



Enhancing Communities' Resilience Programme (ECRP) in Malawi.

Report on Programme Lessons Learnt

ECRP Programme Workshop

Lilongwe Hotel

27th -29th March, 2017

Associate Professor Bernard C.G. Kamanga
University of Livingstonia
P.O. Box 37, Livingstonia
Rumphi

7th April, 2017



Norwegian Embassy

Introduction

Throughout the entire Enhancing Community Resilience Programme life cycle, lessons were learnt and opportunities were continuously discovered for improvement. Documenting the lessons learnt gives an analysis of successes, root causes of problems that occurred, and generates recommendations for future initiatives.

This report presents lessons learnt from the “Enhancing Community Resilience Programme (ECRP)” in Malawi. Capturing lessons in this programme represents one of the steps in gaining a deeper understanding of resilience issues in Malawi before its comprehensive evaluation, which will more clearly identify the bigger picture of the programme impact among communities in Malawi, and discover opportunities for improvement. It seeks to assess the outcomes and barriers to success throughout the programme life cycle. The lessons learnt might provide guidance to future programming in similar initiatives.

ECRP programme

The Enhancing Community Resilience Programme’s (ECRP’s) purpose is to increase the resilience of vulnerable communities to climate variability and change. The programme is being implemented in 11 disaster prone districts by two consortia led by Christian Aid and Concern Universal. The programme was funded by the United Kingdom through the Department for International Development with additional support from Governments of Ireland and Norway. ECRP was initially planned for 5 years from 2011 to 2016, however, the programme was extended up to September, 2017.

ECRP was implemented to deliver four outputs namely, (i) the capacity of local authorities, communities and individuals to address the impacts of climate change is increased; (ii) the capacity of communities and individuals to adapt their livelihoods to climate variability and the impacts of climate change and to disasters is increased; (iii) information sharing between stakeholders on Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and climate change (CC) adaptation is strengthened, and (iv) the capacity of disaster risk reduction and climate change policy and programmes and delivery structures of key Government Ministries and Departments is strengthened.

To achieve the outputs, the programme promoted a variety of interventions including Village savings and loans (VSL), disaster risk reduction (DRR) and early warning systems (EWS), small scale irrigation, agroforestry, conservation agriculture, catchment management, gender, small scale livestock (SSL), low carbon technology, disability, youths, markets and knowledge management and advocacy among other interventions.

The overall implementation of ECRP was successful in that all activities were well coordinated and achieved tangible outcomes. Partners identified fifteen successes of the programme across project design, management, community participation, partnerships, outcomes and outputs, and capacity building. These successes are

presented in Appendix 1 of this report. While successes were achieved, the programme faced several challenges as well. Challenges are learning points for improvements and they are lessons in that sense (Appendix 2). The main issues encountered during the implementation ranged from late disbursement of funds to land disputes that significantly delayed some activities of the programme. Appendix 3 presents a set of proposed interventions for wider coverage. To have a complete picture of the ECRP successes and challenges, read this document together with the appendices referred to in the document.

1.1. The assignment

The need to compile lessons was, in particular, to help promote sharing of evidence-based lessons and processes that led to successful and unsuccessful results in improving community resilience. The assignment's overall objective was to document lessons learnt in ECRP as experienced in the implementation of this project across the impact districts. In addition, the assignment identified:

1. Successes in the project as observed by the implementing partners and technical leads;
2. Specific factors that lead to the attainment of each success observed;
3. Challenges observed by all players in the project in the implementation of the project;
4. Specific obstacles met in the course of implementing the project;
5. Efforts made to overcome the identified challenges and the effectiveness of those efforts; and
6. Recommendations to inform ECRP final evaluation and future programmes.

Methodology for capturing and consolidating lessons learnt

The lessons were generated from programme implementation by partners and technical leads in the impact areas. The participatory process at a workshop conducted from 27 – 29th March, 2017 at Lilongwe Hotel was aimed at gathering and validating the lessons. Partners made presentations for discussions on the successes, challenges, and recommendations using a template. Four groups of partners and technical leads generated the lessons learnt basing on the presentations and were presented in plenary for further analysis of the lessons. Technical leads finally validated and approved the lessons presented in this report.

The report covers lessons learnt and recommendations for each lesson. The successes and challenges are part of this report as Appendices 1 and 2. It also outlines promising practices with potential of being maintained and replicated or scaled up in the future or absorbed in other projects. Its importance lies on serving as an information toolkit for ECRP stakeholders to make some reflections and analyses of what worked or not, how it worked and why.

Lessons learnt from ECRP and recommendations

Lessons learnt are general statements that describe good practices or innovative approaches that are shared to provide continuous improvement. They may also be descriptions of challenges or areas for improvement. Lessons have to meet certain characteristics such as relevance, programme experience-based, and scalability. The following were identified as lessons learnt from the Christian Aid ECRP.

Lesson 1: Interventions with short term benefits or returns register a higher adoption rate than those with benefits realised in a long term.

Out of the many interventions promoted, those with immediate benefits attracted most participation from households. The relevance of this lesson lies on the provision of immediate practical solutions to needs of households. For example, a strong consensus exists among partners and Technical Leads that use of VSL as an entry point to participation proved to be an effective tool for enhancing adoption of other interventions such as low carbon cook stove. The short term economic benefits the VSL offered were practically important in responding to many household needs, indicating that sustainability would likely be achieved. It is a preferred intervention because it is more practical, efficient, effective and very appealing to the households. Interventions with medium term benefits such as conservation agriculture and winter cropping were also appealing.

Recommendation: Future programming should focus on interventions with benefits realised in the shortest term possible. To do this, analysis of factors that hinder full participation of households, as well as affecting benefits realised is important. Issues of late disbursement of funds need to be critically looked at to reduce untimely activities. Scaling up these interventions would have a wider and positive impact to vulnerable communities.

Lesson 2: Community involvement at all stages of project cycle enhances participation and sense of ownership and widespread impact

The relevance of this as a lesson hinges on qualification of community participation. Community involvement is a key aspect for sustainability. Community development is a two way traffic that calls for active community participation and accountability by the service providers. Building local capacity from scratch is difficult and time consuming, and thus identifying and engaging existing capacity reduces costs and ensures sustainability. It was observed that when community participation was pulled by false expectations such as provision of incentives, sustainability of interventions was less secured. Drop outs become the order of the day in such situations. On the other hand, when participation is coupled with positive mind-set change, ownership of interventions is guaranteed as well as course for sustainability is vivid. For example, learning visits have been observed to influence adoption of interventions - adoption of irrigation intervention was a tall order in Ndamera, but it picked up when the community was involved in a learning visit to Makhanga, Chikwawa and Phalombe.

Recommendation: Partners need to ensure that all interventions secure community involvement driven by their passion and not false promises as they lead to frustrations and drop outs. Sustainability starts with passion hearts and commitment of individual members of communities. Securing that should be the priority of any intervention prior to implementation. Programmes should also identify and support community leaders who can think big and innovate within their means as that is considered key to long term success of interventions.

Lesson 3: Cascading the work plan to community structures and development of detailed implementation plan promotes accountability and increases efficiency

When communities have understood the workplans and their implementation, accountability and transparency are achieved. Accountability and transparency are key to the success of resilience building programming. Cascaded workplans made communities see the course of the programme activities and implement them with understanding and commitment for desired outcomes.

Recommendation: When possible, partners should prioritise development of work plans with communities and/or making them fully understand to reduce loss of time in implementation.

Lesson 4: Consortium-based programmes are most likely to succeed where technical support and good working relationships with relevant stakeholders exist and are effective.

ECRP worked with most relevant stakeholders such as public officers, community development structures and district development structures at district level, in addition to Technical Leads for each thematic area. The lesson learnt from this is that most successful interventions were found where strong and good relationships existed with stakeholders and the local community with high civic capacity. District level staff involvement was very crucial and worked better because of the existing good relationships. Where strong district development structures were fully involved in intervention management, the observation showed high likelihood of sustainability of outcomes. For example, involving agricultural extension workers who are key in implementation of agriculture related interventions such as conservation agriculture, livestock and irrigation enhanced success and uptake of interventions.

