

ECRP Insights

Bulletin, June 2015



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ECRP

DISCOVER



A challenging time



Five of ECRP-Christian Aid's seven target districts were heavily affected by floods from January onwards. Lives were lost and damage was caused to houses and crops.

This disaster has certainly had an impact on the work of the programme. But it has also demonstrated how ECRP has strengthened the resilience of communities, how village

civil protection committees and early warning systems work in practice and, in the aftermath, how village savings and loans (VSL) groups enable people to take out small loans to buy essentials to get them on the road to recovery.

The floods have also provided an opportunity to see what we can improve and how we can work to minimise further the impact of future shocks on communities. We continue to learn from our experiences.

We would like to thank everyone involved in the relief and recovery effort after the floods. Cooperation and coordination are so important at this challenging time.

Sabine Joukes
ECRP-Christian Aid, Chief of Party

Emergency response



Climate change and variable weather patterns remains one of major challenges of our time.

DISCOVER supports rural poor communities that are vulnerable to a changing climate and assists them to develop a strong asset base to increase their resilience.

During the recent floods, more than 100,000 people were affected across all DISCOVER districts. We were flexible in our switch from a resilience building programme to an emergency response programme to avert loss and damage to life and property.

The programme provided 600 litres of fuel to evacuate families that were trapped by flood waters in Nsanje district. This support was valuable for the government's search and rescue activities.

DISCOVER also provided 40 tonnes of food to evacuation camps, followed by 8,000 cook stoves, solar lights and firewood. Our recovery programme reached more than 30,000 families in, and far beyond, DISCOVER areas.

Senard Mwale
DISCOVER, Chief of Party

About ECRP and DISCOVER

Christian Aid and Concern Universal are each leading a consortium for the Enhancing Community Resilience Programme (ECRP) – a five-year initiative to improve food security, reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience. It has a direct reach of 600,000 people, and in total impacts up to 1.6 million people in 11 districts of Malawi prone to natural disasters and climatic hazards.

The programmes, known respectively as ECRP-Christian Aid and ECRP-DISCOVER (Developing Innovative Solutions with Communities to Overcome Vulnerability through Enhanced Resilience) will run



A village savings and loans project.

until 2016. They work with local partners to deliver a range of interventions. These include early warning systems and disaster risk management, village savings and loans (VSL) groups, conservation agriculture, small-scale irrigation, post-harvest management, agro-forestry, livestock, seed banks, and low-carbon technologies such as fuel-efficient cookstoves and solar lights.

The programme is funded by UK aid from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), Irish Aid and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, totalling more than £19m over five years.

The goal of the programmes is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and increase the resilience of vulnerable communities. This will enable households to build livelihoods that are sustainable and profitable, incorporating natural resource management and risk reduction, increasing adaptive capacity and enabling people to have a voice in decisions that affect them.

National Disaster Risk Policy approved

The recent disasters affecting 15 districts have contributed to the Malawi Government fast-tracking the approval of its National Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Policy.

ECRP partner the Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) has continuously lobbied for a policy, which has been in draft form since 2010. Specifically CEPA has been working closely with the Department of Disaster Risk Management Affairs (DoDMA) to push for its development and approval. Until now, the country has been relying on the 1981 Disaster Preparedness and Relief Act, among other policies.

‘This is a major step forward – districts and national government are realising how important it is to have these plans and fund them’

CEPA has carried out various advocacy activities to highlight the need for the policy. These include an analytical study on national and international policy instruments on DRM, annual assessments on the status of policy implementation for enhancing community resilience in Malawi, reviews of key policies and legislation towards policy frameworks for climate change adaptation and DRM in Malawi and national budget monitoring and panel discussions on climate change and DRM

‘We have been looking forward to the

approval of this policy considering that disasters in the country are becoming persistent, affecting assets and lives,’ says CEPA’s Dorothy Tembo. ‘Most of these disasters are intense rainfall, strong winds, floods, droughts and prolonged dry spells.’

ECRP-Christian Aid Chief of Party Sabine Joukes added in the programme’s latest quarterly report: ‘This will provide a legal framework for ensuring adequate budgetary support to DRM and devolution of functions and funding from national to community level and making the policy effective for implementation.’

ECRP consortia took part in a steering committee meeting where updates on the DRM support programme and early warning systems were provided. During the same session, plans for 2015 were also shared, with DoDMA saying that districts will start to have their own funding for DRM in future budgets.

