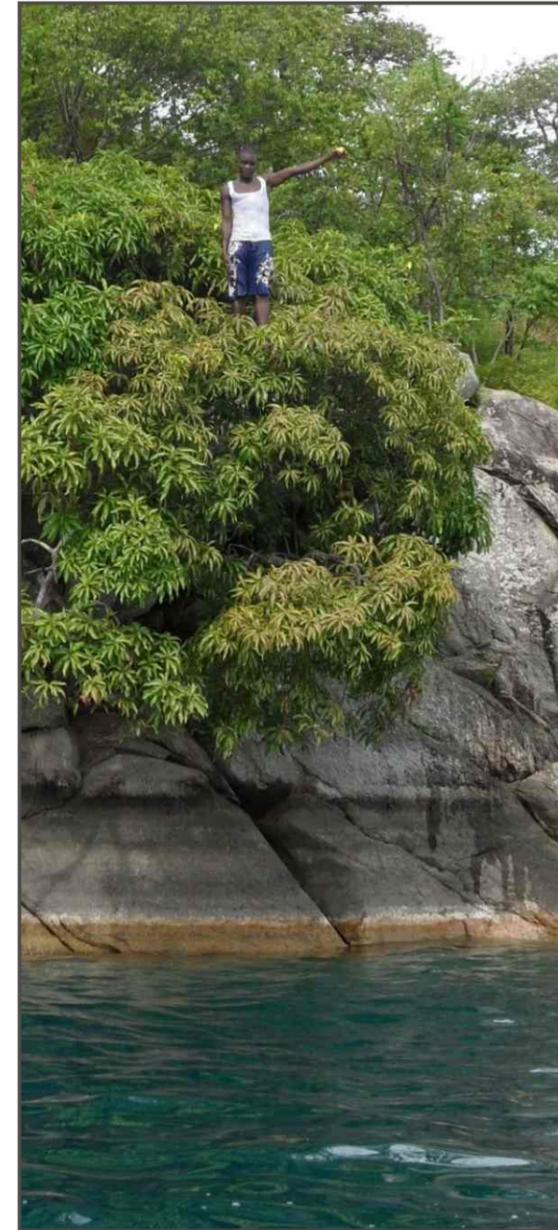
*Dolce Vita.*



*Young chefs in the making.*



*Uhm...*



*He illustrates from a tree.*



*The entertaining Captain Jack.*



*A traditional long-jump game.*



*Some of us follow from a rocky ledge. This was just before I made the decision to abandon my nose.*