Recommendation: Where possible, the ECRP II should prioritise continuing the partner-based or consortium-based programmes where all stakeholders feel engaged and civic capacity is high. It should also invest considerable time and resources cultivating relevant influential district leaders prior to implementing the other phase.

Lesson 5: Severity of damages experienced during a given scenario, thus disasters, influences the commitment of community members.

People learn from failures and successes. Where adverse events such as droughts and floods occurred with certain severity, communities become committed towards interventions that would help them cope with disaster effects. For example, scarcity of firewood pushed households to participate in tree planting and use of efficient stoves, and droughts promoted use of drought tolerant and early maturing varieties to ensure food security.

Recommendation: Promotion of interventions based on events would be an additional means of promoting uptake of such interventions.

Lesson 6: Conflicting agendas between organizations targeting the same communities affect people's commitment and programme delivery

Attribution of outcomes was observed to be compromised when other NGOs outside the consortium implemented similar activities in similar areas, to the extent of having households with dual participation. This was largely coming in due to lack of proper coordination and guidance by the district authorities. For example in Chikwawa, World Food Programme had relief programmes on the same farmers that ECRP had resilient interventions with. Attribution of outcomes was difficult in most cases. The district seemed to have lost control of coordinating niches where NGOs would work. The lesson impacts on costs through replacement of trained farmers or households with capacity who have switched to other players.

Recommendation: Much as it is difficult for the district to deny access to any part of the district by any NGO, deliberate efforts have to be made by the district officials to ensure that NGOs work with minimum conflicts and overlap. Particular attention is needed on making sure that services offered by NGOs are not a duplicate of the other as that is costly in the long run. Coverage for consortium-based or partnership-based programmes should be inclusive so that tangible benefits are felt by a larger fraction of communities. Where activities are not similar such as distribution of relief items, coordination with existing partners in the impact areas is important.

Lesson 7: A sub-administrative office in the district of operation is necessary to provide administrative support to field operations/programme implementation.

Having head offices for implementing partners away from the district of operation is proving a challenge for the administrative support to the program. This compromised efficiency of the activities in some cases as they could wait for long for a decision to be made at partner level. A sub office at the district level would take care of many urgent issues that otherwise require involvement of higher offices.

Recommendation: ECRP II or any other consortium to come should consider having sub offices in target districts with personnel to offer coordinating roles. This will speed up implementation of interventions as well as decision making.

Lesson 8: Use of volunteers compromise quality of programme results when field staff are not adequate.

In most cases, there were reports of over achieving enrolment of beneficiaries. Use of volunteers contributed to this over enrolment. However, an observation was made that too many volunteers over a lean staff compromised quality of delivery as supervision was lacking. Use of volunteers where supervision is minimal may compromise the relevance of the interventions.

Recommendation: It is important to consider the number of volunteers to staff so that the volunteers are able to learn from staff as well as making staff able to train and monitor them. It is important to consider use of volunteers who can contribute effectively to the delivery of the services and careful inclusion of volunteers is important. Consider one field staff per intervention. It is important also to consider promoting fewer interventions to concentrate efforts for better outcomes.

Lesson 9: The quarterly / monthly funds disbursement system proved unrealistic and not effective in addressing the 10% rule.

Too much work on processing disbursements which created time lag between monthly disbursements which cumulatively meant almost a month is lost every quarter. This shortened implementation time, and led to less resources being disbursed than forecast. Time bound activities such as planting crops may be affected and that reduces the relevance of the interventions.

Recommendation: Disbursements from partner head office to field offices needs to be more efficient to ensure ongoing availability of funds for implementation. Ensure timely approval of budget. Partners suggest that future consortium-based programmes or partnership-based programmes should consider bi-annual disbursement of funds to allow smooth and timely implementation of activities. Partners need to improve on compliance to project financial procedures to minimize time wastage in managing queries.

