

WHAT DO COMMUNITIES FEEL ABOUT **COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT**

LEARNING FROM AN INVESTIGATION
IN RURAL MALAWI



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What do communities feel about community-driven development?

Learning from an investigation in rural Malawi

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Abstract

Rural communities in Malawi share sophisticated understandings of community-driven development and of the capacities they need for undertaking the related tasks effectively. Local ownership is key: “orphan” projects have little lasting effect. External agencies can help, first, by recognizing the centrality of local communities to their own development, and second, by assisting bottom-up initiatives, not just financially, but by helping communities build capacities of different kinds, corresponding to different dimensions of self-developing communities. Communities vary in terms of starting points. Rather than any standardized mode of assistance, a customized approach, building on the dimensions we outline, is necessary.

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Overview

Community-driven development is regarded by many as both morally and practically superior to traditional forms of development assistance, but what do communities themselves feel about community-driven development? Are they willing and able to take on the related responsibilities? What do they feel about the roles they must play? These and other related questions need better answers. What do communities regard as the end-goal of the enterprise? How do they measure success? How should concerned outsiders provide help? Is it enough to simply hand over financial resources, or are there different elements to effective external assistance?

To explore these questions, we go into nine communities in central Malawi, holding day-long discussions with focus groups and key informants centered on these questions. The answers we obtain from these communities provide a ringing endorsement of community-driven local development.

In central Malawi, at least, community-driven development is not just an academic notion, nor a method imposed by outside experts. A cherished goal shared by rural communities, it is central to their conception of what is appropriate and legitimate for local-area development. Each community we consulted expressed unequivocally and matter-of-factly the need for communities to “own” development projects. “Orphan projects” (*Chitukuko cha masiye*) – those to which communities have not given birth and for which they do not take responsibility—rarely survive for long, in their experience. Communities emphasize the importance of ownership and highlight other factors, including unity and leadership and skills of different kinds, using very nearly the same terms in Chichewa, the language of the area, as the academic and policy discussions on the subject have flagged as important. Rather than being a matter of choice or a question of relative priorities, assistance to community-driven development represents the only viable way forward in this context, the only modality that people will accept and which they regard as being effective and appropriate – and scientific.

We organize this report as follows. Section 1 reviews all-too-briefly the gist of the academic literature. Section 2 presents the four steps of the methodology that we implemented and briefly introduces the institutional context. Section 3 begins the presentation of communities’ understandings of development, articulated in terms of the goal of self-developing community. Sections 4 and 5 probe different dimensions that the communities commonly regard as important for this goal. These communities’ distilled experiences show clearly how rather than being merely some good intention, community-driven (or bottom-up) development is a methodical enterprise that is guided by distinct design principles, represented here as dimensions of self-developing communities. Section 6, summarizing this

evidence, draws conclusions about how external assistance can be most effectively designed in similar contexts.

Section 1. Community-driven development - a brief review and some unanswered questions

For diverse tasks of local provisioning—whether concerning roads, schools, health care, agricultural improvements and animal husbandry, small business development, etc.—a growing literature, which includes notably but hardly exclusively the Nobel-winning work of Elinor Ostrom, emphasizes the utility and advantages of community-driven (or community-led) development. The foundational belief is that seemingly beaten-down and impoverished communities have talents and energies that tend to lie latent until they are activated. Treating community organizations as active partners rather than passive beneficiaries is, in and of itself, more democratic and more respectful. In addition, a process is more productive, which helps generate confidence-building experiences and engenders longer-term mechanisms and capacities, nurturing grassroots leadership.

Such a process rarely self-ignites. “Assisted self-reliance” is the more useful and accurate conception, conveying, at the same time, both the importance of assistance and the centrality of self-reliance.¹ This conception lies at the heart of community-driven development. The ultimate goal is—or should be—self-reliance. But to get there, communities usually need external assistance.

The elusive but illuminating end goal is that of a *self-developing community*—a community never really gets to this end state, but as it comes closer, development becomes more natural, more organic, more a part and parcel of everyday life, with communities having taken charge of crucial development processes rather than only being encouraged by outsiders to take charge of development. That shift, when it occurs, is subtle but real and perceptible.

A community comes progressively closer to the end-goal by gaining certain capacities and instituting certain processes. These capacities and processes represent different dimensions of self-development. Different dimensions are distinguished in the academic literature, including:

- 1) Local institutional development: Stronger local organizations, indicated by:
 - a) Social capital—the propensity a community has for undertaking mutually beneficial collective actions based on trust, solidarity, and reciprocity;²

¹ See Uphoff and Esman (1984); and Krishna, Uphoff, and Esman (1997).

² Defined as a propensity for mutually beneficial collective action (Krishna and Uphoff, 1999) and as “features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam et al., 1993). See also Woolcock and Narayan (2000); and Krishna (2007).

- b) Managerial and technical capacity; and helpful external connections.³
- 2) Grassroots leadership: The emergence of a diverse and representative pool of local leaders, gaining in confidence and experience, rooted in and accountable to the local community;⁴
 - 3) Sustainability: Evidence that the benefits of prior initiatives are being sustained and the processes giving rise to these benefits remain vital;⁵ and
 - 4) Multiplication: Following on the heels of a prior initiative, generating new initiatives, new partnerships, and new resource mobilization.⁶

The best-case expectation is as follows. Attempting to become self-developing, communities take on growing responsibilities. As they gain diverse skills and take on additional initiatives, they acquire greater confidence in their own capacities, and a greater share of the development dynamic can be powered internally, leading to more and newer skills and capacities, which can be used in turn to energize new enterprises, thus creating a virtuous cycle.⁷

Such is the hope of community-driven development, but the reality has been contested. Evaluations have uncovered a mixed bag of results while examining the impact overall of community-driven development projects.⁸

In practice, the rub lies not in whether, but in *how*, community-driven development is given effect in some given context. How is the tricky idea of assisted self-reliance to be implemented? How should outsiders assist community-driven development without it becoming outsider-driven development? What should external supporters do that will leverage (and not displace) the bottom-up effort? How should communities' technical and managerial capacities be grown, and leadership nurtured, without stifling local

³ Ostrom, Schroeder, and Wynne (1993). Uphoff, Esman, and Krishna (1998) note how external connections of different kinds—including horizontal ones (across community organizations), vertical ones (with federations and groups of community organizations and with external actors), and lateral ones (with local governments and other locally organized actors) can each contribute to greater development effectiveness.

⁴ See, for instance, Bansfield (1958); Buur and Kyed (2006); Krishna (2002); Platteau and Gaspart (2003).

⁵ See, for example, Chambers (1999, 2008); Mitlin (1992); and Ostrom (1996).

⁶ See, for instance, Hirschmann (1984); Grindle (2007); Kidjie (2018); and Wade (1994).

⁷ See, for instance, Esman and Uphoff (1984); Hirschmann (1984); Ostrom (1990; 1996); Uphoff (1992); and Uphoff, Esman, and Krishna (1998).

⁸ See, for instance, Casey (2018); Kidjie (2018); Mansoori and Rao (2004); and Platteau and Abraham (2002). Such mixed verdicts are only to be expected: these and other evaluations have tended to lump together a congeries of projects, commonly categorized as "community-driven" because a community had some role, however small or however large, in one or more aspect of the project's design, implementation, or evaluation – a widely varying locus of control and division of responsibilities.

initiatives or engendering co-optation and subordination? These kinds of practical knowledge are urgently worth acquiring.

If one investigates community-driven development as one should—from the perspective and with the values of the communities concerned—then the first step requires involving communities in concept definition and process specification. How communities define development and how *they* assess progress needs to be understood, and what they feel about the notions of self-developing community and community-driven development.

We address ourselves to these questions, taking on three main tasks:

1. Ascertaining communities' understandings of development, of self-developing communities, of the roles that communities play in this process, what capacities are necessary, and how these capacities are acquired.
2. Compiling oral histories of development in each community—stories of change and process tracing.
3. Understanding how external support agencies can act more effectively in support of self-developing communities.

The authors bring to bear a diverse set of perspectives. Including a North American researcher; two Malawian researchers; and two staff of World Connect (an agency that actively and exclusively supports community-driven local development in different countries, including Malawi); the authors have undertaken these inquiries in close association with local communities and their elected Village Development Committees (VDC).

For each of these actors, these investigations have served as an opportunity for unlearning older verities and acquiring important new learning. In order to involve local communities and other partners as actively as possible, the methodology we employed in these investigations developed in a multistage process.

Section 2. Methodology and context

After querying the academic and policy literature, we discussed these concepts and relationships with the leadership and field staff of World Connect, and we took our emergent protocols for ground-testing into three central Malawian communities. Field staff of World Connect conducted this initial exercise within these three communities—Nkhusu, Kalumbu, and Kauma—with the intention of ascertaining what people here regard as the appropriate locus of “community,” what they regard as development, and what agencies and what processes they consider appropriate for taking a development idea to fruition in their community.⁹

These initial exercises revealed that community is consistently defined here as “the group of people who live in the same geographical area and are governed by one person, a chief (...); a place they call home and share services such as water points, clinics, schools with the group of people who live in the same area.” The appropriate locus of inquiry is the VDC, described in the next section. Mostly agrarian, these communities are by no means homogeneous communities. Differences in wealth and status are large and visible within rural Malawian communities, as they are in rural communities in most other countries, and there is evidence these differences are growing in Malawi (Peters and Kambewa 2007).

Development is commonly understood by these communities as a process leading to improvement in living conditions. Commonly, people stressed the centrality of communities for development. Commonly, the beliefs they expressed resonated with the ideas both of community-driven development and self-developing communities.

The exercise also helped improve tradecraft. We learned, for instance, that it helps get these discussions started if the chief and religious leaders attend at the beginning but leave at some later point, not too deep into the discussion, so other members can speak more freely.

With the benefit of these initial exercises, we designed a protocol for the full inquiry. Once again, to make sure the protocol addressed issues of value to communities and incorporated their priorities—while translating potentially complex terms (such as social capital) into their everyday equivalents in Chichewa—we ran the protocol initially in one more pilot community, Mphunda VDC in rural Lilongwe. After another round of revisions based on this experience, we arrived at the protocol (see Table 1) that we implemented in the nine study communities. The methods are appropriate for the task; qualitative data are, in

⁹ World Connect had worked prior to these inquiries in Nkhusu and Kauma but not in the third community, Kalumbu. The results of these inquiries were not qualitatively different among these three communities.

general, more useful for addressing questions of process and examining interlocking changes occurring over longer periods (Creswell, 2014). These research tools and checklists were vetted for ethical clearance and were approved by the National Commission of Science and Technology in Malawi.¹⁰

Table 1: Field Research Protocol

Two key questions:

- How do local communities acquire capacities for self-development?
- How can external support organizations help (and not hinder) communities in acquiring capacities for self-development?

Process:

Discuss development:

- What it means?
- Indicators—how does one know if a community is more developed or less developed? What elements does one look at? Probe regarding each of the four dimensions—LID (social capital, managerial and technical capacity, external connections), grassroots leadership, sustainability, and multiplication. How does one assess whether a community is strong or weak on some dimension or subdimension? What are the indicators one should look at in each case?
- Indications of change—what other elements indicate that a community is going to be more developed in the future? Probe.
- What are the facts that support these assertions? Elicit and compile the evidence related to each of our four dimensions and subdimensions.
- What is the expectation about this community's status in the near future? What are the facts that support these expectations? Elicit and compile evidence related to each of the four dimensions.
- Eliciting the community's oral history of development: What is the story of development in this community? How was progress made (or not made)? What were the key turning points, positive and negative? What significant events and personalities were associated with each turning point? What other elements were important in each instance?
- How many different development projects (including self-funded ones) has this community implemented over the past ten years? List these projects in chronological order, giving information about the funding agency, purpose, approximate amount, duration, process followed (in detail), immediate results, longer-term outcome, and whether this project did or did not constitute a turning point of development for the community (and the related reasons). What positive and negative changes did each project introduce?
- Why were some projects more useful and beneficial than others? Discuss and compile reasons, probing about the nature of the project, modus operandi of external agency, community leaders and organization involved (if any) and its modus operandi, and external shocks and unforeseen contingencies.
- What lessons can be learned from these experiences? What aspects of communities' internal features and structures are most important? What features of external support agencies' assistance are most helpful for building communities' capacities for future development? What external events and actors derail (or boost) communities' development? Each answer to be supported in terms of this community's experience.
- Anything else you would like us to know about how development assistance can be made more effective and communities' capacities raised for self-development?

¹⁰ Research Ethics and Regulatory Approval and Permit for Protocol No. P.05/22/646: Investigating Processes Leading to Self-developing Communities in Malawi, dated June 27, 2022.

We selected nine communities, all located in central Malawi and thus comparable in terms of institutional context and historical background. Three criteria informed this selection—population size, distance from the nearest urban center, and relative level of infrastructure development—and we selected an assortment of communities corresponding to each criterion. Six of the nine communities had participated in one or more World Connect projects in the past—including Huwa VDC in Dedza district, Chunga VDC in Nkhotakota district, Mtika VDC in Salima district, Mpalale VDC in Dedza district, Khwema VDC in Dowa district, and Mvugo VDC in Lilongwe district. Three communities that had no prior World Connect association are Lobi VDC in Dedza district, Mkoko VDC in Lilongwe district, and Mangwale VDC in Mchinji district.

We followed a two-step process of discussions within each community. First, focus group discussions (FGD) were held, usually with 10–20 members, including a few members of the larger Area Development Committee (ADC), all available VDC members, and the leaders of other village groups, including youth groups and village savings and loans (VSL) groups. These discussions lasted between 2–4 hours.

Next, we had discussions with a smaller group of key informants (key informant interviews, or KIIs); generally, six people composed of a selection of ADC and VDC members and other well-informed leaders, lasting 1–2 hours. While the FGDs were useful for discovering a range of perspectives, KIIs helped go deeper into particular issues. Both discussions, the FGD and the KII, were concluded within the same day in each community and were captured on digital voice recorders after seeking consent from the participants. This number of FGDs and KIIs is more than adequate for unearthing the information sought in a qualitative investigation of this nature (Hennink and Kaiser 2022).

Before turning to the results of these inquiries, it is necessary to describe the local institutional context briefly. The process of decentralization began in Malawi in 1998 and led, starting in 2001, to the creation of ADCs and VDCs across the countryside. A VDC is comprised of elected representatives, one from each village or group of villages, ward councilors within the VDC, women representatives nominated by people within the VDC, and an elected extension worker representative.¹¹ “The main functions of the VDC are to identify, organize and seek funding for development-based activities” (Maiden et al., 2020: 859).

VDCs have come to be the main agency for local development, “contributing to accountable and responsive governance at the local level (...). VDC members (...) are overwhelming voted into their positions (...) [and] considered active, with committees finishing at least one project within a six-month period. Village members rate VDCs highly (...). Women make up almost half of all VDC members”

¹¹ Chinsinga (2008), GoM (1998 a and b); and Maiden et al. (2021).

(Maiden et al., 2020: 857). ADCs sit above VDCs in this hierarchy of institutions and include representatives drawn from constituent VDCs.

VDCs and ADCs are not, however, the only relevant actors. Chiefs have control over land resources, and they are customarily respected. The dynamic between the chiefs and the VDC has an influence on the effectiveness of local development initiatives. As a result of these changes, VDCs in Malawi have been given the major responsibility for local development programming, and with experiences acquired over the past few years, they have gained varyingly in capacities.¹²

With this brief introduction to the methodology and context, we turn to the results, beginning with communities' understanding of the appropriate goals and dimensions of development. Interestingly, despite their varied experiences, we found very little variation in communities' impressions and aspirations.

¹² Chinsinga (2008); Peters and Kambewa (2007).