DoDMA said the DRM bill would be presented in the next parliament sitting around May or June 2015. Civil society organisations have called upon the government to translate its provisions into practice and also committed to support government in DRM.

As the government responded to the recent floods, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mining contacted CEPA to get copies of district contingency plans developed under ECRP, to inform the national DRM plans.

This is seen as a major step forward, as since the floods – one of the worst disasters in the recent history of Malawi – districts and national government are realising how important it is to have these plans and fund them.

Success is sweeter than honey

While many people in Salima district are struggling to source income, communities from Saopampeni and Chilenga in Mwanza have a different story. It is a story of bees and honey, and generating income by making the most of sustainable natural resources.

‘The cooperative has made an annual profit of MK 860,030 in 2014/2015 year and the projected profit for 2015/2016 is MK 3m. This shows that the cooperative is growing stronger financially,’ says Manuel Thokozani, secretary of the Chilwa cooperative that runs the honey project.

‘The first year we experienced losses but that did not discourage us because we knew profits are yet to be realised,’ adds cooperative chairman Maganizo Mayenje.

The income each member gains has improved the livelihoods of many households, including two child-headed households and 12 female-headed households.



People in Salima are generating income through a sustainable natural resource: honey.

CEPA hosts TV debate

ECRP partner CEPA (Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy) hosted a television debate with experts and the media to mark World Meteorological Day on 23 March, which this year focused on

the theme *Climate Information for Climate Action*.

The discussions, which aired on MBC-TVM, brought recommendations to increase

awareness and understanding of climate information systems in Malawi and assess the synergies between the Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services and disaster risk management.

Floods put ECRP to t

Heavy rainfall in January caused massive flooding in southern Malawi, affecting many ECRP-Christian Aid and DISCOVER districts.

Nsanje and Chikwawa were badly affected, while other areas experienced flash floods and crop damage. Programme activities were put on hold in the worst hit areas, as attention switched to the flood response. Some programme funds were redirected to support the relief efforts with food and other items such as kitchen kits, solar lights and cookstoves.

While ECRP areas were severely impacted by the floods – Mlolo in Nsanje, for example, remained flooded for a long time and all community members were relocated to camps – positive stories emerged of how ECRP has played a role in helping communities better prepare and recover.

‘When the water came we rushed to evacuate people – going from house to house to tell people. This was something we were trained to do’

Village civil protection committees (VCPCs) and advanced weather forecasts played an important role in warning communities that heavy rains and floods were on the way, preventing greater loss of life.

‘I sent the message to all civil protection committees in Chikweo traditional authority to warn them on the consequences of the heavy rains the area was receiving,’ says area civil protection committee chair George Mkwaila, from Machinga. ‘No sooner, I started receiving reports of collapsing houses from different villages.’



Modesta Masawutso was trained in first aid as part of the ECRP programme. During the floods she resuscitated a woman pulled from a collapsed house.



Chief Luka Ndendende (centre) and the Katute village civil protection committee help the community prepare for and respond to disasters.

Chief Luka Ndendende says the VCPC he leads in Katute village, Mulanje, an ECRP-Christian Aid area, had tried to make people aware of climate change.

‘When there are disasters, we help the villagers respond. With the heavy rains and winds, we went out in the middle of the night and helped them regroup on higher land.’

Modesta Masawutso, another member of Katute VCPC, was trained in first aid as part of the ECRP programme. During the floods, she resuscitated a woman pulled from a house that had collapsed.

‘I was not afraid. I was confident I could help the person,’ Modesta says. ‘When the water came we rushed to evacuate people – going from house to house to tell people. This was something we were trained to do. The water came up very close to the village.’

VCPCs in DISCOVER areas have also been supported to develop hazard maps which proved vital during the floods.

‘DISCOVER-trained VCPCs managed to warn their

he test

In January 2015, southern Malawi was hit by devastating floods, the worst in decades. Almost 200 people died, homes were destroyed, villages submerged and precious crops washed away.



Janet Asuwema, 16, (left) and Fairure Nkhoma, 15, walk along the Ruo River, which burst its banks during the floods. 'This used to be a maize field,' says Janet. 'The river used to be just by those trees but now it has divided itself into four parts.'

fellow community members to seek shelter based on their village contingency plans and evacuation drills,' says DISCOVER's Memory Tchale. 'The most important element is having the knowledge of what to do and when.'

