Karonga Community Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis

Mtafu Manda

Work Package 1: Methodology Overview

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Methodology Outline

1. **Introduction**

Malawi has only about 20% of the national population living in settlements defined as urban. As a country reliant on farming (80% of national revenues), development policy has consistently been rural oriented and attempts have been made to contain urban development[1] due to urban challenges such as increasing informality. Malawi remains one of the most rapidly urbanising nations. Urban growth rates of above 4% have been recorded since the 1980s. Some of the highest growth rates are recorded in small cities such as Karonga. Although the World Bank[2] has reservations on the rapid growth figure, projections show that the national urban population will rise to about 50 per cent by 2050.[3]

With a general 'anti-urban' policy, little attention has been paid to the governance[4] and development of urban areas in Malawi. Ironically, informality is widespread with nearly 60% of the urban population living in informal settlements. Inappropriate or ineffective governance structures have also created challenges for disaster risk reduction initiatives in urban settlements. The dissolution of urban councils in 2009 resulted in urban settlements being governed on the basis of customary rural systems.

Malawi experiences several natural hazards with severe impacts on the economy and livelihoods. Hazards such as floods, strong winds, droughts and earthquakes in the case of Karonga frequently occur and are in many cases predicted. However, the underlying risk driving factors, the level of community knowledge and capacity of local communities and local governments to respond are not well understood. In addition, despite a growing trend of urban disasters, the focus of interventions remains rural. For example, though five urban centres (Karonga, Blantyre, Zomba, Mzuzu and Lilongwe) face various risks categorised from medium to very high,[5] the 2015 Disaster Risk Management Policy[6], only mentions urban hazards and risk reduction in passing. Consequently, disaster analyses and interventions also emphasise extensive physical hazards and neglect everyday risks.[7] How to adequately address the natural and everyday disaster risk in urban contexts is a major concern. An understanding of the nature and impacts of these risks is required both to create knowledge and capacity for better response.

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[1] Kalipeni, E (2012). Contained urban growth in post independence Malawi,' East African Geographical Review, 19:2, 49-66

[2] World Bank (2016). Malawi Urbanisation Review, Washington DC

[3] UN Habitat. (2010). Malawi Housing Sector Profile, Nairobi

[4] Chasukwa, M; Chiweza, A.L and Chikapa-Jamali, M (2013). 'Public Participation in Local Councils in Malawi in the Absence of Local Elected Representatives- Political Eliticism or Pluralism?' published online *Journal of Asian and African Studies*

[5] Malawi Flood Vulnerability Assessment Report, 2015

[6] DRM Policy launched on 21st March, 2015

[7]Satterthwaite et al, 2016)

The Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge Programme created an opportunity to undertake research to assess the underlying factors and impacts of the hazards and risks in Karonga Town, Malawi. Major focus is on understanding the capacity of local communities and local government to respond to key hazards and risks. The knowledge generated contributes to mainstreaming risk reduction in urban planning and development. From the view point that vulnerability is the main cause of disaster,[8] preventing vulnerability through knowledge and capacity building is a major step towards reducing the risk of disasters.

2. Research Aim / Questions

The aim of this study is to understand the scale and nature of risks in Karonga Town and to relate these risks to local knowledge, perceptions and capacity and how these risks impact livelihoods and health. The specific objectives of the study are:

i.   To investigate the main risks (nature, scale)
ii.   To assess how the risks are distributed spatially and over time
iii. To assess the key driving factors for these risks
iv.   To analyse community perceptions and level of knowledge regarding risks
v.   To investigate the cumulative impacts and losses related to health and livelihoods from past risks
vi.   To examine the capacity of households and community actors and local government to respond to and manage risks and impacts

3. Overview/Summary of methods

To achieve our goal of knowledge generation and building capacity, two community participatory methods were adopted. These methods were supported by household surveys, document reviews, in-depth interviews and observations. The methods seek to:
- Build local community and local government capacity
- Create knowledge and awareness useful for building a culture of safety
- Learn with and from the community
- Empower the local community with knowledge to use to demand and advocate for services
- Stakeholder engagement and buy-in to community priorities

a. Methods description

(i) Urban Vulnerability Capacity and Loss Assessment (*UVCLA)*
The UVCLA is a four step tool that includes (a) situation analysis to identify key hazards through focus group discussions, historical timelines, transect walks and seasonal calendars (b) vulnerability analysis using problem tree as a tool, (c) capacity analysis and (d) formulating solutions. These steps can be locally or externally supported. The approach adapts methodologies developed by Oxfam[9] and Red Cross[10] which has been implemented predominantly in rural areas. Adapting these methods for research in urban areas where the population is highly diverse and with a large informal

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[8] *See UNISDR. (2009). Terminology of Disaster Risk Reduction , Geneva*

[9] Oxfam, (2012). Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis (42 pages)

[10] International Federation of the Red Cross (2006). What is VCA? An Introduction to Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment, Geneva

population, offered a test of the methodology worth exploring. The principles on hearing local voices[11] informed our work . As a bottom up method, the UVCLA not only assists in data collection, but also builds community capacity to understand vulnerability and to respond to hazard and disaster risks. Creating awareness and understanding about risks and/or underlying factors is crucial in reducing vulnerability[12]. Focusing on community level engagement is important because it is at 'the community level that disasters are felt and, frequently, it is also where risk reduction steps can make the biggest difference.'[13]

(ii) Action at the Frontline (AFL) methodology

The AFL was developed by GNDR[14] as a tool for data collection, action planning and reflection in relation to managing everyday risks. It is a three stage process: (a) resilience profiling to strengthen local capacity, (b) collaboration, participation and shared action and learning, and depends largely on resources secured locally, (c) knowledge sharing to create political space for advocacy. The process is led by community members but facilitated by experts. AFL can be applied as a basis for establishing or enhancing existing partnership between a civil society organization or local government and a community. AFL seeks to address everyday risks and disasters which are known to be the major causes of losses faced by the communities.

b. Data collection – technical aspects, sampling techniques etc

Collecting data using UVCLA
To collect data in an urban set up without any recognized governance structures required us to establish community groups. The community groups were then trained in the UVCLA approach. To facilitate the exercise, a group of 8 assistants two from each community were recruited. We called the group research counterparts. Their main role was to interface between our team and community leaders and committees. To avoid complications, we adopted existing village (customary) level structures and renamed them neighbourhood (neutral/urban) committees. Over 40 VCPCs were amalgamated into 4 neighborhood level committees that coincided with a higher level chief's position called group village head (GVH). The neighbourhood committees became the entry point and focus of data collection. They were also the target of capacity building. This was important because a 2015 DRM Policy had already incorporated the structure to form part of decentralized policy implementation framework. The establishment of the committees was therefore a contribution to institutional capacity at local government level. The actual data collection involved separate groups of (minimum 5) women, men and youth deliberating (and choosing 10) everyday risks guided by a data collection sheet. The results of timelines, problem trees, and calendars from focused groups were merged into community priorities and can be a basis for demands and advocacy to duty bearers.

Data Collection using AFL

The process involves firstly organising the community, identifying committed participants and training. A minimum of 22 purposively selected participants is required for effective discussion. The

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[11] Moser C and Stein A. (2011). Implementing urban participatory climate change adaptation appraisals: a methodological guideline. *Environment and Urbanization* 23: 463-485.

[12] Gautam, D (2009). Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction-Good Practices (23 pages)

[13] International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRCRC): Law and disaster risk reduction at the community level- Background report, Geneva, Switzerland 28 November – 1 December 2011

[14] http://gndr.org/programmes/action-at-the-frontline.html

participants included CSO (3), government (3) and the community (16). The persons from outside the community are required to listen to community ideas. The training is undertaken to reach agreement on key terms used in DRM. The training is followed by risk profiling exercises during which the community participants identify everyday risks/threats, consequences/impacts, actions and barriers. The risk profile is based on individual interviews in which one is asked to identify 5 key everyday risks, impacts, action, and barriers. The risk profile findings are then analysed and charts produced to show *visually* the findings to the community. These findings are then discussed by the community to generate priorities for action planning and consider any barriers to suggested actions. A local action that has been selected by the community as the most feasible and cost effective can then be implemented. The final part is community reflection on the process.

c. Any biases and limitations

The Karonga town boundary is blurred and DRM structures are named after rural governance structures (village civil protection committees). To introduce urban Neighbourhood DRM Committees in places where VCPC were existent was akin to replacing rather than merely renaming the structures. The government emphatically prohibits any other structures apart from VCPC.[15]

d. Statement of how gender considerations are included

A deliberate attempt was made to ensure gender balance. The composition of research counterparts is 50:50. Participation of community members in UVCLA and AFL by design requires equal men and women. For example, AFL specifies that community participants are youth (2 male/2 female), adults (5 male/5 female and elderly) (1male/1 female).

4. Data analysis – approach and techniques

Data for both UVCLA and AFL is analysed as it is collected. After discussions/interviews, the findings are tabulated and charts generated in excel software. The results are bases for the project planning (for CSO and government) and demands for services (for community).

5. Impact plans

Results are disseminated through community workshops, district executive committee meetings, regional and national workshops. Media briefings were regularly organised both on the process and findings.

6. **Lessons learnt** – this could include a list of points on refinements needed, opportunities and challenges to implementation (including beyond Karonga and particular reference to application in an urban context)

   a. Using community participatory tools enables everyday risks to come out during analysis
   b. The list of risks is much longer when communities are given the opportunity for direct engagement
   c. Using participatory tools in urban is more challenging than in rural context
   d. Participatory tools require a research team committed to facilitate rather than supervise.
   e. Community ownership of the process is central.

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[15] DoDMA (2015). National Disaster Recovery Framework

  f. Engaging with community leaders to facilitate entry into communities and develop relationships is much more effective than through government officials

Though local communities have a long list of priorities, in practice external support is needed for their implementation as the local government lacks resources