Section 3. *Chitukuko chopanga tokha* (self-developing communities)—The shared aspiration

Development is similarly understood within these communities as consisting of “activities that people in the community engage in to improve their livelihoods.” It involves “changes in the lives of the people from a poorer to a better state.” A longer-term view was stressed, as in “development is work done by a group of people with an aim to prepare and support the future of children and youth” (Khwema), and “development activities should not be static, but need to change over time as one’s status improves” (Mkoko).

More than any other agency, communities there regard themselves as the most appropriate drivers of local developments. The goal of becoming progressively like a self-developing community was the stated aspiration of every community.

Ownership of development projects is central to these conceptions. Their experiences have demonstrated to communities the importance of local ownership, referred to in every case by the same Chichewa term, *umwini*. They have seen that when communities do not “own” development projects—that is, control and manage them from the inception and be responsible for them continuously—these projects fail to produce good results. One community group cited the example of a skills center that an NGO had paid to build and equip some years in the past. “But the structure is now in ruins and the youth do not have a place to learn skills for self-employment. The project ended soon after [the international NGO] withdrew its support. The main reason is that people did not own it” (Mangwale). Another community remembered a borehole that a government agency constructed with “minimal involvement of the community. They provided everything and handed over the complete borehole to the community. [However,] the borehole broke down, and the community did not have the knowhow to fix it, the government agency was not responsive, and this forced the people to draw water from unprotected shallow wells. Incidences of water-borne diseases resurfaced” (Chunga).

Communities believe that ownership is necessary for project effectiveness and essential for sustainability. “Ownership comes when people have sweated for development. They own it and take care of it. Ownership is a key driver of sustainability of development, as it brings a sense of responsibility to the community” (Huwa).

A change of mindset is a precondition for cultivating ownership and inculcating responsibility. “In fact, this mindset change is development. Development starts with the mind. If the mind is not changed, no development can take place. Mindset change is actually the reason why communities do development activities without expecting pay or handouts, because they realize that handouts retard development, and hence, we need to do things on our own” (Mpalale).

“People’s mindset has changed over time. Those who would not participate in community work before, now do so because they have changed mindset towards development activities. It is this change in the mindset that leads communities to own roads, bridges and school projects in their areas and do something together” (Lobi).

Ownership and the associated mindset change are parts of a drawn-out and interactive process. As communities realize benefits from locally owned projects, they become more willing and able to take up additional initiatives.

“The community wants to own projects when they realize projects are solving their problem. People see benefits of having roads, bridges, schools, having electricity in the area. The perceived benefits make people take responsibility and own these projects. They believe that if they leave the projects to external agencies, the problems will not be solved, and the ones to suffer will be the people themselves.” (Mvugo).

“Ownership develops when everyone in the village benefits, when people have perceived the benefits, and when projects are aligned to good existing practices in the community. At this point, development becomes a ‘culture of the people’” (Khwema).

This “culture” of development, with local ownership as its defining feature, is firmly entwined with the shared goal of becoming a self-developing community. Five of nine communities used the same Chichewa term, *chitukuko chopanga tokha*, when referring to this concept, which was immediately and enthusiastically grasped by every other community.¹³

“When development is initiated by the community itself, supports the needs of the community, and implementation is led by leaders from the community itself (...) that is self-development. The community is able to identify and analyze their own problems, make plans, and mobilize resources locally to start implementation. External organizations come in to support the community in areas where it lacks capacity only” (Chunga).

¹³ Other communities used terms that are closely similar, including *chitukuko chonkhazikika* and *chitukuko chopatsirana*.

“It starts with the community identifying their own needs which are discussed by chiefs and the rest of the members. Community examines and identifies what they are capable of doing and sources external funding for what they cannot do” (Huwa).

In common, these focus groups and key informants described eight characteristics of self-developing communities (Table 2). Annex 1 presents a more complete selection of views presented by the community groups on this aspect.

Table 2: Community-identified characteristics of self-development

1. Addresses the needs of the people.
2. Is initiated by community members.
3. Is implemented by some members of the community.
4. And supported by the rest of the community (local leaders, men, women, and youth).
5. Has to be sustained (continuity).
6. Helps grow local people's capacities to take up activities.
7. External support in aspects where locals lack capacity.
8. Leads to new development initiatives coming into the community (multiplication).

Though the goal of self-developing community is commonly held, and communities understand the notion in terms of nearly the same characteristics, the record varies in relation to the types and numbers of such initiatives that have been taken up by different communities. Table 3 presents what community groups reported about the project initiatives each of them had taken up in the preceding ten years.

Table 3: Type and Number of Self-Development Activities

Activities	Communities								
	Huwa	Chunga	Mtika	Mpalale	Mkoko	Mangwale	Khwema	Lobi	Mvugo
Roads	x	x	x	x					x
Bridges (Makeshift And Concrete)				x					x
Nursery, Primary, Secondary, And Technical School Blocks	x	x	x	x	x				
Protected Wells And Boreholes	x	x							
Health (Toilets, Hospital)	x		x						
Farming (Crops Rain-fed)	x			x	x	x	x		x
Farming (Crops Irrigation)	x		x		x				
Farming (Livestock And Fisheries)			x	x	x		x		
Bakery									
Markets				x					
Processing And Value Addition		x							
Small-scale Businesses (Groceries, Maize Mills)		x	x			x			x
Houses With Iron Sheet Roofs				x	x	x	x	x	x
Food And Nutrition Promotion Activities				x		x			
Timber (Selling)					x				
Savings And Loans Groups					x				
Planting Trees					x		x		
Total	6	5	6	8	8	4	4	1	5

The most active self-developers, such as Mkoko and Mpalale, each took up eight projects of self-development, while the least active, Lobi, took up only one activity of self-development. (The six communities that World Connect has assisted in the past, and the three communities it has not so far assisted, are similarly composed of more active and less active ones.) It is beyond the scope of this research to pinpoint the causes of this variation.

Community groups identified different dimensions of self-development, consisting of particular processes and certain capacities. Instituting these processes and nurturing these capacities helps communities become better managers of self-development. In addition, therefore, to providing community organizations with financial resources, concerned outsiders, including donor agencies, can help identify and then nurture certain types of local capacities.

Financial resources and assistance with capacity building are complementary and essential parts of an effective aid package. Community-driven development requires a holistic approach, focusing simultaneously on multiple elements outlined in the next two sections and brought together in Section 6.

Section 4. *Malamulo ndi athu omwe ndiye sitingaswe*—“The rules are our own, so we can’t break them”—Unity, rules, and trust

Community groups highlighted unity (*umodzi*) as the first essential dimension. Without unity, the community does not exist as an entity that is capable of taking on collaborative actions for collective benefit.

Ownership and self-development are predicated upon the existence of unity within the community. Differences of wealth and status need to be overcome for its achievement. “Unity in the form of cooperation can occur in different forms but the one that leads to a community doing development has to be close to that of the bees, who each play different roles but work together to produce honey” (Mtika).

“Unless people unite to work together, like *chimvano cha mamvu* (wasps who agreed to all be thin at the abdomen) so that they are stronger, and when they combine together, can achieve a lot” (Mpalale).

Annex 2 reproduces the wealth of views expressed by the nine community groups about this dimension of self-development. We reproduce below the gist of these community expressions.

Unity is itself an outcome of complex processes and cannot simply be wished into existence. It requires that rules, norms, and enforcement structures are in place. Putting these elements in place is the first step, and that requires both a platform and opportunities.

“Unity means coming together or bonding. Among the factors that unify people in this community are rules and bylaws. These rules help the people come together and perform development activities in their area” (Lobi).

Different kinds of rules are in operation. There are rules related to resource mobilization, for instance, rules requiring everyone to contribute sand, bricks, and labor for building a bridge or a school building.

“In 2010, the community constructed a school block at Mpachika primary school. Chiefs put in place rules that made people cooperate. Everyone adhered to rules and made bricks and provided sand for construction. In the same year, community constructed two community roads, and again people had to contribute” (Mangwale).

“In 2002, the community built a community hall and school block at Mauni Community Day Secondary School to support unemployed youth in the area. The chief organized that each of the sixty-three village headmen (VH) should provide 2,000 bricks, sand, and quarry stone for construction. This work took only two years because the community worked together... In 2015, the community came together to build a tele center for the youth to access services such as printing,

photocopying and internet. The chief and VHs came up with a plan on when each village would come forth to provide sand, bricks, and quarry on the agreed dates. If the VH failed to provide materials, he/she and his/her village were barred from any activities that took place in the area of the chief. As a result of this bylaw, communities worked together and finished constructing the tele center in two years" (Khwema).

Other community rules—referred to as bylaws—prescribe or proscribe certain behaviors. Community groups provided different examples, including the following, indicative of the vastly important, and often transformative, roles that grassroots institutions play in this context.

"We noted the rise in cases of child marriages. We thought of intervening by setting a bylaw to curb this vice. We formed a mothers' group to monitor implementation of this rule. If found, the case is reported to the Group Village Headman and other leaders. Parents of the girl have to pay a goat and the VH under whose village the case has been identified also pays a goat. The girl is withdrawn from marriage and sent back to school" (Mpalale).

"In 2018, community and its leadership established a bylaw that any woman who delivers at home as opposed to the hospital must be fined 13,000 MWK (about 15 USD). As a result of this bylaw number of pregnant women delivering at the hospital has increased, and as result, maternal deaths have reduced" (Lobi).

Rules and norms are essential for unity, but they are not enough. There have to be sanctions against those who break the rules and mechanisms for enforcement.

Communities impose a range of sanctions upon rule-breakers. The following examples are illustrative:

"The rules are not only established but they are accompanied with strong penalties, for example, exclusion from important social activities. The community member is barred from attending funeral services if found not adhering to the rule of having, say, a backyard garden. Likewise, when an individual who breaks the rule has lost a family member, the community does not provide support for the funeral" (Mkoko).

"All committees in the community have set dates for meetings. For example, the youth club set 15th and 30th day of the month for their meetings. Failure to attend meetings attracts a fine in form of money or chickens" (Mtika).

"Those who did not participate in activities for school project were required to pay absenteeism fine, *chindapusa*" (Huwa).

Notably, rules and sanctions work best when they are established and owned by the people themselves. Rules introduced by outsiders are not regarded as equally legitimate and thus not as effective.

“The community leaders establish the rules and bylaws in consultation with community members at all levels hence there is total ownership of these rules by the community members. The community members feel they cannot breach the same rules they took part in establishing. This makes the process of enforcing the bylaws easy for the community” (Khwema).

Democratization at the grassroots level and the advent of elected VDCs and ADCs, now widely seen as the appropriate loci for development activities, have had important effects in terms of how local rules are established and who participates in rule formation.

“Rules were solely established by chiefs in the past, with little or no consultation of the community members. This led to low ownership and adherence to the rules as well as poor implementation” (Mkoko).

“In the past ten years there has been a shift in the involvement of chiefs in development. At first, chiefs were in charge of development, but they were perceived to be unfair and not transparent, and elected committees were introduced that are better” (Mpalale).

To be sure, chiefs still have positions of great importance. They “are vested with the guardianship of the land under their respective areas” (Chinsinga, 2008: 89). They “remain influential among their subjects. Their word is trusted and respected” (Chinsinga, 2012: 11).

A shifting dynamic between chiefs and locally elected committees has resulted. On the one hand, chiefs and other leaders are more often called to account and required to submit themselves to the same rules that govern others.

“Rules also apply to leaders the same way as ordinary community members, e.g., leaders in the committee also pay 100 MKW when they are late to a meeting” (Chunga).

“At one point, people refused to attend meetings to build school block after allegations that chief misused money meant to pay community members for participation. Chief mostly recruited friends and next of kin to participate and benefit from the money. These perceptions were held by the community because of failure by the chief to enforce rules and sanctions properly” (Huwa).

At the same time, rule observance, and in particular, enforcing sanctions, hinges to a great extent still upon the chief's moral authority. As a result, the chief's involvement in, or at least his blessings for, a particular development project is important.

“People listen to the chief. When he tells everyone to participate in development work, they do so without hesitation, because they fear the sanction by the chief” (Mkoko).

“Committees lacked authority to enforce rules in the community (...). Chiefs had to be brought back (...). Re-engagement of chiefs in development has resulted in more adherence to rules and better enforcement of sanctions” (Mpalale).

“In 2013, chiefs and VDC worked together to facilitate molding of bricks for the construction of the skills development center in the area. Chiefs worked with VDC to come up with rules on participation and the accompanying sanctions. The VDC reported to the chief about those who broke the rules, and these people were being fined accordingly. The rules and sanctions carried more weight because the chief was involved” (Mangwale).

Coordination among different local leaders—chiefs and VDCs—and across diverse local groups—youth groups, VSL groups, etc.—is another important dimension that community groups highlighted. We return to this point after discussing the dimension of leadership in the next section.

Unity requires rules, sanctions, and enforcement mechanisms. It also requires trust among community members and between leaders and members.

“Development activities take place because of high level of trust between members and their leaders. For example, in 2021, when Livizi bridge was washed away, community members contributed money for cement, sand and poles to maintain the bridge. The money was kept by VDC leaders, and it was not misappropriated (...). Leaders made allocation of resources transparently in an open space. They also report to members how the resources are used such that everyone is aware and knows about the activities and processes that are taking place within the group” (Mpalale).

“Without trust between leaders and their subjects, there cannot be unity among them hence no progress in development (...). Leaders are chosen here on the basis of their previous records of being trusted individuals” (Khwema).

Unity helps a community act as a single unit, but what kinds of actions it takes up and how effectively depends on another set of capabilities that communities have to acquire in addition, including managerial and technical skills, an effective and deep pool of leaders, and strong networks both among local groups and externally. We turn next to these dimensions.

Section 5. Skills, leaders, and networks (*Atsogoleri ochita, otakatakandi akuthekera*)

It is necessary for communities and their members to acquire skills of different kinds on the pathway to self-development. “A community must be multiskilled for it to make progress. Skills must be possessed by the people from the community. No community develops if it has to rely for skills upon people from external agencies” (Mangwale).

Table 4 presents the skills that were prioritized by different communities. Broadly, three types of skills were distinguished; technical and managerial skills dominated everywhere, but a few communities also listed activities such as sports and drama.

Table 4: Prioritization of Skills for Self-Development

site	Vocational/technical skills	Managerial skills	Talents
Huwa	Building, carpentry, and road construction—facilitating agricultural and health activities	Literacy, monitoring, problem identification, planning, proposal writing, financial management, and report writing	Youth groups (drama)
Chunga	Building, carpentry, maintaining boreholes and feeder roads	Monitoring, planning, problem identification, proposal writing, financial management, and report writing	
Mtika	Sewing, carpentry, saloon, builders, and farming	Problem analysis, planning, proposal writing, financial management, reporting, and monitoring	Poetry, singing, drama, and dancing
Mpalale	Welding, tailoring, carpentry, building, fish farming, and bakery	Problem identification, action planning, writing proposals, financial management, reporting, and project monitoring	
Mkoko	Farming (backyard gardens and irrigation) and bakery	Business and financial skills	
Mangwale	Building, carpentry, making charcoal, and building design,	Community needs assessment, loan and saving	Drama and poetry
Khwema	Tailoring and building skills	Not mentioned	Drama for message dissemination, sports (football)
Lobi	Building, welding, saloon, barbershop, printing, photocopying, farming	Business-burning music, VSL, Village Action Plan	
Mvugo	Construction	Community mobilization, savings and loans, and business skills	Drama, music, sports (football), and traditional dances, such as Gule Wamkulu, Chimtali, Chitelera, and Mganda

Among technical and vocational skills, communities ranked skills related to the building trade highest, while among managerial skills, the highest priority was given to problem assessment, proposal writing, and managing finances. Some groups mentioned other kinds of skills, such as drama and football, which help bring group members together and can assist with fundraising. “It is entertainment to the people. Also, football keeps the youth busy, so that they do not indulge in bad habits like alcohol and drugs” (Mvugo).¹⁴

Skills of different kinds are required, thus, but how have people in these communities acquired these skills usually? Annex 4 brings together what different communities have experienced in this respect.

