

D412 Lions in Action

It was a lunch time the rendezvous point being the Lions Eye hospital and with love still in the air, it wasn't a valentine luncheon. The eager and serving Lions had a different kind of love in mind. They had planned to spend Sunday the 15th of February , afternoon in the Lower Shire , Chikwawa district which is 75km south of Blantyre in Malawi. It has been a sad story that has been told over and over and over again. Malawi was been hit by serious flooding since January with 420 000 families displaced, in 15 districts. 104 deaths have been recorded and the number is always thought to be higher than that and 172 people missing. The president duly proclaimed and declared a State of Disaster.

When natural disasters strike, in addition to being there to offer help and support, Lions are able to rely on disaster relief grants and funds from Lion Club International Foundation to assist with crucial immediate needs. Through the generosity and compassion of Lions and donors, in the last 10 years the Foundation has been able to award more than US\$100 million in disaster relief funds .An Emergency Grant that provides up to US\$10,000 for districts impacted by a natural disaster that has affected at least 100 people, including tornadoes, hurricanes, floods and tsunamis is available for Lions to make a difference. Lions district governors can apply for disaster relief funds to help meet immediate needs such as food, water, clothing and medical supplies. LCIF typically awards more than US\$2 million in Emergency Grant funding each year. As such District 412 through the district governor applied and got such a grant totalling \$10 000. The Lions of Blantyre got and administered the grant on behalf of the district. They also saw it proper to add onto this amount and they sourced from Lion members and well wishers who donated various items like blankets , clothes.

As energised as ever the Lions of Blantyre led by Lion President Hilda Singo and PDG Francis Mpepho made the long drip down to the Lower Shire and braved the heat in order to bring smiles to the displaced and affected. The first port of call was the District Administrators (DC) office and the aim was to introduce the Lions to the DC . The DC Mr Alex Mdoko duly and heartily welcomed the Lions and thanked them in advance for their donation and time. He noted that in times like this unity of purpose is very important and makes all the difference in a society. He then reminded the touring party that the real work was not in his office but on the ground in the camps. So he quickly asked the Lions to be on their way and go to the camps and do the real work, so he put it.

Off the convoy departed, which had the hired truck with the relief items, followed by the DC and the Lions in their cars with the police accompanying

them to ensure order and security. The first camp was in a village called Jombo which is under the jurisdiction of Traditional Authority Mugabu. This has provided refuge for families from the East bank of the Shire and come from about 9 different villages with others housed in other camps.



Words will never be able to explain the mood and feeling at the camp but to put it all in perspective, the camp has 700 registered families. On site this camp had 20 tents to accommodate all these families. So you can imagine the sleeping arrangements. We could not ascertain the total number of people in the camp as there is always movement, others coming in and others leaving, but if we assume that each family has an average of 4 people and we multiply that by the number of families we can estimate and say they were 2800, but then this is not official but just an estimate to highlight the number of people in

that locality.



Trying to understand their plight is always difficult, they are now used to seeing the media and they will even joke about their condition. One man who was in a tree for 3 days before he was rescued, joked and said that who ever thought of the saying that you jump from the frying pan into the fire was a Malawian who was affected by a flood. He goes on to narrate how he was in the fields with his son and daughter. Before they knew it the river was roaring and they were trapped. They then dashed to the trees and sought refuge until they were rescued by army boats. He looked down and in a low voice and adds, *"I should have have listed to Phiri when he was yelling and telling me to go home as the river was swelling, but I thought he had had one too many as I could not see the swelling."* I ask how he could hold on for that long and he adds that when it danger the human body adapts and goes into survival mood. Cold, hunger ,heat, pain and the need to go to the loo were all suppressed.

The ladies offered to cook a meal for me even though their mealie meal was low. As we continued to chat , one lady tells me that most of the people here were left with nothing, very few managed to salvage anything before the floods razes down their villages. So if you had 10 goats , and you are running upland for dear life chances are that you would not think of hearing your goats to safety. The same for chickens ,they had to find an escape route also and if your paths meet, the better but chances were that they would be

roasting in trees.



