

Locally-Led Loss & Damage Programming in Malawi: How Scotland Spent its COP26 Pledge to Loss & Damage

Summary

- How Scottish L&D funding has supported communities to recover from 2022 Cyclones Ana and Gombe, building further resilience to future shocks, in a locally-led way
- Assessment of 2023 Cyclone Freddy on Malawi and recommendations for improving responses to sudden-onset events
- Recommendations for Transitional Committee (TC) consideration on gaps, triggers, means of dissemination of funding

Background

At COP26, the Scottish Government pledged £2m to address Loss and Damage (L&D). Of this £2m commitment, £500k was awarded to a project led by the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) with communities in Southern Malawi impacted by 2022 Cyclones Ana and Gombe. This project is implemented by Trócaire Malawi, the Civil Society Network on Climate Change (CISONECC), Churches Action in Relief and Development (CARD) and CADECOM Zomba. Towards the end of implementing this programme, Cyclone Freddy hit Malawi, leading to the loss of hundreds of lives, destroying vital infrastructure and affecting hundreds of thousands of people. This case study reflects on this example of L&D programming and the impacts of Cyclone Freddy on Malawi, drawing out learnings relevant for the mandate of the Transitional Committee (TC).

The Project

Locally-led L&D programming, post-sudden-onset recovery

Implemented by district-level partners, the programme worked with communities in 10 Group Village Heads (GVHs – collections of rural villages) across the districts of Zomba and Nsanje in Southern Malawi. Community-led needs assessments were undertaken to establish the experienced losses and damages (economic & non-economic) caused by Ana and Gombe, and subsequently co-design interventions using participatory techniques, identifying priority response measures.

Activities funded through the programme have included: borehole restoration, rehabilitation of flood defences, reconstruction of homes and public buildings (such as school outhouses), graveyard restoration and protection, and psycho-social support. These interventions were based on funding gaps exposed via the participatory vulnerability and capacity assessments, including in relation to water infrastructure, flood defences, private and public buildings (including schools), non-economic losses and damages (including damage to gravesites and mental health impacts) and lack of ongoing support to displaced people in temporary accommodation (including psychosocial support). Through the community-led participatory process, adaptation activities were also identified as a priority. Therefore, the programme also funded adaptation activities including construction of additional flood defences, afforestation, and rebuilding of homes in accordance with government recommendations to enhance resilience to future extreme weather events.

The project therefore focused on community-based needs in places directly affected by frequent L&D events. Blending of preventative action (minimising L&D) with response actions (addressing L&D) was highly valuable in these communities who were caught in a cycle of either recovering from one disaster or preparing for the next. A **micro-grant funding window in the LDF** could support projects such as this in communities who meet agreed criteria of vulnerability to L&D.

Cyclone Freddy

Sudden-onset Loss and Damage: gaps in response

Tropical Cyclone Freddy wreaked havoc across southern Malawi in early 2023. Many of the communities impacted by this storm were the same who had been hit by Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019 and Ana and Gombe in 2022. The Government of Malawi has developed a three-month response plan to support approximately 360,000 households (1.64 million people) to address their immediate survival needs, restore basic socio-economic services and facilitate the transition to early recovery. A total of MWK 147.8 billion (\$144.4m) is required to implement the plan, MWK37.3 billion is available leaving a current gap of MWK 110.6 billion (\$108m)¹. The UN flash appeal for Freddy and the Cholera outbreak is at present only 20.4% funded². A **rapid response window in the LDF** could help fill gaps in funding such as this.

New legislation in Malawi, the Disaster Risk Management Act, has sought to improve the legislative framework through which support can be channelled to communities when storms hit the country. The act establishes a new committee to recommend when to declare a state of emergency, which if agreed by the President can enable the flow of treasury funds and appeal for international support. This support is channelled through the Department of Disasters Management Affairs (DODMA), with support from clusters established at the district level, who coordinate local-level Village Civil Protection Committees (VCPCs). Whilst the new legislation should improve the ability of government to respond quickly to future disasters, Malawian CSOs have called for further devolution of decision making to the local levels. Note: **a rapid response window in the LDF could be triggered via a similar process to this**, with parties agreeing an internal process, in line with LDF criteria, when to declare that a “Loss & Damage Event” has taken place and appeal for funds accordingly.

Learning & Recommendations

1) Localised Action to Address Loss & Damage

Both the Scottish Government funded programme dealing with medium-term post-disaster recovery and the assessment of short-term responses to Cyclone Freddy demonstrate the importance of the principle of subsidiarity in addressing L&D. As L&D often affects communities and households in different ways, depending on intersectional marginalised identities, localising the response (e.g. via cash transfers) is highly responsive to variant levels of need, and a localised approach helps translate L&D from a piece of UNFCCC jargon to something relevant to those with lived experience of climate impacts.

The L&D fund can support localised action through:

- a) providing finance to develop and operationalise national mechanisms to respond to L&D which ensure strong connection between local, regional and national levels;
- b) funding development of data services, software and processes to manage responses;
- c) building capacity of institutions to support local level rapid response and rebuilding activities.
- d) A readiness and capacity support initiative funded by the LDF could support this work, drawing from existing experience in build adaptation capacity³.

¹ [Relief Web Report March 2023](#)

² [Relief Web Report April 2023](#)

³ [UNDP, M-Climes](#)

2) **Adaptation & L&D Spectrum**

The extent of losses and damages in Malawi is so great because there has been a lack of financial investment in adaptation, due largely to the failure of Global North parties to meet their climate finance commitment. It is vital to appreciate that many activities which may be categorised as to address L&D must also contribute to further enhancing resilience. Build infrastructure must be rebuilt to withstand future climate impacts, and this will require investment in resilience building activities alongside responses to all forms of losses and damages. On a small-scale, in communities who are in a constant cycle of recovery from or preparation for future disasters, projects which blend anticipatory action (to “minimise” L&D) with ex-post action (to “address” L&D) may be more appropriate and effective.

The L&D fund should address these definitional issues by:

- a) establishing a micro-grant funding window which is responsive to community needs, open to blended preparatory and responsive activities, based on qualifying eligibility criteria including frequency of exposure to shocks;
- b) establishing an agreed definition of action to “address Loss & Damage” and in so-doing establish discourse that reflects reality of the full adaptation-to-loss and damage action spectrum;
- c) invest in national mechanisms which ensure responsiveness at pace and based on need, informed by lived experience of climate impacts at the community level;
- d) include a slow-onset funding window that draws on global best practice to address L&D impacts in the long-term.

3) **Non-Economic Loss & Damage**

Non-Economic Loss & Damage (NELD) represents a cross-cutting consideration that should be addressed across rapid-onset, slow-onset and micro-grant funding windows of the LDF. Activities eligible for funding via each of these windows should include (inter alia) psycho-social support, preservation of heritage and restoration of ecosystems, biodiversity and cultural artefacts.

The L&D fund should ensure NELD is addressed by:

- a) developing understanding of approaches to both evaluating and policy responses to NELD (drawing on wellbeing economy principles),
- b) designing its operations on the basis of an appreciation of the value of both economic and non-economic climate impacts, the later of which have been underappreciated historically.

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