



MALAWI COUNTRY OFFICE - STORIES OF CHANGE, JULY 2023 SPOTLIGHT ON LOCALISATION PILOT PROJECT



Save the Children

Story of Change: 'Once-Vulnerable Communities' Stand Tall against Disasters, thanks to Localization Efforts

In the heart of Neno district, where the struggle against disasters was once a seemingly insurmountable battle, lies a story of transformation and resilience. For years, Neno had been held captive by the grim reality of disaster-stricken communities. Inadequate capacity, resources and poor road connectivity made it challenging for communities to be resilient or access critical support timely during emergencies.

Aid faced logistical hurdles, leaving affected communities to bear the brunt of natural calamities alone for days.

"It would take a staggering seven days without assessment or any support. Lives were lost, properties destroyed. Hope was replaced by desperation," says Russel Msiska, Executive Director for Beyond Our Hearts (BOHF) – a local NGO.

"We can't bring aid to Neno. The road is bad. Come to Mwanza district and get the materials. This is what we have often been told during emergencies," says Hudson Kuphanga, Neno District Commissioner.

However, a beacon of change has emerged, thanks to the innovative localization project, supported by Save the Children Italy.

Spearheaded by a collaboration of local committees, Local NGOs, and local district councils in Neno and Zomba, the project has not only reduced response time but has also empowered communities to prevent disasters and protect residents effectively.

"The project has been a game-changer for us," says Russel. *"We are now able to reach affected communities with response within 72 hours as per the Sphere Standard,"* he says. [READ MORE](#)

ABOUT THE LOCALISATION PILOT PROJECT

Funded by Save the Children Italy, the Malawi Localisation Pilot Project (Dec 2021 - May 2023) aimed at strengthening capacity of government structures and civil society in Zomba and Neno districts in Malawi to prevent emergencies and respond effectively during emergencies. The project outcomes were:

- **Outcome 1:** The emergency preparedness, prevention, and response capacity for Zomba and Neno district councils and four local NGOs is strengthened
- **Outcome 2:** Local Authorities and Civil Society (LACS) play a more active role in the Malawian humanitarian coordination structure
- **Outcome 3:** Local Authorities and Civil Society (LACS) access more funding directly from donors

OUTCOME HIGHLIGHT

Neno and Zomba districts have witnessed remarkable impact of community-based organizations whose capacities have been enhanced, enabling them to efficiently source funding and respond swiftly to the needs of affected populations.

In Neno, BOHF was able to secure funding from the USA-based Malawians in Diaspora Network to respond to tropical cyclone Freddy. The ELMA Foundation, Malawi Community Hubs, and Roots for Change, which supports vulnerable households and provides resources for tropical cyclone response, are three additional funding sources that Youth for Development and Productivity (YODEP), in Zomba, was able to get. These accomplishments are attributable to the capacity-building programs like financial management and accountability offered by the Localization Pilot project.

IMPACT VIDEO

Watch this [VIDEO](#) to see how the Localisation Pilot Project has impacted lives

The Malawi Humanitarian Landscape

The humanitarian landscape in Malawi is shaped by a variety of challenges faced by local communities during emergencies. The country is evolving into a shock-prone nation, largely because of its susceptibility related to climatic variability, which is driving natural disasters like floods and droughts. These elements have intensified the effects of shocks, increasing the demand for humanitarian aid in recent years.

With limited time, resources, and capacity to anticipate,

respond and recover between shocks, Malawi went from needing 8% humanitarian food/cash assistance during the 2014/15 lean season, for instance, to 18% in 2015/16, peaking at 40% of the population (6.7 million people) during the 2016/17 lean season – the highest in the southern Africa region and in Malawi's history (World Bank).

Malawi Government has been linking social protection and humanitarian systems to make them more 'shock-sensitive'.

National Context for Localisation Agenda

In Malawi, an enabling environment exists where legal frameworks, donor response, and civil society are all supportive to the localisation agenda. If well managed, it may thrive and work to the true meaning of empowering the local and national actor. The Government of Malawi recently adopted a legal framework that is in tandem with localisation agenda. At the same time, some local civil society organisations have been pushing for speedy actions to domesticate the 2016 Grand Bargain Commitments that some INGOs working in Malawi including Save the Children have committed to embrace.

Legal Framework

- **NGO Act:** In 2022 Government amended the principal law that governs NGOs in Malawi. To ensure effective implementation, the NGO Act will have its regulations in these areas: Registration, Coordination and INGO Operations.
- **Draft NGO Regulations:** The Draft Regulations which are ready for adoption, further limit INGO operations and hence reinforce the localization drive in Malawi.

Donor-paradigm Shift towards Localization

Most donors in Malawi and globally have moved to ensure that their funding is going towards localization. They are now making deliberate efforts to ensure that their resources are either going directly to community driven initiatives or funding local and national actors. Some of these donors include USAID and European Union. In this regard, Save the Children localization drive in Malawi further finds great opportunity from donor alignment to global localization drive.

Civil Society Advocacies on Localisation

- Save the Children localization drive has further met advocacies by local civil society. The CSOs are demanding speedy implementation of the Grand Bargain Commitments made by UN agencies and INGOs.
- In 2016 some INGOs and UN agencies committed to the principles of Grand Bargain. Locally, CSOs are pushing UN/INGOs to expedite implementation of commitments made. CSOs, coordinated by Council of Non-Governmental Organization have stepped up their advocacies to hold the UN and INGOs accountable to their commitments.

Our Localization Conceptual Framework

Save the Children acts as an ally to children and local actors by elevating and strengthening their role and voice to drive sustainable impact. We believe that by shifting power and embracing localized approaches, Save the Children and partners we work alongside with – including children themselves – can better respond to increasingly dynamic development and humanitarian challenges and ensure that all children survive, are protected, and have healthy starts to life.

Save the Children Malawi Country Office is actively engaged across seven dimensions of localization to shift power and embed localized approaches in our ways of working: Funding, Partnerships, Capacity, Participation Revolution, Coordination Mechanisms, Visibility and Policy Influence.



In 2022, we supported children, as their ally, to engage Malawi's Head of state on climate change

Watch this [VIDEO](#) to see how the children engaged Head of State during Malawi's first ever Children's Climate Summit

Through this [VIDEO](#), watch how children deliberated climate change, the main driver of disaster in Malawi, during the 2022 National Children's Parliament

FUNDING



Ensuring that at least 25% of internationally raised funding reaches national and local actors 'as directly as possible'.

PARTNERSHIPS



More genuine and equitable partnerships, and less sub-contracting.

CAPACITY



Effective support for institutional development, less undermining of local capacities.

PARTICIPATION REVOLUTION



Fuller and more influential involvement of crisis-affected people in what relief is provided to them, and how.

COORDINATION MECHANISMS



More presence and influence of national governmental and other actors in 'coordination' mechanisms such as clusters

VISIBILITY



Greater public recognition and visibility for the role, effort, contribution, innovation and achievements of local actors.

POLICY INFLUENCE



Increased presence of national actors in international policy discussions and a greater accounting of their views and proposals.

The Malawi Localisation Journey

The Localisation Pilot Project has been a catalyst for profound and meaningful change, bringing about positive impacts that resonate at both district and community levels. Through our strategic focus on partnership management, capacity development, networking, and community response initiatives, we have transformed the way aid is delivered, received and sustained.

Across the two-targeted districts of Zomba and Neno, the project capacity development targeted 70 members of District

Civil Protection Committees (DCPC), 255 members of Area Civil Protection Committees (ACPC). The project has also worked with two local NGOs – BOHF and YODEP.

Project activities have redefined the humanitarian landscape by placing communities at the heart of the process. The impacts are not only measurable in terms of improved outcomes but are also deeply transformative, fostering a sense of agency, dignity, and lasting change within the communities we serve.

The Transformative Impact of the Localisation Pilot Project: The Case of Beyond Our Hearts Foundation (BOHF)

The localization pilot project has had a profound and far-reaching, impact on BOHF, affecting various aspects of the NGO's operations, effectiveness, and sustainability.

BOHF was established in 2014, with the main aim of securing rights of the poor and marginalized people, especially children. The organisation focuses on sustainable livelihoods, education, protection, WASH and health.

Here are some key ways in which the project has made a difference:

BOHF resource base has grown 10 fold during the lifespan of the Localisation Project

"The localization project has empowered our leadership, strengthened our accountability systems, and greatly helped us with talent retention and recruitment. Recently we got funding from the USA-based Malawians in Diaspora Network. They funded us to respond to cyclone Freddy. The network was super impressed with our accountability systems. As a result, they have given us more funding to support with recovery in Machinga district and they have named us their main partner for Malawi southern." - **Pemphero, BOHF Project Coordinator**

Resource Mobilisation

Since its establishment in 2014 BOHF only had one donor. Through strategic investments in enhancing the skills, knowledge, and capabilities, BOHF has unlocked a new era of fundraising prowess, taking the organization to new levels of effectiveness and sustainability. Between 2019 and 2023 BOHF has won the hearts of six more donors.



