



Impacts of Cyclone Ana on Livelihoods and Agricultural Systems: Experiences and Voices from Chikwawa and Nsanje Districts

Background

- Objective - brief the media on the effects of Cyclone Ana on livelihoods and agricultural systems in the two Shire Valley districts, with particular emphasis on areas where further interventions are needed.
- While recovering from Covid-19, Malawi has faced back-to-back cyclones this year, Ana and Gombe.
- MwAPATA Institute and PolSAT undertook a rapid assessment through key informant interviews and focus group discussions to understand how the Cyclone affected households in Chikwawa and Nsanje districts.
- Cyclone Ana resulted in some of the most intense floods that Malawi has ever experienced since the 1980s.

Effects of Cyclone Ana on Livelihoods and Agricultural Systems

- i) Food stocks and nutrition - floods started the night of January 24th and continued to January 25th. The victims were caught unawares and could not rescue any of their food stocks because the water levels were very high and fierce. If anything, flood survivors only managed to rescue their own lives.

A family in Chikwawa District reported having 12 bags of maize destroyed by the floods.

The loss of food has resulted in serious food insecurity and will likely lead to malnutrition particularly among children.

- ii) Crop production - A total of 42,276.7 hectares of various crops were affected in Chikwawa District.

In Nsanje, the floods also affected 12,981 hectares of land under crop production.

The floods came when most of the crops were in vegetative stage, and most farmers had already applied fertilizers. The crops were silted, washed away, submerged, or lodged by the floods.

Thus, largely maize and cotton significantly affected. As we have already heard from the first round of the agriculture survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture maize production is expected to be lower than average this year, in part due to late rains and flooding in the South.

3.9 million metric tons of maize will be produced in the 2022/2023 growing season, a decrease from 4.4 million metric tons realized last year.

- iii) Livestock - it is estimated that over 4,000 cattle were affected in Nsanje District.

Some households have resorted to distress selling of their livestock for survival and for fear of theft while the owners are in the camps.

- iv) Aquaculture - the flood affected several fishponds and aquaculture facilities in Chikwawa and Nsanje Districts.

In Chikwawa, a total of 92 ponds were reported to have been affected by the floods.

Most ponds suffered damage on the inlet and outlet, and most fish were swept away by the flood.

Interviews with the Extension Officer for Chikwawa indicated that the flooded water silted and washed away many fishes.

- v) Irrigation infrastructure - the flood has a severe impact on irrigation infrastructure in the two districts.

The floods resulted in the siltation of dams, destruction of irrigation canals, and washing away of delivery pipes.

Our assessment team visited one solar-powered irrigation scheme in Nsanje and noted that some solar panels were

either washed away by the floods or covered by muddy waters.

The flood damaged the Shire Valley Transformation Project intake dam and a stretch of 750m of the irrigation canal.

The damaged irrigation schemes would need financial resources to be rehabilitated and, in some cases, redesigned.

- vi) Road infrastructure - the floods cut off several points along the M1 Road in Nsanje and Chikwawa.

Besides the main roads, access roads were heavily affected by the flood.

This led to a negative effect on transport, logistics, and service provision.

- vii) Housing and household assets - Interviews with locals in the flooded areas indicate that flooding water rose to about 1.6m from the ground.

Most houses collapsed in the heavy flooded water, especially those not built with cement.

Some households lost virtually all household assets, particularly productive assets, including hoes, treadle pumps, panga knives, knapsack sprayers, axes, mattresses, bicycles, chairs, tables, livestock and others were lost to the flood.

In fact, our team came across a story of a woman from Lukina Village in Chikwawa, who died as she was trying to rescue her knapsack sprayer. May her soul rest in peace.

Areas where further interventions are needed

We have put forward short, medium and long-term recommendations for consideration.

Short-term recommendations

- There is need for swift support with agricultural production inputs, including seeds, pesticides, and livestock.

Production support is urgently needed to take advantage of the dimba season and alluvial deposits from the floods.

This type of support is important because it will lessen the burden on humanitarian relief once households start harvesting their crops.

Medium-term recommendations

- There is a need to rehabilitate and strengthen infrastructure, including feeder roads, main roads, bridges, irrigation schemes, schools, and others destroyed or shaken by the floods.

Road networks are particularly important to reconnect affected households to their economic livelihoods including markets and medical facilities.

Long-term recommendations

- With climate change, the occurrence, frequency and severity of floods in Chikwawa and Nsanje is likely to continue.
- There is, therefore, need to implement a permanent resettlement scheme for households in Chikwawa and Nsanje districts, especially in flood-prone areas.
- The relocated households should have the opportunity to maintain their low-lying lands for agricultural production while residing in upper lands.

Conclusion

- Cyclone Ana disrupted livelihoods and agri-food systems, particularly human lives, household assets, production, transport, distribution, markets and preparation for consumption.
- It is important to consider various short-, medium- and long-term measures.