

## **A Bird's View on Non-Economic Losses and Damage: A Case of Maseya Community in Chikwawa District, Malawi**

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### **Synopsis**

This case study underscores the impact of climate change on Malawian communities, necessitating their relocation. While relocation serves to safeguard lives in disaster-prone areas, adherence to legal procedures is imperative. Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD) should be given due consideration alongside economic losses, as its long-term negative effects are often overlooked. The case brings experiences from the ground and strongly advocates for integrating NELD considerations into community resettlement efforts and compensating affected communities for NELD incurred due to climate change-induced disasters.

### **1. Overview of the Case Study**

Malawi is one of the least developed and poorest countries in the world, with a GDP per capita of \$645.2 in 2022<sup>1</sup>. The country heavily relies on agriculture, with approximately 80% of its population engaged in subsistence farming. However, the country faces escalating climate shocks, particularly cyclones and floods, since 2015. Chikwawa district with a population of 615,685 people out of which 51.2% are women<sup>2</sup>, is one of the most affected districts. The district is vulnerable to climatic shocks exacerbated by its geographical location in the lower Shire Valley. In 2023, Government of Malawi under the newly enacted Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Act<sup>3</sup>, reallocated five communities<sup>4</sup> in response to Cyclone Freddy's impact including the Maseya Community in Traditional Authority Ngabu. The community has approximately 480 households is predominantly Sena<sup>5</sup> by tribe.



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<sup>1</sup> World Bank Data <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=MW>.

<sup>2</sup> Chikwawa Social Economic Profile 2022-2030

<sup>3</sup> The Malawi Government Disaster Risk Management Act of 2023

<sup>4</sup> With a total of 1,600 households being reallocated in various areas within the district

<sup>5</sup> Sena: An ethnic group, with origins in the northwestern region of Mozambique farming tribe with high prestige on land ownership and livestock.

*Photo 1: Part of the resettlement for the Masaye community in Ta Ngabu*

### **Non-economic losses incurred due to cyclone Freddy?)**

Psychological trauma following the relocation due to loss of territory (land) and cultural fabric. According to Chikwawa's displacement and relocation report 2023, each household was



**Photo 3:** Mr. Frank Potifala sitting in front of his makeshift house

allocated a 15 by 20 meters piece of land which is small as compared to their displaced land. Some continue to live in tents. This has left them with little space for cultivation and yet these are farmers by birth. As a result, the NELD has been an inevitable result. These include loss of traditions that are

integral to Malawian societies, especially the Senas; and trauma associated with the loss of territory and livestock which are prestige in Malawian tradition. For instance, in the Maseya community, girls and boys upon reaching puberty, sleep in "Gowero<sup>6</sup>", a culture which now they are no longer practicing as lamented by one of the elders in the community - Mr Frank Potifala



**Phone 2:** One of the elderly family at Mayesa Community

*"This is our tradition, but with the limited land that we have, we can not do this anymore. Now we can no longer honor and we have failed them"*

*"We normally hold initiations for our girls and boys locally known as Maseseto and Jando respectively. These are held in very secluded places. But now we can not do that anymore. We have no place to do it. Besides, the host community will not allow us"*

Further, the community laments about the limited space for cultivation, lack of social amenities such as schools, health facilities, access to safe drinking water and other sanitation facilities which also aggravates the situation.

*"The schools here are already overcrowded with double shifts and each teacher having a class of about 100 children. This definitely will have an effect on our children which often is not counted as losses"* Said Mr Potifala.

### **Impacts**

Despite legal justifications, community relocation has resulted in new complications and heightened vulnerabilities, particularly for the Maseya Community. Apart from material losses, the community has experienced a loss of land, cultural identity, and societal status. Land,

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<sup>6</sup> Gowero is a small house built outside their parents houses, meant to separate children with the parents as a sign of growth. This also ensures privacy.

symbolizing prestige among the Sena tribe, is integral to their identity, rendering their plight profound and distressing.

*“Here we are just like children without land and we are not even respected. We feel empty and helpless. I feel as if I am walking naked”* Lamented one of the elders.

### **Vulnerabilities/impacts by compounding risks**

The disasters have a significant impact on the livelihoods of the communities, leading to other social problems such as the migration of people, especially men, to other districts or even neighboring countries in search of employment. As a result, women and children are left behind and often at risk of facing gender-based violence and sexual exploitation.

Additionally, loss of cultural heritage results in a sense of hopelessness and diminishes one’s self-esteem. For the Maseya community, this also poses a risk to children’s cognitive development and mental well-being due to the lack of social amenities like schools and hospitals.

## **2. Arrangements and Enabling factors**

Caritas Malawi provided psychosocial counseling and economic support to mitigate post-disaster trauma. Awareness campaigns through theater for development and economic empowerment initiatives, particularly targeting women and youth, aimed to enhance community resilience. Plans for vocational skills training to create opportunities for youth economic empowerment.

### **Prerequisites for NELD programming like the case of Maseya community**

Effective NELD programming necessitates community trust alongside financial support, stakeholder involvement, and conducive policy frameworks. Caritas Malawi's collaboration with government agencies and adherence to Catholic Social Teachings exemplifies this holistic approach. Maseya and other communities have benefited from such support.

The newly enacted DRM Act gives powers to the local authorities to develop district-level disaster risk management plans supported by humanitarian actors which include Caritas Malawi.

## **3. Lessons Learned and Future Support**

Future interventions should prioritize adequate financing and adherence to resettlement protocols to address NELD comprehensively which includes activation of NELD financing to compensate the affected communities. Ensuring land ownership and livestock like the case of Maseya community is imperative along with access to essential services. Economic empowerment initiatives, coupled with research on NELD during resettlement, are also essential. Multi-sectoral approaches to addressing NELD are also crucial where everyone including the affected communities is involved.

*“There is need to understand more about NELD, especially regarding the resettlement of people in disaster-prone areas particularly how this affects vulnerable groups in the society like women, youth, and People With Disability,”* Said one of the government workers who sought anonymity.

Nonetheless, financial challenges remain an obstacle in reaching out to many, and lack of understanding of NELD by key stakeholders.

### **Key Lesson Learned**

- Prioritize psychosocial support to mitigate long-term NELD among displaced communities. From experience, this has brought hope to the affected communities as evidenced in some communities who have now moved on with life as normal.
- Engage affected communities in resettlement planning and efforts to ensure effective outcomes and avoid unforeseen challenges.
- Integrate NELD considerations into loss and damage funding mechanisms to provide holistic support to disaster-affected communities.

Currently, Caritas Malawi is largely being supported by the Scottish Government through SCIAF<sup>7</sup> and Trocaire on NELD initiatives.

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<sup>7</sup> Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund