



From Child to Adult

Malawi's children comprise nearly half of the country's total population. The strain of such a large number of children on the overall economy creates problems impossible to solve - from education to adequate health care. Three of every ten children will die before they reach five years of age and thirty percent of the remaining number will die before they reach the age of ten. One missionary reported many Malawians used to number, instead of naming, their children until they were two years old. A proper name was not given until then because of the probability of an early death.

In spite of the health threat to survival, most children go about their play time with little apparent concern for the future. They are very inquisitive and exceptionally creative; whether rolling an old tire along the road, making a galimoto (car) from old coat hangers, or using the available hangers, as well as some old wire and pieces of cloth, to create instruments of what sounds like a full blown orchestra.

Often we ask the question, "What do the teenagers do?" Perhaps the answer comes in a realization that adolescence does not exist in many cultures. Adolescence is primarily a phenomena of western culture and of recent appearance in history. In the Malawian culture, children begin taking on adult responsibility around the age of ten.

Girls carry water, prepare meals and help with the babies from a very early age. Boys work in the fields, carry wood and carry out adult responsibilities long before the teen years. It is estimated that half of all women in Malawi are married by the age of 17. Because of their harsh living circumstances, children are forced to become adults too quickly!! Outreach International works hard in Malawi, and other countries, to help families succeed so that children and stay children- they can go to school, play with their friends, and laugh!