

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



WELCOME

Toward the end of 2020, I sat in my office chair amazed at the number of phone calls I missed in just 15 minutes. Five different numbers were trying to get hold of me. Before I finished dialing one of the numbers to return the call, another call came through and I knew that something is wrong.

The caller at the end of the line sobbed, choked, and narrated that one of our dear friends has passed on to COVID-19. It felt surreal. I was mad and scared at the same time. Immediately, I stood up ready to pack my bag to go home – it is over, COVID-19 is ready to devour. Suddenly, I heard a knock, my colleague informed me that schools are closed indefinitely due to the pandemic.

Then it dawned on me that I cannot pack my bag. We needed to do something.

We convened as a team and started the brainstorming process on what we can do to continue educating children, during school closure. Everything seemed impossible! We prayed, researched, thought, read, and sought opinions – the majority were clueless.

Then, a eureka moment came – providing support to the government-led radio education program. Find out the challenges and outcomes of this program on page 13.

2020 was a year when we were as true to our mission as ever before. We educated children. We trained teachers. We collaborated. We pivoted. We grew.

The experience helped us in crafting our 2021 - 2022 Strategic plan. Take a look at our strategic goals on page 14.

Our special mention to our funding partners for your flexibility to repurpose and add more grants to respond to the pandemic. Another mention to our allies – the Ministry of Education, Communities, and fellow NGOs for the trust, collaboration, and learning.

Thank you Rays of Hope Staff, Volunteers, and the Board of Trustees for technical and emotional support. Without you, there is no Rays of Hope.

Last, but not least – we thank God for His provision and protection.

Willie Mpasuka
Executive Director



ABOUT RAYS OF HOPE

In Malawi, the transition rate from primary school to secondary (high-school) is only at 35%, and out of those, only 8% will make a jump into higher education. Also, the student-classroom ratio is high, standing at 116:1, which in many cases a teacher teaches 116 students at once.

We exist to transform Malawi by equipping teachers and educate children in public schools. Our program areas are teacher training, remedial lessons, provision of bursaries/scholarships, and we run an excellent high-school for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We strive to nurture children and youth and empower them with abilities essential for life management, academic excellence, spiritual development to become leaders in their society. We use a transformative education model to build teachers' capacity, support learners, and provide financial inclusion solutions to youth for a productive life.

Our **vision** is that every child and youth access transformative education.



BOARD MEMBERS

Our Board of Trustees has become a circle of mentors, a well of wisdom. They are a group of volunteers, who actively oversee the governance of the organization. They ensure we continue to exist and are accountable to our communities including, funding partners.

This group is the second and third generation of the Board of Trustees since we started. It brings skillsets in marketing, law, communication, corporate networking, project management, strategic planning, and execution. We are forever indebted to their sacrifices and immense contribution to the mission. Here is our Board of Trustees.



Gilford
Kadzakumanja



Madalo
Samati



Ronald
Chimchere



Pilirani
Chuma



Emmanuel
Gondwe



Bayana
Chunga

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Willie Mpasuka

Executive Director

John Zakeyo

Programs Manager

Chikondi Kampani

Finance & Admin. Manager

Along with the Rays of Hope Academy Principal, 4 teachers, 3 coordinators, 14 program officers, 3 supporting staff, 2 interns and 3 volunteers.

OUR APPROACH & KEY GOALS



Academic Innovation

Run after-school programs across 10 primary schools in Blantyre district and work with **800** students

Train **550** teachers in Blantyre rural to reduce technical gaps

Maintain **95%** primary school completion rate among the 10 targeted primary schools in Blantyre.



Academic Inclusion

Support **175** secondary school students with bursaries that will guarantee access to secondary school education in various schools in Blantyre.

Run coaching and mentoring activities with **150** secondary schools on our bursary program to remove the non-financial barriers to access secondary school education. Activities include Sexual and Reproductive Health, entrepreneurship, and leadership.



Economic Integration

Reach out to **50** young people with activities meant to increase their ability to engage in economic activities through entrepreneurship training and soft loans.



Rays of Hope Academy

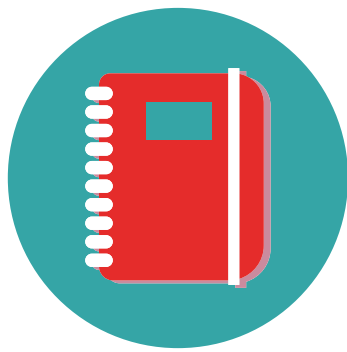
Enrol **20** students in Form 1 by 1 October 2020



Get the school registered with the government of Malawi and ISAMA (Independent Schools Association of Malawi)

WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2020

As explained throughout this report, Rays of Hope needed to pivot to achieve our mission within the confines of COVID restrictions on schools. We are thankful to God and proud to have achieved the following:



Supplied and integrated our remedial lessons/material in 40 primary schools to benefit 20,000 students



Supported 800 students with remote low-tech initiative in 10 primary schools.



