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MALAWI ACT FORUM

Food Crisis Emergency and Recovery Project



Joint Terminal Evaluation Report by the ACT Partners

(BSHDC, CHAM, CARD, ELDS, SOLDEV)

25th November, 2011

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACT	Action by Churches Together
ADC	Area Development Committee
BSHDC	Blantyre Synod Health and Development Commission
CARD	Churches Action in Relief and Development
CBO	Community Based Organization
CHAM	Christian Health Association of Malawi
DC	District Commissioner
DEC	District Executive Committee
ELDS	Evangelical Lutheran Development Services
EPA	Extension Planning Area
GVH	Group Village Headman
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Participation
HH	Household
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MVAC	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
PME	Participatory Monitoring and Review
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SOLDEV	Synod of Livingstonia Development Department
TA	Traditional Authority
VDC	Village Development Committee

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Executive Summary

NCA & ACT partners implemented the “Food Crisis and Recovery Response” project. This was in immediate support of the population at risk of Food insecurity. MVAC (2010) reports 64 553 people at risk in Balaka, 161, 205 in Chikwawa, 100, 711 in Nsanje, 54, 201 in Phalombe, and 203, 426 people in Thyolo.

The project sought to contribute towards improving and enhancing nutrition and skills of 17,000 households direct beneficiaries (translating into 102, 000 people based on the 6 people per household) farming households through offering a variety of livelihood options to those affected by the dry spell and floods to enable them attain self reliance and independence.

This final evaluation report focuses on those activities that were implemented between April, 2011 and October, 2011 by the partners: Synod of Livingstonia Development Department (SOLDEV) in Rumphi, Evangelical Lutheran Development Service (ELDS) in Chikwawa and Phalombe, Blantyre Synod Health Development Commission (BSHDC) in Balaka and the Churches’ Action in Relief and Development (CARD) implemented activities in Nsanje and Thyolo, whereas CHAM implemented Nutrition and Supplementary feeding activities in its Nutritional Rehabilitation Units in the same districts where other members implemented their programmes.

The final evaluation was conducted to provide implementing members a cross-learning opportunity through peer review, and jointly assessed the efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and overall impact of the project in achieving the intended objectives..

The scope of the review covered ACT coordination office, district implementing partners and the communities that are benefitting from the project and was overseen and facilitated by NCA as the contract holder

Summarised findings:

The project was seen as relevant as it was meant to provide support in building Food Crisis Emergency and Recovery Response interventions to the affected communities during the critical lean period and help to build future resilience.

During mid-term review, the project has managed to provide targeted food distribution to 2,400 households translating into 14 400 beneficiaries including indirect beneficiaries based on the total household size of 6 members per family.

Apart from those benefiting through targeted food aid, 2 400 have also benefited through food for Work programmes.

A comprehensive summary of actual as opposed to targeted beneficiaries from the various project activities is tabulated in table 1a below:

Table 1a: Beneficiary Households Participating In Various Activities

Population at risk by area	Activity	Target HH	Actual HH	Observations
Rumphi 67,400	Solar irrigation	400	400080hh? How did these benefit	System not yet operational so Could not be assessed yet
	Conservation farming	300		
	Food for work	200	250hh	4 roads in 4 VDCs rehabilitated to total of 28.3 km
	Targeted distribution: maize grain, Likuni Phala, and cooking oil	250	250hh	Distributed successfully
	Input for work	300	250hh	Combined with food for work
	Livestock production: Distribute 500goats; drug training	300hh	250 households. 6 households 4 livestock drug boxes procured and issued to 4 VDCs Trained.	100 kids have been recorded. Survival rate at 88%. 22 beneficiaries accessed goats through pass- on scheme;
Balaka 64, 553 HH	Food for work	500	500hh served	Working on weir rehabilitation
	Treadle pump and scheme irrigation	800	275 hhs used 75 treadle pumps, 365 water user hhs	5hh per pump. 740 hh serving 4240 individuals. Enthusiastic group demand is outstripping supply.
	Targeted food distribution	300	300 x2	Received the items twice Making 600hh
	Input for work	400	400 hh 11.1km of roads	Feeder roads improvement and canal excavation. 2400 individuals.
	Crop diversification and conservation farming	400	400 hh	Ddistributed 200 pkts of vegetable seed of cabbage, rape, mustard, tomato and onions and 300kg of maize seed (SC 403 variety)
Thyolo: CARD 203, 426	Solar and scheme irrigation	800	135Hhs	60% operational. However, the concrete stand on which the tanks rest has developed serious cracks which threaten the safety of the tanks and pipes in the long run.
	Treadle pump irrigation	400	324Hhs	In full use
	Conservation	600	134hh	77% of irrigation farmers

