

Close to the Suffering in East Africa

By **Chao You-Chen**, Superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital

“When you watch on television children in poverty barefooted, or flies circling around their food, that is just an image. But when you are over there

looking at the wounds on children’s feet and touching them with your hands, you feel their warmth, and they will pull away in pain. To be there in the flesh is different



Leader Supt. Chao You-Chen brings a patient to the gynecology clinic for examination using the only ultrasound machine in the entire Mozambique.

from watching it over television, and that was when I truly comprehended the suffering Buddha spoke of,” Supt. Chao You-Chen began recounting his outreach experience in Mozambique. “The health conditions were poor, flies everywhere. The victims were living in tents. Their houses made of mud were destroyed in the flood. Watching them eating mielle meal with their hands, as painful as their life may be, I could still feel their optimism and innocence.”

Supt. Chao, with numerous international medical missions under his belt, would remain humble before each departure, and do his homework in understanding local health conditions and prevailing diseases. “Prior to our trip to Africa, I learnt that malaria, HIV, tuberculosis, and skin disease are relatively common, malaria in particular. Local doctors and residents are familiar with its treatment. Not only are there rapid screening tools, but clear instructions on methods of administration,” he said. There were certain drugs difficult to access after the flood. Public hospitals did offer these drugs for low prices, but these hospitals were few and far apart, and when these drugs run out the hospitals could do nothing more, putting many chronic patients at risk of having no medication. “A patient who had a blood pressure over 200 needed to take high blood pressure medication regularly.

However after the flood medications were running scarce, and his blood pressure was no longer under control. Another young HIV patient in her 20’s had no medication for over two months after the flood, and contracted tuberculosis during the time, became extremely weak, and was troubled by the lack of medication.”

The coverage and accessibility of healthcare resources in these African countries were inadequate. “During the free clinic an old lady told me she can’t see. From observation it wasn’t cataract, so I took off my glasses and gave her to try, see if a pair of glasses is all that she needed. When she putted them on, everything became clear, and she was overjoyed. Her eyes were fine. All she needed was just a pair of glasses. She could not go to a hospital for glasses because the journey was too far. Simply eye treatment such as this could be implemented into our free clinic services to provide immediate assistance to the local residents,” Dr. Chao spoke of his observations. “The central hospital in Beira suffered tragic losses in this flood. But they have excellent medical students who offered tremendous help during the free clinic as translators,” Dr. Chao said. “There were several other local doctors who joined our rank. When they spoke of their medical practices, most of them could practice medicine in hospitals after graduation, but there were simply no





Supt. Chao You-Chen(left) assists an inconvenient old lady after she got her diagnosis.

civil service vacancies available. They had to work for no pay. Some of them had to give up medicine. Maybe we can contemplate on a way to develop and advance the careers of doctors with TIMA resources.”

There is a “Home of Tzu Chi” in Maputo, Mozambique. Because of Tzu Chi volunteer Denise Tsai’s effort, thousands of local volunteers emerged to help those in their communities. Supt. Chao mentioned, “A college dean,

Monica, said, ‘Mozambicans in Tzu Chi uniform look elegant!’ That elegance is in fact Tzu Chi humanities.” He said that the eradication of malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis in the region require tremendous effort. As long as Tzu Chi humanities can take root there, with the effective and efficient Tzu Chi global network, we can accomplish anything together, whether it is the establishment of Da Ai Village, schools or small hospitals.