

Land labour and water:

**Irrigation development and the
meaning of community in southern
Malawi**

Two well-developed perspectives:

1. 'Communities' (wherever they are) internally differentiated and contested. About asserting belonging, boundary creation and differentiation. They may reflect places, but also interests

(too many authors to cite, mostly from anthropology/sociology).

2. 'Communities' are proxies for 'the people'. They probably intersect with place, but they might not. This doesn't usually need to be specified

(many policy makers in many contexts over many years).



This paper:

- The second perspective persists, despite more than 50 years of the first –How? Why? Why does it matter?
- Myth-making: ‘discourse coalitions’ linked to politics and power. The compartmentalisation of intervention also significant.
- Pressures to create formalised institutions are problematic
- It matters: access to land, labour and water, issues of agency. The case of Malawi and Muona scheme

Malawi and Irrigation

- Colonial and donor-supported irrigation schemes – aspirations and abandonment
- Irrigation fits narratives of climate-resilience, need for economic growth and increased productivity.
- Recent revivals with IFI support: Green Belt Initiative; Shire Valley Irrigation Project (proposed); IRLADP, based on principals of IMT – and community participation



National irrigation policy and development strategy (2000):

- *“Informal and formal group formation will be an integral part of ensuring community involvement in the schemes and the sustainability of interventions.... Water Users Associations (WUAs) will be the main focus of attention with guidance and training provided including the role and operating procedures of an association, structure and responsibilities of farmer organizations officers, procedures for their election, internal rules and regulations and the rights and obligations of the members.”*

The IRLAD Project



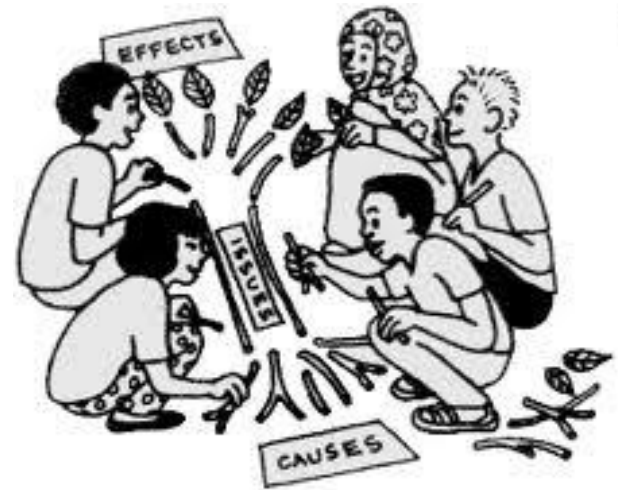
2006-2015. World Bank/IFAD - \$65m +.. ‘farmer driven and bottom up’

Focus: (includes)

- Irrigation rehabilitation and development, scaled up to 28 districts
- ‘Institutional development and community mobilisation’

Community participation: the ideal

- *Prior to commencement or rehabilitation works, communities should be made aware of the objectives of the rehabilitation works and the subsequent handover;*
- *The PRA process should ensure that communities are ready to take part in decision making and provision of labour as their input to the rehabilitation works;*
- *Communities should help to identify and prioritize rehabilitation works. This would help to address problems as identified by communities themselves in which case it would be easier for them to take part in renovations (WB/GOM 2009: ix)*



- *Farmer's participation at all stages is mandatory for the development and the rehabilitation of all the schemes concerned by the IRLAD. More, the formation and the capacity building of beneficiary's organizations such as WUAs are essential elements to prepare the beneficiaries for sustainability of the management of operation and maintenance of the schemes.*
- *'The output of the PRA process will be an individual village action plan summarizing the key issues that each community wishes to address' (World Bank 2005: 83).*



Community as inadequate/ a barrier

Members of the community or beneficially communities should be allowed to make decisions affecting their schemes. However, where communities lack leadership, officials should be ready to intervene....