Lesson 10: Community based review meetings enhanced programme ownership by the communities.

Where workplans and activities have been understood by the participating communities, commitment is enhanced and ownership is more secured. Partners observed that where communities conducted monitoring and review meetings for workplans, ownership was observed high and benefits accrued from interventions made more impact to participating households. Review meetings offer room for communities to participate in decision making. This does not only enhance ownership but also capacity of households to manage other interventions.

Recommendation: Programmes should factor in resources to secure community involvement at all stages particularly in the review meetings and that they are part of

decision making for the programmes. This is a lesson worthy scaling up, but with focus on securing commitment of communities prior to interventions.

Lesson 11: Joint planning at an organizational level involving program and finance personnel addresses challenges of the projects.

Partners observed that where planning did not involve finance personnel, implementation of interventions was compromised. Finance personnel often feel sidelined and fail to understand and honour financial requests in time. Most successful interventions were observed when there was joint planning with finance personnel as they understood the need for timely activities. Other challenges that could likely occur from lack of joint planning are thus avoided.

Recommendation: To ensure timely positive outcomes, partners should avoid isolated planning of intervention management, but rather embrace participatory planning where everyone feels important. This enhances a sense of recognition and effective contribution.

Lesson 12: Use of village agents and lead farmers enhances quick uptake of technologies.

The success of ECRP will be measured by the level of uptake of interventions and sustainability of the same beyond the programme period. Partners practically learnt that the village agent and lead farmer approach were beneficial and preferred as adoption of interventions was quicker and higher. For example, uptake of fixed cook stoves (low carbon technology) was lower before involvement of village agents. Uptake of conservation agriculture improved with involvement of lead farmers. Village agents are community members with knowledge of the communities and it is easier for them to convince fellow community members on interventions. Lead farmers are often those with some degree of respect in the society and may be economically better off. This status may generate some level of confidence in other members resulting into uptake of interventions.

Recommendation: Identification and support of village agents and lead farmers with capacity should continuously take place so that the process of adoption of interventions is improved. Creative and innovative village agents and lead farmers are key to success of the interventions and need to be supported.

Lesson 13: Fixed stoves are preferred to portable ones by communities.

Promotion of low carbon technologies such as use of cook stoves showed that communities preferred fixed stoves to portable ones. The main reason was that fixed stoves are made from cheap and locally available materials. Portable cook stoves require special type of materials which are not available in some impact areas. Although that was the case, portable stoves were said to be used anywhere one wanted and that advantage was important to its uptake.

Recommendation: Partners should consider analysing factors influencing uptake of cook stoves and improve on their promotion. With the alarming deforestation rates currently prevailing, cook stoves of any type should continuously be promoted.

Lesson 14: Uniform conditions to local volunteers would enhance consistency in implementation of programmes.

Volunteers were engaged across ECRP impact districts. However, they were subjected to different conditions. Even within the same site, treatment of volunteers varied. Where the conditions were lowest, implementation of interventions was compromised. Success in some cases hinged on the participation of volunteers and thus deserved recognition of some sort.

Recommendation: Partners should consider uniform management of volunteers in implementing ECRP projects.

Lesson 15: Use of youths in disseminating weather-related forecasts has been more helpful than just using the DRM structures.

Youth interventions such as drama were critical to the success of ECRP. One example is the dissemination of weather forecast through drama, as a lived experience that enhanced uptake of information and use in disaster preparedness. Enthusiasm of the youth coupled with their literacy levels is adding value to programme quality and achievement of ECRP objectives. Recruited youths were trained and in-turn ably transferred the skills to the communities, e.g. on DRR, VSL, conservation agriculture and collecting data on beneficiaries.

Recommendation: If ECRP wants to achieve resilience of vulnerable communities, it must accept that a long-term commitment in youth participation is often necessary. Careful analysis is needed to discern best way to secure youth participation for the long-term success.