In general, communities identified three modes of skill formation—formal training programs and informal, often hands-on, training provided, alternatively, by external agencies and by fellow community members.

Instances of formal training include sending community members to specialized training institutions or organizing such training programs at local centers.

“Youth from this community go to Chongoni Technical College which trains youth in various skills, including baking, tailoring, welding, and building. It is located close by” (Lobi).

“External agencies have provided capacity-building programs locally for financial management and business skills for VSLs” (Mvugo).

Hands-on training provided by outsiders and by community members has been the dominant mode of skills development, however.

“We work closely with agriculture extension workers resident in the area. This relationship enhances our agricultural skills” (Lobi).

“People who learn different skills outside are motivated to use them in their community. There is transfer of skills within the community, which has led to increase in skilled people. Youth teach each other skills such as sewing and chicken rearing” (Chunga).

“The youth group is helping other youth gain skills such as sewing and chicken rearing” (Mtika).

In addition, training of individuals for leadership positions is an aspect that needs special attention. New leaders have arisen; older ones still remain salient, albeit as part of a different and more egalitarian dynamic at the grassroots level.

¹⁴ “We formed a team and made a makeshift stadium to cover the pitch so that people can pay to watch soccer. Through this, we generate income to support vulnerable groups like the orphans and the elderly” (Mvugo).

“In the past, chiefs and politicians were the only leaders. They did not allow other individuals to take up leadership roles apart from themselves because the chiefs did not want to share their authority with other individuals other than their kinsmen” (Mtika).

Now, however, chiefs exist alongside a variety of relatively newly arisen local leaders, many of whom obtain their positions in open elections. “Over the years, the villages have become numerous and autonomous. In the past, there were few villages led by the group village heads who reported to the TA. However, more villages have emerged with their own village heads who report to group village head. Each of these new villages is required to have development committees. Hence increasing the number of committees and leaders” (Mkoko).

“It is a requirement by organizations working in the area to establish committees which require leaders. It is for this reason that there are leaders for VSL, VDC, Youth Club, Forest Committee, Mother Care Group. Working with external agencies, the leaders have received training in action plan preparation, report writing, monitoring” (Mpalale). In response to this stimulus, committee formation at the grassroots and the number of local leadership positions has exploded (Archambaut and Erhard, 2022).

Merely having leadership positions is not enough. “The leaders must meet a set of qualities that can help them to work with people and discharge their duties better” (Mvugo).

A number of qualities were emphasized by communities—honest, hardworking, humble; trustworthy, committed and dedicated; naturally intelligent and wise; visionary; open to criticism—which may be innate or acquired through experience; along with other skills and attributes, including being able to write reports and proposals, monitor projects, engage with government officials, resolve conflicts, and handle budgets and finances, which are more easily transmitted through training programs.

Being accountable and responsive is the greatest quality these communities want of their leaders. An egalitarian ethos was very much in evidence: leaders of development enterprises are in no way “above” other members.

“Here we do not fear leaders. We demand accountability from them because we elected them to serve us. For example, there was a time when the village demanded their chief to account for his action of cutting down trees in the communal graveyard for personal use. The community exerted pressure on the chief by boycotting funerals, by not volunteering their services such as preparing food and digging the grave and burying the dead. After these actions by the community, the chief completely stopped cutting down the trees” (Lobi).

“We respect our leaders because we elected them to their positions. When the VDC failed to organize development initiatives and could not hold meetings, the

community asked all the members to resign and later elected new committee member” (Mpalale).

Networking and coordination constitute the last dimension that was highlighted by community groups. Annex 5 reproduces what communities mentioned in this regard.

The need for coordination locally has grown sharply as an increasing number of local committees and organizations were formed in each community, including the VDC, mothers’ groups, school committees, VSL groups, agriculture committees, youth groups, lead farmers programs, health committees, human rights groups, church and mosque groups, and other community-based organizations dealing with cooperatives, forestry, and environment, etc.

These committees, structures, and institutions work best in tandem with one another. “They do not compete but actually share plans with each other. There is open communication and room for constructive criticism and guidance given by different committees” (Mtika).

This result is not automatic but needs to be worked toward. Different means for coordination are in evidence, with some communities still relying on the chief for the purpose, other communities on their VDCs, and a third group bringing to life a special kind of coordinating mechanism. In Mpalale, the mothers’ group worked with committees of the VDC, a school committee, and chiefs to implement the back-to-school bylaw that had been adopted by this community. The mothers’ group helped by identifying underage girls on the verge of getting married. “They reported these cases to the VDC and chief. The chief fined the parents of the girl and the village head. VDC and mothers’ group are empowered to take these girls out of the marriage and to send them back to school. The mothers’ group continues to monitor that these girls stay in school” (Mpalale).

In another community, the VDC functions as a central hub that is connected with spokes to each of the different committees. “VDC members gather information from various committees and share it in the VDC meeting. The nutrition project is an example, where VDC member interfaced with care groups and nutrition promoters and school committees” (Huwa).

Coordination and interaction between different committees in Mkocho have been strengthened by the erection of a structure called *Nthewatewa*, demonstrating the flair communities have for institutional innovation. *Nthewatewa*, a sort of super-committee, “was established on 15th January 2021 to coordinate the activities of the different groups operating in Mkocho. The idea was advanced by the locals themselves after observing that the individual committees were not performing, and it was necessary to have a structure that would monitor the performance of the individual committees. *Nthewatewa* was established to provide space to committees to share plans, lessons, and experiences. This is expected to enhance

unity and to help the community work toward the shared goal of developing the community” (Mkoko).

Networks with the outside world are important, for they enable communities to tap into opportunities for information, funding, and economic development. Leaders and groups liaise with grant-making organizations. As they begin to produce promising results locally, grassroots leaders’ standing grows among funding agencies.

Section 6. Moving things in the right direction

How can things be arranged such that more development initiatives are launched and made more sustainable and effective? Bringing together what was reported in the previous two sections, community groups identified the following dimensions on which progress is necessary in order for communities to become more effectively self-developing:

- Community ownership of local development enterprises,
- Unity within the community despite heterogeneity maintained through rules and sanctions, locally made and routinely upheld,
- Trust among community members and between members and leaders,
- Skills—managerial, technical, vocational,
- Leaders—multiple, effective, and accountable,
- Coordinating networks.

Resources by way of funds are necessary but not enough. In addition, agencies supporting community-driven development need to attend to these other dimensions.

The experiences that communities in Malawi have derived from participating actively in different projects of local development have served to grow communities’ capacities along each dimension. Unity has been practiced, rules rehearsed, skills acquired, and new leaders have emerged in the process of implementing diverse grassroots initiatives.

Without being actively immersed in a succession of projects, it is hard to imagine how progress could have been sustained by these communities. Without projects, the need for skills may not have been felt so acutely. Without projects, leaders would have no stage for their performances. Projects have served as the practice ground for leaders and the vehicles whereby trust has grown, and organizational rules and structures were made more effective. At the same time, projects, when poorly designed and implemented, can damage rather than build community capacities.

A key question, therefore, is when do projects help, and when do they hinder the growth of community capacities? Closely related is the role of external actors. How should development support organizations, including NGOs such as World

Connect, intervene in ways that assist communities in acquiring diverse capacities for self-development? In this section, we bring together relevant lessons that emerged from these community discussions.

Local ownership is a critical condition for effectiveness, sustainability, and multiplication. Orphaned projects result when control and responsibility are not firmly vested with the community. To assist with building other kinds of capacity, projects have to be rooted firmly within community structures. All nine communities provided examples of projects that continued to function and deliver benefits after years. Physical structures (e.g., school blocks) were well maintained and operational; the scope of operations had expanded (e.g., scaling up and out of market infrastructure, backyard gardens, gender awareness campaigns); the new technologies were being utilized by larger numbers (e.g., incubators for a poultry project, income from aquaculture) and institutionalizing local projects (e.g., recognition of vocational centers by the government).

Table 5 provides examples of sustainable projects that were emphasized by each community. In each of these cases, the community was centrally involved at project inception and made significant contributions during implementation. The nature of ownership varied across these projects, as did the mode of community involvement. In some instances, communities were involved in project activities such as problem analysis, training sessions, and campaigns organized by external organizations, while in other instances, communities initiated the projects, establishing relationships with external organizations and making their own decisions through local institutions. Even in the former set of cases, communities contributed labor (skilled and unskilled), land and materials (e.g., sand, bricks, seeds), and often, also cash as a means of establishing ownership.

Table 5: Ownership and Sustainability

Site	Community involvement in the early stages of the project	Community contribution	Aspects continuing
Huwa	The community identified and prioritized problems, reaching out to an external organization for support on the road, borehole, and nursery school projects.	Mobilizing bricks, cement, and labor for constructing nursery school block and borehole.	Road maintained annually, and nursery school continues to enroll pupils.
Chunga	The community agreed to establish a marketplace. They also agreed on a road project to make the market accessible.	Labor for constructing the road.	The market has expanded and is now serving fifteen surrounding villages. The community continues to maintain the road every year.
Mtika	The youth group wrote a proposal to mobilize funds for a poultry project.	The chief contributed 2-acre land, and the youth group contributed start-up capital.	Modern chicken house built with solar system (200 wats) and an incubator for 600 eggs.
Mpalale	The youth group wrote a proposal requesting funds to start an aquaculture project.	Group members contributed money to buy land and provided labor for making fishponds.	The aquaculture project continues. In 2021, they harvested 105 kg of fish and earned 390,000 MWK.
Mkoko	Bunda college established a group in 2011 to conduct research on orphan crops (Bambara and sorghum) and indigenous vegetables in backyard gardens.	Land, labor, and seeds for backyard gardens.	The chief established a rule that every household must own a backyard garden to reduce incidences of poisoning from consuming vegetables applied with toxic pesticides (sold by vendors). The group has added savings and loan activities.
Mangwale	Leaders of a community-based organization (CBO) agreed in 2011 to build a structure where the youth (i.e., orphaned and school dropouts, jobless) would acquire vocational skills.	Labor and building materials (sand and bricks).	The vocational school continues, and it has been recognized by a national vocational institution (TEVETA).
Khwema	Chiefs noted that enrollment in local primary schools was low. In 2015, they decided to use traditional dancers (Gule Wamkulu) to coax children out of their homes to go to school every morning.	Local institution (Gule Wamkulu). Chiefs worked with school committees to monitor school enrollment and attendance.	Enrollment in schools continues to increase (189 children sent back to school).
Lobi	Community participated in awareness campaigns on the equality of men and women organized by a prominent rights activist in the country.	People attending meetings and training sessions on gender.	Community leaders and local structures have continued to sensitize fellow community members about gender equality.
Mvugo	A CBO was established in 2009 to support people living with HIV and AIDS. The chief and the CBO members (women) participated in a nutrition-training program supported by Concern Universal. They received rabbits.	Bricks and sand to build a CBO structure. Constructing good animal houses, feeding animals, and participating in meetings.	Activities of the CBO continue, and men are now also participating in lessons on nutrition. The group upgraded the livestock enterprise from rabbits in 2009 to goats in 2010 and later to pigs in 2011. They plan to start dairy farming.

Communities similarly made the case about ownership and multiplication. Projects that the community owns produce learning and give the community the confidence and the capacity to take on new and related initiatives.

Several new initiatives were implemented, introducing new practices and projects that are directly related to an older community-owned project. Table 6 lists examples cited by communities of practices and projects that emerged from initiatives taken up earlier within the same community.

Table 6: Ownership and multiplication: examples of new practices and projects that emerged in each community

Site	New practices	New projects/initiatives
Huwa	The nutrition project brought feeding practices (six food groups), under-five services-scale, cooking skills, improved marital relationships.	Road project added water harvesting and management project (tree planting and swale) in catchments areas to reduce water run-off that destroyed roads.
Chunga	Moringa-processing project has introduced moringa soap, which is sold in Nkhotakota district and Lilongwe city. People now appreciate herbal products.	Local market: services at the local market have expanded, including mobile financial services, such as Airtel Money and Mpamba; solar service to charge phones, and batteries for lighting houses.
Mtika	Irrigation farming is now practiced at a large scale (from one to around 800 farmers; from one to three villages). The irrigation system changed from watering cane (water drawn from shallow wells) to surface irrigation (dam water running in a canal using gravity).	The youth poultry project has expanded to beekeeping (apiculture), irrigation farming (vegetables), and running grocery and barber shops.
Mpalale	Energy saving stove project: almost all households in the community have made a stove (1,300 were trained and 1,130 made own stoves).	The aquaculture youth group has diversified to VSL and invested in groceries, private nursery school, secondhand clothes business, and selling potatoes.
Mkoko	Culture of saving and investment is enhanced in the community, both among men and women. The number of savings and loans groups has increased to seven, each with ten members.	To support the backyard garden project, a borehole was constructed to supply water for irrigating the gardens. A rabbit project was introduced to complement the backyard garden. People eat vegetables and animal protein to diversify their diet.
Mangwale	VSLs have spread across the community, with each group of ten to twenty-five members. Each village has about five VSLs. Men and chiefs are now joining VSLs, previously considered to be an activity for women.	Some graduate youths from the vocational center have teamed up to form tailoring firms operating trading centers where they make good money.
Khwema	The youth group is advocating for children to go to school, a role previously played by traditional Gule Wamkulu dancers. Chiefs have also introduced fines for families that fail to send children to school.	The youth group is giving prizes (notebooks and pens) to the best-performing pupils to encourage them to remain in school. The youth group grows soya beans to raise money to support school-attending children with fees and procuring prizes.
Lobi	Gender equality mainstreamed into local organizations, with women occupying leadership positions. For example, the chairperson for the youth group is a woman and the treasurer of the agricultural stakeholder panel is a woman. The youth group has gender equality as one of its key topics.	Women are not just in committees or leadership positions but are also running own businesses.
Mvugo	The livestock pass-on program enabled members in the group access to nutritious foods. While livestock started as a nutrition program, members also sell the livestock to generate cash for use in the households.	The CBO started several projects in the community, including irrigation farming to grow vegetables; rain-fed maize, and soy production; support for orphans whose parents died of HIV; maize mills; a pig pass-on program; VSL program. After learning from small livestock (rabbits, goats), the group wants to start a dairy (cow) project to generate income and improve nutrition. They have secured a loan through a government commercialization project called AGCOM to invest in a dairy project.

Local ownership of projects is, thus, very important. The alternative, projects brought in from the outside and managed by outsiders, do little to build confidence and grow capacity. In Mpalale, for example, an NGO introduced a project for planting bamboos without consulting the local community. As a result, this FGD reported, “survival rate for the bamboos is low as some dried before planting, others were destroyed by livestock (goats). People are not interested to care for the bamboos. They do not water the seedlings or stop their goats.”

Local ownership, while necessary, is hardly sufficient. Other dimensions of local capacity, such as unity, skills, and leadership, also matter critically, and progress along these dimensions is necessary in parallel.

Outsiders can do little directly to build unity within the community by instituting local norms and rules and instilling trust among community members. They can, however, help indirectly, for instance, by arranging for demonstrations of what is feasible for a community. Quite often, communities gain faith in their own abilities when they see how another community has successfully taken up a related initiative. One community, Mpalale, spoke of “good envy—*kusilira kwa bwino*—as a force that drives one to take action to become like the successful person”, which gives rise to healthy competition. Communities, observing one another, gain new ideas and learn new tactics. This is something else external support agencies can facilitate by maintaining an information bank about promising community initiatives and by arranging for intercommunity visits and contests.

Mindset change—*kusintha kaganizidwe*—which is the precondition, according to these communities, for ownership and unity and community-driven development, is another largely internally generated attribute, though external agencies can serve as catalysts, hastening and precipitating this development. One community mentioned, for instance, how “mindset has changed because of the training people have received from organizations such as National Initiative for Civic Education. The training changed mindsets and now people prioritize going to work either in their fields or piece works before going to drink beer. It is this change in the mindset that led this community to own roads, bridges, and school blocks projects, as they believed that these projects belong to them and not outsiders” (Mvugo).

