



AFRICA/MALAWI - "We are working alongside doctors from Malawi every day on the Internet," says Fr. Alfonso Raimo, head of "Denied Childhood," collaborating with health center in Diocese of Dedza

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - "The few doctors who decide to remain in Malawi make heroic efforts, but that alone is not sufficient to cope with diseases such as AIDS. So, we started a project to help them," Fides was told by Fr. Alfonso Raimo, head of the association "Denied Childhood", which has partnered with Malawian health facilities of the Diocese of Dedza. "The diocese has created a center, the Dedza Catholic Health Commission, which operates 12 health centers distributed on its territory," said Fr. Alfonso. "Our association has started a collaboration in particular with the center of Mtendere. This facility serves a population of about 60,000 people and is specialized in receiving and treating children affected by HIV/AIDS. In the center, there is a single doctor assisted by nurses. There are no specialists because the Malawian doctors who specialize in a certain area prefer to emigrate abroad."

The priest continues: "For this reason our association, in collaboration with two physicians in Naples (Italy): Dr. Sergio Cerrato, a pediatrician, and Dr. Raimundo Vito, a radiologist, has launched a project to provide advice and long-distance learning via the Internet, making use of counsel from the Athena Center of Avellino. From Mtendere, they can send pictures and medical records of patients to Italy via the Internet to seek medical consultation. Similarly, from Italy they can manage the training courses for staff in the center of Malawi. A group of Italian doctors has offered to go on a regular basis to visit the African country."

"For the Internet connection to exist, there is a need for electricity and so, we've sent generators to power the medical centers. The lack of electricity and drinking water is one of the main difficulties of the common people of Malawi, and it has a serious impact in the health field," says Fr. Alfonso.

Malawi is one of the poorest countries of Africa and is marked by the scourge of AIDS. "The main reason for the spread of AIDS in Malawi comes from the fact that the country is crossed by the main road that links Zambia and Mozambique. Along the way thousands of truck drivers stop to have relations with the local women. That has sparked a sharp increase in the number of children who are born HIV positive," says Fr. Alfonso.

Even children who are not HIV positive are subject to disease because of the severe food shortages. "Local agriculture depends on rain water," says Fr. Alfonso. "There are no wells or irrigation systems, everything is left up to the climate. Yet the soil is very fertile. In the few areas where irrigation systems have been created, the harvest has more than doubled. To meet the nutritional deficiencies of children, the association "Denied Childhood" has launched a project to create stables near the medical centers of the Diocese of Dedza. "It sounds like nothing, but thanks to the eggs produced there, children can consume albumin and other substances essential for their growth," said Fr. Alfonso. "To respond to vitamin deficiency, we turn to agriculture instead of chemistry. Our next project is to plant orange groves for a source of vitamin C. Again we want to create a partnership, either directly with the specialists on site or remotely, via the Internet, between an Italian agricultural school and local farmers."

"Malawi is a very poor country, and so far has not attracted the interest of foreign powers. On the one hand, this is positive, because there have been no reasons to provoke civil war. On the other hand, however, it has prevented the arrival of foreign investors. Perhaps this is why the local population is peaceful and very welcoming," the priest concluded. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 19/11/2009)