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NEWSLETTER

End of project

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Success Stories on Social Accountability Project



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Isaack Makina, a beneficiary of Phaloni Road, Phalombe

Overview of the Social Accountability Project in Malawi

The Social Accountability project, fully known as the “**enhancing citizens’ participation in budget tracking and monitoring for equitable and sustainable development in Malawi**” was conceived against the background of alarming reports of massive resource abuse coupled with citizens’ limited participation in budget cycle as well as tracking.

Implemented by ActionAid Malawi (AAM) in partnership with Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) with funding from European Union, the project impact districts were Rumphu, Mchinji, Phalombe and Nsanje for a period spanning 2016—2019.

The project also had national level engagements with relevant and key institutions such as the Ministry of Finance, Public Accounts Committee and the Social Welfare Committees of Parliament

Other key stakeholders include Reflection Action Circles, ADC’s, VDC’s, District Councils, Councilors, Members of Parliament, Ministries, Media Houses.

Overall, the project sought to contribute to improved transparency and accountability in public expenditure at national and district council levels.

Using Human Rights-Based Approach the project

focused on building the capacity of stakeholders. The project also built strong networks and coalitions with key stakeholders through signing Memorandum of Understanding with District Councils and Media engagement as well as developing and using policy dialogue to advance advocacy.

The project also strengthened Civil Society Organisations coordination networking and collaboration for increased advocacy on public resources management at district and national level.

Most significantly, the project provided a platform for increased citizen participation in meaningful policy dialogue to promote transparency and accountability for effective public resources management.

It is also worth noting that due to regular media engagement, the project has had increased participation of the media in promoting social accountability at local and national level.

Though the project has phased out, it is highly expected that project beneficiaries will use the various interventions such as knowledge and skills gained to continue engaging duty bearers in critical areas such as budget formulation and implementation.

When the watcher is watched...project awakens stakeholders' role on CDF



Agness participating in the construction of Mlowe Bridge she helped to demand

For almost 11 years, since the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) started, Rumphi residents like one 27 year-old Agness Nyirenda, rest assured that the development fund was in safe hands.

Members of parliament, being law makers, were looked upon as ideal keepers of the purse. The parliamentarians, thus, enjoyed unquestionable authority and monopoly on the use of the fund. No one raised an eyebrow.

“What our member of parliament told us about CDF was final because everyone in the constituency thought the CDF belongs to a parliamentarian,” says Agness, a mother of two.

“This is why we never cared participating in the identification of CDF projects, let alone procurement of the materials. We were completely in the dark.”

However, says Agness of Village Mlowe, T/A Mlowe in the district, the coming in of the European Union funded-social accountability

project in 2016 started reshaping the tale of governance around CDF in the district.

The project, “enhancing citizens’ participation in budget tracking and monitoring for equitable and sustainable development in Malawi,” sought to, among others, strengthen CSOs and communities’ participation in planning, budget analysis, and expenditure tracking for effective public services delivery.

“The project proved to be an eye opener in the district,” says George Mbizi, a secretary of Rumphi Civil Society Network.

“Soon after the project was introduced here, ActionAid Malawi and Civil Society Agriculture Network, organized an orientation exercise in Public Expenditure Tracking (PET) for members of the district civil society.

As an output of the training, we resolved to conduct PET on CDF, targeting Rumphi Central, Rumphi East and Rumphi West Constituencies.”

Mbizi says CDF was targeted due to limited knowledge among CSOs

and communities on how the fund is utilized in the constituencies.

“However, community members lacked guideline information in implementation of projects funded through CDF,” he adds

As feared, the PET report produced by CSOs and members of community unearthed a number of governance shortfalls in the target constituencies. The report, for instance, noted blatant flouting of procurement guidelines in the purchase of the CDF materials.

The report further bemoaned lack of implementation committees for the projects under the CDF.

The CDF guideline stipulates that for each project, there shall be a Project Implementation Committee consisting of not less than 5 persons whom shall be responsible for planning and execution of the project in liaison with the Member of Parliament and maintain and keep records of all aspects of the project under their responsibility.