Lesson 16: ECRP interventions enhanced unity among communities.

Promotion of interventions through group approach such as in seed multiplication slowly brought in an element of unity and understanding of each other. Relations improved and sharing of knowledge became easier. The relevance of unity is that community members encourage each other to participate in programmes and thus improve their economic status. Collective decision making is a key element for development.

Recommendation: Partners should foster use of the group approach. There is need to analyse the dynamics of group approach and work on making them more effective. There is need to analyse factors that can lead to the smooth implementation of interventions among communities and embrace the better ones.

Lesson 17: Innovative community members are critical for ECRP success and should be supported.

ECRP created room for innovative beneficiaries to integrate indigenous and scientific knowledge which facilitated smooth implementation of interventions. When maize crops were attacked by armyworms, there were no chemicals to treat them, but communities used sand and Fish bean (*Tephrosia vogelii*) leaves to kill arm worms. This was a lived experience by communities.

Recommendation: It should be noted that where such innovation is identified originating from community members, support is needed. This should continuously be identified and supported, as innovators are key to long-term success of many interventions.

Lesson 18: Leveraging of local structures and volunteers fosters quick implementation of an apparent difficult activity

In some cases, participation in events was enhanced through use of local institutions such as *Gule wamkulu* (a cultural institution among Chewa people of Central Region). Its performance is associated with beliefs and some command of order. Partners experienced that when such institutions were used in promoting interventions, other tasks that were seemingly difficult were performed with ease.

Recommendation: Cultural institutions need to be respected and may also act as vehicles or entry points to promotion of interventions.

Lesson 19: Truncheon tree planting require specific agro-ecological zones.

ECRP promotion of tree planting builds on resilience of communities greatly. However, it was observed that specific agro-ecological zones require specific truncheons.

Recommendation: There is need for assessment of factors that influence performance of truncheons in specific areas to improve coverage and growth.

Lesson 20: Pass on Gift within closer vicinities has proved difficult to materialise.

Pass on Gift involving livestock was observed difficult with households closer to each other as livestock returned to original owners. It was observed that in most cases, such owners either killed them or hide them and claim no responsibility. This had compromised the Pass on Gift approach. Loss of livestock through unfaithful means is a great setback to the promotion of livestock and also a constraint to reducing vulnerability to livelihood shocks and poverty.

Recommendation: Pass on Gift should be among households that are far apart so that livestock do not easily trace back their roots. In addition, selection of participating farmers in the approach should consider an element of trust and faithfulness.

Lesson 21: Social gatherings create informal awareness and enhances uptake of ECRP interventions among communities.

It was observed that social gatherings play a critical role in promoting other interventions since they involve almost everyone in communities. It was observed that adoption of solar technologies was poor in some areas, but through social gatherings such as funerals, adoption of the intervention improved tremendously.

Recommendation: Partners should use all means possible to enhance adoption of technologies. Analysis of factors governing adoption is key factor for success. Adoption of interventions is a slow process and requires patience.

Lesson 22: Use of website to upload ECRP materials has been crucial in enhancing ECRP visibility and sharing of information.

Apart from monthly publications, ECRP programme used websites to share information. It was observed that visibility of ECRP and sharing of information was wider and relatively easier. For example, use of online MIS and CEPA-website enhanced sharing of information on ECRP. It enhanced access of information to others to learn from sharing lessons with external stakeholders. It allowed partners to learn in identifying information to share and the format in which the information would most successfully reach a wider community.

Recommendation: Partners should be encouraged to learn and provide relevant information for anchoring on the websites. Other means of enhancing visibility and sharing of information need to be explored.

Lesson 23: Inconsistent use of DSA guidelines brings mistrust among stakeholders.