Water is a precious commodity in the camp. The camp is in the middle of another village and the place had a single borehole to cater for it. Now you can imagine an extra 700 families on this lone borehole. An engineer friend of mine once told me that typically in a village a borehole will safely service 250 families without any problem. So with the new arrivals the picture is sad. Queuing for water becomes a real chore and it becomes tedious as you have to wait and wait and wait for your turn. You can just picture what might happen if you jump the queue.

Health wise, they have been helped from donors and a mobile clinic visits once a week to attend to their needs. The under 5s have a health worker permanently stationed in the camp to cater for their needs. Those on ARVs are most affected as their medical records were washed away and there is no clear plan on how they are to get their medication. A health worker on site highlighted the issue of compliance saying that those on ARVs need to take them diligently without breaks. So it has been a challenge to those affected. The other thing is the stigma that this will bring when people see you going to get your medication, so most of them don't bother coming out in the open and declare their status to get help.

As the writer was getting to know the people, the Lions were busy at work. First it was a symbolic presentation to the DC by Lion President Lion Hilda Singo and then it was down to work. The office of the DC with the help of the camp representatives and the police had managed to vet and verify the

recipients. So they all were in a queue and it was indeed a long and winding one. PDG Lion Francis could be heard chatting to one of the victims and offering advise saying that when they go home , they should move to higher ground to avoid a repeat of flood damage next rainy season.



The Lions dished out the donations and gave out to each family representative the following

10 kg Mealie Meal, Soya Pieces pack, sugar, Salt, Pot, Plate, Cup, Plastic Bucket. If it was a lady a wrapper popularly known as a *Chitenje/Zambia* was given out and if they had a baby a nappy was given.

So handing out and organising everyone proved to be a real task and with the sun slowly approaching the horizon , the team agreed that the 50 families that they had handed out items to was enough. The DC the tasked the councillor and his team to continue handing the goods out. The team then went to the second camp and dropped off some of the remaining items mainly mealie meal and cups. This camp had about 400 families . Racing against time with hunger and heat exhaustion setting in you had to praise the Lions for keeping

high spirits.



It was then a stop at camp number 3 with about 500 families being housed. The truck was quickly offloaded and it was off to one of the temporary storage warehouse to drop off the rest of the items. Bulk items like beans that could not be shared easily on that day were then put in the warehouse that in manned by the state in liaison with the DC.



