

**Network of Organizations for Vulnerable
and
Orphaned Children (NOVOC)**



Boy in rural Malawi

Annual Report 2009

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“Children in Difficult Situations are the Reason We Exist”



Typical rural village scene, Malawi

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	4
Who are we?	4
Our Mission	4
Our Vision	4
Our Objectives	4
Key Achievements	5
Thanks to...	5
Activity Reports	6
Economically empowering women	6
What we achieved in 2009	6
Challenges and Learnings	6
Networking and capacity building	7
What we achieved in 2009	7
Challenges and Learnings	7
Increased access to quality education for OVCs	8
What we achieved in 2009	8
Challenges and Learnings	8
Better psychosocial support for OVCs.....	9
What we achieved in 2009	9
Challenges and Learnings	10
Conclusion - Looking Forward to 2010	11
Ongoing projects	11
Ongoing challenges	11
New for 2010	11
Appendix 2 - Acronyms.....	12

Executive Summary

Welcome to NOVOC's 2009 Annual Report. Here, you will find information on our projects and key achievements, as well as our challenges and learnings for 2009. Please explore our website www.novocmalawi.org for more information on what we do.

I was appointed National Coordinator for NOVOC in 2007 and am excited by the progress we've been realising since then. Our success can be measured both in terms of donors approaching us to facilitate programs in Malawi and also the success of our member organizations on the ground with OVCs.

I would like to begin this year's Report by celebrating some of our key achievements in 2009. One of our principal objectives is to empower communities to help themselves. This is real sustainable development! It follows that we view empowering achievements as particularly important.

Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) are best practice for economic empowerment of rural communities in Malawi. They operate as 'community banks', where community members deposit funds (no matter how little) and can borrow money to set up small businesses to generate income for themselves, their households and their communities.

We trained a small number of village agents in VSLA methodology, who facilitated formation of over 100 VSLAs across the country. Savings deposited as a result varied from MK10,000 to over MK300,000 per VSLA. This translated into supporting 7,000-10,000 children.

Our Advocacy campaign resulted in the Malawi Government, through the National AIDS Commission, increasing its support for primary school education for OVCs from only 500 in 2007 to over 12,000 in 2009.

We developed the NOVOC Stamp of Approval, which is about ensuring OVC service providers are operating to best practice in areas such as accountability, transparency and caring for the children. Right now, we are consulting widely on the Stamp and running pilots before we seek endorsement from the Malawi OVC Technical Working Group.

I've included a section on our ongoing projects and new projects for 2010 towards the end of this Report. As you can see, we are working on a number of ground-changing projects that will help empower Malawi communities to help themselves and change the face of Malawi society.

The quality of care we give to children, particularly vulnerable children, determines the future of our society.

*Cuthbert
Nyirenda*

Cuthbert Nyirenda

National Coordinator,
NOVOC



Novoc staff. Back row, left to right: Wanja Ngure, Clement Silungwe, Josephine Mapilo. Front row. left to right: Cuthbert Nyirenda. Joshua Ainabvona. Monica Changanamuno.

Introduction

Welcome to NOVOC's 2009 Annual Report. We have aimed to provide you with concise information on our projects and key achievements for 2009. For more information on what we are doing right now, as well as past projects, please explore our website www.novocmalawi.org.

We all become better at what we do by successfully facing challenges, identifying learnings and integrating them into our practices. This Report focuses on our successes and also our key learnings – things we have learnt to do better over the past year. Indeed, as you will see, some of our key successes have come through overcoming and learning from challenges.

Who are we?

NOVOC is a non-government, umbrella organization based in Lilongwe aimed at helping Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) in Malawi. Our main roles are:

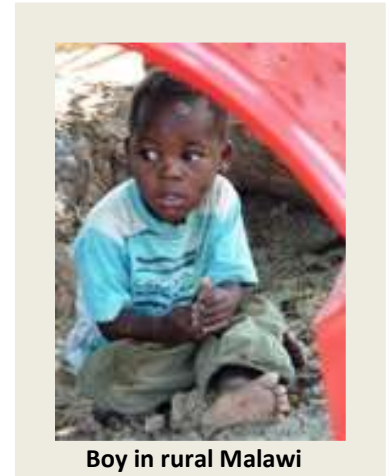
- network OVC service providers, building their capacity, thus improving the quality of services to OVCs;
- lobby Government to better deal with OVC issues;
- information on our other roles can be found on our website, www.novocmalawi.org

Our Mission

NOVOC exists to promote, assist and empower individuals and organizations involved with the care and support of orphans and vulnerable children so as to create and increase services and thereby improve their quality of life.

Our Vision

The Malawi OVC population provided with adequate holistic support and care in order to effectively integrate them into the economically productive segment of the population.



Our Objectives



Girl in rural Malawi

- Increase coordination, collaboration and communication between OVC stakeholders and service providers;
 - Government Departments
 - Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)
 - Community Based Organizations (CBOs)
 - Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and
 - individuals involved in OVC work

- Facilitate information sharing between OVC stakeholders and service providers
- Advocate for effective policies and practices in OVC care, including access to essential services, integrated and comprehensive community-based support
- Build and enhance the capacity of those involved in OVC care

Key Achievements

One of our principal objectives is to empower communities to help themselves. We do this by working with CBOs, FBOs and NGOs at grassroots level around Malawi. By helping these organizations to better help their local communities, we increase the quality of services provided to Malawi OVCs. This is real sustainable development! And so, we view empowering achievements as particularly important.

Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) operate as 'community banks', where community members deposit funds (no matter how little) and can borrow money for small businesses to generate income for themselves, their households and their communities. This is why they are best practice for economic empowerment of rural communities.

- We targeted 2 village agents from each of 16 selected CBOs in VSLA methodology. These agents then facilitated forming over 100 VSLAs across the country. On average, each VSLA has 15-20 members, which means an estimated 1,500 - 2,000 households have greater access to finance. Savings varied from MK10,000 to over MK300,000 per VSLA. This translated into better supporting 7,000-10,000 children.
- We separately targeted women who lead households caring for OVCs. Almost 1,000 women joined together to form 48 VSLAs. Savings generated ranged between MK12,000 and MK120,000 per VSLA. This helped around 5,000 OVCs and their households.

We advocate to influence government and other stakeholders to promote national programmes, practices and strategies that respond adequately to OVC needs at all levels. In particular, we believe that funds should be allocated in the Malawi national budget to provide for OVC education support. Our efforts have contributed to, the Malawi Government, through the National AIDS Commission (NAC), increasing its support for secondary school education for OVCs from only 500 in 2007 to over 12,000 in 2009.

We developed the NOVOC Stamp of Approval, about ensuring that OVC service providers are operating to best practice in areas such as accountability, transparency and caring for the children's physical and psychological needs. Our documentation includes a concept brief and assessment tools. Right now, we are consulting widely on the project and running pilots before we seek approval from the Malawi OVC Technical Working Group.

Thanks to...

Our partners' support makes us more effective at what we do – help others help OVCs. Special thanks to these partners, who contributed to our successful projects:

- Raising Malawi Trust – networking & capacity building
- UNICEF - strengthening the capacity of service providers to improve psychosocial support to OVCs, specifically through Journey of Life
- STOP AIDS NOW! - scaling up psychosocial support services for OVCs
- World Vision International - strengthening psychosocial programs within our networks
- Oxfam Joint Program - increased access to quality education for OVCs (advocacy)
- Cordaid - economically empowering women



Providing children's toys & learning materials to Kamamina CBO

Activity Reports

NOVOC is involved in a number of key projects or programs. This is a brief update on our key projects for 2009, including the key challenges we faced and lessons learnt ('learnings'). For more information on past, current and future projects, please consult our website www.novocmalawi.org

Economically empowering women



Woman in rural Malawi

This project aims to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on OVC households by empowering women to better care for, support and protect OVCs. It does this by improving:

- household economic status of 180 OVC caregivers
- capacity of 6 women's groups to assist care givers and the OVCs under their care, including appropriate psychosocial support

What we achieved in 2009

Trained 72 women's group leaders in leadership and governance skills. As a result, the 6 women's groups:

- revised their management structure, developed clear mission statements and roles and responsibilities stipulated in their constitutions and introduced activity plans

- conducted self assessment exercises to identify gaps in financial and economic management skills
- adopted the formation of VSLAs as an approach for improving the economic status of local community members
 - 12 community members trained as facilitators in VSLAs. Their role is to train women's group members in VSLA methodology and facilitate VSLA formation
 - about 120 women now access small loans through the 48 VSLAs established - 43 in Nsanje, 2 in Kasungu and 3 in Chiradzulu, with average membership of 20 per VSLA

Organizational self assessment exercises to identify gaps in financial and economic management skills will be carried into the next project as it takes time to successfully complete the exercises and increase skills.