Other dimensions of capacity, particularly skills, can be built more directly and deliberately through formal and informal training. “Projects bring skills”, but care needs to be taken that even if it takes longer, the skills required for a project are built locally and that these tasks are not simply given over to skilled outsiders—for that means losing the downstream benefits of building these skills locally and having them to use in future endeavors. In addition to situations where external organizations bring skilled individuals from the outside, which is counterproductive for local skills development, community groups identified a variety of suboptimal situations: when the support agency fails to build skills

locally; when there is no training institution at hand that can help develop the skills of community members; and when skills development is considered as a one-off exercise and not as a continuous process that requires participants to update their skills regularly. Support agencies must recognize the edifying experience of locally led implementation, as imperfect as it may be, and lean in with recognition and resources to support local skills and leadership development at its earliest stages.

Conclusion

The four-way partnership that carried out these investigations helped uncover structures and processes at the grassroots that enable effective community-driven development. The inquiry helped outline emergent trends that need ongoing attention. As importantly, it produced learnings of a practical nature for each of the partners, in itself a valuable achievement.

For the academics on the team, it was a humbling experience to uncover the sophisticated understandings that are held by these rural communities, which in some respects replicate, and in other respects go beyond, the academic formulations (reviewed in Section 1). Just by listening carefully to these community groups, an entire theory of action can be articulated. In general, the correspondence is intriguingly close between what the academic literature has identified as the goals and the dimensions (or components) of success in community-driven development, but the terminology is different. What the academics call “social capital”, Malawian communities speak of as unity. The difference is mostly one of language; the conception and the desired end state are nearly identical.

Communities, on their part, also expressed satisfaction with these discussions. Many felt they had learned a great deal by thinking aloud in the company of their peers and by articulating in detail the everyday processes that are otherwise taken for granted. They recounted lessons that they had acquired during the discussions with the researchers related to leadership qualities, public speaking, self-belief, as well as the relationship between community ownership and sustainable development. The communities also indicated that they now perceived development as a process beyond physical infrastructure and that mindset change, skills and talents, networks, unity, norms, and local structures are crucial. Many agreed that having such discussions among themselves on a regular basis would help fine-tune the local efforts.

For external support agencies, like World Connect, there are important lessons about how to offer assistance intelligently, without stifling, or replacing local initiatives. The structures and processes that underpin community-driven development are unevenly distributed across rural communities, indicating the need for custom-made packages of assistance built on an intentional

commitment to understanding context and building on existing capacities. While “best practices” are useful, a one-size-fits-all approach can be counterproductive. Financial assistance is direly needed by such communities, but it is not enough only to give them the money (Hanlon, 2004). In addition, the external agency should take stock of each of the dimensions and capacities that go into the making of self-developing communities.

Communities in central Malawi, entirely in sync with the rationale of community-driven development, are staunch in the belief that the ownership of development enterprises by communities is essential for building capacity and inculcating responsibility. Effectiveness, sustainability, and multiplication are all premised upon communities being in the driver’s seat of local development projects. That should be regarded as a central tenet while providing assistance to community-driven development.

Though ownership by communities is necessary, communities are not always able to discharge ownership responsibilities adequately. Capacities of different kinds need to be strengthened, starting with a capacity for collective action, which requires rules and sanctions, trust and networks, and effective and accountable leaders. It also requires technical skills appropriate to the enterprise—such as masonry and roadbuilding—and managerial skills, especially, proposal writing and accounting.

As communities acquire these different capacities, they become more able to take on more and bigger development responsibilities. Progress toward becoming a self-developing community is the goal expressed by Malawian communities. One community, Mvugo, described the typical dynamic—“starting small, growing incrementally in confidence and ability, acquiring more skills, and setting up stronger local structures, and then taking up newer and bigger initiatives”. This community’s development history maps onto its philosophy; over the course of a decade, a community-based organization has been working here to support households to acquire and rear different kinds of livestock, starting with rabbits, then adding goats, and more recently, pigs, each time ramping up the economic benefits. Other communities have also acquired structures and capacities that enabled them, for instance, to facilitate information flows between the government and citizens during the pandemic (Kohler et al., 2022). This kind of virtuous-circle dynamic, involving learning, capacitation, and multiplication, requires a more holistic and more customized approach on the part of external support agencies that is based on the needs and the capacities of particular communities. Making assessments on the ground in consultation with community leaders will help ascertain the specific capacities needed in a particular instance. The dimensions elicited from these Malawian communities and elaborated in Section 6 serve as a useful checklist for making these ground assessments.

How widely can we expect these findings to hold across countries, or are there reasons to believe that Malawi may be special? Notably, VDCs have been formed in many other African countries (Maiden et al., 2021, provide a list). In this era of retreating states and advancing markets, with a “critical lack of implementation capacity” in government agencies at the local level (Mdee et al., 2020: 1271), rural communities are increasingly faced with situations where they have no choice but to take over the reins of development. How far advanced they are in this direction varies, with communities realizing more clearly in some countries and less clearly in others that the onus has swung to them, that no one else is going to do it, and that they must be the main doers of local development. In Malawi, the highest in the government have clearly signaled that this is how it will be in the future. The country’s president, speaking of the Malawi Vision 2063, averred that “we cannot wait for someone to develop this country for us. We need a mindset change that embodies a national consciousness built around belief in our own capabilities, home-grown solutions, and a positive value system. A system that recognizes unity of purpose, hard work, self-reliance, patriotism, integrity and hate for hand-outs” (NPC, 2020). Other communities and other national leaders may not have sensed the need as clearly, and other countries’ decentralization laws may not be as enabling as Malawi’s.

For all these reasons, context-specific investigations are necessary to ascertain how communities in other contexts understand development, how they define its goals, and whether the goal of a self-developing community is as basic to the self-conceptions of rural communities in, say, Senegal and Rwanda as it is to these communities of Malawi. We do not know everything we need. The search for grounded practical answers is ongoing. Ground-up investigations will illuminate how assistance for local-area development is best designed within specific contexts. More programs of collaborative action research are necessary for making more efficacious and more penetrating the assistance outsiders can provide in support of self-developing communities.

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Annex 1: Communities' understanding of development and self-development

The definitions provided by the respondents highlighted the following elements.

- The purpose of development,
- The conditions for the development to take place,
- The activities that lead to development,
- Development taking place at different levels (household/family, community, country; personal or group),
- Sustainability,
- It is a process (transition).

All the communities agree on development as involving activities and having a purpose (to improve livelihoods). A few communities extended the definition of development as including conditions for development, taking place at different levels, and including sustainability and development as a process.

a) Purpose of development:

"Activities that people in the community engage in to improve their livelihoods". Huwa, Chunga, Mtika, Mpalale, Mangwale, and Khwema VDCs

"Changes in lives of the people from a poor to better state". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

b) Conditions of development:

Development takes place when:

- "People are involved". Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022
- "Changes are taking place to improve their livelihoods". Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022
- "People in the community have positive mindset about development". Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022
- it is voluntary: "Any work done as a group to improve the area but without pay". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

However, there was a counterargument from one of the youths:

"Not all development activities are free. Whilst some are free, for others we get paid. The aim of all these activities is to improve the livelihood of people in the community i.e. social cash transfers". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

c) Development as activities

Development also takes place when activities that bring change include:

Development as activities

Development also takes place when activities that bring change include:

Huwa VDC

- Building roads for easy transport (infrastructure)
- Building schools so that children should go to school and become educated
- Digging shallow wells (clean water)
- Having the right mindset (maganizo)
- Building churches (spiritual development)
- Making available food for nutrition (six food groups)
- Generating income (finances/income) (Huwa village)

Chunga VDC

- Building schools
- Digging shallow well for clean water
- Having markets
- Having hospitals
- Building a bridge
- Building roads for easy transport (infrastructure)

Mtika VDC:

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Having hospitals | Building schools |
| • Having toilets | Paying school fees |
| • Building a fence around a house | Digging shallow well for clean water |
| • Building roads for easy transport (infrastructure) | Having markets |
| • Farming (crops and livestock) | The presence of youth clubs (Luso Langa Club) |
| • Having craft skills (e.g. building) | Having hospitals |

Mpalale VDC:

Examples of development in the area are:

Those Initiated And Driven By The Community Alone

Local schools, such as nursery, primary, technical college (Chingoni technical college), educate people; in the past, children traveled long distances to get to schools, resulting in few people being educated.

Houses with iron sheets (has increased in the area)

Good nutrition

Digging fishponds

Keeping livestock

Good roads (improved road network in the area)

Good markets

Farming activities to reduce hunger

Building/maintaining bridges and roads

Those initiated and supported by external organizations

Safe motherhood and family planning supported by the hospital; women no longer give birth at home and receive contraception advice.

Laboratory at a community day secondary school

Electricity

Businesses, such as bakery for mandazi, bread, tcheleziya (snack) supported by TVETA, Corp Africa

Boreholes for safe water

The availability of health services to reduce diseases (training on healthy diets including six food groups) has helped reduce the incidence of diseases in the area.

Activities to protect the environment. For example, energy-serving stoves and planting bamboos with support from United Purpose.

Mangwale VDC:

Examples of development in the area are:

Those initiated and driven by the community alone	Those initiated and supported by external organizations
Food (zakudya)	Roads/transport (misewo ndi mayendedwe yabwino)
Good farming practices (Malimidwe abwino)	Education (maphunziro), school blocks
Building good houses (nyumba zabwino)	Building bridges (kumanga ma bridge)
Income/cash (ndalama)	Good health and nutrition (moyo wa thanzi)
Land (malo)	Village savings and loans (VSLs) (Bank mkhonde)
	Cooperatives

Mkoko VDC:

Examples of development in the area are:

Those initiated and driven by the community alone	Those initiated and supported by external organizations
Farming (kulima)	Roads (misewu)
Doing businesses, such as making timber (kupanga ma bizinesi)	Availability of health services to reduce diseases (zipatala)
Building schools and sending children to school (kutumiza ana ku sukulu)	Boreholdes (mijigo)
Building good houses (kumanga nyumba zabwino)	
Having groups that save and lend money (kukhala ndi magulu osunga ndikubwereketsa ndalama)	
Vegetable gardens	
Planting trees	
Keeping livestock	

Khwema VDC:
Examples of development in the area are:

Those initiated and driven by the community alone	Those initiated and supported by external organisations
Planting trees (kubzyala mitengo)	Maintain roads (misewu)
Farming (kulimai)	Building school blocks (kumanga school blocks)
Building good houses (kumanga nyumba zabwino)	Building bridges (kumanga ma bridge)
Keeping livestock	Having markets (kupezeka kwa misika)

Lobi VDC:
Examples of development in the area are:

Those initiated and driven by the community alone	Those initiated and supported by external organisations
Buildings i.e., houses	Maintain roads (misewu)
	Building school blocks (kumanga school blocks)
	Building bridges (kumanga ma bridge)
	Planting trees (kubzyala mitengo)
	Farming (kulimai)
	Building good houses (kumanga nyumba zabwino)
	Keeping livestock
	Boreholes
	Hospitals
	Mindset change by gender groups
	Electricity

**Mvugo VDC:
Examples of development in the area are:**

**Those initiated and driven
by the community alone**

Roads (miseu). The activity is led by the chief.

"Makeshift bridges (mndato). With permission from the chief, people get poles from the graveyard to construct makeshift bridges".

"Crop diversification in addition to tobacco and maize (ulimi wa mbewu zosiyanasiyana monga soya). With one crop, there are risks associated with markets and rainfall. When a market for tobacco fails, we struggle. So, we have to diversify".

Small-scale businesses, e.g. grocers, that help people to access food items, such as salt, fish, and snacks (zigege) (ma bizinesi osiyanasiyana) and maize mills

Building houses (kumanga ma nyumba)

**Those initiated and supported
by external organizations**

"Schools (ma sukulu monga Madzimnyanga Primary School). The community makes bricks and provides sand. The government provides teachers when the school is built. This kind of development has problems as sometimes it happens that we assemble materials, but there is no support from the government".

Standard bridges (ma bridge)

Health centers (zipatala)

Community-based organization (Mvugo2 CBO)

VSL (Ma Bank Mkhonde). They help to access loans during emergencies. With support from Extension Workers and Care Malawi.

Livestock pass-on programs (Ulimi wa ziweto zopatsirana) for goats, rabbits, and pigs. Help to access manure; fertilizer is expensive. Get income in times of emergency.

Borehole (mjigo); people access clean water and reduce diseases.

Development as activities is “transition from low value to higher value activities. For example, in Mvugo people aspire to transition from rabbits to pigs/goats and now dairy. From hawker to maize mills”. Mvugo VDC, 22 July 2022

a) Level of development

- “Development is work that is done in an area, in the country and at family or house of a person with an aim to change life so that it becomes better”. Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022
- “Work done by a person or in group with an aim to improve the family or an area”. Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022

b) Sustainability

- “Work done by a group of people with an aim to prepare the future of children and the youth”. Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022

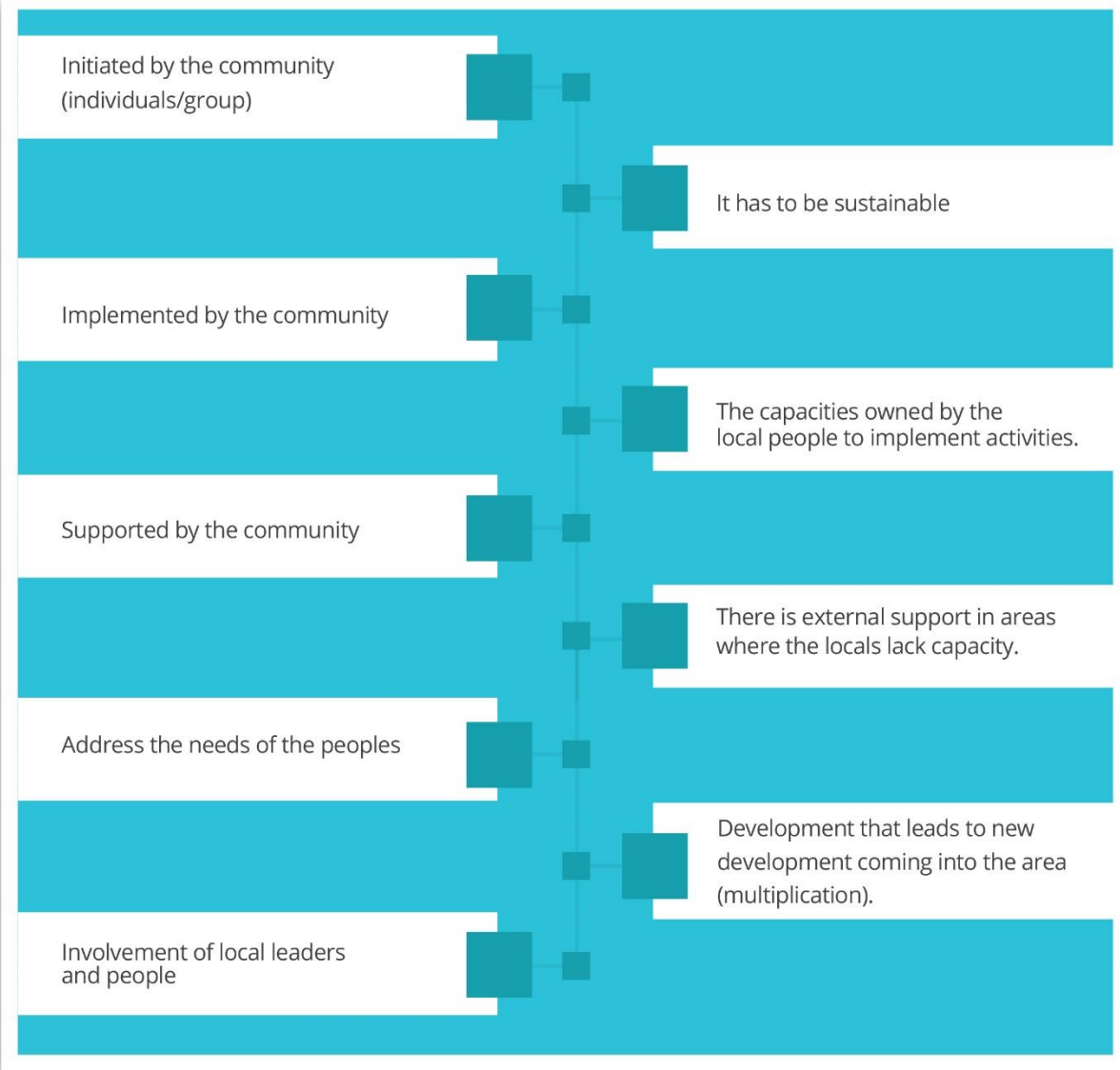
c) Development as a process (transition)

- “Transition from lower status to higher status. For example, a household that adds to its assets is considered as a developing family”. Mvugo VCD, 22 July 2022

The meaning of self-development:

The respondents defined self-development by its characteristics, including:

**The meaning of self-development:
The respondents defined self-development by its characteristics, including**



“Development that is initiated by the community. It starts by identifying our needs and talking to the chiefs and people. It involves examining what we can do by ourselves and what we cannot do, that requires external support”. Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022

“Development that is initiated and supported by the community”. It “is the development initiated by the community but may seek for assistance from external organizations by writing a proposal”. Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

“There is that is development done by the people themselves with no or minimal external support. There is also development that involves the community working with one or more external agencies. Each stakeholder has a role to play to achieve the objectives of the development activity- *chitukuko chopatsirana*, meaning the community does its part and the external agency does its part”. Mvugo VDC, 22 July 2022

“The community appreciates support from development agencies, but they know that it is there to help them to add resources that they themselves cannot manage to get on their own”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

ANNEX 2. Unity—rules, sanctions, and trust

1) Unity among community members

Community members value the need to embrace the unity of purpose for development to take place in their areas. Unity was locally described as *umodzi*, which brings people to work as one.