However, only Rumphi West out of the three sampled constituencies, had constituency CDF committees comprising all relevant stakeholders to run the fund, reads the report in part.

Ironing out the issues during the CSOs PET interface meeting in October, 2017 in the district, the late senior Chief Chikulamayembe called upon stakeholders, especially members of parliament to soberly look at the report and act on the recommendations. He called upon the chiefs to mobilise their subjects to ensure that there is trans-

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parency and ac-

countability in the implementation of the projects under the CDF.

On his part, Director of Planning and Development, Frank Mkandawire, urged stakeholders in the CDF implementation to ensure that there is improved transparency on CDF.

He said access to information is critical in the implementation of CDF and asked members of parliament and CSOs to ensure that constituents are in the know of the all guidelines around CDF.

Reacting to the findings, Member of Parliament for Rumphi East, Honorable Kamlepo Kalua, said he will be engaging the CSOs and community members on the daily basis to ensure that recommendations in the report are implemented.

The PET exercise is bearing fruits, as testified by Agness Nyirenda, a community member in Mlowe, Rumphi.

“I am happy that during the 2018/2019 financial year, I was involved in the identification of Mlowe Bridge Construction as one of the projects to be financed through the Constituency Development Fund,” says Agness.

District CSOs influencing good governance in the districts



Thom: The public expenditure tracking has enhanced service delivery in Phalombe

Usually, people think that the existence of civil society organisations (CSOs) networks in their districts is for reacting negatively to performance of public institutions at the district level.

But people from Phalombe, Nsanje, Mchinji and Rumphi now have a new perspective towards their CSO networks.

This is due to the CSOs positive influence on governance in these districts, thanks to the European Union (EU)-funded three-year Social Accountability project titled “**Enhancing Citizen’s Participation in Budget Tracking and Monitoring for Equitable and sustainable development in Malawi**” which ActionAid Malawi (AAM) and Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) implemented from 2016 to 2019.

Senior Chief Kaduya of Phalombe

parted Phalombe CSOs network on the back saying it has helped to provide bridge between the communities and duty bearers in as far as good governance, especially budget tracking, is concerned.

Kaduya said: “The Civil Society Organisations network in this district has helped us a lot in promoting accountability in public projects. People are now knowledgeable on how much is budgeted and spent for a public project like construction.”

She said the CSOs have helped in the transparent construction of a police unit and hospital guardian shelter at Migowi trading centre in the district, among other positive interventions. In the four mentioned districts, CSO networks have proved to be the guide of the people on budget tracking.

According to Rumphir CSO

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“Social Accountability has eased our work”

There is no denying the fact that the return of ward councilors in 2014 caused a chaotic working relationship in the districts. The four, members of parliament, ward councilors, council secretariat and chiefs couldn't really agree on who was supposed to do what.

It was even worse for the parliamentarians and councilors. The two engaged in endless battles, taking turns in accusing each other of ‘trespassing’ into the constituency development fund local development fund, district development funds, among other development packages in the districts.

“It was particularly tough for us, considering that we were just new in the decentralization environment and needed support from the old guards,” says Damson Chiphaka, Councillor for Mpatsa Ward.

“Both the council secretariat and members of parliament looked at us enemies rather than a key stakeholder in local governance and development. Some chiefs, too, thought we had come to replace

their roles in the communities. We were just praying that the situation might improve one day.”

However, while the challenges might still remain unchecked in other districts councils, Rumphu, Mchinji, Phalombe and Nsanje have since moved on, thanks to the European Union (EU)-funded Social Accountability project.

Implemented by ActionAid Malawi (AAM) in partnership with Civil Society Agriculture Networks the social accountability project--spanning from 2016 to 2019--engaged various stakeholders such as chiefs, councilors, council secretariat and members of parliament in various capacity building sessions on accountability and transparency, with emphasis on budget tracking.

