

I tried “nsima” – a corn based food that looks a bit like firm mashed potatoes and is a staple Malawian meal – for the first time today. I am also learning to eat the Malawian way – with my hands!

## Daleka

September 11, 2015

Yesterday was my first trip to the field for a food distribution set to take place at the Dzaleka refugee camp about 45 minutes north of Lilongwe. Dzaleka is home to around 24,000 refugees in Malawi. While there, I met people from Rwanda, the DRC, and Burundi, all who talked about the range of challenges from poor education and schools, insufficient health care systems, sanitation issues, poverty, gender issues and among the most prominent of all, inadequate access to food. I learned more about life at the camp through conversations I had with four individual refugees. After spending a lot of time in the office preparing for our upcoming emergency response – 12 straight days to be exact – the timing of this field visit could not have been better. Overall the distribution was an incredible thing to witness. To see the work we do in the office fully operationalized is pretty motivating and in ways very moving. And the fact that experiences like yesterday’s are a part of my job is what makes me so drawn to this type of work.

## September in Malawi

October 4, 2015

The month of September went so quickly here in Malawi. Part of this probably was in part due to the amount of work we’ve all had to do in preparation for the emergency response WFP that began with the start of October. In a country whose

economy is agriculture-based, the months preceding the next harvest are referred to as “lean season” because food becomes most scarce. Malawi had a particularly bad farming season this past year, and is now facing its first maize deficit as a country in a decade. For this reason, 17 percent of the population is expected to be without proper access to food from now until next March. As you can imagine, working in food security in the wake of this looming emergency made for a very busy month. Aside from work, I spent September continuing to explore Lilongwe, going to “braais,” taking my first trip outside of the city, playing some “football,” and visiting Lake Malawi. “Braai” for those of you who aren’t familiar is a South African barbecue – I’ve quickly learned that it is also the main way of socializing in Malawi.

## Football

October 5, 2015

I started playing small-sided 5-on-5 indoor “football” (soccer) on Tuesday nights and am so grateful to be playing again! On that note, this past Friday night I played in a full field football match with a team organized by my coworker, Portpher. Upon showing up to the field, I quickly realized that I was and would remain the only female both on the field and at the match in general. With very low expectations of girls’ athletic abilities, my team seemed pleasantly surprised when they realized I could in fact kick the ball and complete a pass. In what turned out to be a very physical game (many of the guys I played against seemed to take no notice in our size difference), we won 6-3. During a pause in play halfway through the game, I looked up to see my teammates – both Malawian and international – scattered across the football field with the Lilongwe landscape as our backdrop and a

bunch of Malawian children playing their own game of football off to the side. I could not have been happier.

## Balaka

October 26, 2015

I spent most of last week on my first overnight field visit to the southern district of Balaka where many of WFP’s resilience-building programmes are taking place. My days in Balaka spent in the villages installing 15 rain gauges at farmers’ homes ended up being my best days in Malawi so far. Putting faces to beneficiary numbers and seeing their homes, families and lives was both humbling and really put the level of poverty so many Malawians live at into context for me. Overall there was something so wonderfully intimate and personal about the experience. Every family welcomed us in their own way – we were offered fresh mangos by one woman and were welcomed with song at another. Part of why I came to Malawi was for the chance to surround myself with people from vastly different experiences, cultures and ways of life. Working here allows me that and continues to cause me to challenge my own assumptions and beliefs and ultimately to learn more about my own self. We ended our day at a little stand in one of the villages where goat meat was purchased for a small braai. Little did I know that the meat would be cut right off a dead, recently skinned goat hanging directly in front of us. I will admit, I was a bit worried my stomach was not equipped to handle this, but I am happy to say no stomach issues resulted and I really enjoyed it – so much so that we went back for a second one the following day.

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