	farming			
	Targeted food distribution & for work	1500	1550hh	790 males and 760 females
Nsanje 100, 711	Gravity-fed irrigation	500	220hh	150male and 70female hh (These have the Gender segregation data while the rest don't. Could we have the gender figures for all the households
	Conservation farming	300	-	Yet to be assessed as actual growing takes off
	Food for work	700	1319hh	489 male hh 830 female hh
	Targeted food distribution	400		
Chikwawa 161, 205	Solar irrigation	600	762hh	These are participating, awaiting the actual onset of irrigation once systems are finalised. A few difficulties were observed on the solar irrigation and these were to do with the cracks on the basement where the tanks rest.
	Treadle pump irrigation	600		
	Food for work	800	2400hh	Beneficiary households received several rounds depending on which member participated and where.
	Targeted food distribution	600		
	Input for work	800		
	Total	3400		
Phalombe 54, 201	Targeted food distribution	300	1000hh	Cumulative sum as some households had members participating in several activities
	Food for work	300		
	Input for work	400		
	The Solar Irrigation	800	220hh	The set up for treadle pumps has not yet been mastered. The panels and tanks have been installed, but the basement is cracking and part of it is already broken, and the entire set-up risks falling down

All targeted districts	Nutritional rehabilitation	2500	2500	All beneficiaries were served, and more missed out as numbers swelled
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Project Relevance

The project has proved relevant to communities as it , in short term, provided them with food when they were most vulnerable, and established fall-back assets for them in the long term. This supports the aims of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) i.e. the Social Protection Pillar in terms of Protection of the Vulnerable. In addition, project supports the outcomes of the Disaster Response framework as outlined in the National Plan of Action.

Efficiency

Other than for few instances of timing and logistical hick cups, the partners maximized the available resources, while ensuring community ownership and participation through ongoing training. That community groups can tell their status difference in ‘before’ and ‘after’ the project is clear evidence. The pass-on concept, in both physical assets and training concepts cemented the efficiency in working towards the planned goals in the limited time available.

Effectiveness

The Project has been very effective in achieving its objectives. This is best appreciated through peer learning, increased involvement of communities throughout the various phases, and the communities’ ability to identify short falls that could have made the project even more successful. Farmer-to-farmer outreach and training demonstrates ongoing capacity building in the communities.

Impact

From the training some women are able to make varieties of food dishes, including soya milk and soya cakes for their families. Others use manure and milk from the goats they received. Yet others can treat animal diseases in the community, where as the hungry were assisted to cross over the hungry months sustainably. In some irrigation schemes, farmers are already consuming and selling their produce from both solar and treadle pump irrigation systems. For example by August end, 2011, the highest farmer in Thyolo had realized Mk42, 000 from the sale of tomatoes, followed by another with MK 40,000 from the sale of green maize, and were still selling. They anticipate three harvests per year.

That more households are demanding to join in is further evidence of a positive impact:.

Sustainability

Peer learning among ACT Alliance members facilitated timely learning and adjustment to project implementation. This has helped instant lessons and success tips to be passed on. For example by working with district agricultural personnel to design and implement irrigation schemes jointly with communities' one partner displayed the cornerstones of sustainability and resource maximization at least cost. As communities have worked together with existing local structures (traditional leaders, Area Development Committees, Village Development Committees), a sustainable partnership has been created.