AAM Project Officer, Thokozani Kachingwe, says such capacity building sessions were key to strengthening oversight and improving service delivery in the four the district councils the project was being implemented.

“We noted that there was lack of specific skills among CSO's and district Councils on inclusive budgeting, budget analysis, gender focused budgeting among others. This was compounded by poor coordination between all the stakeholders in

the budgetary process in developing sustainable budgets and monitoring developments” she says.

Concurring with Kachingwe, Chiphaka says the project has improved situation for the better. He says due to various capacity building initiatives, they (councilors) noted they have a very important oversight role at the district to ensure that resources are spent for intended purpose.

“As councilors, we were so weak in oversight. However, the project empowered us to take charge of the oversight in the district. For instance, there was a bridge T/A Nankhama which was poorly constructed.

When the community raised the matter with me, I took it up and discovered that some funds were misappropriated. The council intervened, the funds were recovered, and quality bridge was constructed,” says Chiphaka.

It' not just councilors hailing the project for enhancing their capacity. Senior Chief Kaduya says following empowerment of communities, the project has made it easy for chiefs to mobilise their subjects to take part in governance projects.

“Initially, it was difficult to mobilise communities take part in monitoring projects in the communities as they thought it was none of their business. The social accountability project has eased our role,” she says.

Senior Chief Kaduya: It is now easy to mobilise the people



PET unlocks development in Chisimuka

When a parent sends a child to buy groceries and finds out that the child has not bought all the listed items, said Marcel Germann, former European Union (EU) Ambassador to Malawi, it is very likely that any responsible parent will demand back the change (unspent money).

“That’s the essence of expenditure tracking. You must also follow up and track the expenditure of public resources because it is your own money.” Germann made the remarks in October, 2017, during the interface meeting between rights holders and duty bearers over the CDF PET Report in Rumphi District.

Chisimuka communities in T/A Katumbi took Germann’s tip as gospel truth. Under the European Union-funded social accountability project titled: **“enhancing citizens’ participation in budget tracking and monitoring for equitable and sustainable development in Malawi”** the communities established Chisimuka Reflect



Chisimuka RAC facilitator, Catherine Mfuno, (Centre) and others crossing a bridge constructed after demand the service from the council.

Action Circles (RAC) at the facilitation of the project implementing communities realise how remotely involved they were in expenditure of public resources in their area.

The capacity building activities Initially, reports of theft,

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network’s governance thematic leader, George Mlowoka, the Rumphi CSO network has been involved through development committees at every stage of budget tracking.

He attributed this good development on the knowledge the network and some members of development committees acquired through the project.

One of the objectives of the project was to strengthen CSOs and communities’ participation in planning, budget analysis, and expenditure

tracking for effective public services delivery.

Phalombe CSO network chairperson who is also executive director for Phalombe Youth Arms Organisation, Vincent Thom, said the project has met its objective as CSOs in the district now have the necessary skills that have made them active in implementation of the public projects.

AAM project officer, Thokozani Kachingwe, said AAM and CISANET are satisfied as the project has injected specific skills

among CSOs and district councils on inclusive budgeting, budget analysis, gender focused budgeting among others.

Rumphi District Council’s Director or Planning, Frank Mkandawire, also hailed the project saying it has improved the working relationship between the CSOs and the council. “The project has brought cordial relationship existing between Rumphi District Council and Rumphi CSO Network,” said Mkandawire.



Rumphi District Council, a key oversight institution which the project worked closely with.

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misappropriation of public resources and abandonment of infrastructure projects were never taken as their issues as people thought that it was public resources, says Catherine Mfuné, facilitator for Chisimuka RAC.

“However, with the establishment of Chisimuka RAC, we realised that any project from government is implemented using our own taxes, hence it is our project. Since then, we started taking interest in any public project in the area,” she shares.

RAC offers communities a platform for diverse people to unite with a common purpose, identifying and analysing governance issues that affect them and ultimately, collectively influencing policy

and practice.