Fisherman Master Malizeni's boat and nets were washed away, as well as his fields of maize, cotton, and millet. But with his wife and six children he made it to a camp for flood

survivors, where they received essential items and food through DISCOVER.

Sheffi Nakasongole, 18, lost both his parents and three brothers and sisters in the floods. When the water came he was at the mill having the family's maize ground down into flour. He managed to find his brother Isaac (13) and sister Nina (12) and heard that his parents were being rescued on

another boat with his other three siblings. Only later did he find out that boat had capsized and all passengers had drowned.

Now he is looking after his brother and sister. In the camp, they stayed in one of the tents provided by DISCOVER partner GOAL Malawi, and received food from DISCOVER distributions, but he doesn't know how he will provide for them when they get home.

Buleki, a 65-year-old widower from Chipolonga village, saw his house collapse in the floods but knowledge gained through ECRP-Christian Aid enabled him to find safety and warn others of the coming floods.

'They made it to a camp for flood survivors, where they received essential items and food through DISCOVER'

'I am now an experienced man with the capacity that ECRP has built in me,' he says. 'I managed to move all my belongings (yields from the previous growing season and valuables) to the chief's house, which was solid.'

Village savings and loans (VSL) groups established through the two programmes have also enabled people to pay for relief items for their families or essentials to help them replant crops.

'It has helped. After the coming of ECRP they have been able to harvest more. They have been able to sell some of that off and put back into the VSL,' Chief Ndendende adds. 'When the floods happened, they have been able to go back to the VSL and borrow money to bounce back.'



Sophie Mphehuka lost her crops in the floods. 'The water washed away everything a human needs to survive,' she says.



Simple, early warning systems such as a river gauge saved lives when the floods came.

Ordeals for Nsanje flood victims



People from Mlolo had to run for their lives, using canoes to reach drier land in Mbenje.

Nsanje – a district where both DISCOVER and ECRP-Christian Aid work – often faces floods and droughts, but this year has been the worst in recent times.

More than 100 people died, and more than 50,000 people lost their homes and property as the district was caught off guard without sufficient resources to respond to such an unprecedented disaster.

At midnight on 12 January, people from Mlolo were trapped by the raging Shire River, which completely submerged their houses within two hours. Their only option was to run for their lives, using canoes to reach drier land in Mbenje.

But people in Mbenje were also looking to escape after the swelling Lalanje River had also wreaked havoc in many villages in the area, causing more than 250 houses to collapse.

Many displaced people found shelter in Magoti Primary School, but conditions were not ideal. People of all ages, men and women, were put in one classroom while the school authorities did not want the evacuees to be there and frequently told them to seek refuge elsewhere.

‘This is not good and we cannot continue to live in the same class with men and children because it is a taboo and we need our privacy as women’, one evacuee said.

With funding from DFID, and through its partner GOAL Malawi, DISCOVER provided five marquees to the Area Civil Protection Committees in Mbenje and Chimombo, each able to hold up to 150 people.

All the displaced people were moved from the classrooms to the marquees, enabling pupils to study again, and giving the evacuees some dignity and room to sleep.



A woman takes refuge in a school.

Hope for Selina amid the ruins and floods

by Lusungu Chinombo, Emmanuel International

When Selina Yakobe saw her home collapse in front of her eyes and her maize field submerged in flood waters, her first thought was that life, as she knew it, was over.

‘It was as if some family member had died,’ Selina, from Machinga district, says. ‘I cried.’

But as time went on, little by little, Selina (pictured below) realised these were shocks that perhaps she could handle after all, thanks to the resilience she had built through the ECRP-Christian Aid programme and its disaster recovery initiatives. She saw light at the end of the tunnel.



With money she had saved through the village savings and loans group, she was able to rebuild her house.

Little could be salvaged from her flooded fields, but she was told by the village civil protection committee that she would benefit from the Early Recovery Programme, supported by UK aid, which was quickly rolled out in the wake of the disaster. She received sweet potato vines and cow peas through ECRP.

‘This is not recovery, my life has been upgraded. I shall never rely on handouts anymore, but rather on the resilience that the ECRP project has built in me.’

Assets in a pen



Keeping goats has made a huge difference to Yotam's life – and shows how livestock provided through the DISCOVER programme can boost livelihoods in vulnerable communities.

'Manure from the goats helps to boost his crop yields, reducing the need to buy fertiliser'

The goats have helped Yotam (pictured above) during tough times and emergencies. He sold two goats to pay school fees for his two children, and another two to help meet the basic needs of his family. 'Without them I would have had to sell a piece of the land,' he says.

Manure from the goats helps to boost his crop yields, reducing the need to buy fertiliser. He also uses his goats as collateral to get loans from banks and fellow villagers.

They are easy to look after too. 'The only hard job is the construction of the housing. After that, I only have to tie the goat where there is grass for them to graze. From there I am free to do other things,' Yotam says.

6,000 cookstoves in just two weeks

Almost 6,000 fuel-efficient cookstoves were produced in just two weeks after an ECRP initiative supported village-based trainers to act as 'multipliers', training others to produce greater numbers of stoves for communities.

There are fewer challenges with fixed cookstoves than chitetedzo cookstoves, as they can be built with locally available materials and only take a few hours to make. After drying for a week, they can be used straight away, while they are also affordable for most households.

ECRP-Christian Aid will continue promoting both types of stoves, but is expecting an increased uptake on fixed stoves in future.

Meanwhile, within DISCOVER programme communities, the production of cookstoves is improving

the livelihoods of community members who had previously depended solely on subsistence farming.

Adidya Mnosi, 62, from Mmanga village, has produced more than 300 stoves, generating an income of approximately MK 150,000 to support her family.

'My life has changed since I started participating in stove production,' she says. 'The money I generate from this activity helps a lot in daily upkeep. Furthermore, I have managed to build a bigger brick-fired house in which am living now.'

Adidya is now looking forward to completing the house with iron sheet roofing, which she hopes to do by the end of the year.

Farmers take the lead on new techniques

Through ECRP, communities are harnessing their own expertise to help one another.

'Lead farmers' are selected by their villages to receive training in climate-smart agriculture techniques such as conservation agriculture and agro-forestry, which they demonstrate and pass on to the wider community.

Philip Oneka, a lead farmer in Mbelemunu village, near Mulanje, goes to monthly trainings organised by ECRP partner CARD and attended by more than 20 other lead farmers – men and women – from the area. He also went on a recent exchange visit to Chikwawa district.

Philip has taught other villagers about mulching, planting in pits and in fours, and methods of soil cultivation that require no tilling. 'I have a small piece of land where I can teach some new techniques.'

Adam Bakari, also a lead farmer from Mulanje district, said: 'I teach my fellow farmers conservation agriculture techniques. This includes



Lead farmer Anne Jackson says ECRP is helping communities deal with climate change.

making fertiliser and how to adapt to changes in the climate.

'Conservation agriculture is a new way of farming which has helped me a lot. If everyone did it, they would harvest a lot more too.'

Anne Jackson, a lead farmer from Nantusi, Chikwawa district, added: 'We used to plant a large area and our crop yield was low. We now plant a much smaller area but the crop yield is greater.'

'People listen to me. ECRP has shown us new ways of working which are helping us deal with climate change.'



Halima Ngala is the community HAP representative for Kutewetsa. Her role is to highlight which ECRP activities are working well and which need improvement.

Communities ask the tough questions

Halima Ngala helps ensure that ECRP-Christian Aid is keeping its promises to communities and delivering work to the highest standards.

As the community HAP (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership) representative for Kutewetsa village, in Chimwala GVH, Halima's role is to highlight which ECRP-Christian Aid activities are working well and helping communities, as well as things the programme could be doing better.

Christian Aid is proud to be certified under the standards of HAP, a partnership of development organisations dedicated to ensuring greater accountability to the people they support, and applies its principles within the ECRP programme. HAP believes accountable organisations better meet people's needs, and reduce the possibility of mistakes, abuse and corruption.

HAP meetings are held in communities every quarter. Partners are not present but are later given opportunities to respond to the issues raised.

'The good bit is being vocal and open, you get to voice your concerns,' Halima says. 'If you want to help yourself you need to voice your concerns about what's wrong.'

Women and men, and people of all ages and professions – divided into groups where they can speak freely – take part in the meetings, and complete a scorecard exercise overseen by an independent assessor.

'The good bit is being vocal and open, you get to voice your concerns'

If scores are low in a community, solutions are suggested, and commitments are made to address challenges and key tasks, with responsibilities designated.

'It's a very good system because it keeps you on your toes and you're checked all the time. Sometimes you don't know that these things are happening,' says Chikumbutso Kilembe, ECRP-Christian Aid programme officer in Mulanje.

'They are positive if we are implementing very well, but if you're not HAP can bring up lots of issues.'



The Kaipa family – (left to right) Moses, 10, mother Janet and father Michael – show how synergy between ECRP activities can be so effective.

Model families inspire communities

Janet and Michael Kaipa are shining examples of how the ECRP programme can change lives.

The enterprising couple (pictured) from Mbelemunu village, near Mulanje, are involved in various ECRP-Christian Aid programme activities – an example of how synergy between interventions can be so effective.

Janet, 25, chairs the village savings and loans (VSL) group and has been a member for three years. She makes a good profit on the MK 1,000 she invests each week.

Janet has also borrowed MK 60,000 from the VSL to bring electricity to their home, buy school uniforms for her children and set up small businesses selling fruit and vegetables, dried fish, and second-hand clothes and other items.

‘Before I started in the VSL, I was not able to borrow for my business. Now I am able to borrow money and it has boosted business,’ Janet says.

Chimwemwe Kajombo, a programme officer for ECRP partner CARD (Churches Action in Relief and Development), explains how women had often been the first to see the benefits of VSL groups. ‘The pioneers in most of the communities were women,’ he says. ‘To have that facility in their community is very helpful.’

Michael, 28, is a lead farmer, a position he was selected for by the community. He has received training in new agricultural techniques and agro-forestry through ECRP which he passes on to other farmers. He also uses

these methods on his own crops of potatoes, tomatoes, cabbages and onions.

The family, which includes Moses (10) and Vanessa (five), is also part of ECRP’s seed multiplication programme, receiving seeds at the outset, but also committing to put seeds back into the bank. ‘Our life has improved. At first we had no money to take care of our family, now we have money,’ Janet says.

Chimwemwe adds: ‘Everyone can see how they are doing here. They are setting an example. CARD uses such families as role models.’



Janet Kaipa has set up a business selling dried fish.

Synergy so important within ECRP

Most people reached by ECRP-Christian Aid are involved in three or four of its main activities to improve food security, reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience – with some taking part in all nine.

The importance of the ‘synergy’ between different interventions is highlighted in the latest ECRP-Christian Aid quarterly report, which is submitted to donors UK aid, Irish Aid and the Norwegian Embassy.

‘It is envisaged a household will be more able to bounce back if they are involved in at least three climate smart practices or disaster risk reduction transformative strategies,’ the report states. ‘As of Year 4, Quarter 2, up to 77 per cent of beneficiaries are participating in at least three interventions – some are involved in as many as nine.

‘This is in line with the programme implementation strategy, which planned to focus on intervention synergy.



Text messages inform ECRP communities on the expected weather and help farmers know when to plant.

‘At the core of the ECRP-Christian Aid approach is the belief that for a household to be resilient to the negative impacts of climate change they need to be able to prepare for disasters and adapt.’

Every person reached is involved in at least two programme activities, as community-wide early warning systems benefit entire villages.



Households are better able to bounce back if they are involved in at least three ECRP activities.

Natural resource challenges discussed



The hearing was organised to discuss and agree solutions on climate change challenges facing Malawi.

stakeholders included members of the Parliamentary Committees for Natural Resources and Climate Change, Parliamentary Committee chairs for Legal Affairs, Public Accounts, Women's Caucus, Agriculture and Irrigation, Budget and Health, other government officials, development partners, civil society organisations and the press.

The hearing was organised to discuss and agree solutions on the challenges around natural resources, climate change and DRM facing Malawi. This included looking at how Malawi is losing 2.3 per cent of its forests every year and why the country has been experiencing different disasters affecting assets and lives without concrete solutions.

ECRP, alongside the Civil Society Network on Climate Change, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), accountable governance grant-making body Tilitonse and international development agency Oxfam, brought together key stakeholders for discussions on natural resources, climate change and disaster risk management (DRM).

Centred on the theme *Developing Solutions for Natural Resources and Climate Change Management*, the

Participants suggested the country's policy and legal frameworks were not adequately addressing these challenges, putting Malawi's natural resource-based economy at significant risk.

Legislators and other stakeholders committed to address these challenges in the current term. Some of their work was appreciated, such as their engagement with the forestry sector in early 2015 on protecting the diminishing Viphya and Dzalanyama forests.



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