

Malawi Children



The Childhood That Isn't

Childhood has not always existed as it does in some cultures today. The idea of "childhood" started 200 years ago in Europe during the Industrial Revolution. An increase in child labor, and harsh abuses followed. The Factory Acts of 1802-1878 ended the abuse and brought an emphasis on the sanctity of the child. This has remained in Western societies since that time, and what developed is called "childhood."

Intense Labor

In sub-Saharan Africa, few children enjoy a carefree time, like that enjoyed in western nations. Most village children must take on adult responsibilities as early as 5 or 6 years of age.

Intense labor is a hallmark of Malawi families, and children work along side their parents in order for the family unit to survive the harsh living conditions. Only a small percent of children are able to attend school.

Absence of Toys

There are few toys, and children must be creative in making their own from cast off wire, plastic bags, sticks, tire rims, or whatever they can find with which to amuse themselves. There is, however, little time for recreation, so a few playthings can last a long time. Village children seldom celebrate their birthdays, and other holidays such as Christmas are not part of their lives.

Medical Needs Unheeded

Children are malnourished and sickness comes easily. Most have serious bouts of malaria several times a year, and almost none see a doctor.

Food is Short

Food in the village is most often in short supply and children are often hungry and malnourished.

With families of 6 or 7 children, the young ones are pressed into service as caretakers for their siblings, and it is common to see young girls carrying younger siblings on their backs. They learn to carry large water containers, and wood on their heads, and at the same time carrying farming tools in their hands. Boys thatch roof, weed gardens, and work at any job done by the older men. Many children have only the clothes on their backs.

Yet the children of Malawi have some things that are lacking in modern western nations. They have a strong family bond, a close-knit community, and a link to their past. They may one day move away from their home village, but their "home village" will stay in their hearts all of their lives.



The Malawi Project

For more information about the children of Malawi, go to: www.malawiproject.org or email: info@malawiproject.org