Stewardship of irrigation schemes or other resources based on ancestry and concepts of indigenous ownership may be a hindrance to development in a population that is increasingly mobile and therefore should be discouraged at all cost (WB/GOM 2009: x)

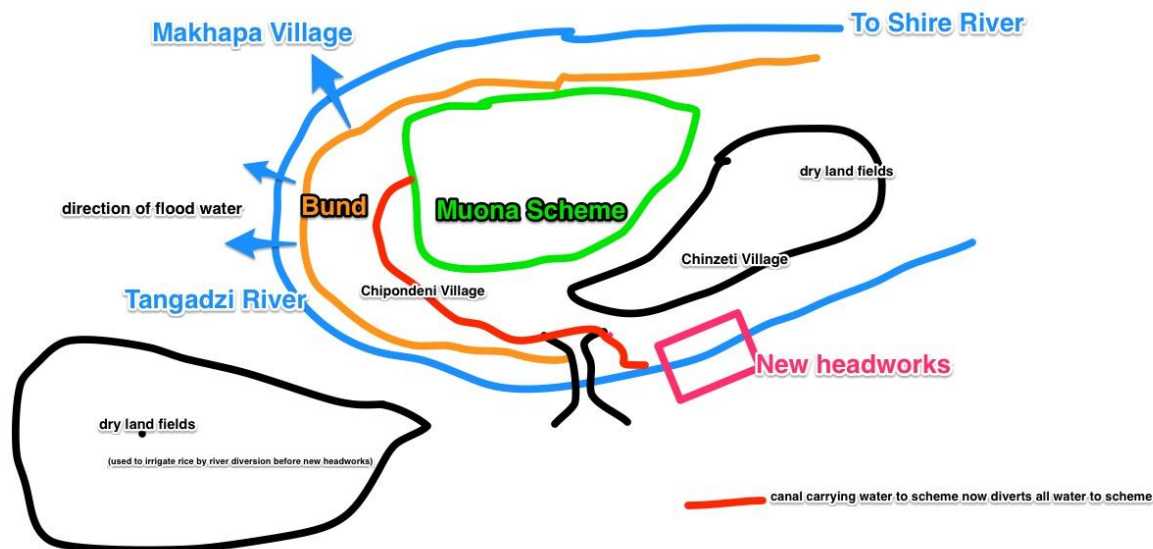
Participatory failures?

Beneficiaries of the irrigation schemes have formed Water User Associations (WUAs), which are meant to take over the operations and management of irrigation schemes after the project. There is however slow incorporation of the WUAs, which limits the effectiveness of the project's capacity building, and delays the formal transfer of management responsibilities from the government to the WUAs. (World Bank website)

Participatory failures are about failures to
'understand'

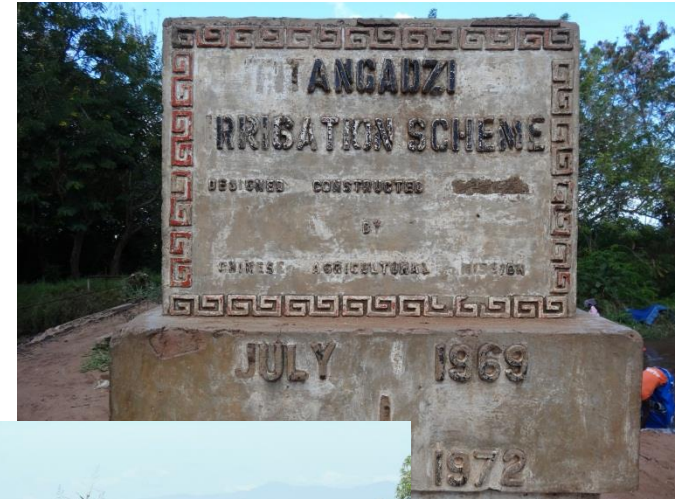
Muona: the 'community'?

- Muona formal institutions – the WUA and its committees
- 45 villages catchment
- 'Village' institutions: village heads, village development committee, etc



LAND, LABOUR AND WATER

- Land: histories of resettlement with ethnic underpinnings.
- Labour: land 'owners' become labourers; irrigated and dryland allocations and their gendered dynamics
- Water: parallel systems and competing jurisdictions; unequal access 'inside and outside' with formalisation and payment/commodification



Communities of place and communities of interest collide











“The floods came at night while we were all sleeping. I felt my blankets getting soaked and I jumped up, put some clothes on and got everyone up. We spent the rest of the night outside, we were afraid of the house collapsing on us while we slept”.

Issues of influence and responsibility

- Makhapa: *We told them that this would happen, that we would suffer more when the flood season started. They told us they had to protect their scheme*
- The WUA: *'those people, they wanted a war'*
- IRLADP in Blantyre: *'there was an appraisal. It's with the irrigation department'*
- Irrigation department: *'those people should move'*

Conclusions

- Donor policy in support of participatory rhetoric perpetuates inaccurate narratives of community – compartmentalisation contributes to this
- Communities only partially equate with place
- Consolidation of formal/informal dichotomy also consolidates power.
- Becomes significant when resources become scarce or commodified
- Varied ability to influence what happens is obscured