Mistrust can derail planned activities. It was learnt that inconsistent use of DSA guidelines generated mistrust among stakeholders and that compromised participation of affected staff, particularly government staff who are key to the sustainability of the interventions. Full board reduced participation of stakeholders in implementation of the activities of ECRP. The issues of DSA are very common when programmes of this nature are viewed as an extra source of income by other quarters, rather than an opportunity for one to contribute humbly to the development of the communities. At the moment, it is difficult to have such souls that can do without “what is my take home” question. Unless that happens, the DSA issues will remain. In such situations, sustainability of interventions is never completely secured. This is why most donor funded programmes seem to have minimal sustainability and impact beyond end line of programmes.

Recommendation: Authorities should consider reviewing the DSA guidelines and be consistent in its implementation. Sensitisation is also key as allowances should not be

everything one needs to implement activities. It should be born in mind that impact is more important than self-benefits. A radical call for mind-set change on participating staff in this regard is needed.

Lesson 24: Timely release of weather forecast is key to resilience building

Weather forecast helps communities to prepare for disasters. The ECRP focus on resilience building includes understanding weather forecasts and utilising the information for survival in case of eventualities. In implementation of interventions for example, it was learnt that heavy rains affected conservation agriculture (maize became yellow) in low lying areas due to rising water table. Challenges of this nature reduce uptake of technologies, as well as commitment of participating communities. However, this happened before the conservation agriculture guidelines were released by the Ministry of Agriculture, which now gives proper guidance on sites for conservation agriculture. Early release of weather forecast coupled with the guidelines on conservation agriculture provide information relevant for promotion of conservation agriculture. This will likely improve adoption of the technology.

Recommendation: Use of conservation agriculture guidelines will minimize such challenges. Weather forecast information is crucial and partners are advised to link up with the Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services (DCCM) in the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mining through the Malawi Weather Forum where updates are common. Strengthening of early warning structures and DRR knowledge across the board, changes peoples' mind set, and hence reduction in losses and damages caused by disasters. There is need to ensure information is shared in a manner that is timely and "actionable" and also to integrate people, processes, and technologies to drive optimal benefits in weather forecast and use.

Lesson 25: Availability of other complementary initiatives by other stakeholders enhances adoption of related interventions.

It was observed that the government Farm Input Subsidy Programme provided room for adoption of other interventions including conservation agriculture. This was observed where good and strong collaboration existed. Farm input subsidy beneficiaries used the inputs received from the programme in conservation agriculture fields to maximise benefits. This complimented adoption of the conservation agriculture interventions.

Recommendation: Strong collaboration is very key and this should be done at district level using all players. Participation in right forums enhances collaboration. Even the civil society should be strong at district level. Weak district level management affects collaboration negatively.

Lesson 26: The score card approach improves community understanding and enhances adoption of interventions.

It all centres on committed involvement by communities which in all terms must be secured immediately interventions start. One lesson learnt from this is that the score card approach enhances commitment of communities to the programme. It was observed that when this approach was used, adoption of interventions improved as a result of knowledge generated from use of the approach. It helps getting feedback from communities and thus enhances adoption of interventions.

Recommendation: Communities are different and no one-size fits all approach to adoption may work. There is need to analyse factors influencing success in such cases as they would form part of scaling up activities.

Lesson 27: Use of truncheon approach in planting trees in saline areas was a success.

Saline soils are naturally with high concentration of salts which do not offer suitable conditions for most plants' growth. Establishment of tree nurseries was observed a failure using salty water for watering. Success was observed when trees were planted using the truncheon approach. Seedlings are area specific and need to be managed according to their niches.

Recommendation: Use of truncheons need to be emphasised and promoted. It is important to assess the pattern of vegetation so that only those with tolerance to the conditions are promoted within specific locality.

Lesson 28: Disasters have been used as an excuse to default in Pass on the Gift scheme.

When disasters occur such as floods, loss of livestock is sometimes experienced. While this is so, it was learnt that people claimed that livestock for Pass on Gift scheme were lost. Surprisingly enough, visiting them a day or so revealed that their own livestock did not. This was just an advantage to default in the pass on a gift scheme due to selfishness.

Recommendation: Partners and communities should work hand in hand with the livestock committees which are key in enforcing the available livestock guidelines. Recipients should fully understand the concept and take responsibility for the livestock they have. Sensitisation is key as all livestock given to communities remain within the communities.

Lesson 29: Lack of solar technicians to repair faulty gadgets reduces solar technology adoption.

Although uptake of solar technology was improved, lack of technicians to repair the gadgets reduced their use. Most solar gadgets may not be repaired, but availability of local artisans would instil some level of confidence in households in using solar gadgets.

Recommendation: There is need to consider investing in training local artisans for repairs of the gadgets. Sensitization to communities is also needed in that each gadget has a warranty period, and damage within that period is replaceable. Linking with suppliers is another area to be considered in the process so that they are ready to assist in enforcement of warranty for long term use of solar technologies. Careful choice of suppliers to support the interventions such as low carbon technology e.g. use of solar gadgets is essential.

Lesson 30: Implementing gender as a stand-alone activity has proved to be effective than mainstreaming it

ECRP promoted gender dialogues alongside mainstreaming initiatives. It was learnt that gender dialogues among communities improved programme delivery, relations and involvement of men in activities that were deemed feminine before. This success was observed when gender dialogues were conducted as stand-alone intervention. Communities understood the gender concepts and positive change was immediately observed. For example, men were observed participating in cook stove making which was believed to be for women only.

Recommendation: Gender issues are still critical at the moment and they derail development, and thus it is important to conduct series of gender dialogues besides mainstreaming it. Formation of gender dialogue committees would help in implementing gender issues.

Lesson 31: Comprehensive and participatory feasibility studies are key to sustainability of irrigation schemes.

Comprehensive and participatory feasibility studies are important in sustainability of success of ECRP interventions. Partners observed that some irrigation schemes dried up, that community members participated against their will and in some cases schemes were flooded and dams damaged. They believe incompetent consultants rushed through the work and sub-standard schemes were offered to communities. On the other hand, it was observed that the irrigation vote did not have adequate funds to warrant such comprehensive studies. Non-functional irrigation schemes decimated the desire by communities to participate in irrigation, and it often takes time to re-convince them to participate.

Recommendation: Enhance feasibility studies that will foster sustainability of interventions. In any case, consultation with government experts in irrigation must be encouraged so that they are part and parcel of consultancies in that field. Irrigation requires heavy initial capital investment and programmes should consider allocating adequate funds to this vote. Returns from irrigation schemes are lifelong and appealing if well designed and sustainably managed. For drying up of irrigation schemes, catchment conservations should be one of the key interventions.

Lesson 32: Combination of promising technologies is key to resilience building.

All interventions promoted by ECRP aimed at building resilience of communities to climate change effects. However, it is not all interventions that fulfilled that role as some struggled to gain recognition. A lesson learnt from this programme is that no single intervention has magic answers but a combination of several ones brings positive outcomes to communities and is key to resilience building. For example, partners observed that a combination of VSL, small scale livestock and small scale irrigation interventions had more benefits to a household than each one of them separately.

Recommendation: Partners should consider several intervention options and assess their benefits to households with time. Those promising interventions should be promoted at wider scale. Training and necessary support like in case of livestock should be facilitated

Lesson 33: The hand-out culture has an effect on adoption and sustainability of interventions,

Partners observed that the culture of hand-outs due to disasters has eroded the ability to work for self. This is so in districts like Nsanje that are highly vulnerable to climate change effects. Hand-outs may not only be from relief items, but even free distribution of farm inputs such as seed. The hand-out culture spurs laziness and dependence syndrome which may reduce the hardworking spirit in individuals. Households that are so dependent on hand-outs may not see the need to adopt interventions.

Recommendation: There is need for special activities to address the hand-out syndrome e.g. awareness raising. Partners should work in securing commitment of such households in the process of promoting technologies.

Lesson 34: Timely advocacy presents opportunities to influence policy processes

Through experience timely advocacy especially with policy issues results in uptake or consideration of proposals/voice from partners. It was observed that there was limited implementation of district level advocacy due to limited capacity of staff on the ground and work load. However, evidence from the ground was utilized to inform the national policy advocacy.

Recommendation: Capacity building is key in district advocacy structures and it is important therefore to invest in training more staff or involving more competent staff to do advocacy.

Lesson 35: Evidence-based advocacy strengthens advocacy efforts

Advocacy helps communities to demand services that are not available or delivered inadequately. However, evidence on issues identified to be advocated for is critical as it

strengthens the case being advanced for. It was learnt by partners that evidence-based advocacy strengthened advocacy efforts at district level.

Recommendation: It is important to conduct research so as to come up with evidence to strengthen advocacy.

Lesson 36. Enhanced understanding and skills are required for long term intervention success.

ECRP worked on the basis of understanding of all partners and processes therein and their skills to implement multi-intervention programme. Where there was lack of or inadequate understanding and skills, the programme strived to capacitate the stakeholders at all levels. Skills were needed to make sure that implementation of the programme responds to the log-frame indicators, goal and decision making.

Recommendation: The programme should enhance internal partner development or training so that they are up to date in terms of skills and knowledge to implement interventions in a relevant manner.

Lesson 37. Building resilience is a long term and inherently dynamic process

Key aspects are engagement of the communities, multiple interventions giving multiple benefits, and that adoption is a slow process. To achieve these, partners observed that continuous learning during implementation and flexibility in programming are key factors for success.

Recommendation: Partners should continuously strive to learn and isolate gaps for improvement. When gaps are isolated, learning will take place and improvements will likely be made.

Lesson 38. The success of any resilience building programme depends on the community itself

Capacity building of local institutions, farmer to farmer extension and experiences influencing priorities and decisions, work towards improving communities acceptance of interventions and participation. Success is dependent on their socio-economic characteristics. Success of interventions was observed to be greater where a strong work ethic, and high levels of motivation and innovativeness were in place.

Recommendation: Partners, donors and researchers must therefore make efforts to understand these underlying factors to achieve success.

Lesson 39. Inclusivity in resilience building can be achieved through using a variety of channels for communication.

Use of a variety of communication channels are likely to achieve a lot in making communities understand the objectives of the programme, and sharing of knowledge generated from the programme.

Recommendation: Resilience building must allocate adequate financial resources for communication and information sharing.

Lesson 40. Interventions that act as catalysts for overall livelihood improvement are key to success and should be promoted.

Some interventions that have multiple benefits are livestock development, small scale irrigation, village savings and loans and conservation agriculture. A combination of two or more of these interventions yields more benefits than each one of them. Households that adopted a minimum of three of these interventions have over the time built their resilience to climate variability and change.

Recommendation: Catalyst interventions spur overall livelihood improvement over time and capacitate beneficiaries to be independent. It is important that their promotion is enhanced and scaled up for wider coverage.

There is need to consider introducing market-driven interventions at an early stage of the programme to allow farmers to use an agribusiness approach for marketable products. There is need to explore more on lucrative markets and link them to market groups which later could be advanced to associations and cooperative level.

Lesson 41. Multi-layered partnerships are critical for successes at different levels.

ECRP engaged several partners from government, local governance structures and civil society organisations to enhance formal and informal partnerships. This type of partnership is key to the success of interventions. ECRP saw that aspect and brought in its programme all relevant stakeholders to embrace success together and achieve resilient livelihoods for vulnerable communities. This is possible as long as good relations are created, mutual understanding is enhanced and common vision is shared and understood.

Recommendation: Programmes should embrace working with at multiple and interlinked levels with informal and formal partnerships.

Conclusion

A key point presented in this report is that resilience building introduces added capacity of humans to anticipate and plan for the future. In so doing, successes are realised and challenges faced, making the process of resilience building complex. Throughout the process, lessons are continuously learnt and opportunities created for improvement. Lessons learnt in this report were collected, validated and now documented from ECRP. The lessons were approved and recommendations have been made for future

improvements. It is important for partners to strive for continuous improvement and this portion of the lessons learnt process is an integral step.