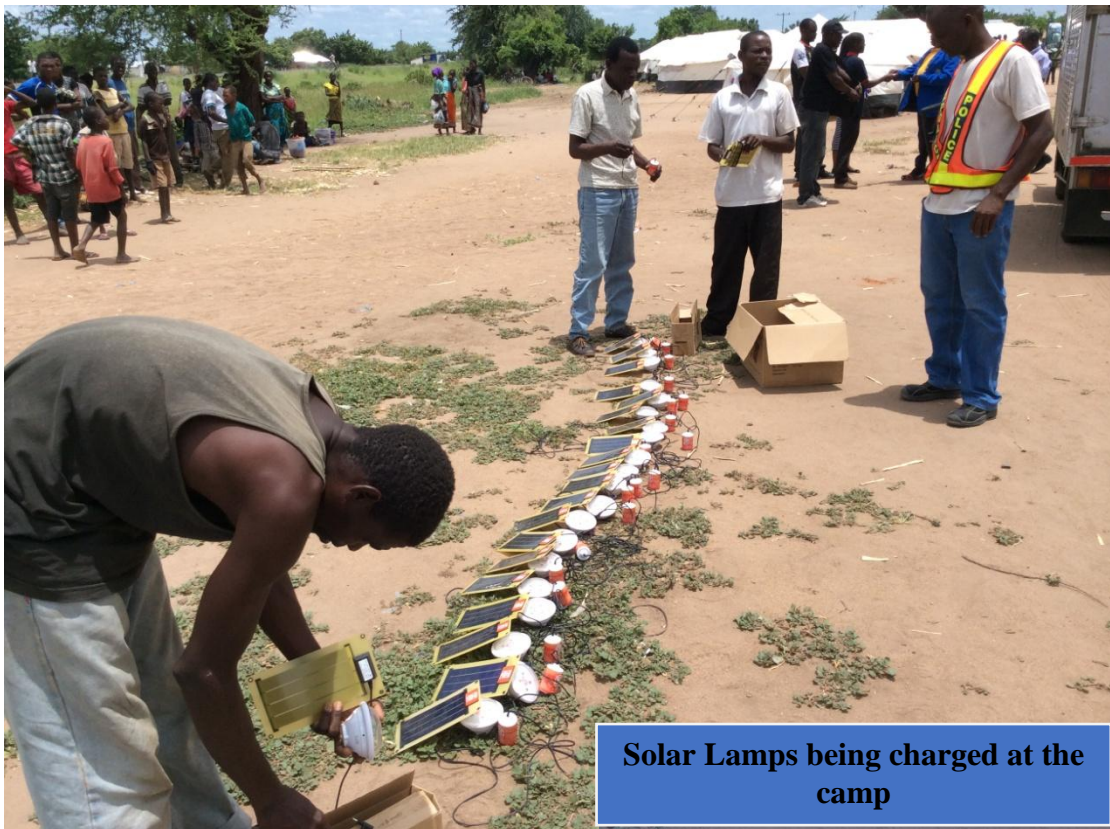
It was

indeed a Sunday well spent as Lion Stain Singo put it . He was in charge of the taskforce as he is also the community service director for the Lions club of Blantyre. A big roar to him and to all the Lions of Blantyre who donated and took part in the handing out of goods. Also Lion George Chirombe who represented Chichiri Lions and Lion Abraham George the Zone 1A Chair. A representative of the Leos who was from Kamuzu Academy graced the occasion and she ably represented the Leos and showed that we are all one big happy family

.As we drove back up hill one would be reminded of how fortunate we are to have daily provisions, how we are lucky to be able to sleep not only under a roof but as a family, how we take a bath for granted, how our kids will eat two spoon fulls and tell you they are full and want to throw away the food. These are some of the luxuries that our dear friends do not have. They all want to go back home as they say this is not home but the question I still had was go back home to what ?? Life goes on one lady told me and we will rebuild and pick up the pieces and start a new life. Such is Life



Tents used at camp 1



Solar Lamps being charged at the camp



Some of the goods handed out



Another view of the camp and residents

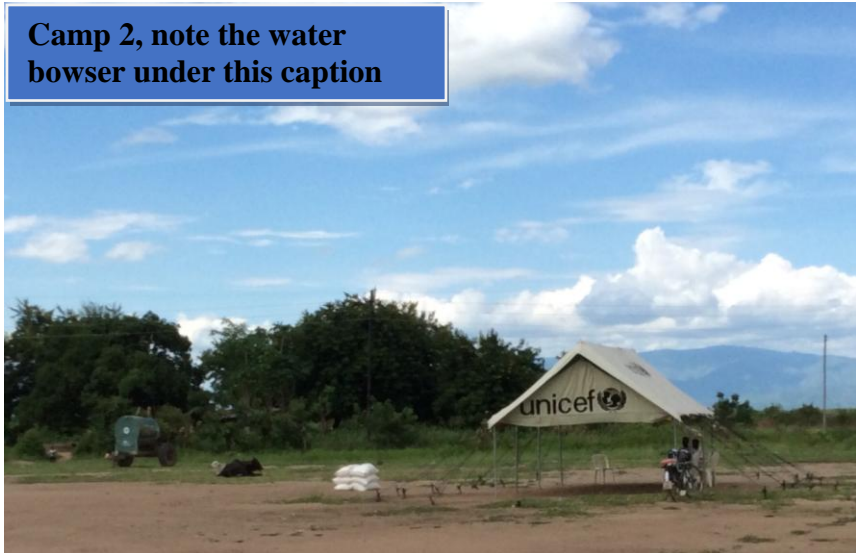


Lions in action



Mealie meal temporary store

**Camp 2, note the water
bowser under this caption**







Camp 3 offloading

One of the donors



Compiled by Lion Melusi Lusaba