In this space, there is sustained analysis, reflection and action needed to lead into a change into governance relations, hence the power shifts. The most important thing is that RACs also strengthen poor and excluded people’s capacity to communicate and be heard. Thanks to the knowledge and skills acquired under the project, Chisimuka RAC is now able to track resources under various development packages in the area.

Some of the funds targeted with PET by Chisimuka RAC included safety nets such as public works programmes, school improvement grants, and social cash transfer.

According to Mfuné, one major area the PET has helped instil accountability and transparency is the use of School Improvement

Grant (SIG) at Hewe Primary School. She says in the past, only the headteacher and chairperson of the school management committees (SMCs) had the monopoly of information, including identification of the projects for the funds.

Noting the anomaly, Chisimuka RAC employed PET exercise which revealed that the funds did not meet the transparency and accountability standards as laid down in the implementation guidelines.

“The exercise led to an interface meeting between the SMC and members of Chisimuka RAC. Since then there has been an increased transparency and accountability in the use of SIG funds at the school. The SMC is now able to engage the wider communities on the identification, sharing of the information on the costs of the SIG

When citizens are empowered to promote accountability

People of Mlowe in Rumphi used to think that Constituency Development Fund (CDF) comes from Member of Parliament. Little did they know that this is public money which government provides from collections of people's taxes.

It was for this reason that they were not interested in following and knowing how this money was spent on public projects.

But now the situation is different as they know that CDF is public money which the community should track its expenditure to ensure that it has been used without abuse. Thanks to the three-year project titled **“Enhancing Citizen’s Participation in Budget Tracking and Monitoring for Equitable and sustainable development in Malawi”** which ActionAid Malawi (AAM) and Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) implemented with funding from European Union (EU).

The project which started in February 2016 and ended in January 2019 targeted Reflection Action Circles (RAC), Area Development Committees (ADCs), Village Development Committees (VDCs), District Councils, Councilors, Members of Parliament, Ministries and Media Houses.

Mafuness Nkhata, a member for Mwachisonthi VDC in Mlowe, Rumphi said the project has empowered her and many community members as they can confidently take part in the budget tracking of



Speaker of Parliament Richard Msowoya: Citizens need to hold elected duty bearers to account

any public project in her area. “Through budget tracking, we are able to monitor how government funds are used. This is a responsibility which we hardly carried before this accountability project started,” said Nkhata.

Nkhata said her participation in RAC also helped her to be conversant with development processes hence making it easy for her to engage in budget tracking in her area. She added that in RAC, members that are led by a trained facilitator, construct democratic space, where everyone’s voice is given equal weight and decisions are made by all.

Councillor for Mpsa Ward in Phalombe, Damson Chiphaka, many community members were not interested in governance issues because they lacked skills.

“But this accountability project

has opened eyes for many people,” he said. Chiphaka gave thumbs up to the project saying its impact has trickled down to the citizens.

Like in Mchinji, Phalombe and Nsanje, the people of Mlowe in Rumphi are therefore all smiles because there is increased productive interaction between them and public institutions that deliver public services.

“Since we started participating in the tracking of resources and monitoring of services, we have noted that the quality and quantity of public services being provided have improved for the better, as the service providers have started to operate following clear set guidelines for different windows of development. This has reduced extravagances in the use of resources thereby contributing towards the quality and quantity of services,” said Eggie Banda, chairperson for Mzokoto RAC.

Attaining accountability through RAC

When Eggie Banda, 37, fell ill in February 2016, she feared for her life. The health facility in her area, Mzokoto Health Centre in Chinyolo Village, Traditional Authority Mwanikhunikila, Rumphi district, always disappointed her.

Every time she visited the facility for treatment, health workers at the facilities would simply diagnose the disease and prescribe medicines for her to buy from private traders.

“I had no courage to ask why there were no medicines at the facility as I regarded myself not worthy asking such questions to authorities. I thought all those working in public sectors such as health, education, agriculture and transport are our bosses who work to do us a favour,” says Eggie, a mother of four children.

