# Developing a Framework of Social Audit for Evaluating Projects on Climate Resilient Agriculture in Malawi, Africa

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## ABSTRACT

*An expo-facto research was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of projects on climate resilient agriculture that are being implemented in Phalombe district, Malawi and to analyze the outcomes, constraints and impact of selected projects, with the objective of formulating a framework of social audit for evaluating such projects. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 120 respondents from three Extension Planning Areas of Tamani, Kasongo and Mpinda and also 15 staff from the three NGOs that were selected for the study.The research results showed that mostly females (78.3%) participated in climate resilient projects. It was also revealed that many people who participated in climate resilient agriculture projects were married and most of them had education only upto primary school level (84.2%). The perception of the beneficiaries on severity of constraints showed that there was high degree of concordance among the 120 respondents. The study also showed that in order to make social audit process for climate resilient agriculture projects in Malawi effective, all actors should take part in the process. It could also be found that effective and transparent social audit of climate resilient programmes require close examination of training programmes, muster rolls, materials procured, input distribution (quantity), cash distribution (amount) and funding.*

***Key words :*** *Climate resilient, social audit, beneficiaries, stakeholders.*

Social audit as a tool of evaluating development projects had been there for a while. This tool is found to be used by governments in monitoring and evaluating projects and programmes in many countries. Social audit has been found to be an efficient tool in evaluating projects in various sectors like health, natural resource management, agriculture, community development, water sanitation and hygiene, land conservation etc.

Development projects in agriculture are mostly technology driven and heavily weighted in favour of resource endowed environment, which calls for different control mechanisms to ensure transparency, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in programme implementation (*Nanda and Chandel, 2003*). Moreover, interventions that are planned as part of agricultural projects are multidimensional, which warrants good evaluation mechanisms that would enhance active community participation and effectiveness in achieving objectives and goals. In agriculture and climate resilient projects, social audit has been observed to strengthen resilience capacity as it helps empower local communities rather than foster institutional dependency (*Wisner et al., 2003*).

It is to be noted that though agricultural development projects have hugely contributed to accomplishment of food security, they are currently constrained by several issues*inter alia* climate change, lack of resources, corruption, lack of participatory evaluation mechanism and poor involvement of communities in decision making processes. The situation is not different inMalawi either. Phalombe district in Malawi faces a number of problems related to climate change. Floods and droughts are experienced continuously over a period of years. Although government of Malawi has decentralized the implementation of its programmes to empower local communities to decide, monitor and evaluate developmental projects in their locality, not much has been done to empower them. The evidence of this

challenge is seen in the activities of most of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Phalombe districts as they follow top down approach in the implementation of development programmes. Owing to this, localcommunities have less powers to question the agencies that implement various development projectsfearing discrimination and exclusion from projects. Non-involvement of communities in decision making processes and evaluation of projects has been found to contribute to poor sustainability of projects as the community would not follow up the activities once the agency withdraws from implementation.

Experiences from across the developing world have shown social audit asan effective tool for ensuring transparency in programme implementation by facilitating awarenessgeneration and reducing the chances of corruption. This has also been found to helpimplement effective grievance redressal, co-ordination among implementors and communities, and follow-up on corrective actions.There are several experiences of employing robust social audit process fromIndia, particularly in implementing the massive Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (*Shankar, 2010*). It is with this background the study was undertaken with the following objectives :

- To assess the effectiveness of projects on climate resilient agriculture which are implemented in Phalombe, Malawi.
- To evolve a framework of social audit for evaluating such projects.
- To analyze the outcomes, constraints and impact of selected projects.

## METHODOLOGY

Phalombe district in Malawi was purposively selected for the study due to its proneness to floods and droughts throughout the year. It is among the fifteen-districts regarded as flood prone areas by government of Malawi (*GoM, 2019*). The district is one of the seven districts making up Blantyre Agricultural Development Division (BLADD). It has six Extension Planning Areas (EPAs) namely: Kasongo,Mpinda, Naminjiwa, Nkhulambe, Tamani and Waruma. Out of the six Extension Planning Areas three were randomly selected. A simple random selection was performed to give all EPAs equal chance of being selected for the study.

A sample of 120 beneficiaries were proportionately selected as respondents of the study from the six villages in Phalombe districtwhere projects on climate resilient agriculturewere being implemented. For these 20 beneficiaries each were selected from Masanza and Chirombo villages in Tamani EPA, Mukakhe and Grevulo in Kasongo, and Likhutu and Mathanda villages in Mpinda EPA. A total of 15 staff members drawing five each from the three projects (NGOs) to which the respondents were affiliated also participated in the study. Primary data were collected and analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics such as Binary logistic regression, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance percentage, average, mean, standard deviation. Resilience score was estimated using the following formula:

$$RI = \frac{R1 \times W1 + R2 \times W2 + R3 \times W3 + R4 \times W4 + R5 \times W5 + R6 \times W6}{W1 + W2 + W3 + W4 + W5 + W6}$$

R= Resilience component (good agriculture practices, village savings and loans, backyard gardening, timely cash/inputs delivery, good land husbandry practices, improvement in nutrition status, improvement in business skills and increasing capacity to adapt to climate change)

W= weightage given to the components.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of beneficiaries* : Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of beneficiaries considered for the study were gender, age, marital status, education level, income source, family size, land holding size and average family income per month. The results in Table 1 revealed that mostly female farmers were involved in climate resilient programmes, with 94 females (78.3%) and 26 males (21.7%). Considering age of respondents, it was found that highest proportion of respondents were in range of 25 to 35 years (33.3%). A considerable proportion of the respondents ( 71.7%) who had participated in various climate resilent agriculture projects were married and as much as 84.2 per cent had education up to primary level. Predominance of married people as participants of climate resilient agriculture projects was found to be due to the priority for married households as they require more food and resources to support their families compared to a single household. It was also found that majority (66.7%) depended on farming as their primary source of income and as much as 43.3 per cent had a family size of 5 to 6 individuals. With regard to assets, majority (54.2%) of farmers were found to have land

**Table 1. Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of beneficiaries**

| Variable | Scale | No. | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 26 | 21.7 |
| | Female | 94 | 78.3 |
| Age | 18-24 yrs | 8 | 6.7 |
| | 25-35 yrs | 40 | 33.3 |
| | 36-40 yrs | 17 | 14.2 |
| | 41-45 yrs | 14 | 11.7 |
| | 46-50 yrs | 19 | 15.8 |
| | 51-55 yrs | 22 | 18.3 |
| Marital status | Single | 1 | .8 |
| | Married | 86 | 71.7 |
| | Widow | 15 | 12.5 |
| | Divorce | 18 | 15.0 |
| Education level | Never attend | 8 | 6.7 |
| | Primary | 101 | 84.2 |
| | Secondary/high school | 10 | 8.3 |
| | Others (Adult Literacy) | 1 | .8 |
| Income source | Farming | 80 | 66.7 |
| | Small scale business | 7 | 5.8 |
| | Fishing | 1 | .8 |
| | Casual labour | 13 | 10.8 |
| | Unskilled labour | 1 | .8 |
| | Farming and small-scale business | 16 | 13.3 |
| | Others (Remittance) | 2 | 1.7 |
| Family Size | 1-2 | 6 | 5.0 |
| | 3-4 | 38 | 31.7 |
| | 5-6 | 52 | 43.3 |
| | 7-8 | 19 | 15.8 |
| | 9-10 | 5 | 4.2 |
| Land holding | Less than 1 acre | 54 | 45.0 |
| | 1-2 acres | 65 | 54.2 |
| | 3-4 acres | 1 | .8 |
| Av. family income/ month | Less than K5000(<Rs. 500) | 4 | 3.3 |
| | K5001-K10000(Rs. 501-1000) | 24 | 20.0 |
| | K10001-K15000(Rs.1001-1500) | 26 | 21.7 |
| | K15001-K20000(Rs.1501-2000) | 16 | 13.3 |
| | K20001-K25000(Rs.2001-2500) | 17 | 14.2 |
| | K2500 above (2500 above) | 33 | 27.5 |

holding size of 1 to 2 acres. The predominance of farmers with smaller holding size implied that availability of food is affected during various events of climate change since the amount of produce from this land could not last for the whole year unless the production process is properly managed. It was also found that that 27.5 per centof the respondents had an average monthly income of K25,000 (which is just above Rs. 2500). This low income implied that the households would not have enough resources to sustain their lives particularly in the backdrop of climate change eventualities.

*Resilience of beneficiaries of climate resilient agriculture projects* : In order to find out the exact level of resilience of the beneficiaries of the projects, weightage was given to the components that would contribute to resilience based on importance perceived by beneficiaries. The components included good agriculture practices, village savings and loans, backyard gardening, timely cash/inputs delivery, good land husbandry practices, improvement in nutrition status, improvement in business skills and increasing capacity to adapt to climate change (Table 2).

**Table 2. Resilience of beneficiaries of climate resilient agriculture projects**

| Statement | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Good agricultural practices | 56.58 | 21.74 |
| Village savings and loans | 46.88 | 13.10 |
| Backyard garden | 32.41 | 10.92 |
| Improvement in nutrition | 43.08 | 13.70 |
| Improvement in business skills | 54.04 | 25.42 |
| Increase capacity to adapt climate change | 69.30 | 06.52 |

*Relationship between socio economic variables and resilience :* Binary logistic regression was employed to find out the relationship between socio economic variables and resilience of farmers. Results in Table 3 showed that variables like education and land holding size had significant positive effect on resilience index of farmers as the odds ratios were above one in these cases. This implied that for unit increase in the level of education, the respondents are 2.63 times more probable to occupy the above average resilience class based on the index. Similarly, if respondents attained a unit increase in land holding size, the people would be 2.845 times more likely to have above average resilience index.

*Major constraints faced by beneficiaries* : Major constraints faced by farmers were analyzed to find out whether there existed any agreement among the beneficiaries regarding the severity and importance of constraints reported from the field. The results in Table 4, which showed the Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance of agreement among beneficiaries that coefficient of concordance w= 0.5, chi square =239.96 was significant at 1% level of significance. This revealed that there was high degree of concordance among the 120 respondents in ranking the constraints according their importance. While drying up of water resources

**Table 3. Binary logistic regression in relationship between independent variables with regards to contributing to resilience of farmers**

| Variable | B | S.E. | Wald | df | Sig. | Exp (B)Odds Ratio | Probability |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | -.386 | 0.530 | 0.530 | 1 | 0.467 | 0.680 | 0.40 |
| Age | .084 | 0.123 | 0.473 | 1 | 0.492 | 1.088 | 0.52 |
| Marital status | .074 | 0.190 | 0.150 | 1 | 0.699 | 1.077 | 0.52 |
| Education | .967 | 0.518 | 3.492 | 1 | 0.062* | 2.630 | 0.72 |
| Income source | -.123 | 0.089 | 1.914 | 1 | 0.167 | 0.884 | 0.47 |
| Family size | -.319 | 0.228 | 1.949 | 1 | 0.163 | 0.727 | 0.42 |
| Land holding size | 1.046 | 0.401 | 6.786 | 1 | 0.009*** | 2.845 | 0.74 |
| Constant | -2.130 | 1.902 | 1.251 | 1 | 0.263 | 0.119 | 0.11 |

Note: *denote significance at 10% level and *** denote significance at 1% level; Probability = Exp(B)/1+Exp(B)

was the most severe constraint identified by beneficiaries, drought/ flood, inadequate quantity of food, late delivery of inputs and poor involvement in decision making were ranked in the order of importance perceived by the respondents.

**Table 4. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (Severity of constraints as perceived by beneficiaries)**

| Constraints | Mean Rank |
|---|---|
| Drying up of water resources | 4.15 |
| Drought/ flood | 3.93 |
| Small quantity of food | 2.92 |
| Late delivery of inputs | 2.07 |
| Poor involvement in decision making | 1.94 |

*Project components to be subjected to social audit according to beneficiaries* : In an attempt to formulate the framework of social audit to be followed in evaluating climate resilient projects implemented in Malawi, the components to be included in social audit were identified. The results revealed that cash distribution (amount), input distribution (quantity), material procurement, training programmes and funding components of climate resilient agriculture projects should be necessarily included in evaluating the transparency of implementation of the projects while doing social audit.However, the respondents opined that muster rolls should not be subjected to social audit, probably due to the fact that the respondents are not aware of the importance of social audit in climate resilient programmes and other developmental programmes.

## CONCLUSION

Based on experiences from India and other countries, it could be inferred that social audit could be an effective tool to resolve problems of corruption and lack of transparency which cripple the effectiveness of climate resilient agriculture projects in Malawi. All the factors that contribute to the failure of projects can be identified through social audit and corrected. Conducting social audit will increase the sustainability of projects even after the implementing agency stops supporting them. An ideal framework of social audit in Malawi should include all actors in agricultural sector and emphasize on participatory approach of evaluation. Social audit shall be an entry point for correction of shortcomings during the course of implementation of projects. It would also provide benchmark details based on which subsequent interventions can be chalked out. Social audit would also help the beneficiaries overcome the constraints listed by them as the process would improve the efficiency of implementation of projects.

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