“The degree of unity in the community is like that of wasps, who agreed to have thin abdomen locally referred to as *anthu ndiwogwirizana mwa chimvano chamavu choning’a pamimba*”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June, 2022

The communities recognized that unity happens where there are rules/norms put in place. Some of the rules indicated where as follows:

a) Rules and norms

b) Rules of cooperation

- “The degree of cooperation in the community was compared to that of the bees, who work together with each of them playing different roles to produce honey”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

c) Rules of participation that led to a sense of volunteerism

- “It is required that every member in the community participates in the project e.g., borehole and school project”. Huwa VDC
- “All committees in the community have set dates for meetings. For example, the youth club set 15th and 30th day of the month for their

meetings. Failure to attend meetings attracts a fine in form of money or chicken". Mtika VDC

- "There is unity among members when doing community work. This is attributed to the rules and sanctions that have been set by Chiefs and committees to govern people when doing community work". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

d) Rules of resource mobilization

- "People contributed materials (sand, bricks, buckets for drawing water, skilled people—builders, carpenters) for school project, nursery school and bakery". Huwa VDC

e) Rules of orders to create/support local institutions and development activities

- "ADC and chief have made a bylaw that every village should have nursery school. Failure to adhere to the bylaw attracts a fine of one goat". Chunga VDC
- "The community has established bylaws forbidding parents to marry underage girls. E.g., When household marries an underage girl, the committee takes the girl back and the household is fined a goat". Chunga VDC
- "We noted the rise in cases of child marriages. We thought of intervening by setting a bylaw to curb this vice. We formed a mother group to monitor implementation of this rule. If found, the case is reported to the Group Village Headman and other leaders. Parents of the girl have to pay a goat and the VH under whose village the case has been identified also pays a goat. The girl is withdrawn from marriage and sent back to school". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022
- "There are rules that prohibit women from giving birth at home. They are supposed to go to the clinic. If found giving birth at home, the family has to pay a goat. As a result of this rule, it was reported that the number of women giving birth at home has reduced and maternal deaths have reduced, too". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

The rules were working when enforced with sanctions. Whilst the community enforced some sanctions internally, others were enforced by external agencies. Examples of the sanctions include:

- Paying a fee (cash),
- Pay a fee in kind (e.g., chickens, goats),
- Lack of access to benefits from services.

"Working sanctions made people to abide by the rules. E.g. cooperation in water project was a result of people fearing that they would not be allowed to collect water unless they paid. Those who did not participate in activities for school project were required to pay absenteeism fine *chindapusa*". Huwa VDC

“People in the community are able to see benefits when rules are followed. E.g. bylaw on early marriage the community has increased number of girls who finish school”. Chunga VDC

The rules and sanctions were enforced where there were existing mechanisms and structures that were perceived as being fair and, at the same time, having the authority.

“In the past ten years there has been a shift in the involvement of chiefs in development. At first chiefs were in charge of development but they were perceived unfair and not transparency, hence were replaced by committees (ADC). However, committees lacked authority to enforce rules in the community. This has prompted external organization to engage chiefs and committees. Re-engagement of chiefs in development has resulted in more adherence to rules and enforcement of sanctions”. Huwa VDC

“At one point, people refused to attend meetings to build school block under MASAF 4 on allegation that chiefs misused money meant to pay community members for their participation. Again, chief mostly recruited their friends and next of kin to participate and benefit from the money. These perceptions held by the community led to failure by the chiefs to enforce rules and sanctions”. Huwa VDC

“Rules also apply to leaders the same way as ordinary community members e.g., leaders in the committee pay 100 MWK when they are late”. Chunga VDC

“Rules were not working when the chiefs favored their next kin and friends when enforcing the sanctions”. Mtika

“The mother group is in charge of monitoring the rule on child marriage. It goes around the community to check if there are any underage girls who are married. As a result of these rules, child marriage has declined, and most girls are going to school”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“The rules are in use because they are made at traditional authority level, hence all subjects under the TA have to adhere to these rules. To make sure that the rules are followed, the TA monitors the enforcement by the Group Village Headmen. Apart from the chief, the respective committees play a watchdog role to ensure that the rules are implemented”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“It is hard to silence the truth because of the watchdogs. In the past people would break the rules and get away with it without being reported, a thing which cannot happen now because of the presence of the watchdogs”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

The rules and sanctions work when they are established and owned by the people themselves. They tend to work in a homogenous community than a

heterogeneous community where new members join from outside to establish a business.

“The chief and existing development groups, such as the youth, club prepared the rules in open and transparent manner. These rules are understood and owned by all members”. Mtika VDC

“Other communities in the area have lots of immigrants who have come to do business in the area. These people are not obliged to follow the rules. They claim they do not have time to participate in development activities”. Mtika VDC

“Apart from enforcements, the rules are made popular such that everyone in the community knows them. There are campaigns conducted by the respective committees about the rules. For example, at the time of field work there was a campaign called back to school which was led by school committee together with chiefs and VDC to urge girls who dropped out of school and got married to get back to school”. Mpalale VDV, 16 June 2022

“In the past adherence to rules was minimal and people cooperated in development activities out of fear of chiefs. The people did not own the rules. This affected activities such as road maintenance where it was hard for chiefs to command their people to participate”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

2) Ownership: the sense of ownership of development activities was described as *Umwini*, which is interpreted as viewing developments as their own not, for those supporting them.

“Here we view development as our own. It does not belong to those who support us. In past when we could not own the development programs, we could name the projects using the name of the external agency that brought it. For instance, roads constructed by Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) were called *Miseu ya MASAF*, meaning—MASAF roads”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

Ownership of development works when people know the perceived benefits.

“In the past people could not grade or maintain the roads because it was felt these belonged external agencies such as MASAF project. At that time the project used to pay people to maintain roads and bridges. Now, community maintains the roads and bridges without waiting for external agencies for support. The community also plants trees in the village forest and take care of them without waiting to be paid. We do everything ourselves as community. This is because we realize that these projects benefit us not external agencies”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

The community owns projects when they realize that the projects are solving their problem.

“People see benefits of having roads and bridges maintained. They have therefore taken responsibility and owned these projects. They believe that if they leave the projects to external agencies, the problems will not affect them but us”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“Members reported that when they maintain roads and bridges, it is community that benefits. Before we started maintaining roads and bridges, we struggled to access basic amenities. For example, during rainy season, our children could not go to school because they could not cross flooded rivers. It was also difficult to go to the markets because we could not cross rivers without bridges”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“The community appreciates support from development agencies, but they know that it is there to help them to add resources that they themselves cannot manage to get on their own”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

3) Trust

Trust was highlighted as one of the elements of unity. Trust, locally referred to as *kukhulupilirana* makes people commit themselves to participate in and do community work.

“Without trust, it is difficult for members to cooperate and work together”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

The trust occurred at two levels: among members and leaders and among members themselves.

a) Among members of the community:

“For people to work together they need to depend on each other and believe in the ability of other members to drive development in the community”. Huwa VDC

“In the past all development projects were initiated and managed by people that came from outside (Linga, Nkhotakota Boma). The projects included water boreholes. At this time people believed that they had no capacity to do development but wait for people from outside.” Chunga VDC

“There is trust among members because they do not envy each other as in the past. Instead, they take each other as role models. For example, development of a market started with one person with a tearoom. Instead of feeling jealous of him, community members opted for opening their own businesses at the same place. More shops have been opened and this has led to development of a rural market that is serving six communities. Now the marketplace is recognized such that every Friday people, including women, from different places to sell their goods”. Chunga VDC

"In the recent times, there are cases of trust. E.g. the youth club conducts business transactions on trust where a member is entrusted with items from the club, e.g. chickens, vegetables, tomatoes to sell at the market of behalf of the group. The representatives bring back the expected amount of money". Mtika VDC

"Ten years ago, trust among members was high and natural because there were fewer people and closely related. The interest to make financial gains was low". Mtika VDC

"In other communities, there is less trust among members. For example, there are cases where friends poison each other and snatch away wives". Mtika VDC

b) Between members of the community and their leaders:

"People also work together when there is trust among community members and trust between members and leaders. For example, the chief delegated his powers to VDC on road and tree planting projects on trust that they would deliver results". Huwa VDC

"Previously chiefs and political leaders imposed individuals to lead development. These individuals who had political connections and sometimes they were considered as thugs, were not trusted by the community. For example, they hindered the community from tracking progress of the MASAF school block project. There were rumors that there was poor mixing of concrete, but the community feared to investigate the allegations". Huwa VDC

"People committee themselves to do community work when their leaders are trustworthy. Here people do not commit themselves when leaders cannot be entrusted with resources for development activities. This also applies to mere members in the community". Mpalale, 16 June 2022

"Development activities take place because of high level of trust between members and their leaders. For example, in 2021, when Livizi bridge was washed away, community members contributed money to cement, sand and poles to maintain the bridge. The money was kept by VDC leaders and it was not misappropriated. Following the experience with these leaders, it has been easy for community to contribute resources for any projects in the community because they know that leaders will not abuse resources". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

"The community members feel obliged to contribute because leaders handle group resources in a transparent manner. Usually, leader allocate resources in at an open space. They also report to members how the resources are used such that everyone is aware and they know about activities and processes taking place within the group". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

"At one point, the members contributed money to build under-five clinic and dipping tank. The leaders at that time sold cement when they noted that the project was taking long because they thought it was going to go bad. However,

the leaders sold the cement not because it overstayed but because they just wanted to get the money. This incident made it harder for people to contribute towards the project anymore and it did not finish". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

c) How to come up with trustworthy leaders:

"Leaders elected by the community are based on the record of how trustworthy the members have been in the past. Those that bare not trustworthy are not elected into leadership positions. And the leaders were not trustworthy when they were appointed by the chiefs and not elected by the people. The chiefs bother about qualities of these leaders. Such leaders were feared by the community such that they could not demand them to account for group money". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

"Active citizenship can help to make leaders trustworthy. When leaders sold trees from the community forest to an organization, they did not disclose the money generated until members forced them to account for the money. They did so and gave back the money about 450,000 MWK. The money was used to build a school block and digging a borehole". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

d) Networks among community structures:

The communities recognized the need for connecting different development committees in the community. They proposed for existence of a committee that acts as a hub, connecting different committees in the community. This can be achieved through the use of the following:

i) Existing VDCs

"Currently, VDCs are able to call other committees (lead famers, health committees, school committees) and ask what problems the committees are facing. There is representation of VDC in every committee. The VDC member gathers information from various committees and reports to VDC. The nutrition project is an example, where VDC member interfaced with care groups and nutrition promoters". Huwa VDC

ii) Traditional leaders

"Currently, the chief is aware about development plans from different committees in the area. VDC, chief and mosque have worked together to construct water borehole. Chief and VDCs have worked together to construct and maintain the road that connects the market and other village. The CBO, chief and VDC has made bricks for nursery school block". Chunga VDC

"The chief has opened space for committees to carry out their activities and interact without interference. In return, committees share their plans and activities with the chief without being forced". Mtika VDC

The recognition of the need for connections among the development committees is a result of:

(1) Training from external agencies

“Committees understand their roles and duties including the synergies between different committees in the community. This has come about as result of trainings on the functions of local structures given by Salima District Council”. Huwa VDC

“The committees have been made aware on the importance of working with other committees. E.g. officers from Salima District Council and World Connect have emphasized the importance of different committees working together”. Mtika VDC

(2) Experiences with failed projects as a result of conflicts between committees

“Where there were expectations that they would be handouts, e.g. material and financial gains, individual committees tended to hold and personalize information and activities to the extent that committee competed against each other”. Huwa VDC

“In the past there was little respect towards each other. Every group had their own race to run. They wanted to keep benefits to themselves”. Chunga VDC

When an environment of mutual understanding and respect is natured

“There is room for constructive criticism and guidance given by different committees. E.g. VDC noted poor sanitation at community borehole and guided village health committee to clean and build a brick platform to improve sanitation”. Chunga VDC

(3) When there are no political interests and interferences in development activities and linkages of actors at the community level

“Even now, political leaders (MPs) do not work with local development structures especially the committees. There is fear of being transparent. Political leaders protect their interests”. Mtika VDC

Annex 3: Grassroots leadership

“In Mpalale, vibrant grassroots leadership is considered critical for their community to register various developments. The leaders initiate, manage development. They also play important role in leading the community into the right direction of development”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“Leaders encourage people to work together. They attract agencies to support development initiatives. The leaders have to come from the same area because they know the problems people face in the area, and they come up proper projects to address the problems”. Mangwale VDC, 07 July 2022

“Khwema community appreciates the need for leaders to steer development in the area. Good leaders encourage members to follow and achieve their vision. Bad leaders discourage members and development does not take place”. Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022; Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

“Leaders make development to take place or not take place in the community. It is therefore important to have the leaders in the community. But having leaders alone is not enough, they must do their job and perform”. Mvugo2 VDC, 22 July 2022

1) Availability of capable individuals in the community (those who can initiate, manage, lead development)

a) Are there more leaders now?