In some cases discussions on the enactment of a memorandum of (MoU) between the communities and the district councils particularly on long-term and capital intensive projects are at an advanced stage. Project offshoots such as the self governing women's Loan groups evidence sustainable internalized community progression as lasting impact.

Milestones

- All ACT members and stakeholders have demonstrated concerted dedication to achieving their planned objectives and associated learning during implementation.
- Open communication between ACT Alliance partners and the office of the ACT-Coordinator has proved that several geographically separated agents can work well together.
- Most training modules, save for HAP, were done so well that project committees enjoy passing on the information via retraining others.
- CARD solar irrigation is a particular success in Thyolo as farmers are harvesting maize and planting other vegetables, and proclaims the joy of earning from irrigation.
- All beneficiaries showed dedication in their participation in improving feeder roads, providing labour for irrigation system, canal construction, and clearing garden plots in anticipation of setting up new crops.
- Farmers have found a way to manage the economic sustainability by setting up annual membership subscriptions in cash or in kind, for any eventualities. Water user association at Khwisa weir and farmers of Makande are examples.
- Women of Synod of Livingstonia Development Department and those from ELDS Phalombe openly celebrate the application of their training through improved domestic culinary skills, improved meals, and a vibrant village loan system.
- Strong ties with existing community structures such as Village Development Committees and DCs facilitate the sustainability of the various project activities..

Challenges

- Timing: certain activities such as training sessions were ill timed, probably due to the overly short implementation time for the entire project. Consequently, incubation period of the ideas and concepts was not allowed for, hence affecting overall success.
- Delayed procurement of livestock torpedoed beneficiary number with price hikes.
- The role of District Structures (to provide info on existing facilities) was in some cases overlooked in the earlier days leading to resource duplication such as having two water wells side by side when both have water.
- Communication of instructions from CHAM secretariat to NRUs personnel on the receipt and further distribution of food commodities was neither uniform nor clear.
- CHAM secretariat progress indicators were unclear to most NRU staff and so precluded meaningful data capture.
- The effect of salty water on crop choice for the irrigation scheme was overlooked in places like Chanyoteka in Rumphu District.
- ACT Alliance Partners' contracts with suppliers were rather vague on quality safeguarding clauses, leaving room for abuse or legal challenges by irrigation systems and produce suppliers wherever quality was compromised

Lessons Learnt

- Use of local experts including those from DC's office, in irrigation systems installation, improve participation and reduce costs.
- The involvement of all stakeholders including, ADCs and VDCs, from the onset enhances ownership and promotes sustainability of the project.
- Mounting solar irrigation water tanks on high towers adds no pumping or energy efficiency and increases energy losses.
- Like a stitch in time, doing background work on existing local facilities saves on labour and other resources, in turn increasing number of project beneficiaries
- An earlier signing of a Memorandum of understanding on the infrastructure investments of the solar irrigation schemes and advisory roles could have facilitated things.

Recommendations

- For meaningful implementation and outcomes from the project there is a clear need to extend it so that ideas and concepts can fully incubate, and technologies like the solar irrigation systems can be internalised and fully operated by communities.
- Communities that have their tank towers cracked prove the need to draw up a concise MoU that sets forth clear parameters of roles and responsibilities of ACT members and district structures as a means of ensuring political will and commitment on both sides

- Those partners who have not yet had engineers carry out feasibility studies must expedite the process
- There is need to brand NCA & ACT partners interventions by designing signposts similar to those of EU/WFP etc for purposes of visibility.

2.0 Project Background

Norwegian Church Aid & ACT alliance partners implemented the “Food Crisis and Recovery Response” project. This was in immediate support of the population at risk of Food insecurity. MVAC reports that about 64 553 people are at risk in Balaka, 161, 205 in Chikwawa, 100, 711 in Nsanje. 54, 201 in Phalombe, and 203, 426 people in Thyolo.