We trained 1800 teachers in numeracy, literacy, management of large classes, and inclusive education in Zomba, Blantyre (Rural), Ntchisi, and Mchinji.



85% pass rate in the national standardized exams in primary school by our beneficiaries in the afterschool initiative



15% improvement in literacy and numeracy by 15,000 students in 40 primary schools in Blantyre Rural through our remedial materials and teacher support.

ANNUAL PROGRESS

Community Update

The Academic Innovation Program has an afterschool initiative that physically meets.

Due to the pandemic, physical meetings were not possible. The community became quite supported as usual in the pivot of our programming. We introduced the Low-Tech Remedial Initiative that relied on phone calls, SMS, handbooks, and workbooks. The process was supported by 44 teachers from 10 schools, and 200 parents for 593 students who were part of the initiative from two locations – Machinjiri and Chilomoni. The pivot would not have been possible without the participation of the tutors, teachers, and parents. Our tutors integrated faith as a psychosocial solution for learners to have hope.

New Programs / Systems

- Integrated Handbooks and Workbooks

Due to COVID-19, we developed handbooks and workbooks, the former for the teachers and the latter for the learners. The initiative was rolled out in 40 primary schools in Blantyre Rural and Urban targeting 20,000 students. This was done to accelerate learning since the school term was shrunk by three weeks. Our materials were integrated into the lesson delivery by the teachers. At least 15,000 students improved in numeracy and literacy by 15% from the baseline.

- COVID-related Programming

With support from the Save the Children – Sponsorship Program, we carried out several COVID-19-related activities. First, we oriented parents on COVID-19 prevention including their roles on continued learning while pupils were home – 716 parents showed up. Second, when schools reopened, we conducted a mass campaign to 57 primary schools and their catchment areas in Zomba to encourage learners to go back to school after a long COVID-19 break. Third, we supported the government in ensuring that school and community structures are taking up their roles effectively through “social contract”. The exercise took place in 100 primary schools in Zomba.

Partnerships & Advocacy

In 2020 we explored several partnerships through our workbooks and handbooks. First, we are in partnership with Center for Youth and Development – CYD, Fount for Nations, Ladder to Learning, and Jacaranda Foundation. These local organizations used our workbooks and handbooks to accelerate learning when schools reopened after the COVID-19 break. Second, we are in a consortium with CARE Malawi and Micro-Loan that, a project seeks to end child labor in tobacco growing communities in Mchinji and Ntchisi districts. Third, we are at an advanced stage to sign the MOU with the Blantyre Teachers Training College as both parties see the need for collaboration in teacher training.



Rays of Hope Academy

It is quite exciting that we managed to complete one full academic year with 16 students in 9th grade (Form 1)! The feeling is unimaginable. One day I visited the campus to catch up with our principal - I did not find him. As I was about to leave the campus, I saw him signaling me to wait for him.

His first words were, "I am so tired." He explained that he was coming from Brian Sagawa's home - a student on the right. Brian was the most troublesome student at the school and the visit was to work with his parents for him to change. The last attempt before dismissal.

Fast forward to now, Brian is at the top of his class! This is the real definition of our vision - transformative education.

We are excited for Brian; much more animated for the new students who have already started registering to join the school when the COVID-19 break is over.

Team Updates

Rays of Hope's Board of Trustees, Selected members of the team, and the Executive Leadership attended the Organization Capacity Development (OCD) supported and led by Save the Children International. The exercise assesses the capacity of the organization, and we scored very high in many areas but needed more investment and improvement in culture and inclusion especially on organizational policies.

Key Challenges in 2020

- We failed to implement most of our program activities in 2020 due to COVID-19 more especially that schools were closed in March and our interventions are school-based.
- The Government delayed in giving us the permission to pilot our remedial workbooks and handbooks meant to support the interactive radio program.

CLARA'S STORY

Clara Chikuni was a standout student from the moment she joined us back in 2017 as part of the afterschool initiative cohort.

She was the only learner with glasses, but that was just the tip of an iceberg. Her problems were beyond vision.

Being a girl, her father did not believe that she can be successful in her academic; as such, she got intermittent support from the family, which led to her dismal progress in her studies.

Now, before you start to denigrate the father, it may help to understand the Malawi education sector a bit. One spends at least 8 years in primary school. Everyone takes the national standardized examinations in 8th grade before they make a jump into secondary school. The national transition rate between primary and secondary school currently is at 35%, which means that 65% are stuck in primary school or drop out. The majority of those are girls; in fact,

only 6% of the girls complete secondary education.

It makes sense then, that in Malawi, 42% of girls are married before the age of 18. Unfortunately, this is the Malawi that Clara and her family know.



We rise up against this reality. We do not think this is ok. Education should be a right. Education should be accessible equally by both boys and girls. This is one of the reasons we created Rays of Hope – to give hope to girls like Clara through education interventions integrated by the Christian faith. Clara started getting our remedial lessons alongside our biblical counseling, mentorship, and psychosocial support. Slowly her academic performance improved.

