

A Birds-Eye 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 selected 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 strongly advocates for integrating NELD considerations into community resettlement efforts and compensating affected communities for NELD incurred due to climate change-induced disasters.

1. Context Analysis

Malawi is one of the least developed and poorest countries in the world, with a gross domestic product per capita of \$645.2 in 2022¹. The country heavily relies on agriculture, with approximately 80% of its population in subsistence farming. The country faces escalating climate shocks. Chikwawa district with a population of 615,685 people out of which 51.2% are women², is situated in the lower Shire valley. The district is vulnerable to climatic shocks exacerbated by its geographical location. In 2023, government of Malawi under the newly enacted Disaster Risk Management Act³, reallocated five communities (1,600 household in total) in response to flooding. Maseya Community in Traditional Authority Ngabu is one. The community is predominantly Sena⁴ by tribe with approximately 480 households.



Photo 1: Part of the resettlement for the Masaye community

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

² Chikwawa Social Economic Profile 2022-2030

³ The Malawi Government Disaster Risk Management Act of 2023

⁴ Sena: An ethnic group, with origins in northwestern region of Mozambique farming tribe with high prestige on land ownership and livestock.

Non-Economic losses incurred

Relocated communities experience psychological trauma and a breakdown in the socio-cultural fabric. According to Chikwawa's displacement and relocation report 2023, each household was



Photo 1: Frank Potifala in front of his makeshift house

allocated a 15 by 20 meters' piece of land; significantly smaller than their original land. This has left people with little space for cultivation, separating them from their traditional identity as custodians of land and increasing food insecurity. The loss of territory and livestock has furthermore resulted in a re-calibration of social structures and reducing prestige of traditional authorities. Many cultural practices which affirm group identity amongst the Senas have ceased being practiced due to the displacement.



Photo 2: A displaced family in Maseya community

Many "coming of age" traditional practices which signal the transition to adulthood are no longer possible to practice. There is not enough space and housing to celebrate the tradition of "Gowero"⁵, as one community member told us: Mr Frank Potifala

"This is our tradition, but with limited land which we have, we can not do this anymore. There are reasons why our forefathers introduced this which now we can no longer honour and we have failed them"

Other traditions including "Maseseto" and "Jando" traditionally take place in very secluded places can no longer be practiced due to a lack of space and host community hostilities.

Alongside the overall lack of adequate housing (some continue to live in tents.), the community lament about the limited space for cultivation, lack of social amenities such as schools, health facilities, access to safe drinking water.

"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.

In summary, besides material losses, the community has experienced a loss of land, cultural identity, and societal status. Land, symbolizes prestige among the Sena tribe.

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

⁵ 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.

2. 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 neighboring countries in search of employment. 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 a diminishes one's self esteem. For the case of Maseya community this also poses risk to children's cognitive development and mental well-being.

3. Addressing NELD

Caritas Malawi adopts a holistic approach in addressing NELD.

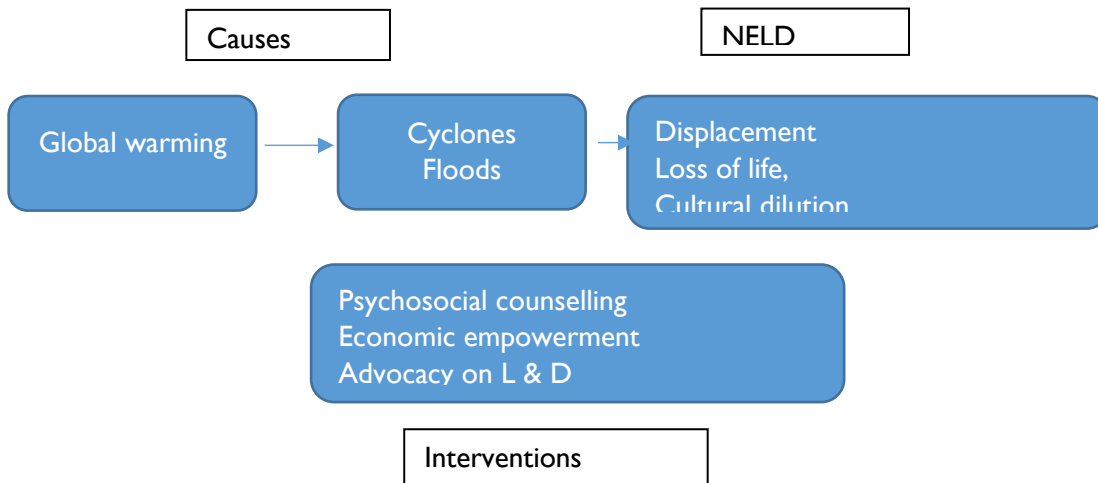


Figure 1: A holistic View in addressing NELD

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 approach⁶. Maseya and other communities have benefited from such support.

The newly enacted DRM Act (article 34) gives powers to the local authorities to develop district level disaster risk management plans supported by humanitarian actors.

4. Support Needed in the Future

⁶ https://www.sciaf.org.uk/assets/000/002/000/NELD_L_D_Full_Report_original.pdf?1700820904,

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 and economic empowerment initiatives. Research on NELD during resettlement is also essential.

“There is need to understand more on NELD especially regarding resettlement of people in disaster prone areas particularly how this affects vulnerable groups in the society like women, youth and PWDs” Said one government worker who sought anonymity.

5. Key Lesson Learned

- Prioritize psychosocial support to mitigate long-term NELD.
- Engage affected communities in resettlement efforts to ensure effective outcomes.
- Integrate NELD considerations into loss and damage funding mechanisms to provide holistic support to disaster-affected communities.
- Ensure support also helps prepare hosting communities to ensure a smooth re-location