



Averting 'New Variant Famine'

Briefing Notes No 7

Updated December 2007

The Malawian Case Study: livelihoods in Nihelo

This briefing presents some information about the field site in Malawi, Nihelo village. Most of this information was gathered through community and household profiling exercises.

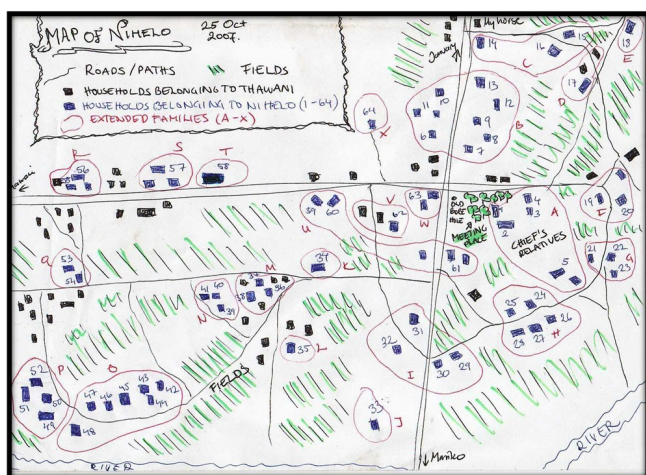
Nihelo village

Nihelo is located in the densely populated Thyolo district south of Blantyre in Malawi. It is 14 km from the tarred road from Limbe to Thyolo and close to the traditional authority headquarters of Chimaliro.

Brief facts about Nihelo:

- 72 households and 25 extended family groups
- Family groups comprise between 1 and 8 households
- Households have 1 to 7 members, commonly 1-4
- No electricity
- No borehole but access to borehole in twin village Thawani for K20 per month.
- Many households have toilets
- Inhabitants belong to 26 different churches
- No cattle, but some have goats, pigs or poultry
- Common possessions are radio, bicycle and iron
- Only a few households have beds

Map of Nxxxxx showing households and extended families



The community's concerns

Good and bad things about Nihelo:

Examples of good things according to people themselves are that their chief is good, they have good harvests, that streams, maize mill and markets are closeby, they have many churches and the primary and secondary schools are close. Bad things include that the water pump is broken, the road is poor, houses are poor, the clinic is far,

there is a shortage of land and lack of money for fertilizer, the tea estates have very low wages and are corrupt and youth lack money to invest in small businesses.

Livelihood opportunities:

Subsistence farming is an important source of food for every household. Opportunities for formal employment are scarce, but some people work on tea

estates, or find work in cities such as Blantyre or Zomba. Other income sources are: selling crops at market, irrigated dambo cultivation, selling fritters or scones, ganyu casual labour, housebuilding, making bricks, bike/radio/electronics/shoe repair, buying and selling sugarcane, selling firewood, tailoring, butchering and making hoes and baskets.

Key Points:

- Malawi field site: Nihelo village is located in densely populated Thyolo district in southern Malawi and consists of 72 households.
- Main livelihoods: subsistence farming, dambo cultivation and many different small scale businesses as well as some jobs on tea plantations.
- Key issues: fertilizer is very important to the community and lack of money to buy it is a big problem. Lack of money for schooling is another.
- AIDS affects both individuals and the community in a range of ways.



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CENTRE FOR HUMAN GEOGRAPHY, BRUNEL UNIVERSITY

Further issues



University of Malawi



National University of Lesotho

Farming, famine and fertilizer:

Common complaints in connection with farming were that:

1. People lack money for fertilizer
2. The soil does not produce well without fertilizer
3. Land shortage / small fields
4. There are not enough people in the household / people are too old or sick to work in the fields

Access to fertilizer is the biggest issue in Nihelo according to people themselves. Famines are more readily blamed on failure to get fertilizer than on droughts or other environmental conditions.

Problems with schooling

Malawi has "free education", i.e. no school fees, and yet one of the biggest problems in Nihelo is that children cannot go to school due to lack of money. Constraints are related to government and school policies, such as mandatory school uniforms, teachers' misuse of power, and various "fees" that are demanded of the schoolchildren. Those who cannot pay are not allowed in class.



Many children have dropped out of school because of a fee introduced just before this year's exams.

AIDS

People in Nihelo are acutely aware of the AIDS pandemic and the problems it brings, saying that people are today dying at a very fast rate compared to earlier times. There are several people who are open about their HIV positive status and are on ARVs, but rumours about other people abound. Though the clinic in Chimaliro offers free HIV testing, and some of the young people go for this regularly, myths and misconceptions about the virus, the disease and ARVs flourish. While some people still know too little about the risks and how to avoid them, others believe that abstinence is the only way to avoid the virus, and are thus crippled in their relationships and hindered in their lives by exaggerated fears.

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Project website: www.brunel.ac.uk/about/acad/sse/chg/projects/nvf

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