“Apart from chiefs, in the recent years the community has more leaders for development and these have been appointed in the community. They include youth, women and VDC members”. Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022

“In the recent years more leaders have emerged from the community and they are selected by the community. There are also women and youth leaders. For example, the VDC has 50% female members”. Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022

“The community has several leaders who can initiate, manage development. The leaders have a vision are able to communicate the vision and mobilize community members to act on the vision. The leaders are recognized and selected by the communities and they have to be from the community”. Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

“The area has over the time witnessed an increase in leaders who are able to lead others towards development. These include chiefs, individual local leaders, chairpersons of development committees and economic groups. These leaders have spearheaded various development initiatives in the community”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“In recent years (from 2012), the community has witnessed the election of individuals into leadership positions of development related committees. These include women and youth who have been elected to lead farmer field school, VDC, VSLs and a local youth organization”. Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

“Over the years, the villages have become numerous and autonomous. In the past there were few villages led by the group village heads who reported to the TA. However, more villages have emerged with their own village heads who report to group village head. Each of these new villages require to have development committees. Hence increasing the number of committees and leaders. The community reported whilst these different committees provided spaces for more leaders, there was also conflicts that emerged between different committees. This is the reason why community decided to establish Mthewathewa, a local structure to coordinate the different committees in the area”. Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

“We realized that our community faces multifaceted challenges hence no one leader can address them. We need different committees to deal with different problems”. Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

“In Mangwale VDC, there are capable leaders that initiate development activities. These leaders include chiefs, VDC, leaders for school committee, agriculture committees, youth groups, and village savings and loan groups. The leaders have been instrumental in projects such as road maintenance, construction of school blocks, vocational skills center and bridges. Leaders for youth and VSLs help members to have business activities. These businesses improve household income”. Mangwale VDC, 07 July 2022

“Khwema community has a pool of capable leaders who steer development in the area. These include chiefs, ADC, VDC, Chimwemwe Youth Club, School Committee, Forest Committee, Tele Center Committee, Health Committee, Agriculture Committee”. Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022

“Lobi community has a variety of capable leaders who steer development in the area. These include chiefs, ADC, VDC, Youth Network, Cooperative Society members, Area Stakeholder Panel leaders. The availability of these leaders is making the development committees to be functional. These leaders are being guided and supported by Traditional Leaders”. Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

“From the year 2000, Mvugo 2 has witnessed an increase in a pool of capable leaders. Apart from chiefs, other individuals have emerged who are taking up leadership positions in local structures including VDC, ADC, VSL and youth committees. These leaders have been critical in spearheading development in the area”. Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

b) Examples of leaders of development

“The community has capable leaders who are driving various development initiatives. For example, Youth Leaders leading chicken projects, VDC/ADC leading road, school, health projects. Individual leading irrigation scheme. The youth represent the community at district council level”. Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

“In the area, individual leaders have initiated fish farming. The chief has been instrumental in back-to-school program for girls to return to school. The VDC has initiated the vocational skills center projects, the road and bridge projects. Together with the school committee, the VDC has led the construction of school block”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“In 2022, the VDC leaders together with chiefs mobilized community members to grade and maintain community roads on their own. They only asked for rings for culverts from the district council to improve the drainage systems. The district responded by assessing the work by the community, but it has not provided the support for rings as per the request by the community”. Mangwale VDC, 07 July 2022

"In 2015, the chiefs could deploy traditional dances (Gule Wamkulu) to force children to go to school and enrollment increased. But in 2019 Gule Wamkulu relaxed and stopped because it was thought children had gotten used and they would not stop going to school. In 2020/21, enrollment declined from 1,010 to 810". Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022

"In 2017, a young man initiated the establishment of the youth group called Youth Network in the area, whose objective was to change the mindset of the youth so that they should become self-dependent. The group became vibrant such that it was even recognized district level. His leadership skills were appreciated by many, which led to his election as a member of Dedza district Youth Committee. Later the community members appointed him to represent them in the VDC".

"The leaders in Lobi VDC are reported to have managerial and lobbying skill. E.g they developed a village action plan 2021 and forwarded it to the ADC for onward forwarding to the district council. The proposal was supported by the MP and councilor and the request for construction of a bridge and two teachers houses has been incorporated in the District Development Plan from the district council. The council has accepted to construct the requested infrastructures soon". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"We do not just acquire skills and keep them. We use whichever skills we acquire. For example, when we acquired a skill in village action planning (VAP), we decided to utilize the skill by requesting for a bridge and two teachers houses from the district council. Because of the lobbying skills, so far one bridge was completed in 2021". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"The trainings provided by external agencies working in the area, such as CADECOM, Concern Universal, Evangelical Lutheran Development Services, Eagles Relief has enhanced the capability of leaders in Lobi community". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"In 2009, the VDC leaders were instrumental in mobilizing the community to construct a makeshift structure for the CBO. The chiefs admired the CBO in Madika, which anchored the youth and HIV programs. They mobilized the community and people brought together poles, grass to construct the makeshift structure to house the CBO". Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

"In 2010, women emerged as leader for development. They established a VSL to generate money to use for transport to go to the clinic to access ARVs. The women have sustained the VSLs in the area up to now. Currently number of VSLs has increase to fifteen in the community. Members of the VSLs include those in the support group and non-members with the majority being women". Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

c) Why are there more leaders now than before?

“Chiefs now allow democratic processes to take place in the community. E.g. there are regular elections where leaders are chosen”. Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022

“When chiefs were considered custodians of people, hence development, there were fewer leaders of development. However, chiefs could not plan development, so outside organizations and government bypassed them and worked with people directly”. Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022

“It was hard for one to come in the open to contribute ideas on development because chiefs were always suspicious of anybody who had ideas and one was considered a threat to the chief and his power”. Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022

“Chiefs have empowered women to be leaders in the community for development activities. The leaders teach their members to be leaders and pass down the leadership skills”. Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022

“In the past the only recognized leader in the community was the chief. The understanding then was that only chiefs were the only leaders for development”. Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022

“There is youth empowerment where the youth are given the opportunity to be leaders. For example, the chief has allowed the youth to take leadership roles. The chief does not think there is competition with emerging leaders”. Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

“External organization has conducted training on leadership to most members in the community”. Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

“It is a requirement by organizations working in the area to establish committees which require leaders. It is for this reason that there are leaders for VSL, VDC, Youth Club, Forest Committee, Mother Care Group. Working with external agencies, the leaders have received training action plan, report writing, monitoring. These plans are sent to the ADC and government structure where they can lobby for support. E.g. the committees are aware that they can send action plans to ADC, which forwards to Dedza District Council. The committees are also aware of the Constituency Development Fund which is managed by the Member of Parliament”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“We do not trust politicians and chiefs to lead development projects, therefore the coming of alternative leaders. The past failed projects such as the health center and the bridge, has created the perception that chiefs and politicians lack transparency and accountability”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“Apart from the chiefs opening up to allow individuals get into leadership positions, the people in Mkoko are willing to participate in decision making processes and governance of their community. They attend and actively

participate in the process of selecting leaders of their choice". Mkokko VDC, 17 June 2022

"We have a local institution called Mthewathewa that ensures that elected leaders are held accountable for their actions. In Mthewathewa, some leaders are even replaced with backing of the people". Mkokko VDC, 17 June 2022

"There are many leaders now in the area because there are many agencies working in the area. Each agency encourages that there should be leaders for the projects they support. The leaders are able to lead community members because they are well trained by the agencies". Mangwale VDC, 07 July 2022

"In the past, chiefs could not give space for other leaders to exercise their leadership skills as they felt threatened. They made sure every was done by themselves. Again, in the past, they were few external agencies that could support communities with trainings on leadership hence the chiefs did not know that delegation helps them to give chance to other individuals to support them to develop their area". Mangwale VDC, 07 July 2022

"The chiefs have given room or delegated development to other leaders in the community to steer many developments in the area because they understand that they cannot lead all development activities by themselves". Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022

"In Lobi, leaders are more capable in terms of managing development than their counterparts in Chiphe. This is why people from Chiphe access services such printing, barber shops, markets in Lobi. Even external agencies are attracted to Lobi because the leaders are good. In the past the agencies used to work both in Chiphe and Lobi. However, the leaders in Chiphe failed to manage development activities which never came to completion. E.g. Welt Hunger distributed tree seedlings to both communities. But almost all the seedlings in Chiphe dried while in Lobi they were planted because the leaders were monitoring the project". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"Leaders in Chiphe are not transparent and visionary and tended not apply their skills acquired from external agencies. The community of Chiphe does not cooperate to pressurize the leaders. Hence the leaders do not bother to perform to carry out their functions". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"Chiefs have given space to ordinary members to lead development work in the communities because chiefs realized that the area is too vast for one chief to cover. So, the Group Village Headmen have been delegated to lead development in communities. This is where the VDC has been established to oversee development". Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

d) Implications of fewer/more leaders

“When chiefs and politicians were the only leaders for development there was a lot of duplication because it did not matter as to whether the activities already existed or not. What mattered to chiefs and politicians were their interests. They implemented activities in some places not because there was lack of development but because they were interested in the areas. These development activities were in most cases not completed. Examples of such projects are the health center the bridge. A Korea-based organization engaged the chief to mobilize the community for construction of a health center. People contributed bricks, sand and quarry. However, the project did not take off because the promised materials such as cement, iron sheets were not provided. With no clear explanation as to why the expected resources were not provided, people expressed resentments towards the chief for wasting their time and materials”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“In the past, it was difficult for chiefs to allow individuals contribute ideas as well as lead development because it was seen as an attempt to undermine their authority. This made individuals not to actively participate in governance of development activities in the area”. Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

“In the past, chiefs had overall authority to manage customs, people and development activities. However, many of them lack skills in planning and managing development. This made external agencies to work directly with individuals who were regarded as able to handle development activities. The problem was that these individuals did not have the power to act as gate keepers and mobilize people”. Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

“In the past, the community was linked to Malingunde Cooperative Society whose catchment area stretched to all villages in the EPA. The problem with this heterogenous cooperative was that none of the members from Mkoko assumed leadership position. It was observed that this lack of representation in leadership position led to Mkoko missing out on key activities and benefits provided by the cooperative. Projects initiated by the cooperative were placed in other communities where leaders came from”. Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

“The large catchment area for Malingunde Cooperative meant that some communities were not reached and therefore not satisfied with its performance towards helping them address their needs. Mkoko ended up breaking away from Malingunde Cooperative and forming its own cooperative known as Kachenga”. Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

“In 2017, government promoted other Group Village Headmen (GHV) to the rank of sub-Traditional Authority (STA). But this was done without consulting the TA of the area. This brought division between the TA and STAs. It also brought divided royalty among VHs as some were royal to the TA, others to the STAs. Community members were also divided. The situation made it difficult for communities to initiate, implement and lead development project. Members would not attend development project initiated by those who were on the opposite side. The

divisions affected construction of the house and the office of the Head Teacher at Mauni Primary School. It took four years to be completed". Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022

"Development led by chiefs, politicians was characterized by conflicts. Both parties used development as source of power and fame. Chiefs wanted to be seen as the ones bringing development, likewise the politicians wanted to show that they were the ones who can help the area to develop. The conflict between the two meant that local people with no power had no space to lead development. Therefore, availability of leaders, other than chiefs and politicians, was not common". Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

e) Quality of leaders

"Leaders should have good qualities. For example, they should be respected by people, they should be from this community, not a drunkard. Leaders should also be able to go out and look for support. They should communicate with internal and external organizations. They should be able to use technologies such as phones. These help leaders to easily link with members and outsiders, e.g., meetings". Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022

"Good quality leaders are able to listen to the concerns of their members, a leader who is capable in doing managerial tasks. A leader demonstrating technical skills and skills for managing people". Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022

"Qualities of a leader are to make people to participate in development work at community and household level. The qualities make people and organizations trust an individual who is elected as a leader. It is for this reason that members look into several qualities before one can be elected into a position to lead development work". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

"Mangwale community recognize that good leaders are very critical to the development of their area. They know that it rises and fall on a leader". Mangwale VDC, 07 July 2022

"Having a pool of leaders that can initiate, lead and manage development is not enough. The leaders must meet a set of qualities that can help them to work with people and discharge their duties". Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

Summary of quality of leaders

Managerial	Technical	Interpersonal
Visionary	Able to write proposals	Transparent
Able to delegate	Hardworking	Trustworthy
Strengthen unity	Good at managing funds	Love for people
Love for the people	Able to monitor projects	Approachable
Unifying leader	Active	Good track record
Visionary	Action/result-oriented	Honest
Action and result-oriented	Knowledge about community needs	Empathetic leader
Able to meet the needs of their household so there is no need to engage in corruption	Solve problems	People-centered leader
	Have networks with external agencies	Listening leader
	Writing of proposals	Fast thinker
Hardworking/leads by example	Develop plans	Decisive
	Budgeting	Not womanizer
	Writing reports	Self-control and not violent
	Walk the talk	Dedicated
	Committed	Exemplarily (able to do what he says)
	Good networking skills with external agencies to facilitate collaboration for development to take place	Approachable
		Not greedy
	Quick/fast in doing things	Good track record
		They do not put their interests over the interests of others
		He must be caring for others
		Not corrupt
		Pay attention to different views
		A prayerful leader. They fear God, love others in the community, and cannot steal
		A person who is calm and not short-tempered
		A humble leader and meek

“Leaders need to keep secrets and confidential materials. On one occasion when the leader was disclosing confidential information about the money the VSL group had and how much each member had taken. This was not a good thing because he exposed the members to theft”. Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022

“Good quality leaders are emerging now. The leaders are honest hardworking, humble. Communities trust these leaders with confidential information such as the amount of money the groups make and keep”. Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

“Leaders are able to write reports, proposals. They are able to monitor projects. Engage with Ministry of Agriculture to start irrigation. Able to solve conflicts in the irrigation scheme. Able to write finance reports”. Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

“Leaders have received training on the various skills. Some of the activities are required by the organizations that support them e.g proposals, financial reports”. Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

“The community demands that leaders have to do the activities and for transparency and accountability”. Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

“Leaders need to be trustworthy. An example is the bridge construction project. The community was asked to contribute quarry stones, rocks, sand and money. The government was to help with construction materials such as rings, steel, cement. The materials were procured however, the project took long to be started. When community members checked they found that cement and other materials were not available. The chiefs and VDC leaders indicated that they sold the materials because they were afraid that they would be damaged because of overstaying”. Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

“Only leaders who are committed and dedicated leader, naturally intelligent and wise leader people-centered leader, listening, action and result-oriented leader, and visionary leader can effectively initiate, plan, implement and monitor development projects in their area”. Mangwale VDC, 07 July 2022

f) Examples of leadership characteristics associated with development activities

“Community has good quality leaders and are able to lead development. E.g. VDC Chair is able to communicate about meetings, write reports, mobilize human resource. This is demonstrated by presence of school blocks that he has led”. Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022

“Leaders from the VDC played crucial role in organizing community and monitoring road constructing. They also mobilized community to build a maize mill. They were able to attract people to supervise making bricks for nursery school”. Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022

“Development initiatives happening are a result of leaders with good qualities such as the ability to mobilize communities and managerial project. These include

school blocks, Chicken Project, road project, irrigation projects. All these have been possible because the leaders are leadership good qualities". Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

"The leaders have been visionary about education of the children in the area and they came up with a bylaw that children should be in school. But children could not go to school because there was no bridge on Rivirivi river. The VDC together with the chiefs demonstrated the quality of being action oriented by mobilized the community to construct the bridge so that children can easily go to school". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

"The cooperative was able to manage a grant of MK 3.8 million. The leaders were able to report success stories in the project such that a second phase of the project is being considered by the funder". Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

"Khwema community members feel the failure for Sambani Community to attract and implement development projects is due to their leaders. The leaders are not transparent and do not have vision for their area. The leaders do not work well with their subjects and people do not committee". Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022

"It took leaders with vision, transparency and hardworking to mobilize community between 2004 and 2012 to construct roads, bridges and schools using Constituency Development Fund. Leaders were able to mobilize community because of their good track records in facilitating development projects and had demonstrated transparent character in handling finances and construction material. E.g. in 2021, the VDC facilitated the construction and completion of the bridge". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"The leaders were also visionary in terms of making efforts to reduce maternal death in the area. In 2018, the community leaders established a bylaw forcing all pregnant mothers to deliver in hospitals to curb the maternal deaths but also prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"Most of the developments you see in our area, originated from the support group under the CBO. Leaders have worked hard in supporting development such as CBOs in the community. The spirit of hardworking has attracted external organizations such as World Connect to bring more development in the area. E.g. in 2010, World Connect added a maize mill and pig pass-on program to the farming activities conducted in the CBO. Again, in 2013, because of the hardworking spirit and being visionary, the leaders engaged Rise Malawi to support construction of the current permanent structure for the CBO". Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

"The leaders are visionary and open to criticism. They facilitated a self-reflection activity for leaders and community to find out why they were not developing at the same pace as their neighboring communities. The reflection resulted in leaders recognizing their shortfalls in terms of capacity to mobilize people to

cooperate during communal activities such as road and bridge construction". Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022.