Budget: EURO 75,316 Cost: EURO 76,600

Challenges and Learnings

We learnt that each organization is unique and therefore tailored our needs assessment individually for each organization. This helps ensure a long term approach for sustainability for both the CBOs and the communities they serve. For example, different models for microfinance are better suited to some communities than others.

Sometimes, funds allocated are insufficient to cover training for JoL facilitators. We have learnt to provide community-based training in CBOs that mobilise communities to improve the lives of their children.

The challenges and learnings related to VLSAs (page 7) and JoL (page 10) also apply here.

Networking and capacity building

NOVOC's networking and capacity building program is designed to benefit our members, who work at grassroots level in local communities across Malawi. By facilitating networking and capacity building, our members are empowered to build and aim for best practice in OVC care. They learn from each other's experiences and share their own experiences.

We help ensure that the various services provided to OVCs by individual NOVOC members are incremental and complementary instead of being duplicative and isolated.

What we achieved in 2009

Set up and oriented District Networks, made up of local community organizations, in 4 districts (Chitipa, Nsanje, Mulanje and Salima)

- District Networks held quarterly meetings, attended by an average 30-35 District Network members
- quarterly meetings led to an increase in Network membership by 13%

District Networks helped organizations better help OVCs:

- 146 OVC-headed households linked to donor partners for house construction
- 12 CBOs in Mulanje provided with 20 cows for livelihood support
- 25 CBOs and FBOs in Nsanje linked to NAC funding for HIV/AIDs interventions

District Networks improved the skills-base of organizations working with OVCs:

- advocacy training for 24 District Network members and District Social Welfare Officers
- 2 'exchange of lessons learned' workshops conducted with participants (chiefs, Network members, District Assembly Officials) from targeted CBOs in all districts
- organization-specific finance management, organization management, project management, resource mobilization and monitoring and evaluation training to 132 of 192 CBO members

See also the mentions of VSLAs and the NOVOC stamp of approval under 'key achievements' in this Report.

Budget: USD 74,207 Cost: USD 75,000

Challenges and Learnings

We do not currently link direct support (eg providing livestock, seeds or other farming inputs to individuals) with VSLAs. To ensure that support is connected back to the community and provides opportunities for income generating activities to grow, all direct support should be linked with VSLA membership. In addition, VSLA training should include business skills. This will allow VSLAs and their communities to grow faster and expand the range of income generating activities engaged in by communities.



Volunteers at Lingadzi CBO

Increased access to quality education for OVCs

This project aims to ensure that by 2010 OVCs in Malawi have better access to education. We are doing this by influencing government and other players to promote national programmes, practices and strategies that respond adequately to OVC needs. In particular, we believe that funds should be allocated in the Malawi national budget to provide for OVC education support, through bursaries and waiving user fees for OVCs.

What we achieved in 2009

The Malawi Government, through the National AIDS Commission, increased its support for secondary school education for OVCs from only 500 in 2007 to over 12,000 in 2009.

We commissioned a report on the hidden costs of 'free primary education' in 2008. During 2008-09, we distributed the report and ran information sessions around the country. As a result, many school management committees have realised that sending OVCs away from school contributes towards OVCs' difficulties accessing education. They are now using other means to secure payment of school fees.

Rather than expecting others to solve issues, many districts now deal directly with OVC access to education. Eg, Kasungu District Assembly has allocated from its revenue collection MK500,000 to OVC bursary support in 2010.

We visited 4 school management committees from the districts of rural Blantyre and Mwanza to monitor progress on their commitment to waive OVC school fees. We were happy to see that:

- most schools no longer expelled OVCs for not paying fees
- school-fees for OVCs is being discussed by head teachers and school management committees

Budget: GBP 24,208 Spent: GBP 24,208

Challenges and Learnings

It is challenging to work across government in this area. As our experience in this domain increases, so too does our understanding of how government works and how best to work with them. We learnt:

- Unclear policies are unlikely to be implemented. Often, key individuals across relevant portfolios interpret policies differently, with varied understandings of what needs to be done for OVCs.
- To back our lobbying efforts up with more detailed statistics on government operations and funds allocation. For example, some departments believe NAC funds are sufficient to meet OVC requirements. However, our budget tracking and analysis shows NAC funds benefit less than ¼ of the targeted 100,000 OVCs annually.
- Government planning and spending follows cycles. As we build experience in lobbying and advocacy, we have come to know these cycles better. We have learnt to start advocating for funds allocation early enough to influence planning both at District Assembly and national levels.
- That government tools for needs assessment leave out OVC needs, meaning their basic rights are not met. Next year, we will advocate for these tools to be redesigned to better incorporate OVC needs.

