

Malawi Amoto

Malawi Floods Update

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The Road to Recovery?

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The market town of Bangula, about two hours' drive south of Blantyre in Southern Malawi, is now home to thousands of displaced people living in four camps located in and around the centre. These people have been displaced because of the devastating rains which hit Southern Malawi between the 12–15 January 2015.

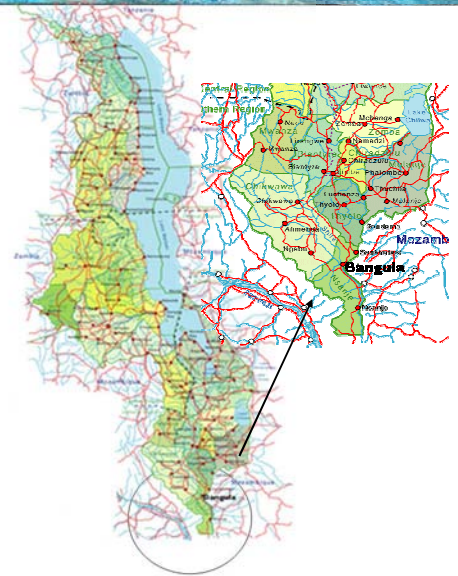
Heavy rain is not unusual in Malawi at this time of year but this rainfall was both exceptional and deadly. Several hundred people died and tens of thousands were made homeless as the remains of a tropical cyclone hit

Malawi with a fury that few have ever experienced.

Houses were totally destroyed or badly damaged, crops washed away and an already impoverished country faces a long, difficult road to recovery. But a start has been made on that road as the camps around Bangula show.

60,000 displaced people; 22 camps

Nsanje District, the most southerly of Malawi's 24 districts, is currently home to over 60,000 displaced people housed in 22 camps. The district is one of the most low-lying areas of the country and not only did it get



Map of Malawi - Nsanje District is the most southerly and Bangula is in that District

inundated with rain, but the nearby Shire River also burst its banks and caused widespread flooding. Indeed, so violent was the flooding that one of the main roads from Bangula to Thyolo was washed away and, as one local told Malawi Amoto, a 'new tributary for the Shire was created two weeks ago' and it is still there for all to see.

Working in partnership

SIM Malawi, working with its partner Church, the Africa Evangelical Church (AEC), has started to supply relief aid to the main camp in Bangula in which between 3,000 and 3,500 people are currently living. We accompanied the first truck load of 2,000 kgs of maize flour and 200 blankets which was delivered to the camp (the transport and fuel costs being met by the AEC).

Driving into the camp one is struck by the sheer number of people,



Main picture: Part of the camp for displaced people in Bangula
Inset: Some of 3,500 displaced people waiting for aid at Bangula's main camp



Peter Ong of SIM Malawi (far right) with Revd Louis Ndekha, General Secretary of the AEC, hand over the first bag of flour and the first blanket at the Bangula camp. Humphrey Magalasi from Nsanje District Council is third right

queuing up behind aid trucks that are already in place, waiting to receive something. Large though these numbers are, they do not tell the full story of this camp.

Tented village expands camp site

One of the aid workers took us on a tour of the camp which is centred on a primary school that has been closed to pupils for the last three weeks. Around every corner we found more men, women and children, often in family groups, patiently making a meagre lunch.

We were taken through this part of the camp to another large area in which tents, supplied by a Malawian NGO, had been set up. One of the occupants of this tented village told us that her entire family of around 20, including children, parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, were all living in the one tent.

Humphrey Magalasi is an assistant district disaster risk management officer for Nsanje District Council.

Waiting for end of rainy season

He said: “We are expecting the people to stay for three months. This is January and we are expecting them

to stay until the rainy season ends in March so they can go back and rebuild their houses.

“At the camps we provide relief in both food and non-food items. These are from the Government, NGOs, and stakeholders including faith-based organisations.”

But Humphrey and Nsanje District Council are starting to look beyond the current rainy season to what help they can give to people as and when

they leave the camps.

“Long-term as a District Council, we are proposing to move the affected population, especially those who are in flood-prone areas, into the uplands so we can prevent flooding events in the future,” said Magalasi.

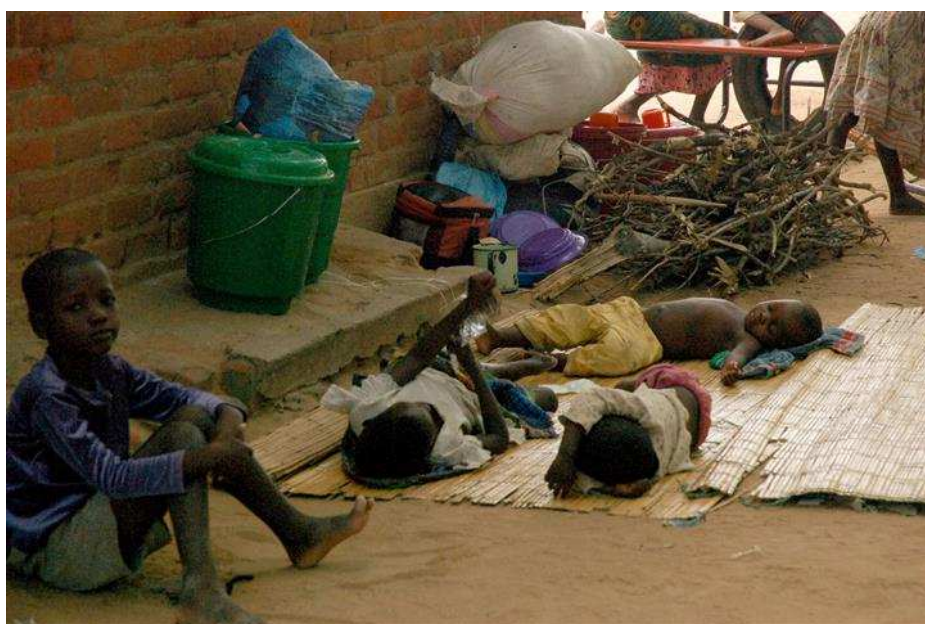
“As a Council, we are co-ordinating with partners, both from Government – especially in the agriculture sectors – and other stakeholders, so we support the affected population with the recovery with maize seed and fertilisers.”

National Government and partners

This desire for long-term reconstruction was echoed by the Honourable Grace Chiumia, the Government of Malawi’s Minister of Youth and Sport, who was also visiting the camp.

“We are working immediately and in the long-term to build a plan with our partners. We want to help in reconstruction. In the long-term we are looking to take people on to higher ground but before we can do this we need to put in place basic services such as water, health services and education facilities,” she said.

To help co-ordinate its work, SIM Malawi has appointed Peter Ong as



Children resting in the shade at the Bangula camp



**Honourable Grace Chiumia, the
Government of Malawi's Minister of
Youth and Sport**

its 'Point Person' to oversee liaison with the AEC and how best relief aid can be purchased and delivered to the areas where it is most needed.

For the most vulnerable

The first shipment of aid to Bangula was split, with the majority of it going to the camp for the most vulnerable people regardless of faith or affiliation, while a small part, 250 kgs of flour and 25 blankets, were left with the local AEC Pastor for distribution to the most needy in that area. Indeed, the Pastor and his family themselves are currently living in temporary accommodation because their house was flooded and part of the external rendering on the wall was stripped away.

"We are co-ordinating with the AEC to know how best to provide relief to the areas affected by the floods," said Peter.

"We hope that today's shipment will be the first of a number of deliveries of aid that we can get to the Bangula camp but we are dependent on funding being available. Our hope is also to have deliveries to the other camps in the area.

"At the moment we don't know how many deliveries we will make but we will sit down with

the AEC and talk about how many we can make depending on the funding that is afforded to us.

Financial donations welcome!

"If people want to help then I think at the moment donations of money may be best because with any relief effort there is a given period of time. So, for example, people in one camp here have been given up to 45 days to stay at the camp. So, practically, to send goods or a package of goods over will take longer than the 45 days. So I think the best way to support us is through the SIM offices and donate cash."

Access to some of the other camps is difficult and while on the visit we saw several helicopters being used to ferry aid supplies to some of the more outlying camps to which road communication is difficult to impossible.

Life in the camps is difficult, not just because the people there have lost everything but because the geography of the area makes life difficult. Bangula is a good 2,000-2,500 feet lower in elevation than Blantyre and because of this the temperature at this time of the year is, certainly for 'Azungu' (the name given to White people in Malawi), unbearably hot. While we were there the temperature was pushing the high 30s to low 40s Celsius with, now, blazing sun all day. But then the temperature plummets at night because of the clear skies and all of this adds to the hardship in the camps.

There is always hope



**Water marks and flood damage on the local AEC
Pastor's house**

If you would like to help

SIM Malawi has established a project MW96759, to which donations may be made via your local SIM office

Donations can be made to the SIM International Disaster Relief Fund ZZ88600.

Australian taxpayers can donate through SIMAid Emergency Fund 68001 (for Malawi Flood relief) which will provide tax-deductible receipts.

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One of the destroyed houses on the outskirts of Bangula

But there is always hope, and this was expressed by Revd Louis Ndekha, General Secretary of the AEC, who handed over the first shipment of AEC aid to people in the Bangula camp.

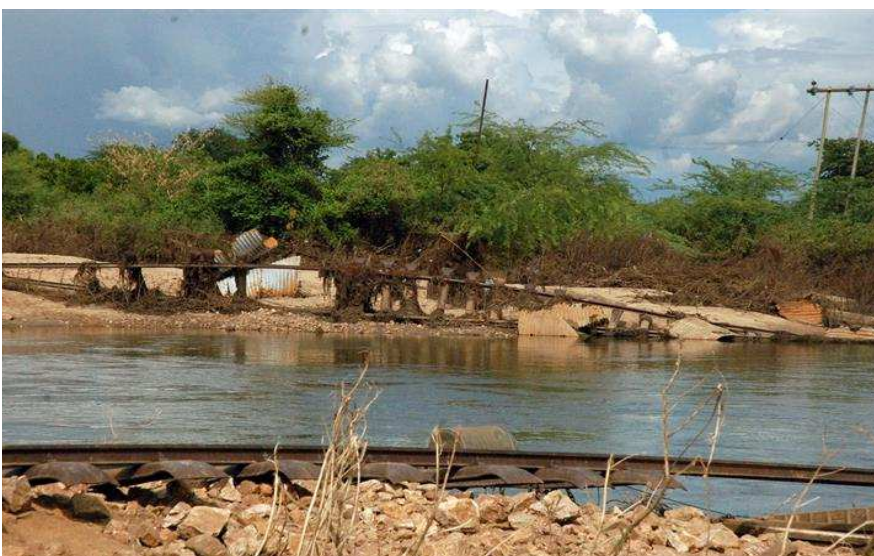
And as he looks to supply some of the needs of the residents in the camp, he knows he also has to be aware of the situation concerning the Church of which he is the leader. "I know a number of church buildings have fallen down and some pastors displaced so, as a Church, we have to respond both to the issue within, like helping pastors to get out of the situation they are in, as well as helping other people," he said.

"So it is actually a cross-cutting problem. It is quite huge but as a

Church we believe the Lord is good and He will help us to get through this.

A plea to the world

"We are asking the world, we are asking our friends around the world, to pray for us and with us in this difficult situation and to help, too, in any ways they can. We need prayers mostly, but if there is anything that they can do to help those people who are in a difficult situation it would be appreciated. So brothers and sisters across the world, whom the Lord is leading, should be able to come in, pray for us and give whatever they can give so we can alleviate the misery our friends are going through in Malawi."



The damaged road and railway to Thyolo and a new 'tributary' for the Shire River

Please Pray

It is important that this acute situation does not become a seven-day wonder, as often happens in when disaster strikes. People will be in camps for at least another 40 or so days but THEN, and only then, they will have the task of returning to their home areas and, literally, rebuilding their lives and their homes.

There are also reports that another catastrophic storm could be preparing itself to batter Malawi and its embattled people. If this occurs, then the results could be truly cataclysmic.

So, echoing the words of Pastor Ndekha, we appeal to our brothers and sisters around the world to come to the aid of this beautiful country and its people who are suffering greatly at this time, through prayer and through giving.

- Please pray that potentially devastating rains from a second cyclone that are forecast do not materialise.
- Please pray that the camps remain healthy and there is no outbreak of disease – this is a prayer also for others parts of the Southern Region, including Blantyre, where power and water shortages has led people to drink contaminated water and fall ill.
- Please pray against outbreaks of disease such as Cholera and Typhoid because of people drinking contaminated water.
- Please pray that crops can be replanted and that there is no major famine later this year and into 2016 because the maize harvest has been destroyed in these flood events.