"The women leaders are dedication and committed to group tasks. E.g., the treasure responsible for overseeing cash inflow from the maize mill has voluntarily to attend to the maize mill, collecting cash every day. She also prepares reports on the money collected to members, the chief and World Connect. She does all the work without being paid". Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 20

2) Drivers for leaders to have the characteristics

"Leaders have space and power to demonstrate their leadership abilities. In addition, they receive support from different local structures such as ADC and other communities on how to lead development projects". Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022

"There is sharing of information and skills about leadership and management of development projects. The leaders who receive leadership training from external organizations share the same with fellow members of the community". Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022

"The open transparent elections helped communities to elect leaders of their choice and of good character. The chief is able to delegate member with leadership tasks. This has empowered members with various leadership skills". Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022

"Members of groups can also make leaders good. Some leaders gave up on their leadership roles when confronted by members or faced a difficult situation. It took members to confront leaders and this saved the groups". Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022

"Leaders were just appointed rather than going through transparent elections. The leaders did not have leadership skills to deal with difficult and confronting situation". Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022

"The people have the freedom to vote and choose who they want. People are empowered to oppose the chief". Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

"The leaders are trained regularly by external organizations. These leaders are able to use leadership skills they receive". Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

"In the past, chiefs and politicians were the only leaders because they were not accommodating. They did not allow other individuals to take up leadership roles apart from themselves because the chiefs did not want to share their authority with other individuals other than their kinsmen. Chiefs trusted and always delegated leadership roles to their kinsmen only. However, the delegates were not capable and they ruled by force, without any respect for people. The politicians did not want other people to lead development because they thought

they would lose their popularity to those that would be delegated with the responsibility of development work". Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022

"The process for selecting leaders emphasizes qualities of individuals as the criteria to be put in leadership positions. Individuals meeting leadership qualities to be respected in the community and easily mobilize people towards development initiatives". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

"The power of the people to hold leaders accountable. Demand for accountability makes current and prospect leaders to demonstrate the desired leadership qualities for fear of being rejected or removed from positions". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

"We respect our leaders because we elected them into their positions. However, we also hold them to account for their actions. This makes them good leaders. For example, when the chief sold trees from community forest and kept the money to himself, the community forced him to pay back all the money. Again, when the VDC failed to organize development initiatives and could not hold meetings, the community asked all the members to resign and later elected new committee member". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

"Chiefs delegated leadership roles to their kinsmen even if they were not capable. This was because the chiefs were not accountable to anyone. The lack of accountability on the part of chiefs was attributed to lack of active citizenship among community members". Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022

"Good leadership qualities are also because of the existing institutions in the community. For example, the traditional authority (TA Masumbankhunda) monitors implementation of projects in the area, including how funds in the cooperative are managed. He also asks for reports from forests and agricultural programs. Therefore, every local leader here is inspired by our TA, who is our role model. He shakes every committee through frequent follow-ups to ensure that every committee delivers on their mandate". Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

"Another institution that is instrumental to leadership, is the Mthewathewa that also monitors the performance of leaders in the committees. It has powers to remove leaders who fail to demonstrate good performance. It was reported that one of the committees was dissolved after failing to demonstrate their actions. It was replaced with new members". Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022

"The community has realized the need for leaders with good qualities such as transparency and they are demanding leaders to demonstrate these qualities. E.g community leaders are now open to their subjects on the conditions for maintaining the roads. Whilst in the past it was food for work, the leaders have made it clear to the members that maintaining of the roads is now on voluntary basis". Mangwale VDC, 07 July 2022

"In 2010, VSL leaders weren't transparent in the way they transacted finances, especially how they distributed loans and dividends. Leaders acquired loans they could not manage to service. This repelled members, especially men from joining VSLs". Mangwale VDC, 07 July 2022

"The community leaders are inspired by their traditional authority Dzoole who leads by example. He closely monitors the implementation of various development projects in his area. For example, he recently toured the tele center and discovered that out of ten committee members for tele center, only two were working, he decided to facilitate election of eight members to make for those that are not active". Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022

"The leaders also want to ensure that their community is exemplary to other communities hence they follow and discharge their duties with dedication". Khwema VDC, 08 July 2022

"Leaders in Lobi have good qualities because of the demands by the community for good leadership. The community actively demands good leadership. For example, there was a time when the village demanded their leader to account for his action for cutting down trees in the communal graveyard for personal use. The community exerted pressure on the chief by boycotting funeral by not volunteering their services such as preparing food and digging the grave and burying the dead. The action by the community the chief completely stopped cutting down the trees". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"Here we do not fear leaders. We demand accountability from them because we elected them to serve us". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"In 2013, the leaders demonstrated poor leadership. They were not transparent on the road project which was brought by an external agent that promised to provide a bag of fertilizer to each participant. However, the leaders were not transparent as to the number of beneficiaries to participate in the project. E.g. they were asked to recruit hundred people to participate in the project, but they recruited fifty and shared the remaining fifty bags of fertilizer among themselves". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"In the past, we had greed leaders who prioritized their personal interests over us. We did not like such qualities that's why we changed the leaders". Lobi VDC, 21 July 2022

"The case of the treasurer volunteering services to the maize mill project is the result of one having a sense ownership and responsibility towards projects that affects themselves, their households and the community at large. In addition, some of the members who volunteered their services to the maize mill project were expected to benefit from the maize mill in terms of loans (income generated from the maize mills)". Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

“The chief in Mvugo is an active person who is able to influence his followers to participate in development activities. He is also able to follow up on the management of finances in the maize mill project thereby ensuring transparency and continuity of the project”. Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

“Over trusting leaders with responsibilities beyond their capacities may sometimes create a situation where they are tempted to act in their interest and against the group interest. E.g. the poor lady was entrusted with millions of Kwachas yet she might have been facing food shortage in her house”. Mvugo 2 VDC, 22 July 2022

Annex 4. Managerial and technical capacities

Talents and skills relevant for development (planning, monitoring, etc.)

“Having people in the community who are capable to participate in development activities. E.g., young and talented individuals who know how to build, monitor activities and write reports”. Huwa

“Community must be multiskilled for it to register progress in many aspects of development. These skills must be with the people from the community. No community develops if it relies on skills by people from outside or by external agencies”. Mangwale

“having skills is one thing, using them is another. Some people get the skills, but they do not use them. This is the reason they do not develop”. Lobi

Examples of skills reported by the communities

“VDC members are able to monitor development activities, for the VDC was able to monitor different development activities such as the recent primary and nursery school blocks. They monitored how much cement to sand ratio when mixing”. Huwa.

“There an increase in number of people including the youth with technical skills. The skills include bricklaying, carpentry for bridges and roofing and roads construction. ADC is able to follow up with political leaders on Community Development Fund on how it’s being managed”. Huwa

“In the recent years different committees are able to identify problems. E.g. VDCs conducted participatory rural appraisal where problems such as inadequate clean water sources, school blocks were prioritized and presented to ADC”. Chunga

“The youth are able to construct and maintain a borehole in the community. There is increase in buildings (shops) at the markets that are being constructed by local builders with skills. The youth are earning income from using the skills gained. E.g. they charge for maintain and constructing boreholes”. Chunga

“In the recent years, VDC has been able to write proposal to District Commissions. The youth have writing proposal to African Library Association for books. A

proposal to World Connect for the chicken project. The youth club is able to write reports for the project. The youth are able to raise money for the group through drama, poetry and music. The youth group is able to organize events where different skills e.g. singing, dancing and poem reciting are showcased to raise money to offer scholarship to their friends". Mtika

"The youth have technical skills such as baking, welding, building and tailoring. These youth have graduated from vocational collage are using the skills to bake scones and sell to generate cash. Some girls are in fashion design. They make dress, sell to generate cash".

Mpalale "households are now able to manage crops such as fruits and vegetables in their backyard gardens. They are also able to set up and manage small-scale irrigated fields. This was not the case in the past when farmers relied on rain-fed agriculture and focused on main field crops such as maize and groundnuts. In addition, their capacity to manage crops under irrigation was low". Mkoko

"The introduction of VSLs in their community, business and financial skills have increased. For example, women in the VSLs now own hawkers, sell vegetables, grains and livestock (rabbits). They also trade in kitchen utensils (pots and buckets) and are running bakeries (make and sell scones). The culture of saving finances now widely practiced in the community". Mkoko

The VDC members have skills for community needs assessment and village action plans (VAP). The youth have skills related to building, drawing, tinsmith, carpentry, briquet-making, tailoring. The youth also have talent to perform drama.

"The VDC is able to mobilize the community to discuss community needs so that they should come up with a project that addresses the needs of the people. The chiefs mobilized community members to reflect on their community needs. Within group, there were individuals with skills for identification and analysis. This led to development of proposals to the district council. The community graded the roads but did not have rings to put on culverts and bridges. They then sent a proposal to district councils for rings. Director of Planning and Development from the council came to the community to appreciate the local roads that the community graded and he then sent the rings. Now roads are passable even during the rainy season. Mangwale VDC also facilitated construction of school blocks after observing that children were walking long distance to school and they were not doing well in class. Some even dropped from school. The VDC mobilized communities to mold bricks for construction of school. Now more children go to schools. The youth have skills for carpentry, tailoring, building. These skills are important as most of the youth employ themselves and are generating cash to use in their home. The youth also have talents to perform drama and music. They use these talents to disseminate messages on important issues at a particular time for instance, disseminating messages prevention of polio disease." Mangwale

"In 2021, Genet under Spotlight initiative trained several women in tailoring skills. To date, five women are qualified tailors who are helping with their skills such as making school uniform for the school going children. Building skills are utilized in various construction projects in the area. E.g. builders from the village participated in building tele center. The youth use drama to disseminate information on sexually transmitted infections. Football team is used to mobilize community members to attend functions where message is disseminated". Khwema

"In the past, the Catholic Church opened Mtendere Technical College which used to train the youth in various vocational trades such as welding and fabrication and trades. This resulted in the area having more people with skills in such trades. In 2001, the government through their Malawi Rural Electricity program, brought electricity to the area. This development led to new sprouting of new skills that are linked to power such as welding, barbershops, saloons, printing, photocopying and music burning. The community has also people with agricultural skills such as irrigated farming, manure making and crop diversification. This is because there have been organizations such as the Horticulture Association by the Japanese which have been training people in agricultural skills. As a result of these skills, farmers grow multiple crops per year. Eventually, farmers are food secure and incomes have increased". Lobi

"In 2013 when Rise Malawi expressed interest to support construction of the CBO, community leaders mobilized their subjects to mold 30,000 bricks, brought sand and also provided labor for the construction of the same. The leaders have also been able to mobilize community to construct primary school blocks, building to house maize mills, bridges. For all these projects, the leaders mobilized the community and also used its own builders and not from other communities". Mvugo.

"As opposed to what others thought that Gule Wamkulu is very harsh, here it is put to good use. We use it to mobilize community members for development work. We also use it to force children to go to school". Mvugo

"We build a makeshift stadium to cover the pitch so that people can pay to watch soccer. Through this, we generate income to support vulnerable groups like the orphans and the elderly". Mvugo

"The football club members employ other fundraising activities to generate funds to buy uniform. For instance, they do a piece work e.g. weeding in somebody's field. The money realized is used to buy uniform and other necessities. This helps the club to fundraise but also help to provide agricultural labor". Mvugo

1) Sources/acquisition of skills

Possible sources of skills/talents:

- a) Formal training
- b) Hands-on training during projects implemented by outsiders
- c) Hands-on training during projects implemented by the community
- d) Informal training by interacting with skilled fellow community members
- e) Informal training by interacting with local groups/institutions

a) Formal training

“The introduction of vocational education center (TVET) has increased the number of skilled people in the in the community”. Huwa

“They youth have gained literacy skills through the school. The members were form 4 (O Levels) graduates. They have numerical skills for reading and writing”. Mtika

“Most of the skills our youth get from the Community Technical College are put to good use right here in the community. Others are into baking, tailoring, welding and building”. Mpalale

“TEVETA trained people with HIV in bakery to empower them economically so that they could use these skills to generate income which would further support their nutrition and health. TEVETA has also trained youth in bakery to empower them economically”. Mpalale

“The VDC has skills for community needs assessment and VAP because the district council oriented them to such skills”. Mangwale

“The technical college at Mtendere and the coming of electricity has improved skills sets in this area. Those that use these skills are benefiting a lot in their homes. Now we do not travel long distances to access such skills as they are within the community. Other communities come to Lobi to access the services by the people who have the skills”. Lobi

“Youth from the community also go to Chongoni Technical College which also trains youth in various skills. Being close the Lobi”. Lobi

“There have been external agencies such as Feed the Children, Care Malawi, HEIFER International and World Connect. The agencies have provided capacity-building programs in various areas such as financial management and business skills for VSLs”. Mvugo

b) Hands-on training during projects implemented by outsiders

“External organizations have also trained people in various skills such as monitoring”. Huwa

“External organizations teach them different skills for example how to construct and maintain boreholes”. Chunga

“External organizations train leaders of the community structures. These leaders are able to train their fellow members”. Mtika

“Interaction with external organizations, school and joblessness has planted in the youth the spirit of using their skills to create opportunities”. Mtika

“our new extension workers link us with external organizations that build our capacities especially in agricultural skills. These include LUANAR, SAFI, World Relief and Good Deeds”. Mkojo

“The youth have various skills because of external agencies that have been working in the area. These external agencies include TEVETA and World Vision just to mention a few. The agencies have assisted in building and developing a vocational and skills development center”. Mangwale

“Genet transferred the skill to the community through the CBO”. Khwema

“Lobi community is also working closely with agriculture extension workers resident in the area. This relationship enhances agricultural skills. Moreover, the presence of agencies such as the Japanese has built up skills for agriculture”. Lobi

c) Hands-on training during projects implemented by the community

“The talents like football are being maintained because it is entertainment to the people. Members reported that games such as football keep the youth busy so that they do not indulge in bad habits like alcohol and drug abuse”. Mvugo

d) Informal training by interacting with skilled fellow community members

“There is transfer of skills within the community, which has led to increase in skilled people”. Chunga

“People who learn different skills outside are motivated to use them in their community”. Chunga

e) Informal training by interacting with local groups/institutions

“The youth teach other skills such as sewing, chicken rearing”. Mtika

“The local institutions in the area support and utilize the skills in the area. E.g. the youth group provided space and oven for individuals to use baking skills acquired from technical school. Development committees opted to include local carpenters, builders and welders in the construction of school blocks”. Mpalale

“The talents are thriving because there is linkage between existing local structures such as the CBO and extension organization.”. Khwema

“Other talents like Gule Wamkulu are part of the culture hence they come naturally. They also thrive because the community observes the benefits such of

those of forcing children to go to school and also forcing community members to patronize development activities". Mvugo

"The skills and talents are being share among the members and the youth". Mvugo

2) Factors hindering capacity to develop and apply the skills

- **Noninvolvement of community in development**

"In the past external organization brought in skilled people from outside to implement projects such as bridge construction, water boreholes and schools. This hindered local skills and talents from being discovered and developed". Huwa

"Unlike recent times, in the past people never demanded that external organization should use local skills and talents". Huwa

"Ten years ago, people did not have the talents and skills they have now. Project that came brought in their own skilled personnel". Chunga

"There was jealousy among people that hindered sharing of skills in the community". Chunga

"The time youth could school and remain jobless because there were no organizations to employ them". Mtika

"The construction projects carried out in the area brought people from outside to carry out the job, leaving out the locals" Mtika

"Before the technical college, technical skills were not readily available in the community such that the projects implemented in the area hired individuals elsewhere." Mpalale

"Despite having a technical college in the community (currently), the availability of individuals with technical skills is threatened by the downward trend in the number of students enrolling into the college. For example, in the past, over 200 candidates enrolled but now the number is failing to reach 200 even though the number of youths in the community is increasing". Mpalale

"The members of Kachenga cooperative reported that they do not have skills for writing proposals. When an external organization that collaborated with government asked them to submit a proposal focusing on soyabean production and livestock, the group hired out individuals to write a proposal for them that was successfully submitted, and they were awarded 3.8 million Kwacha. However, the person who wrote the moved out of the community (to Mchinji district, which is over 100 km away). The cooperative members are now worried about sourcing another person to write them proposal when a different opportunity arises". Mkoko

"Low uptake of skills in Mlonyeni is attributed to lack of ownership of project brought by external agencies. It is these projects that bring trainings which sharpens and strengthens skills of the community". Mangwale

“Sambani community has no external agencies that bring skills, and this is because leadership are not able to attract attention of external agencies who can support them in their development projects”.

“Before 2001, community in Lobi was not endowed with skills that rely on electricity because there was no electricity in the area”. Lobi

“When Mtendere Technical College closed, the level of vocational skills declined. The fewer that had skills moved to other areas where there was electricity”. Lobi

“Members from Lobi community feel Chiphe community lags behind in terms of skills because Chiphe does not attract external agencies that bring skills. Agencies do not go to Chiphe because the community does not work hard, and projects fail. E.g. they failed to care for tree nurseries and tree seedlings dried. This demoralized external agencies and extension workers such that they do not want to work in the area”. Lobi

“Mvugo community members observed that some talents such as chitelera, chimtali mganda are declining these days due to the coming of some musical equipment such as disco. People are getting attracted to equipment than our traditional dances”. Mvugo

“Technology is somehow inhibiting the growth of our culture. We can no longer do some things like music because music equipment can do better than us”. Mvugo

“Some projects perform poorly because people are not properly trained. E.g. in 2012, World Connect started pig pass-on program in the area. The pigs multiplied to twenty-three. Then the organization bought seven more pigs to add to the twenty-three. However, the additional pigs were bought without proper examination and they were brought in the area while they had diseases. The new stock infected the older one and all died”. Mvugo

3) Helpful connection and self-development

Huwa

- Positive connections:

People recognize that external agencies are important for development. However, the support should focus on the gap in skills and talents the community does not have.

“The communities have been able to mobilize resources such as bricks, sand and quarry for nursery school and asked for cement and iron sheets for roofing. The community mobilized itself to dig swales and external organization supported them with tree seedlings to improve the water catchment area”.

- Negative connections:

“MASAF 4 project introduced handouts in form of money for members to participate in the road and school block projects. The handouts lead to mistrust among community members. This affected mobilization of human and physical resources for development projects in the community”.

Chunga

- Positive connections:

“Currently there are organizations working in the area that have introduced projects and new skills e.g. processing and packaging of moringa powder and soap; construction and maintenance of boreholes by the Asian Community that came to construct the mosque”.

- Negative connections:

“Traders from outside doing business on the local market are suspected to have come with thievery behavior. There is an increase in theft in the area. Then road and the market have exposed the community to different characters. Despite the community establishing rules that guide behavior at the market, some of the outside feel they are not obliged to obey the rules”.

Mtika

- Positive connections:

“Communities recognize the importance of linkages with external institutions that enable them to address the gaps in supporting the initiatives that are already doing or are interested”

“The youth club had already started mobilizing sponsorship funds to support school going children at Primary and Secondary level. The connections with human power increased their sponsorship from twenty-two to twenty-six scholarships. The youth club had already started a chicken business. It linked with World Connect that supported them financially to increase business by constructing a modern chicken house, solar powered brooder”.

- Negative connections:

“Within ten years, MASAF 4 constructed a school block when VDC/ADC asked for a house for the teacher. This has resulted in the school not having enough teachers”.

Mpalale

- Positive connections:

“The community has established linkages and worked with several external organizations on various projects in the area. These include World Connect, Corps Africa, Clinton and Hunter Foundation, CADECOM, and Action Aid that have supported initiatives on livestock and fish farming projects. The community dug

fishponds, whilst World Connect, in collaboration with Corps Africa, provided fingerings and fish feed.

C-quest Capital has introduced a stove-making (Mbaula) and bamboo project. This project aims at helping the community to reduce environmental degradation by promoting the use of fuel-saving stoves to reduce cutting down of trees. The bamboos are expected to help supply the fuel wood and provide raw materials for construction”.

- Negative connections:

“A good proportion of the bamboo trees that were introduced in the area by United Purpose have not been planted. Some died whilst in the field”.

“The bamboos were externally sourced and got damaged while being transported to the community. Some farmers did not understand the use and benefits of planting bamboos. Such farmers did not see the need for caring for the bamboos. This was also because most community members did not have the capacity to manage the bamboos”.

“The bamboo project was rushed. It was brought without proper sensitization hence members did not understand their use”.

Mkoko

- Positive connections:

“The community members stated the importance of having connections with external agencies (arguing that no man is an island). To this extent, the community reported working with various external agencies that support their development initiative”.

“The community reported receiving support from the following organizations, which are were mainly related to the agriculture sector: LUANAR facilitated establishment of a Farmer Field Scholl. SAFI supported with farm inputs (seed). World Relief and Good Deeds supported with rabbit pass-on program. Forestry department supported with tree seedlings. Government trough the Sustainable Agriculture Production Programme supported them with goat pass-on program”

“The youths with the help of a LUANAR student wrote a proposal asking for training in areas such as leadership, planning, budgeting and proposal writing”.

“Knowing that we lack skills in proposal writing, we persuaded our extension worker to support us to write the proposals. We got a grant of 3.8 million”.

- Negative connections:

“Some of the external agencies come with short-term projects, and when they phase out, access to services that they provide is reduced. For example, SAFI phased out its projects that supported lead farmers in backyard gardens and drilling boreholes. When it is phased out, there is no more training for lead

farmers. Some lead farmers even decided to quit the role of a lead farmer because there was no organization to support i.e., with farm inputs to set up their demonstrations. There were also no incentives in the form of training and exchange visits that SAFI used to provide”.

“In explaining the presence of external agencies in the area, members complained that they were less connected to organizations focusing on other sectors such as health and education, than agricultural related organizations. Hence, the emphasis on agricultural projects in the area.”

Mangwale

- Positive connections:

“The community recognizes the importance of various groups and their committees working together in the area. They also appreciate that linkages with external actors is important for them to access resources that they cannot afford. There are therefore committees and groups working together in the community”.

“In 2011, ten CBOs built a temporary skills development center to provide skills to the youth in the area. In 2013 World Vision supported construction of permanent structures. TEVETA, through funding from EU, supported training youth. Now there are two structures, Nkhwazi and Kabuthu skills development centers. One center admits students with O-level certificates; the other one admits any school dropout.

In 2011, Care Malawi, World Vision, and Vision Fund started VSL groups to help people to run small-scale businesses. At first, only women were members, but now even men have become members of VSL. The agencies trained members on savings and loans such that community members now know how to save and obtain loans properly. Some community members have been trained to supervise the groups such that the agencies no longer conduct training. Members are happy that through the groups they are able to save and generate money. They use the money to pay for school fees for their children, buy farm inputs and livestock, and get other necessities for their homes”.

- Negative connections:

“The two vocational centers have been appreciated in terms of development the pool of skills in the area. However, after training, the trainees that have O levels usually mostly the community and work in other townships or become instructors or foremen. The trainees that stay in the community are the ones that do not have O levels”

Khwema

- Positive connections:

“The community is working with several external agencies such as PRDO, World Connect, United Purpose, and the district council. These agencies enhance, sharpen and strengthen their skills.

In 2015, the community, with support from the district council through the Member of Parliament, built tele center.

In 2001, the community, in collaboration with PRDO, built a CBO and a school block at Mauni Community Day Secondary School. The chief provided land for the construction of such structures.

Between 2021 and 2022, the community built a house and an office for the head teacher of their primary with support from World Connect.

In 2021, the community, with support from United Purpose, drilled a bore hole in the community to ease access to portable water.

In 2021, Gender under Spotlight initiative trained several women in tailoring skills. To date, five women are qualified tailors who are helping with their skills such as making school uniforms for the school going children”.

Lobi

- Positive connections:

“We cherish our networks with various agencies because they strengthen us where we are weak. For example, if we want to build a structure, we can provide sand, brick and labor but these agencies support with building materials and payment for artisans”.

Lobi community is working with several external agencies, including Evangelical Lutheran Development Service (ELDS), Welt Hunger, Eagles Relief, Clinton and Hunter Initiative, Concern Universal, Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM). The agencies mostly work to build capacity of leaders and their communities.

Since 2009 the agencies have been working with community pass-on projects for rabbits, goats, and chickens. In 2009, it was Concern Universal, in 2017 it was CADECOM, and in 2022 it was Eagles Relief and ELDS.

Mvugo

- Positive connections:

“Mvugo community is well-connected to various external agencies that work with them on various development projects. They indicated that most skills currently thriving in the community as a result of such connections. These agencies include World Connect, Care Malawi, Feed the Children, Rise Malawi, CIPAR, Heifer

International and Government of Malawi project called Agricultural Commercialization Project (AGCOM)".

The Mvugo 2 community is well-connected, and these connections have resulted in various projects, as indicated above. These include:

- In 1991, CIPAR drilled a borehole in the community to help the community to access portable water.
- In 2010, World Connect supported the community maize mills. This was followed by a pig pass-on project.
- From 2010, several NGOs such as Care Malawi, Feed the Children, and Heifer International supported the VSL initiative in succession. They have supported VSLs through training. The Mvugo community boasts of fifteen VSLs currently.
- In 2013, Rise Malawi supported the community with the construction of the permanent structure for the CBO.

Annex 5. Networks among community structures

The need for networks for development has been established. In Mpalale, the understanding is that networking is about different committees working together for the common good of the community (Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022). The community members understand the need for coordination among various groups and committees in the area. Hence, various development groups have committees that work together to implement development initiatives (Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022; Mangwale VDC, 7 July 2022). In Khwema, the community recognizes the need for various groups and their committees to work together in the area because people share skills, experiences, and lessons as a symbol of unity (Khwema VDC, 8 July 2022).

The need for networking has resulted in the emergency of local structures and committees that work together for the betterment of their communities. These structures include the VDC, mother groups, human rights, school committees, village savings and loans groups, agriculture committees, youth groups and organizations, chiefs, chiefs, lead famers, health committees, care groups and nutrition promoters, area development committees, churches, mosques, community-based organizations, local structures such as Nthewatewa and local institutions such as Gule Wamkulu, agriculture and extension committees, cooperative, forestry and environment committee.

The committees, structures, and institutions spur development when there are good working relationships among them. For example, in Mpalale, the mother group works with committees of the VDC, school committee and chiefs to implement the back-to-school bylaw for the betterment of community. Here,

mother group monitors community to identify underaged girls who might be married. Once identified, the case is reported to VDC and the chiefs. The chiefs fines the parents of the girl and the VH. The VDC and mother group are empowered to withdraw the girl from marriage and sent back to school. The mother group continues to monitor that the girl stays in school (Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022).

Different committees are able to work together because they accommodate each other in doing their work (*amalolerana*). They do not compete with each other. They actually share plans with each other. There is open communication between local structures as they know plans for each other. There is also room for constructive criticism and guidance given by different committees. For example, when the VDC noted poor sanitation at the community borehole and it guided the health committee to clean and build a brick platform to improve sanitation (Chunga VDC, 2 June 2022). The committees also respect each work and recognize that each other's work is equally important and contributes to the overall development of the community. The committees do not scramble for development activities (Mpalale VDC, 16 June 2022). The committees understand each other's roles and duties, including the synergies between different committees in the community (Huwa VDC, 1 June 2022).

Good working relationship among various community structures is because they have realized that they need to work together to develop their area. The VDC and the chief work together because they do not compete, but they see each other as important for development activities. Actually, the chief helps the work of VDC very much. People listen to the chief. When he tells everyone to participate in development work, they do so without hesitation because they fear the sanction by the chief (Mangwale VDC, 7 July 2022). Realizing the complementarity of agriculture and business enterprises, VSLs work with lead farmers to plan business. Members plan their enterprises in such a way that they share dividends at the time they can buy inputs to boost livestock and crop production among members. Members also conduct businesses that are related to agriculture. Lead Farmers teach members of VSLs how to use inputs and to implement agricultural activities as business (Mangwale VDC, 7 July 2022).

The communities recognized the need for connecting different development committees in the community. They, therefore, have mechanisms that act as hubs to connect different committees in the community to ensure networking among committees and structures works. The VDC is one example that is able to bring together different groups. The VDCS act as a hub for all committees (lead farmers, health committees, school committees, etc.) as all of them are represented. Through this hub, people know what problems the committees are facing. The VDC member gathers information from various committees and reports to VDC. The nutrition project is an example where VDC members interfaced with care

groups and nutrition promoters (Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022). In Mpalale, the VDC brings together the school committee and the youth club to work together to encourage children to attend school.

The chief is another mechanism that coordinates the chiefs and School Committee to work together with the institution of Gule Wamkulu to force the children to go to school (Khwema VDC, 8 July 2022). The mechanisms of the VDC and the chiefs are able to work together because they have a common and shared vision, for example, to be exemplary or role models to other communities, being independent, and united on development (Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022; Khwema VDC, 8 July 2022). In Mtika, the chief has opened space for committees to carry out their activities and interact without interference. In return, committees share their plans and activities with the chief without being forced (Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022).

In Mkoko, coordination and interaction among development committees has been strengthened by the establishment of an umbrella committee called Nthewatewa, what is known as the local 'Parliament'. The idea of Nthewatewa was advanced by the local people themselves after observing that the individual committees were not performing and were not being checked. Therefore, it was necessary to have a structure that would monitor the performance of the individual committees but also provide space for committees to share plans, lessons, and experiences. All development committees are represented in this body. Because of Nthewatewa, the VDC leaders are periodically appraised on the developments unfolding in the community. This is aimed at enhancing unity and helping the community to work towards a shared goal of developing the community (Mkoko VDC, 17 June 2022).

Some committees work individually where there are expectations that they would be handouts, for example, material and financial gains. The committees tended to hold and personalize information and activities to the extent they compete against each other" (Huwa VDC, 1 June 2022). Actually, in the past, there was no diversity in local structure as development was managed by chiefs and political leaders only. Even now, political leaders (MPs) do not work with local structures, especially the committees. There is a fear of being transparent. Political leaders protect their interests (Mtika VDC, 3 June 2022). In such situations, committees and structures have little respect towards each other. Every group has its own race to run. They wanted to keep benefits to themselves (Chunga VDC, 2 June 2022). Generally, failure to accommodate one another results in competition among the committees. They usually work individually instead of working together, and they scramble for development activities. For example, some school committees do not implement health projects.

The communities recognize the need for networking among the development committees through training from external agencies, where the committees are

trained on their roles and duties, including the synergies between different committees in the community (Huwa VDC 01 June 2022; Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022). The need for networking has also come as a result of experiences with failed projects as a result of conflicts between committees. In Huwa and Chunga, when there were expectations that there would be handouts in the form of material and financial gains, individual committees tended to hold and personalize information and activities to the extent that committees competed against each other. Such projects failed and the need emerged to stop personalizing projects (Huwa VDC, 01 June 2022; Chunga VDC, 02 June 2022). Furthermore, the need for networking has emerged due to political interests and interferences in development activities by various actors at community level. Even now, political leaders do not work with local development structures, especially the committees. There is fear of being transparent. Political leaders protect their interests (Mtika VDC, 03 June 2022).