

The Republic of Malawi is a landlocked country in South Eastern Africa, bordered by Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique, with a population of over 20,000,000. The country is one of the least developed in the world, with an economy based in agriculture and a rural population growing at a rapid rate. There is a high prevalence of HIV and AIDS.

Riders will enter the town of Ekwendeni in the northern region of the country about 20 kilometres from Mzuzu, the third largest city. They will see the **Ekwendeni Hospital**, originally founded in 1889 by Dr. Walter Emslie from Aberdeen, in its present form of a 230-bed hospital serving a catchment area of 50,000 people. In addition to regular medical services, there is a nutrition rehabilitation unit, an eye clinic unit as well as a dental surgery unit and a lab.

Of special interest will be the Primary Health Department, based on community participation. This department organizes maternal and child health clinics, vaccinations, family planning, water and sanitation projects, rural housing, community grain banks, savings and credit schemes for women, HIV and AIDS control programs and a micro-nutrient program.

The Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program (EHAD) began in 1989 and has been working with Presbyterian World Service and Development for over two decades to break down barriers and support people whose lives are affected by HIV and AIDS. Initiatives include the fight against the spread of HIV, emphasis on human rights and the role of men as well as the provision of compassionate care and medicine to those living with the disease.

As in countries round the world, Malawi is now coping with COVID 19. Case numbers are on the rise as are deaths. People are facing the effect of the virus on their ability to meet basic needs due to job loss and the closing of markets and shops. Even as people stay home, living in close quarters with other households makes it difficult to practise physical distancing.

For women, men and children already vulnerable due to the effects of HIV and AIDS, the concern of not being able to access the medication or community assistance they rely on is piled on top of their fear of getting the virus. Recognizing that need has only increased in their community the Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program has never stopped adapting. Examples of their work continue with safety modifications, include smaller self-help groups, the delivery of medications, physical distancing cooking demonstrations to help families effectively use the food resources they have and ensuring that staff have PPE so they can continue to provide services to people in need.



Distribution of clothes, sweaters and knitted blankets to new born babies at maternity



Community facilitator providing bucket, basin and soap to family for them to use for hand washing to prevent COVID-19