In Pictures: BOHF's response to Cyclone Freddy - a response funded USA-based Malawians in Diaspora Network



Organisation Capacity Strengthening

The Project has empowered BOHF to conduct an organisation capacity assessment and this informed development of an Organisation Development Plan which has proven key in ensuring clear roadmap for its future, enabling it to operate sustainably and effectively in the long term.

BOHF also now has in place robust governance structure and policies (Financial, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Communication, Safeguarding and others). These policies have provided a foundation for ethical conduct, effective operations, accountability, protection of beneficiaries and staff and a framework for ensuring that BOHF operates in a manner that is consistent with its mission, values, and the needs of the communities it serves.

"We have become a trusted and credible organisation as a result of this process."

"Additionally, it was very difficult for us to hold physical meetings with our board of directors as we did not have resources. But during implementation of the localisation project, staff and the board have held several physical meetings. This has brought remarkable change to our organisation."

"Face-to-face interactions have helped us to get to know each other beyond their roles, building better relationships and trust as well fostering a stronger sense of teamwork and alignment. We have seen our board taking a more pro-active role in resource mobilisation and problem solving – a huge lesson to us." **Russel, BOHF Executive Director**



Networking

The transformative impact of the Localisation Pilot Project is also exemplified by BOHF's networking successes. Networking efforts have ignited a life-changing journey for the organisation. BOHF has been able to grow its network, partners, access considerable increase in financing, and gained more and better programming knowledge in humanitarian work, WASH and other areas, taking it mission to new heights.

"The project equipped us with the skills and mindset necessary to engage effectively with stakeholders, contributing to our growth, influence, and overall impact. At national level, we have become a member of Civil Society Network on Climate Change (CISONECC), Early Childhood Development (ECD) Coalition, Civil Society Nutrition Alliance (CSONA) and other. Through this, CSONA and ECD Alliance have given us funding to implement programmes for five years, effective 2023. This is World Bank funding.

"At district level, we helped revamp the WASH Network. This has enabled us gain more knowledge in this area and we have developed a successful proposal on Adolescent Menstrual Hygiene Management. Our proposal has won the heart of the Canadian based Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technologies. We will roll-out the project this year." - **Russel, BOHF Executive Director**

Humanitarian Programming

The project has elevated BOHF's humanitarian programming to new heights. BOHF has championed better coordination among humanitarian actors at district level, unlocking a synergy that is amplifying the effectiveness of humanitarian efforts. This coordination has reduced duplication of efforts and enhanced knowledge sharing. As result, interventions are more focused, timely, and targeted, ensuring that the needs of the community are met with precision.

BOHF has also transferred the knowledge it has gained from the Localisation Pilot Project on preventing, and responding to disasters to community structures. This empowerment has led to the emergence of resilient community structures capable of not only responding to immediate challenges but also envisioning and steering their own long-term development.

"Humanitarian programming was never our area of strength. But now we have become champions. At district level we have influenced and supported the revamping of the District Civil Protection Committee. We now talk to one another at district level and we have reduced duplication efforts. At community level, structures are able to conduct assessments and they are now first to respond." - **Pemphero, BOHF Projects Coordinator**

Inclusivity and Diversity



Kelvin (right) and his sister now attend school with relative ease



Kelvin and sister captured in First Capital Bank bus at his school

Inclusion and diversity capacity building components of the Localisation Pilot Project have equipped BOHF with skills and knowledge to engage **ALL** community members, ensuring that marginalized voices are heard and respected. BOHF has developed interventions sensitive to the unique needs of community members, leading to more effective and relevant humanitarian responses.

During BOHF's engagement with children with disabilities, twelve-year old Kelvin shared challenges he faces in accessing information, services and physical spaces.

BOHF linked Kelvin to service providers who gave him and his sister wheelchairs enabling them to access schools, promoting their right to education and allowing them to participate in daily activities and to play.

This story attracted the attention of one of Malawi leading news outlets, ZODIAK. Read how the media house captured the story [HERE](#).

The publication of the story, moved one of Malawi's leading Banks (First Capital Bank) to offer Kelvin and his sister scholarships to one of the best schools in their area. The bank has committed to support the siblings with their education all the way to tertiary level.

Equally moved by the story, a supporter's wing for one of the Malawi's leading football clubs (Nyasa Big Bullets, Lilongwe female supporters) is constructing a better house for Kelvin and family, having noted that Kelvin supports the team.

Opportunities and Lessons

The Localisation Pilot Project has presented a significant opportunity for strengthening child participation in emergency prevention, preparedness, response and recovery efforts. By placing decision-making and action closer to the affected communities, including children, localization has not only enhanced effectiveness of response efforts but also promoted a culture of resilience, preparedness, and collaboration that will benefit societies in the long term. Children are not just recipients of assistance; they are active partners in building safer and more resilient communities.