

**MARCH 2017**

## When FISH isn't fish...



Constructing a “brush park” in the lake

*Helen Jones, EI Country Director in Malawi, writes about the FISH project.*

Climate change! A major topic of concern around the world. Things happen and someone is sure to say ‘climate change.’ In Malawi, weather patterns are changing and bodies of water are decreasing. Lake Chiuta in Machinga District has shrunk to 30% its original size. That is 70% of the body of water gone, water that used to be a source of income for fishermen.

In 2016, EI Malawi was invited to participate in a new program: Fisheries Integration of Society and Habitants (FISH). The main objective of the FISH program is to promote biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation in the four major lakes of Malawi.

See yourself as a fisherman, standing on the beach. Look to your left at the water in the lake. You see that the principal threats to aquatic biodiversity include

- a weak natural resource governance system,
- overfishing by both commercial and artisanal fishers, leading to species decline,
- use of fishing gear that destroys spawning habitats, and
- degradation and destruction of the lake floor vegetation.

The FISH project is responding to these threats with various community-led solutions. With our God-fearing technicians, EI Malawi is encouraging community-led fish sanctuaries which provide a safe haven for fish populations to feed, breed and grow. The project



**Fish drying kilns**



**Drying fish in the sun**



**The fishing community**

is also promoting “brush parks” i.e. the placing of branches of non-poisonous trees or shrubs into the bottoms of lakes, rivers or lagoons to serve as spawning and nursery habitats. As you look out over the water, you may see “Silent Policemen,” tall poles in shallow lakes which act as a deterrent, symbolically saying: NO FISHING HERE. Beside you on the beach there may be members of the Beach Village Committee (BVC) who animatedly describe how they are working together to protect the lake and their main livelihood, fishing. El Malawi is working to build the capacity of the BVC members to govern their resources through training and the creation of by-laws

Now turn to your right, to the land side of the beach where the principal threats to the terrestrial biodiversity have been

- deforestation causing siltation and low water levels, and
- poor methods of farming as farmers abandon former agricultural practices that enhanced biodiversity.

In response, natural resource management groups and climate-smart agriculture groups are being formed, working especially with farmers in key fish breeding areas. They have started Village Savings and Loans (VS&L) groups where fishermen are learning to save and invest instead of spending their money on beer. Natural-based resources are a major topic, discussing how to manage and protect locally found fish, types of trees, vegetation and submerged vegetation. Farmers are encouraged to farm at least 20 meters away from a river or the lake. They are given bamboo to plant, and are being introduced to other inputs such as early maturing rice, orange fleshed sweet potato, sorghum and beans.

## Relief comes in many forms!

*Helen also gives us an update on the 6 months food relief programme which comes to an end in April.*



### 2 Districts

**Machinga:** 75,000 families

**Mangochi:** 55,000 families

Total number of people: 715,000

EI Malawi has been involved in a massive food relief program, the biggest Malawi has ever seen. By mid-2016, after 2 years of floods, droughts and failed crops, over 6 million people in Malawi were in need of food aid. For Machinga and Mangochi, where EI Malawi was assigned, approximately 85% of the population of each district have been targeted to receive food aid.

Because of the size of the distribution, World Food Programme (WFP) asked EI Malawi to include warehousing of food supplies for the 2 districts, something generally done by WFP itself. In order to distribute all the food items (what we call the 'food basket') to all the beneficiaries, this meant warehousing and moving 6 metric tons of food each month.

Distribution started in October 2016 and should be completed by end March 2017.

Fatima, mother of 4 is happy because her husband doesn't spend as much time on the lake. With her savings from VS&L, she has been able to buy a motorbike which she rents out as a taxi. She has put a tin roof on her house and is able to feed her children and pay their school fees.

Since Malawians love smoked fish, improved smoking kilns that use less firewood have also been introduced... If you are in the area, be on the lookout for "change-changu" stoves!

There are also wildlife clubs at school and community level. Their objectives are to engage and educate youth about the environment and natural resources as children are the future custodians of what God has given us. Children playing along the beaches are regularly tested and treated for Bilharzia. Overfishing with very fine nets, eg. mosquito nets which are being wrongly used for fishing, means that the parasitic worms that thrive in shallow water are not eaten and Bilharzia has become endemic.

Issa Mwanjabe, the Project Coordinator for the FISH project says he greatly appreciates that the program provides multiple responses for complex problems. He feels Emmanuel is the right word for this program for surely God is with us.



## Food basket

### Monthly per household

50 kg maize • 10 kg dried beans •  
2 litres oil

### For pregnant/ lactating women and under 2 children

6 kgs CSB (corn/soya blend)

In selecting beneficiaries, community members meet and agree on those who are most at risk and should receive assistance. This is verified and endorsed through a communal gathering and is an ongoing process. At the distributions, community members participate in 'Theatre for Change' to present messages on things like nutrition, gender based violence, health and sanitation, messages that promote social behaviour change. At each distribution site, there are suggestion boxes for people to register complaints of system abuse, favouritism, wrong targeting or forced sharing by community leaders.

Unlike other years when food relief was restricted to distribution of food, this year WFP has introduced "Complementary Activities". Instead of simply waiting for food handouts, vulnerable but able-bodied people in targeted communities are being encouraged to participate in asset building for their communities in response to receiving the food. Some of these activities include: irrigation,



Keeping track of the beneficiaries



## Bicycle taxis help people get food home

water reservoirs, protecting flood areas with flood bunds, and afforestation. Of the 130,000 households, 20% (26,000) across the 2 districts are taking part in these complementary activities. Each participating household is being given 5 different types of fruit trees as well. These 26,000 households will be encouraged to continue in these development-type activities until 2019. So, what started out as food relief will extend to recovery and development for those households that have chosen to participate in the complementary activities.

When asked about any final words, Relief Program Manager, Martin Katunga Phiri responded, "This years' response has been very big and very involving. We thank God that we have come this far. And I thank God for the dedicated staff, 142 people, who have seen this process through, working for the past 5 months, every day of every week without time off to see the food distributed to those in need."

**Thank you, on behalf of El Malawi, to the many people around the world who have prayed for Martin and his staff through this relief program. As in all we do, may God's kingdom be built and may God be glorified!**