Even teachers who cast doubts over her prospects of success started believing in her. It became clear that the education support she was getting from our team was making positive strides.

In 2020, she took the national standardized examinations at 8th grade and passed exceedingly well. In Malawi, your performance at grade 8 defines which school you are going to attend. Good grades at grade 8 mean that you are going to a good secondary school.

Clara is selected to one of the good secondary schools in our city. You may not think this is a big deal, but it is. In the 2019/2020 academic year, 279,084 students took the exams, and 210,324 passed.

Out of these, only 38% were selected to various secondary schools including Clara.

Her story does not end here.

Rays of Hope pledges to support her secondary education. She hopes to become a nurse and we would like to partner with her through our Academic Inclusion Program that provides bursaries/scholarships to needy students. We have many students like Clara in our communities, and we invite you to join us in making sure that their lives are transformed by accessing education from God-fearing mentors.

LOW-TECH REMOTE LEARNING

In 2020, COVID-19 disrupted the implementation of our programs.

The rising infection cases and subsequent deaths called for a state intervention that instituted partial lock-down in March. The lockdown included the closure of schools.

We were faced with two options – close the office and go home or risk our lives and pivot programming. We took the latter. We spent countless hours brainstorming and redesigning until we decided to implement a **Low-Tech Remote Learning Program**.

Designed to use handbooks and workbooks to provide education and



accelerate learning in primary schools. The initial vision was that learners could access materials adapted from the Malawi curriculum and learn alongside a radio education program run by the government. The team and community volunteers also planned to use phone calls and text messages to technically support learning. Unfortunately, a delay in approval from the Ministry of Education meant that by the time approval was granted, schools were reopened.

Once schools reopened, the 14-week academic term was to be delivered in 10 weeks. The Rays of Hope team engaged the Ministry of Education once again, to repurpose the Low Tech Remote Learning material so they could be used and assist both teachers and students.

Their approval was quick.

In collaboration with teachers from 40 primary schools, we reviewed the materials and they were integrated into their lessons. We printed and distributed our handbooks and workbooks to 20,000 students in 40 primary schools in Blantyre district.

The results were amazing! Before the intervention, basic literacy and numeracy skills were rated at 45% in terms of proficiency. After our intervention, literacy, and numeracy skills were at 60%.

The program increased the performance of the learners by 15% in both literacy and numeracy skills.

These are scores from 13,000 learners drawn from 30 primary schools that got our support during the crunched academic term. We believe this is a breakthrough in basic education. The narrative proves that when teachers and learners are given the required resources, learning takes place.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

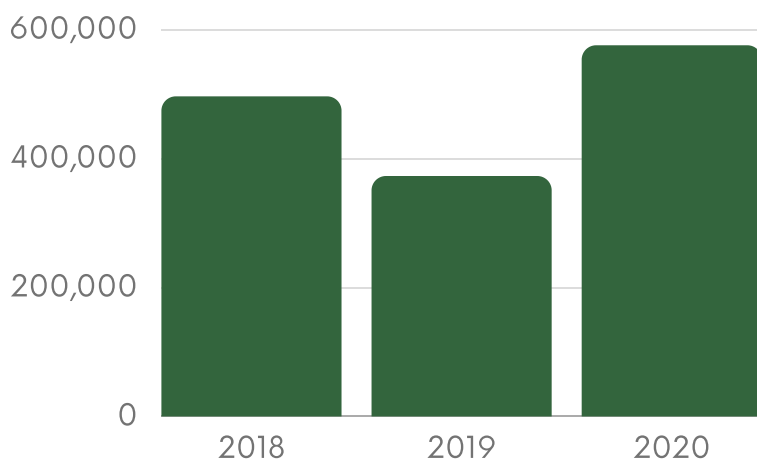
Income and Expenditure for January 2020 - December 2020

INCOME	MK	USD
Balance brought forward	50,396,407	68,103
Funding for the year	375,464,349	507,384
	425,860,757	575,487

EXPENSES	MK	USD
Program	113,161,317	152,920
Administration & Personnel	108,214,939	146,236
	221,376,256	299,157

ASSETS	MK	USD
Furniture	6,859,798	9,270
Equipment	8,490,955	11,474
Motorcycle & Vehicles	14,044,583	18,979
Land & Building	122,034,043	164,910

Income snapshot for past three years



LOOKING FORWARD

We are excited about the future and have mapped out a set of key strategic goals for 2021. They include

Strategic Goal 1

- Grow our teacher training initiative into two new education districts.

Strategic Goal 2

- Expand our bursary initiative, and create entrepreneurship incubators in secondary schools (high-schools) bordering on leadership.

Strategic Goal 3

- Adopt and scale the use of handbooks and workbooks to two new education districts.

Strategic Goal 4

- Sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Teacher Education as we plan to scale the teacher training nationally.

THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS IN 2020





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