However, the coming in of a European Union (EU)-funded Social Accountability project by ActionAid Malawi in partnership with Civil Society Agreement Network (CISANET) in the area changed Eggie’s take on governance. Launched in 2016, the project came to, among others, address limited knowledge among citizens on governance and accountability processes in Malawi’s four districts of Rumphi, Mchinji, Phalombe and Nsanje.

One key structure established under the project was the Reflect Action Cycle (RAC) a grassroots governance committee with membership from village development and area development committees to conduct budget and public expenditure tracking in the communities.

Eggie, a member of Mzokoto village development committee (VDC) joined Mzokoto RAC in April, 2019, and, since then, her knowledge in governance has only improved. A total of 19 more members under Mzokoto RAC gained knowledge in governance through a

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Community rescues abused SIG in



Chihana narrating how the SIG funds were rescued

There was a time people of Chinyolo area in Rumphi district hardly knew how duty bearers were spending public funds. They were always at the receiving end and did not participate in the development processes.

However, this is now a thing of the past as Chinyolo Area Development Committee (ADC) is able to track public expenditure to ensure that all public funds are used for its intended purpose.

“We used to wonder how some institutions spend public funds as the budgeted funds could sometimes not match with the work done,” said Chinyolo ADC chairperson, Harvey Chihana.

Chihana boasted that Chinyolo ADC is now on top of their game in as far as watchdog role on public funds and work are concerned. He picked out Lungazi Primary school where Chinyolo ADC managed to track the public funds and discovered financial abuse by the school officials including the head teacher.

He explained: “At this school, the officials received School improvement Grant (SIG) and another money for school rehabilitation from government. The community was not convinced on how the school used these funds. Therefore, the ADC, the councillor and Primary School Advisor went to investigate and found that K293, 710 was missing. We squeezed the school officials and we are happy that they returned the money.”

Concurring with Chihana, Senior Chief Mwanikhunikira in the district said following the incident the schools are now afraid of abusing public funds. He said this has led to honest and effective use of

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public funds such as SIG. “There has been a great and positive change on the use of SIG in all the twelve primary schools that are in Chinyolo area,” said the chief. Chihana attributes this success to the “Enhancing Citizen’s Participation in Budget Tracking and Monitoring for Equitable and sustainable development in Malawi” project which Actionaid Malawi (AAM) and Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) have been implementing with funding from European Union (EU). Through the project, Chinyolo ADC was trained in budget tracking, the knowledge which they lacked before the project rolled out in February 2016.

Apart from Rumphi, the project was also implemented in Mchinji, Nsanje and Phalombe. Senior chief Kaduya from Phalombe district echoed her Rumphi counterpart by describing the project which ended in January 2019 as a success and best governance gift from AAM, CISANET and EU.

The project’s efforts were in line with global efforts that aim at curbing misuse of public funds as stipulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda requires governments, societies and international organisations to mobilise the necessary resources to bring people out of poverty, and build inclusive societies which are considered the root causes of today’s crises. As nations mobilise resources to finance this global agenda, there has been more interest in how governments are raising revenue to meet the development targets as well as how they are spending these funds and reporting progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

AAM project officer, Thokozani Kachingwe, says the project has narrowed down the 2030 agenda to the community level to empower them with budget tracking skills.

“In the past we have seen a lot of case studies at national and district levels of abuse of public resources. Hence this project aimed to ensure that citizens are empowered and placed in a position where they are better able to monitor and track national and district budgets for equitable and sustainable development,” said Kachingwe.

She added that to achieve this success, the project organised trainings at national and district levels on social accountability, budget tracking and budget policy advocacy among other activities.

Influencing accountability through RAC

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series of training offered by ActionAid and CISANET.

“As Mzokoto RAC, we meet every Thursday to discuss governance issues affecting our area. One issue I brought up during one of our meetings was the limited availability of drugs at Mzokoto health facility,” she said.

Following the meeting, we approached the Health Advisory Committee of the area and together, we agreed to be conducting routine monitoring of the delivery, availability and use of drugs at the health facility. I am pleased to note that since we started conducting the exercise, the availability of drugs has improved at the health facility.”