The project sought to contribute towards improving and enhancing nutrition and skills of 17,000 households direct beneficiaries (translating into 102, 000 people based on the 6 people per household) farming households through offering a variety of livelihood options to those affected by the dry spell and floods to enable them attain self reliance and independence.

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2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess how relevant the project was to the communities and the beneficiaries in general, whether it was effective in addressing the original problems, and how efficient the partners and stakeholders were in the exercise. It was also to point out demonstrable indicators leading to sustainability and achieving the desired impact, from whose lessons recommendations could be made.

The final evaluation was conducted to provide implementing members a cross-learning opportunity during peer review , and jointly assess the efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and overall impact of the project in achieving the intended objectives. This is done through highlighting major observations on successes and challenges, and what could be done even better.

Overall feedback is provided using the indicators of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. These are reported with regard to how well the project contributed towards improving and enhancing nutrition and skills of 17,000 farming households through

the various livelihood options offered to vulnerable communities to help them become self-reliant and independent.

2.2 Methodology

The review was jointly carried out by a team of eight individuals: one representative for each implementing partner, NCA representative, ACT Coordinator, and the Consultant. The review combined a participatory approach combining Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and the most significant Change (MSC). The resulting approach allows the community representatives to highlight their successes and also indicate their insights on how they could have done better. These provided the narrative view, while the consultant cross checked with the objectively verifiable indicators from the logical framework matrix.

Having one funding, necessitated the project to have a common approach to the evaluation and reporting element. As a demonstrable impact of the cross-learning evidence by the members was required as a separate summarized document, the consultant facilitated the learning process by the members in the project sites through immediate discussions at the end of the day.

The consultant worked hand in hand with the Coordinator in the evaluation and reporting exercise. Each partner had a representative in the evaluation team who was there for peer learning as well as data collection.

To ensure adequate understanding of the background and progress reported elsewhere to date, the consultant went through the project document, midterm evaluation, and periodic reports from ACT implementing partners including CHAM secretariat. It was however immediately noted that there is no uniform reporting (no template) and in some cases the implementation targets and actual outputs were in different units. So a proxy evaluation of the quantitative data had to be adopted. For example, on number of treadle pumps given and irrigation systems, progress was recorded in hectare covered instead of beneficiary households.

These interviews were conducted with the background information garnered from, key informants interviews with stakeholders knowledgeable about the project. As need dictated, the review team would, at some point be split into two to maximize on time efficiency. Each team interviewed a different committee of the beneficiaries. The groups would then meet at the end of the day before anyone retired to rest, and share their findings, insights and suggested improvements for the next day. Any logistical or conceptual challenges were ironed out on these meetings to ensure better team performance for the following day.

Fuel shortage precluded the possibility of interviewing all relevant stakeholders. Hence the team had to settle on representation.

The resulting valuation of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact of the project, reported below is a synthesis of the views of the communities, ACT Alliance partner representatives, Act Coordinator and the consultant.

3.0 Findings (In this sector we require the findings by the partner not background, challenges and Recommendations . A section should be written separately.

The initial goal of the Project was to contribute towards improving and enhancing nutrition and skills of 17,000 farming households through offering a variety of livelihood options to the drought victims to boost their self reliance and independence.

Most of the project activities had already been implemented by April, 2011. Their progress was assessed and captured in the midterm evaluation report. Hence this report shall focus on irrigations systems and associated activities that may have been barely started at the time of the midterm evaluation. Lessons learned and recommendations shall, however, be drawn from all the activities as what went on or was missed in the earlier may have influenced the outcomes of the irrigation components.

So far the foregoing targeted food distribution, food for work, input for work and the supplementary feeding in NRUs provided an instant intervention at the beneficiaries' most vulnerable moment. The project created a sustainable resource base via livestock pass-on system, as well as creation of the lasting irrigation farming systems. These have been well supported by community propagated capacity building training, close cooperation and interaction between communities and District agricultural staff, providing back stopping services.

