

## Pre-Departure Volunteer Information

On behalf of the entire EKARI Foundation team, please let us express how excited we are to have you volunteer your passion, skills, interests, and most of all your time with EKARI! We want your volunteer experience to be as worthwhile and meaningful as possible, both for you and for those you will be working with in Malawi. In order to accomplish this goal, we have organized the following information for you regarding the Malawian culture, the EKARI Foundation, and volunteerism. Please take the time to review and prepare yourself for your volunteer experience before you depart for Malawi. Further cultural sensitivity training will be provided after you arrive in Malawi. Thank you once again for assisting to increase the EKARI Foundation's impact in Malawi.

Zikomo kwambiri! (Thank you very much!)

Elias Makina, Malawi In-Country Director, and Michelle Bradley, U.S. Executive Director

## Malawi 101

### Language

The native language spoken in southern Malawi is Chichewa. Although most students and young adults speak English, older adults speak Chichewa. Familiarize yourself with the following words, but do not worry, further training will be provided on site and most Malawians are happy to teach Chichewa!

A: Muli bwanji? (How are you?)

B: Ndili bwino, kaya inu? (I am well, and you?)

A: Ndili bwino, zikomo. (I am well, thank you)

B: Zikomo (Thank you)

Zabwino zonse (All the best)

Dzina lanu ndani? (What's your name?)

Dzina langa ndili ... (My name is ...)

Mumachokera kuti? (Where are you from?)

Ndimachokera ku ... (I am from ...) Abambo (Sir) Amayi (Madam)

mwana - ana (child - children)

wophunzira - ophunzira (student - students)

You can use the word 'zikomo' in brief greetings, when you want to say sorry in passing, and when you want to thank someone.

For more Chichewa: <http://www.chichewadictionary.org/chichewa-chinyanja/mini-course/20>

### Cultural Nuances

Malawi is called the Warm Heart of Africa because its people are truly the friendliest and most welcoming in Africa. Although this is the case, every culture is different and what may seem the norm or friendly and welcoming to one culture may be disrespectful to another. The following nuances are helpful to know prior to stepping foot in Malawi. Further cultural sensitivity training will be provided on site. Always feel free to express your concerns regarding culture to our In-Country Director.

First, make sure to read this short article entitled '[The best and worst of Malawi](#)', which gives an outside volunteer's perspective on Malawi. Following are a few more points about the Malawi culture that were not included in the article.

Children in Phalombe are very happy to see visitors. Children often shout 'mzungu', meaning white person, as visitors walk by. A simple smile and wave or giving them a thumb up will delight the children and a majority of the time they will then go back to their normal activities. However, some children might also shout, "Give me money". Often it seems that

they do not even know what they are saying. Again simply wave, smile, and ignore or say something along the lines of, “Go to school and study hard so that you can have a job one day”.

Adults are also happy to see visitors and some like to practice their English with visitors. Some adults may approach you and speak loudly and abruptly in English. An acknowledgement of their English with an appropriate response is all that is necessary.

Some adults might ask you to buy them something while you are in the market or in a store. In this case you might say that you are just a volunteer not earning money and thus it is not possible.

Young adults other than those that the EKARI Foundation supports may approach you and ask for financial support for their education. A typical response by a volunteer may be, “It is great that you understand the importance of and are willing to pursue an education. An education will not only uplift you, but also your community. Keep up the hard work. I am sorry, but at this time I am not able to assist you.”

As was stated in the above mentioned article, Malawians love to form connections. Many people will ask for your Malawi phone number, home phone number, address, and email. We highly encourage our volunteers **not** to freely give out this information, unless deemed otherwise by the volunteer. A typical response may be, “Thank you for your interest, but I typically do not give out my contact information when I am away from home.”

Greetings in Malawi are formal in nature. When entering a room, make sure to greet each person individually – greetings in Chichewa are highly appreciated! - and shake his/her hand and then be seated.

In general, Malawians are very religious. The majority are Christian, but the country also has a large Muslim community. Sundays (for some churches Saturdays) are typically spent at church. The church starts very early around 6 a.m. in the morning. Volunteers are welcome to join the (mostly catholic) mass at one of the numerous churches. EKARI students will be happy to take them to their churches.

Next to religion, superstition plays a large role in daily life in Malawi. Many people do believe in witchcraft and supernatural happenings. You might hear about children being used by witches to harm their parents and other people, etc. These things are taken very serious in Malawi. Even though this might sound strange to our culture, we need to respect local beliefs and find a ‘compromise’ in daily discussions.

## **Dress**

Men typically wear pants, although shorts are also acceptable.

In urban areas, women wear both skirts and pants. Although it is customary for women in rural areas to wear skirts long enough to cover their knees, few now wear pants. It is recommended that female volunteers pack both skirts and pants and wear what is most

comfortable for daily volunteer activities and respectful of the culture. You might also want to buy some of the beautiful local fabrics and wear it as a ‘chitenge’ (it is a cloth that is worn like a skirt) like the local women do or find a tailor who can even prepare a tailor-made skirt for you. There is a very good tailor in Zomba near bus station!

## **Geography**

Malawi is a beautiful country. As time allows, we encourage volunteers to take three-day weekends and/or one week-long holiday to tour and experience Malawi. Make sure to purchase a Malawi guide book before your departure. Highlights include Lake Malawi – Monkey Bay and Cape Maclear are accessible from Phalombe –, Mulanje Mountains near Phalombe, Liwonde National Park, Majete Wildlife Preserve, capital city Lilongwe, and commercial capital city Blantyre.

## **Phalombe**

Phalombe is a rural community. A 2 hour bus ride to Blantyre/Limbe costs ~8 USD round trip. Transport outside of volunteer activities to be covered by volunteer.

Transport in southern Malawi includes bus, mini-bus, and bicycle. Recently, the government has been trying to introduce motorbikes as kind of taxi, which should replace the numerous bicycle taxis.

Phalombe’s central market area includes a convenience store (Peoples), which typically stocks most basic needs, as well as an outdoor market area consisting of clothes, food, and household items. The outdoor market is open twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays.

For internet access, there is a local internet café or volunteers can purchase a dongle for 11,000 MWK (approx. ~\$30; ~\$1 buys an hour of internet access). The two main mobile providers are TNM and AIRTEL whereas AIRTEL is known for having the better network. However, in Phalombe there is only EDGE standard available which is the lowest internet speed and most of the times the dongle will hardly work. Volunteers typically go to Zomba or Mulanje (each ~ 45-60 minutes drive) to have quicker internet or operate from their mobile phones which usually provide better data connection.

There is a health clinic and hospital nearby; cost for regular visit ~10 USD to 20 USD.

Upon arrival (the In-Country Director will pick you up) make sure to get the following in Blantyre before you proceed to Phalombe: cash, dongle, and SIM card for your phone. Phalombe does not have an ATM. The closest ATM (Visa cards mainly, only Standard Bank accepts Master Card) is in Mulanje or Zomba which is a one hour drive away.

## Visa Requirements

The following requirements are typical for most countries, but volunteers must confirm prior to entry depending on the country in which their passport was issued.

30-day visitor's permit (or less) is granted at any port of entry and is Free

Application for a permit extension for an additional 30 days (or less) is MK 5,000 (~\$15)

Application for a second permit extension for an additional 30 days (or less) is MK 5,000

For a stay longer than 90 days, a visa or temporary employment/ residence permit is required prior to entry. The cost is ~250 USD and is valid for up to 3 years. The application procedure takes 3 to 6 months, requires several documents be submitted, and should be completed prior to arrival in Malawi.

## Travel Requirements

The EKARI Foundation highly recommends that volunteers visit a travel clinic prior to departure for an update on vaccines and for medications. Malawi is a high risk area for malaria; please note that Doxycycline has been phased out in Malawi and is no longer used as a preventative drug for malaria. Although not required on several Malawi websites, immigration officials sometimes check that visitors have received the yellow fever vaccine.

## Packing List

It is advisable to bring the following:

- Valid Passport
- Yellow fever vaccination card (although not required on Malawi travel websites, immigration officials often ask for this)
- Mosquito net and duct tape
- Mosquito prophylaxis (tablets) and spray
- Bed sheets
- Adapter for local sockets
- Basic medicine (e.g. for headaches, diarrhea, etc.)
- Sun protection
- Toiletries: You can purchase most products at Shoprite or the Game store in Blantyre. However prices for “Non-African brands” are very high, (e.g. for shampoo and lotion you can easily pay 3-4 times the price compared to home)
- Dark clothing considering the fact it is very dirty everywhere and you or one of the students will wash your clothes by hand

## EKARI foundation 101

### What We Do and Why We Do It

Before departing review our website, specifically our [Mission](#), [History](#), and [Standard Offer](#).

### Volunteer Program

Review our Volunteer Program [Mission and Goals](#).

### **Elias Makina Bio** (EKARI Co-founder and Malawi In-Country Director)

Elias was born and raised in Malawi, Africa and knows firsthand about the struggles students face in receiving an education. Elias is Joseph Ekari Makina's, for whom the EKARI Foundation is named, younger brother. Prior to joining EKARI full-time, Elias worked with the Malawian Ministry of Health as head of health facilities maintenance in the Phalombe District. Elias holds an advanced craft diploma in brickwork obtained at Namitete Technical College in Malawi, a Certificate in Hospital Maintenance Management obtained from Mombasa Polytechnic in Kenya, and a diploma in Business Management with Amity University through the University of Malawi Chancellor College. Elias's project management background and local knowledge are invaluable assets to the EKARI Foundation.

### **Michelle Bradley Bio** (EKARI Co-founder and U.S. Executive Director)

In 2007, Michelle was deeply affected by both the generosity and poverty she witnessed during her first visit to Malawi, Africa. She resigned from her full-time architecture career in 2010 after 10 1/2 years in order to pursue her true passion for community development. In 2012, she received her Master's degree in Global Community Development from Northwest University located just outside of Seattle, Washington. Since 2007, Michelle has travelled to Malawi each year for extended periods of time and has stayed in the villages of southern Malawi in order to better understand the culture and needs of the community members she is serving through the EKARI Foundation. Michelle focuses on fundraising, donor awareness, and program development and travels to Malawi each year to monitor and evaluate EKARI's current programs and complete research for new programs.

## Volunteerism 101

*Be the change you wish to see in the world. -Mahatma Ghandi*

By volunteering with the EKARI Foundation, you are signing up to empower students and communities as well as re-chart the future of the Phalombe district in Malawi! We truly appreciate that you are sharing your passion, skills, interests, and most of all your time with us! So why do we require a 3 month minimum stay and how do we view volunteerism?

The EKARI Foundation believes that sustainable and lasting change occurs when local community members are empowered and supported to be change makers in their own communities. We believe that local community members have the potential to emerge from poverty through their own efforts and that our volunteer positions are designed for volunteers like you to come alongside communities, in humble service, to assist in harnessing that potential.

The EKARI Foundation further believes that handouts and short-term time commitments create dependency from local community members on outside support and can minimize the communities EKARI aims to serve by neglecting to account for the skill, talent, knowledge, and resources communities have to contribute. The poor often define “poverty” in social terms, like feeling ‘worthless’ or ‘invisible’. EKARI’s approach is to encourage local community members to discover their potential and contribute to the development and success of their community, demonstrating that they have worth and something of value to share.

The time commitment that you pledge to as a volunteer for the EKARI Foundation sends a message to the local community that they are worth investing in; that you want to learn from them and empower them to be change makers in their community. As a volunteer, you are signing up to assist the communities of Phalombe to discover their potential and to find creative ways to assist communities to demonstrate their potential as they contribute to the development of their community. The yield with this approach is sustainable change.

With your partnership, as a volunteer committed to assisting local community members harness and contribute their skills, talent, knowledge, and resources, you will be contributing to lasting change that will leave a legacy upon the commencement of your time commitment. With your support empowered communities full of value and worth will act to be the change they wish to see in their world.

Read the attached article entitled, ‘Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets’, to learn more about utilizing a community’s strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses.

Also, read this [short article](#) regarding volunteerism. This article is not meant to discourage you, but rather to emphasize our goal to ‘honor and learn from the community’. A quote from the article, ‘Yet when we go abroad, we sometimes forget that we have to learn before we can serve.’ 7

## VOLUNTEER TIPS

### Social Media and Blogging

We highly encourage volunteers to blog or post to social media outlets like Facebook and/or Twitter *during* their volunteer experience to spread awareness about EKARI. Here are a few tips in case you are not an expert!

#### Social Media

- Tag all keywords on blog posts. This will increase your SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and make it easier for people to find through searches. Basically you have a higher likelihood of having strangers read your post!
- Use all platforms - Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter - to promote.
- Link everything. Add a hyperlink to all important items that you mention.
- Pictures always win. If you can add photos you will get more traffic and have more impact.
- Repetition is OK. Simply make sure to spread it across social media platforms and across multiple weeks depending on your normal posting frequency.
- Not “look at me” instead “see my experience”. When linking to social media do not say for example, “Look at my post!” Instead say “These children touched my heart; find out more about my trip to Malawi.” People are more interested and are more likely to click through if they have an idea of what they are reading.

#### Blog posts

- They do not have to be long; 200-500 words is ideal. If you want to write more, consider breaking your thoughts into two posts. In a busy society, most people do not want to sit down and read an essay.
- Speak from your heart. If you want to add a blurb about how EKARI works you can, but it is not necessary. Writing about your experience and providing links to EKARI’s website works well.
- Do not try to be everything to everyone. Speak from your heart to your audience in order to deeply influence and impact a niche of people rather than remaining at the surface level to try to influence a large group.

### Photography

We ask that you share your photos of Malawi, our students, and community members with us so that we can share them with our support base!

- Check out this post regarding tips for taking unique and exciting photos!  
<http://www.refinery29.com/instagram-inspiration#slide>

## **During Volunteer Experience...**

- Process your experience during, not just after. This can easily be done through writing in a journal. Try to remember and capture the special moments, the touching stories, the life changing reminders. This kind of content will capture people's hearts and impact others even through a blog post. Capture these memories now and tell the story after.
- Take tons of photos and video! Pictures speak a thousand words. But be careful not to offend those you are photographing or video graphing.

## **POST VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

### **Post Volunteer Expectations**

As was stated in our volunteer job descriptions, the EKARI Foundation expects that our volunteers will be our biggest advocates within their communities subsequent to their volunteer experience. To spread awareness, volunteers are required to support EKARI through social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, or by blogging. Financial contributions from volunteers or from their communities are highly appreciated.

We also highly encourage volunteers to blog or post to social media outlets like Facebook and/or Twitter *during* their volunteer experience.

### **Post Volunteer Communication**

We highly encourage volunteers to correspond with community members that they created relationships with during their volunteer experience. To protect volunteers and EKARI Foundation beneficiaries, all correspondence with EKARI Foundation beneficiaries must pass through the EKARI Foundation. As part of our child protection policy, all correspondence with children encountered in a school setting or through one of our Complementary Student Programs, even those not supported by the EKARI Foundation, must pass through the EKARI Foundation. Correspondence with those adults outside of the EKARI Foundation may occur at the volunteer's own discretion. As previously stated, we highly encourage volunteers not to openly give out their personal information during their volunteer experience.