Eggie adds that using the same PET skills acquired through the project, Mzokoto RAC has helped improve service delivery in other sectors of education, agriculture and transport.

Apart from Mzokoto, the project instituted RAC at Katowo, in T/A Katumbi; Chinyolo and Mzokoto in T/A Mwankhunikira and Zowo and Mlowe South in T/A Mwamlowe to entrench a culture of social accountability in the use of public resources. There are a total of 25 RAC in each district of Rumphi, Phalombe, Mchinji and Nsanje where the project was implemented.



Chisimuka RAC meeting in progress in Rumphi

Kaudzu communities activate their power

Like in many other districts in Malawi, Nsanje district lags behind in development for many people. Many factors contribute to this, but all point to powerlessness among citizens and their institutions.

This gives space to duty bearers to operate in the way they want and not necessarily responding to the needs of the people. The area of Traditional Authority (T/A) Nga-bu has not been spared.

Nsanje has well established governance structures at the community and district levels in line with the country's decentralisation policy. The structures include Village Development Committees, Area Development Committees, Citizen Forums, Governance clubs.

However, due to cultural values and religious dogma, citizens in Nsanje respect elders and leaders, and it, therefore, becomes difficult for them to confront those in authority on accountability issues. As a result, duty bearers are left to their own devices as the citizens suffer in silence and wallow in untold poverty.

However, following the introduction of the European Union-Social Accountability Project by Action-Aid Malawi in the district in 2016, Nsanje has significantly changed governance narrative in the district.

The project supported the mobilization of six Reflection Action Circles (RACs), including Kaudzu RAC in GVH Kaudzu, T/A Nga-bu. The RACs were the main forums for mobilization and citizen empowerment. Following a series of capacity initiatives for the RACs, Kaudzu RAC has turned



One of the projects funded from the CDF which was monitored to its successful completion

things around, as testified by Christopher Thom, Kaudzu RAC Facilitator.

“With support from ActionAid Malawi, we formed the Kaudzu RAC in 2016. It has 16 participants and two facilitators. ActionAid Malawi gave us various necessary skills and tools through training on good governance, budget tracking, policies in Agriculture and health, and operation of RACs,” says Thom.

Thom says the project enhanced their knowledge on the accountability shortfalls in the area. Through RAC, the community started conducting analysis of the development challenges they were facing and engaged relevant duty bearers.

Thom says their engagement with duty bearers have since borne fruits.

“Following our intervention on the reports of corruption at Agriculture Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARK) depot, people started buying maize freely

as the market officer abandoned corrupt practices,” he says.

Concurring with Thom, Mary Yohane, another facilitator at Kaudzu RAC says the project has also led to strengthening of youth friendly services at the health facility in the area.

She adds that chiefs and development committees are now transparent and honest in how they select beneficiaries to different development projects such as public works programme and social cash transfer.

“There is general recognition of the roles of the citizenry in the management of the development processes, including demanding for the services and accountability. Citizens are no longer considered as mere recipients but key stakeholders in the whole process.

“Duty bearers and people in powerful positions are now operating with caution, recognizing the fact that citizens are watching them,” says Mary.

Mchinji communities smiling their way to development



Chatting the way to development : Mkanda RAC discussing development issues in during one of their meetings

The impact of the social accountability project did not spare the communities in Traditional Authorities (T/A) Zulu, Mkanda and Mduwa in Mchinji district.

Following the introduction of the Social Accountability Project by ActionAid Malawi in partnership with Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET), the communities have seen an enhancement of their knowledge and skills in budget tracking, thereby

improving their well-being.

For instance, communities have successfully monitored the construction of the under-five clinic, road networks and other infrastructure projects.

“The introduction of Social Accountability in the district and in particular Gomani Village in 2016 has seen tremendous improvement in the way the right holders are conducting themselves,” says Olivetta Lawrence, a 28 years-old lady

and RAC member.



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