Small Scale Irrigation systems are in place and some working very well, others yet to be used. Crop diversification was enthusiastically taken on by farmers while livestock (goats, chickens and rabbits) component, where animals survived, has been hailed as providing milk, manure and a potential source of meat and revenue back up.

The overall picture is summarised in the table below.

Table 1b: Beneficiary Households Served in Various Activities

Population at risk by Area	Activity	Target HH	Actual HH	Observations
Rumphi 67,400	Solar irrigation	400	80hh	System not yet operational so
	Conservation farming	300		Could not be assessed yet
	Food for work	200	250hh	4 roads in 4 VDCs rehabilitated to total of 28.3 km
	Targeted distribution: maize grain, Likuni Phala, and cooking oil	250	250hh	Distributed successfully
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	Targeted food distribution	600		
	Input for work	800		
	Total	3400		
Phalombe 54, 201	Targeted food distribution	300	1000hh	Cumulative sum as some households had members participating in several activities
	Food for work	300		
	Input for work	400		
	Treadle pump and gravity irrigation	800	220hh	The set up for treadle pumps has not yet been mastered.
All targeted districts	Nutritional rehabilitation	2500	2500	All beneficiaries were served, and more missed out as numbers swelled

3.1 Livingstonia Synod Development Department (SOLDEV)

The project had targeted 1500 households from Chikwawa, Chanyoli, Betere, and Kasongwe village development Committees representing a section of Rumphi that had suffered most from the drought. This resulted from consultations with the District Executive Committee, District Agriculture Development Officer, Agriculture Extension Development Coordinator, Area Development Committee, Village Development Committees and the Village communities.

To ensure full participation of communities in and sustainability of the project, Project area development committees, representing communities, had been trained in leadership, group dynamics, HAP, psychosocial, food processing and preparation and crop storage. 10 committee representatives were specifically trained in the agricultural scheme management. This had helped both in community mobilization and the organization of group work (including food for work) as community members worked on well sinking, solar tower construction and preparation of the field plots and water canals.

The borehole at Chanyoli had been drilled and a pump fitted leading to the solar panels mounted on the same brick tower as are the water collecting drums. The plots have already been allocated to 80 households, following land use contractual signing with the area chiefs. At the time of reporting the farmers were working in irrigation canals that needed construction.

Milestones

- 80 farmers household representing 480 community members are working enthusiastically both preparing their plots and on the canals.
- The irrigation system is almost finished serve for the canals.
- The land agreement signed provided security to the scheme
- Participation of Agricultural personnel in advising on gradient and soil/cropping requirements shall support sustainability.

Challenges

- The tower appeared to have a weak base holding the tanks and so is prone to collapse (from water weight) and damage the panels and the tanks. The connection of the intake pipes appeared ill finished as it leaked.
- The capacity of the contractor to install more than one irrigation system for ACT Alliance, among other jobs, was over looked, leaving room for implementation delays and low quality.
- The quality assurance safety clause in the contract between SOLDEV and the Irrigation system Contractor is not specific enough and can easily be challenged by the contractor if he chose not to redo the work.
- Agricultural experts have not yet advised on what salt tolerant crops can be grown here as the water is salty.

Recommendations

- The MOU needs to be signed soonest possible to ensure project sustainability and active responsibility from the District and Agricultural authorities.
- Extended funding needs to be provided to ensure the success of the irrigation scheme thereby assure farmers that this is serious asset creation to focus on unlike working at Thulwe estate where many are tempted to go at the expense of their own development.
- Agricultural crop experts need to be called in soonest to advise on what crops can best be grown in the scheme irrigated with the available salty water.

3.2 Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM)

CHAM ran the Nutrition Rehabilitation component of the project through its Nutrition Rehabilitation Units (NRUs) in St Patrick's (Rumphu), Phalula (Balaka), Holy family (Phalombe), Malamulo (Thyolo), St Joseph (Chiradzulu), Montfort (Chikwawa) and Trinity (Nsanje).