Our advocacy and lobbying experience led us to develop and use a new strategy for lobbying key influential people. The new strategy should help us better mobilize political commitment (action and funding) among key decision makers in government, donors and other stakeholders to support OVC education.



Better psychosocial support for OVCs

This project links to the Malawi government's National Plan of Action for OVCs. We are working with partners to scale up psychosocial support services for OVCs in Malawi, by increasing the capacity of stakeholders to effectively provide holistic care (psychosocial support, care and protection) to OVCs.

The project aims to:

- increase networking and exchange of experiences/best practices between and among participating organizations and beyond
- create a learning environment among OVC service providers to increase understanding of psychosocial support issues, strategies and interventions by OVC service providers
- increase integration and quality of psychosocial support into OVC-related initiatives

We use 'Journey of Life' (JoL) to strengthen the psychosocial capacity of service providers. JoL is all about communities taking responsibility for themselves, rather than relying on government and/or donors. A simple tool, it mobilizes the community to work as a team towards meeting children's needs holistically, making use of locally available resources. It promotes networking and collaboration; involved organizations see each other as partners, rather than competitors.

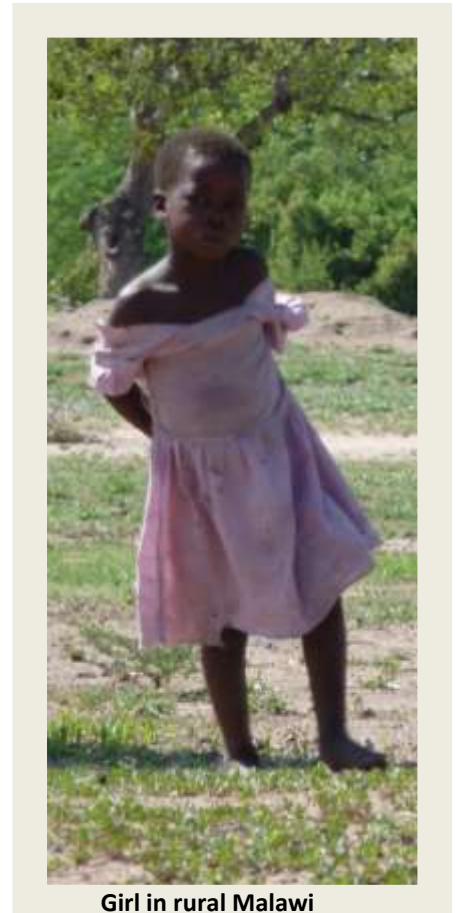
What we achieved in 2009

We increased networks between psychosocial support providers.

- coordinating unit for psychosocial support providers facilitates meetings and experience-sharing between facilitators and trainers
- 3 district networks established and are meeting to share best practices in providing psychosocial support to OVCs
 - increased number of stakeholders with capacity to develop, implement and monitor psychosocial support
 - database of psychosocial support facilitators and trainers
- an additional 3 district networks have been established
- conducted baseline survey on psychosocial issues and strategies for OVCs in selected districts
- conducted a survey on psychosocial support mainstreaming
- facilitated participation of individuals in HIV/AIDS Annual Conferences

JoL is a powerful tool. Using face to face interaction between partners, it facilitates sharing, joint learning and innovation. The results are inspiration and fresh ideas. Meeting as a whole group and sub-groups strengthens and sustains the energy of the partnership. The community workshops:

- provide a forum for people to discuss important issues affecting them and their children, including property grabbing, CBO management, child rights, etc.
- encourage meaningful participation by young people, who leave feeling empowered, with a sense of self-worth that leads them to become active, effective change agents



Girl in rural Malawi

- assemble people of different status, backgrounds and ages towards improving OVC conditions
- are an excellent advocacy tool - communities are now lobbying for better services eg additional teachers in schools that had shortages, medical services, etc.
- build self esteem and bring transformation to communities
- help those running Children's Corners and CBCCs better help children - children should not just play but they should explain lessons learnt to the children after play

Through JoL:

- 16,404 OVCs' psychosocial needs were better met, including 7,612 through children's corners and 8,792 through Community Based Care Centres (CBCC)
- 30 community members from 6 districts trained in using JoL for psychosocial support – 20 were certified as JoL Community Facilitators
- 1 regional workshop conducted targeting 6 districts, resulting in 43 JoL community workshops & 90 OVC service providers who now use JoL
 - 800 OVC caregivers reached
 - 134 Children's corners strengthened/established
 - 100 CBCC strengthened/established

Budget: USD 413,851 Spent: USD 147,524



Challenges and Learnings

Demand for JoL workshops exceeds the number of trained facilitators. When rolling out similar initiatives (eg Fountain of Life see New for 2010 below) in the future, we can better gauge demand and train more facilitators.

JoL facilitators sometimes confront difficulties in obtaining transport to venues and may need to use personal resources. We have learnt to use facilitators from CBOs, as they are more flexible and open to being accommodated within the community they are training.

Sometimes we experience delays in receiving information, funds from partners. This issue, common to donor-funded organisation, often delays implementation. We are currently waiting on the final JoL manual – unfortunately, our facilitators must still use the draft manual with its errors.

Sometimes, feedback from participating organizations is delayed and we need to follow them up for responses. In the future, we will request feedback before completing workshops.

JoL has taught us that we can conduct community workshops without paying allowances to participants. This has additional advantages:

- communities take ownership by mobilizing themselves and their own resources to support workshops
- more workshops are being conducted with fewer resources
- we are reaching more people, assisting more OVCs, as is no limit to how many people can attend workshops

Conclusion - Looking Forward to 2010

As you can see, we have had a busy year at NOVOC. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our staff, our partners and our Board for their hard work and support.

Working with communities and OVCs is a process of continual learning. We look forward to helping more local organizations help more OVCs in 2010, through new initiatives and putting our learnings into practice.

Ongoing projects

We continue to implement these ongoing projects in 2010 and beyond:

- Advocating for increased access to education for OVCs
- Empowering women to better care for, support and protect OVCs
- Working with local organizations for better psychosocial support for OVCs
- Networking and capacity building our members to build and aim for best practice in OVC care
- Journey of Life community workshops conducted in all communities across Malawi to help them work as a team towards meeting children's needs holistically, making use of locally available resources

Ongoing challenges

Malawi, one of the world's poorest countries, is a challenging environment, which is what makes our work so rewarding. In 2010, we continue to work with:

- High HIV/AIDS infection rates in Malawi (approx 14%) exacerbate the effects of dire poverty and increase the number of OVCs and child-headed households
- Many of our member organizations have good intentions but few skills and little knowledge in providing quality, holistic care and support to OVCs
- Downwards trends in funds disbursement from some donors due to global challenges make it difficult to realize some planned activities. Programs and strategies are frequently re-designed and then not completed due to frequent funding cuts, often mid-project
- Quality programs require qualified, enthusiastic staff to ensure they are carried out. Unfortunately, many donor partners set administration costs at an unrealistically low level. This makes it difficult for NOVOC to recruit staff at the required calibre to run our programs and increases stress to current staff
- National policies relating to OVCs are often implemented very slowly
- Current systems that should better protect OVCs are often not enforced by government authorities

New for 2010

- Fountain of Life – to assist victims of rape and sexual assault (see www.novocmalawi.org)
- Increasing access to early childhood development services for OVCs, through community organizations
- Social cash transfer – increasing government capacity to make social transfers to ultrapoor households in Chipita.



Children in rural Malawi

Appendix 1 - Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
AWP	Action Work Plan
CBCC	Community Based Childcare Centre
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CCC	Community Care Coalition
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FBO	Faith Based Organizations
GBP	Great British Pounds £
HBC	Home Base Care
HIV	Human Immune-deficiency Virus
IGA	Income Generating Activities
INGO	International Non Governmental Organization
JoL	Journey of Life (Psychosocial Support Program)
KCCF	Kaballah Centre for Charitable Foundation
LNGO	Local Non Governmental Organization
MIM	Malawi Institute of Management
MK	Malawi Kwacha (MK150 is approximately USD1)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAC	National AIDS Commission
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NOVOC	Network of Organizations for Vulnerable and Orphaned Children
OVC	Orphans and other Vulnerable Children
PLWA	People Living with HIV and AIDS
TOT	Training of Trainers
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
USD	United States Dollars \$ (MK150 is approximately USD1)
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Associations
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas