

My name is Saara, I'm 19 years old, and I'm from Finland. September 2026, I spent a month in Malawi with Afrogarden, and the past month was full of unforgettable experiences, the kindest and most open-hearted people, and countless moments that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

**Wala Club**

School had not started yet during my first week, so I spent the days working with Clement and Hannah at the Wala Club. At the beginning of the week, I quickly realised that the children, even though they were in standards 3 and 4, understood very little of what was being taught and were a little afraid of me. I had many ideas on how to make the lessons more effective so that the children could benefit more from them. I noticed that the schoolbooks were far too advanced for their level, and I personally felt that the teaching methods, even within the Wala Club, often encouraged memorization rather than true understanding.

By the end of the week, I was so happy to see some of the children gaining a little more courage to speak English. Throughout my entire month, whenever I went out into the villages, I would hear children shouting, "Good afternoon, Saara! How are you?" It was such a heartwarming feeling. The Wala children who knew me were especially happy to greet me whenever they saw me, and their enthusiasm never failed to put a smile on my face.

**Distributing Exercise Books Across all 17 Villages**



When schools started, Christina decided that Afrogarden should distribute 1,020 exercise books to village chiefs. The chiefs could then identify the families who needed the exercise books the most and hand them out accordingly. For me, this meant that I had the opportunity to visit all 17 villages and meet most of the chiefs and village group heads. I truly enjoyed biking through the villages, seeing how different the areas deep within the villages looked, and getting a closer glimpse into everyday life.

Meeting the chiefs and visiting their homes made me realise that being a village chief does not necessarily mean being wealthier than everyone else, or even slightly better off. Before this experience, I had always assumed that being a chief of any kind meant being above other people. Here, I learnt that it is much more about the respect of the community and the responsibility that comes with that position. Visiting the villages gave me a better understanding of the communities Afrogarden works with and reminded me how important it is to listen to local people and trust their knowledge of their own communities.

**The Fence-Building Project**

I also got to be part of the project to start repairing the wall around the Afrogarden centre. Although I had no previous experience with building projects of any kind, I was given the responsibility of overseeing the work and making sure the builders had what they needed, as well as handling the shopping for materials together with Letisha, Afrogarden's lovely new team member, and Upile, the builder. Buying the materials introduced me to a whole new side of Malawi that I would definitely have missed without this project. I got to experience local hardware stores, buy bricks from local families, travel around in a truck, and watch oxen make 21 trips carrying sand. And the list goes on.

On my last day, we went to buy more cement, but due to the petrol crisis, we were unable to get truck transport. Local problem-solving came through once again, and we ended up loading 20 bags of cement into a small private car. I was very worried about the car and was sure it would break down, but everyone else was confident that it would be fine, so eventually my worries faded. This is something I have come to appreciate about life in Malawi: people are not easily discouraged by problems. Instead, they find ways to overcome them, even when the solution might seem a little unorthodox to someone from somewhere else. I absolutely love this about the culture!



**Sharing My Donations**

I brought a bunch of clothes, shoes, football boots, and balls with me from Finland to give out in the villages. It felt meaningful to bring something with me that could be useful to others, and I was happy to have the opportunity to share these items with the local community. I hope they will bring some joy and practical help to the people who receive them. This was also a reminder that small contributions can make a difference, especially when they are shared with care and distributed to people who can benefit from them.

**Meeting the Agogos**

One day, Violet and I went out into the villages to meet potential new agogos for Afrogarden's HHS program. In the past months, two agogos had passed away, leaving space for new agogos to join the program. Seeing these elderly women sitting alone and telling us about their illnesses and how they have to manage everything by themselves was heartbreaking. At the same time, seeing them smile despite all the hardships they face was truly inspiring to me. These visits gave me a glimpse into the challenges many elderly people experience, especially when they lack support in their everyday lives. They also reminded me of the importance of programs that recognize vulnerable members of the community and help ensure that they are not forgotten. I left these meetings feeling both sad about the difficulties these women face and deeply moved by their strength.

**Experiencing Malawi**

Besides working in the villages, I had many opportunities to experience different parts of Malawi and discover what a beautiful country it is. My first weekend, we drove to Lilongwe with two local girls and took them to their homes. It was lovely to see more of the country and get to know different places along the way. During my second weekend, I climbed Sapitwa, the highest peak in Malawi, located on Mount Mulanje. It was an unforgettable experience and a completely different kind of challenge from my everyday life at the centre. On my third weekend, Christina and I explored another side of Mount Mulanje, giving me the chance to see even more of Malawi's incredible landscapes and the large tea estates. We also travelled to Zomba—a beautiful and very different city—on two occasions. These experiences allowed me to appreciate Malawi not only through my work with Afrogarden but also through its beautiful nature, diverse landscapes, and the many different sides of everyday life.



All in all, I would not change a thing or trade this experience for anything. This month was such a unique opportunity, and it taught me so much about myself, what I am capable of, and the reality of the world we live in. I learnt that even small things can make a difference, that challenges often come with unexpected solutions, and that some of the most meaningful experiences come from simply spending time with people and learning from them. I am incredibly grateful to everyone at Afrogarden who welcomed me, helped me along the way, and made this month so special. I will always remember the children shouting greetings in the villages, the people who welcomed me into their homes, the lessons I learnt from everyday life, and all the little moments in between. I would love to come back to Malawi one day, hopefully when I can contribute even more, particularly through medical work, and meet all my friends again!