CHAM targeted malnourished under-five children, pregnant women, those suffering from HIV and Tuberculosis. CHAM NRUs distributed food and medical stuffs such as vitamins, Multivitamins, Ferrous Sulphate, Albendazole, cooking oil, salt, sugar, Maize Flour, Beans, and Likuni Phala.

These were meant to help the beneficiaries boost their nutrition levels and come out of the danger zone, and continue with their daily foods to maintain their nutrition levels. NRU staffs were meant to follow the children up after discharge and chart progress continuation.

Milestones

- Upon getting food stuffs and medication many children immediately responded and came out of the danger zone.
- NRU staff promptly distributed the appropriate food stuffs ensuring the nutrition crisis was dealt with.

Challenges

- There lacked a clear blue print on measuring progress of the discharged children.
- In some cases the food was shared between the children and guardians, making it not last
- CHAM secretariat and NRU staff had hazy communication such that some NRUs did not know how, why and what to do with the food stuff delivered by non-CHAM personnel.
- Some food stuffs were almost out of date and others rotten and damp as they arrived in NRUs where staff lacked both authority and quality control expertise.

Recommendations

- Funding needs to be extended as many children have since relapsed into malnourished state and others died due to poor nutrition after discharge.
- CHAM needs to strengthen its monitoring and Evaluation systems to be able to detect problems as they arise.

- Staff retention and training could boost CHAM’s project implementation and success.
- There is need for CHAM to send each NRU only what they need and via a quality assurance facility.
- A uniform reporting format needs to be given to all NRUs with clear progress indicators.

3.3 Blantyre Synod Health and Development

BSHD had targeted 800 households with small scale irrigation farming. This was going to happen using treadle pumps, serving 8 groups and a weir supplying water to dams to supply canals leading into paddy rice fields. This was to create a long term resource base for vulnerable group of farmers.

To that effect the rehabilitated the weir) using local builders and farmer’s own labour. Currently they had reached 740 household, and supplied treadle pumps to 8 irrigation groups supported with treadle pumps and one water user group to use dams and canals in growing rice

The group is anxious to start growing their rice with the onset of rains. Below is a graphic presentation of the weir rehabilitation at Khwisa in Balaka, in readiness for irrigation season.



Figure 1 : Kwisa weir before and after rehabilitation

Milestones

- Gave relief food to 500 people through Food for Work and Targeted vulnerable 300 household i.e. 50kg bag of maize and 10kgs beans two rounds each.
- Rehabilitated the weir using local experts and local labour, ensuring sustainability.
- Water users group put up a contingency fund through group membership subscription, and set to supplement it with a definite amount each from rice sales.

Challenges

- Khwisa to Balaka road bridge is not yet finished, risking being damaged by the rains.
- Marketing arrangements not yet fixed with government experts as no MOU signed yet.
- Undefined rice marketing situation risks farmers being taken advantage of by a neighbouring wealthy estate owner who can name his price and pounce on their produce.

Recommendations

- MOU to be assigned as a matter of urgency to empower local district authorities to support, sustain and protect rice farmers' interests from unscrupulous traders.
- Bridge needs to be finished in time lest farmers' be frustrated when transporting their produce.

3.4 Churches Action in Relief and Development

CARD implemented project activities Traditional Authorities of Thukuta, Chimaliro, Kapichi, Mbawera and Nsabwe in Thyolo and Traditional Authorities Tengani and Malemia in Nsanje.

The project had targeted 3300 households and to-date has made steady progress towards achieving the objective. The project has developed a total of 7 schemes- 5 solar based and 2 river diversion and buried pipe canalized systems of irrigation



Figure 2: A working solar irrigation system

Some use solar modules and existing constructed vats, others using solar modules and plastic tanks and yet others only using networks of PVC pipes extracting water from a river, store it in fortified wells lead off using canals.

Milestones

- Ntolongo PVC pipe network irrigation system installed on Shire River by local farmers with supervision from agricultural staff from Nsanje.
- Some farmers already harvesting and selling tomatoes, maize mustard and rape from their solar and treadle pump irrigated plots.
- Set –aside funds from subscription to cater for eventualities such as broken components.
- August 2011 records show the highest farmer had realized Mk42, 000 from the sale of tomatoes, followed by another with MK 40,000 from the sale of green maize.

Challenges:

- Plot distribution limited to availability and geographic nearness not state of need.
- Plot ownership tied to one’s activity and so long as all current owners are active others have no chance of joining in if there are no funds to extend the land and pumping installations.

Recommendations

- Joining terms need to be reviewed to allow wider participation.

- Funding needs to be extended to allow more schemes to be opened and serve more vulnerable households currently excluded.
- Repair of the cracked tank bases at Makande need to be finalized before rains damage them further.

3.5 Evangelical Lutheran Development Service

ELDS implemented the response and recovery project in the Districts of Phalombe and Chikhwawa, targeting 3,400 households (2,800 households in Chikhwawa and 600 households in Phalombe). The project was being implemented in 18 villages in Chikhwawa and 5 in Phalombe.

The goal was to facilitate self reliance and independence to drought and flood victims (3400 households) by contributing towards improving and enhancing their nutrition and skills through offering a variety of livelihoods options.

These options were offered by ELDS with deliberate regards to gender and human rights issues, with the awareness that many households are female and even child headed. Thus ELDS has undertaken specific advocacy and awareness building to change public attitudes and practices contributing to the vulnerability of young women and girl children to Disasters.

ELDS's capacity building component comprised of different trainings which included: training in disaster management, leadership skills, group management, conflict Resolution, monitoring skills of assets and activities, psychosocial, HAP principles, record keeping and reporting and irrigation site management.

Mile stones

- Lots of tree seedlings planted to stabilize river banks and promote watershed areas.
- Enthusiastic groups very committed to realizing their dreams from micro-irrigation farming.
- Some groups from Chikwawa have already started harvesting maize from their irrigated crops.
- Establishment of offshoot projects such as village loan group from proceeds of potato vine sales.

Challenges

- Apparent delays by the contractor to properly finish the two irrigation systems.
- A fuzzy safety clause in the contract can enable the contractor to buy time and work on other projects at the expense of ELDS beneficiaries.
- Poorly finished tank holding towers risk derailing both irrigation systems if the current repair works are not finished before heavy rains start.
- ELDS risks losing faith and face from beneficiaries if the foregoing risk is not mitigated quickly.

Recommendations

- Introduction of village loan groups to other ACT Alliance sites.
- Prompt and firm hold on the contractor to finish the irrigation systems with high quality.
- Monitoring efforts be made more frequent to nip the problems in the bud .
- MOU to be signed soonest with district structures departments to underline sustainability.

4.0 Overall Assessment

Based on field observations, interviews and implementing officers' own reports, the consultant's overall project assessment as per TOR performance indicators follows below:

4.1 Project Relevance

As per the project document and the implementation on the ground, the project has been very relevant to meeting beneficiaries' needs, capacity and skills development towards self sufficiency and independence in terms of food security and emergency recovery strategies both at NCA/ACT Alliance and at national level.

4.2 Project Effectiveness

In weighting one would put irrigation systems at 75% in performance. Adding that to pass-on animals that are kidding and providing manure, as well as women managing own loans and pleasing their families with new found culinary skills, capacity building done, clearly spells effectiveness. Notable is that most implementing officers are quick to learn and correct any anomalies brought to their attention.

4.3 Project Efficiency

In overall utilization of resources, one notices that emergency food stuffs were distributed in time, irrigation systems equipment and labour were coordinated in time, and in some areas innovative thinking (using local as opposed to hired experts) has saved implementers loads of resources. Ongoing consultations with District agricultural and water authorities solved most problems as they rose. Other than for one instance where three months were lost looking for a borehole site when an existing working one was there, all resources were maximized. The project was indeed efficient.

4.4 Project Impact

Vibrant Village loans groups solely run by women and other wives loudly singing praise to ACT Alliance for helping them improve their domestic skills with training, women holding leading portfolios in scheme committees and training others with their newly learned skills attest to gender focus. The project has clearly improved female participation in Food Emergency and Recovery Responses and other activities.

As food for work enabled households to access food during lean period, it also improved accessibility of remote areas through the rehabilitation and construction of roads. Similarly have households in the project areas increased access to livestock especially goats and rabbits, whereas the introduction of drug boxes and trainings has enabled to reduce livestock mortality rate in the project impact area.

Some communities have so well internalized HAP principles that they can now assess and demand that their rights be heard. They can now promote and hold their leaders to accountability, while proactively participating in group processes that affect their lives.

That many households survived the hunger months and are now strengthening their asset base is a shining beacon to the impact of the project.

Additionally, there has been a lot of experiential shared learning among implementing officers, which is a lasting impact on them and their institutions.

4.5 Project Sustainability

Technically this indicator has been achieved in most projects as capacity building and hands on training including installation of irrigation systems was done together with beneficiaries. If the current rotational own security and subscription and plough back arrangement with most farmers groups are maintained, overtime they may be able to replace any worn out parts of their systems, thereby making it sustainable. This is particularly so where PVC pipes was used.

The institutional side has had good steps taken in practice. However unless MOUs are signed and systems handover to communities from contractors involve handing over to DC's office, long terms sustainability may not be assured. is amongst others related to the capacity building, training and awareness raising especially at District level, where a lot seems to have been achieved.

In Nsanje retraining was not so evident and group failure could result from erosion of institutional skills, unlike in Rumphi where group members, mostly women, keep training others, so carrying capacity building on. Potentially sustainability is possible if it is worked on by the district structures.

5.0 OVERALL CONCLUSION

5.1 Overall Conclusion

The foregoing sections have highlighted milestones reached and challenges for each implementing partner. That these implementing partners supported by enthusiastic communities, are working to overcome their challenges, is a good sign, overshadowing their short falls. That makes this project successful. Needless to say that it would have been more so if there was more time to fully implement it. All steps towards achieving food and nutrition security in the communities have been taken and progress made.

No one reasonably expects full self sufficiency and independence to be achieved in six months; neither can sustainability be achieved with a cut off point. This is the thinking behind the recommendation of funding extension as ideas and concepts are just about to hatch.

Given more time and resources, the current communities could become torch bearers to others.

5.2 Lessons learned.

- As the team went about, shared lessons were captured. A few are offered here, although they may be extracted with a larger set in an independent mini report.
- Using local experts on irrigation system installation reduces costs and build communities capacity.
- Involving district structures at the onset of a project promotes rapport and improves sustainability.
- Procurement and service providers' contracts need to have clear safety clauses to safeguard beneficiaries against shoddy workmanship and poor quality produce.
- Married women tend to hold portfolios longer and rarely move out from the area.
- Training community members as extension/ knowledge multipliers promotes technologies at least cost.
- The larger the number of solar panels, the better the pumping efficiency.
- Fifteen panels (modules) per system seems to be a recommended number for solar irrigation as dictated by the successful systems in Thyolo.
- The lower the height the panels are set at, and the nearer to the water source, lower the resistance to generated power, and the higher the pumping efficiency.
- There is no justification to having the tanks on high towers in view of pumping height and energy losses.
- Nutritional interventions need longer implementation time and follow up than activities that solve physical problems.
- An effort needs to be made to scrutinize a contactor's delivery capacity before he is awarded several concurrent jobs.

5.3 Field Programme

Table 3: Field programme for the consulting team		
Engagement	When	Days
1. Comprehensive orientation with the ACT Coordinator and NCA	October 26 th	1
2. Review all documents, principally aligning the tools to the project	Open	2
3. Field visits; evaluation exercise	October 30 th – Nov 9 th	11
4. Wrap up evaluation sessions with partners	Nov 10 th	1
5. Data analysis and report writing		5
6. Exit meeting and present final report to NCA	Nov 25	1
Total consultancy days		21