

Sink or Swim? Survival Mechanisms Employed by Local Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi: A Case from the Agriculture Sector

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Abstract

The study was conducted to explore the survival mechanisms of local non-governmental organisations in Malawi particularly those operating in the agriculture sector as a case. It used a qualitative approach with focus on survival mechanisms based on three categories *vis-a-vis* financial, public relations and capacity building. Among the three categories, financial related mechanisms were revealed as key to local non-governmental organisations' survival. Many of them depend on grants and donations to fund their projects. Others depend on subcontracting and community or member contributions. Public relations and capacity building mechanisms such as use of rebranding, diversified programmes, technical, managerial and resource mobilization skills were also revealed as central to their survival. Since a good relationship with the public plays a very important role to the existence of any non-government organisation, the study therefore recommends that the local organizations need to touch-base well with the public (target audience) and all stakeholders within and outside its catchment area to ensure their survival. This could enable them to get the much needed support from all the relevant stakeholders thereby guaranteeing their continued survival. In addition, the review of the Non-Governmental Organisation Act and development of a policy, should factor in issues of their survival if their contribution to the development of Malawi is to be sustained. The act or the policy should incorporate some guidelines on how subcontracting should be handled. Above all, local non-governmental organisations should look beyond one strategy.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Survival Strategies, Agriculture Sector, Malawi

1. NGOs' importance in the development domain and a glimpse of their survival across the globe

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) play an important role in promoting and implementing different development programmes (Enyioko, 2012 and Nelson, 2007). They help to open doors for developmental activities in most rural areas (Gurung, Gurung, Karki and Bista, 2011). They have been celebrated by donors for being able to bring fresh solutions to complex and long-standing development problems (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). In practice, many development NGOs perform multiple roles rather than specializing in a single one (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). Hailey (2014) and Lewis and Kanji (2009) summarized their roles into three main sets of activities defined as: implementers (mobilization of resources to provide goods and services to people who need them), catalysts (ability to facilitate change) and partners (work with government and different stakeholders).

The NGO concept became popular in 1945 (Willett, 2002). They take different forms and play different roles in different continents of the globe and have increasingly become important agents of the development process in many developing countries (Atack, 1999). The poor performance of the public sector and the prevalence of weak states in developing countries has led to the rise of NGOs as the only available alternative to promote grassroots development (Mitlin, Hickey, and Bebbington, 2005 and Ulleberg, 2009). Their use is regarded as a more effective and efficient organizational forms of the delivery of public services. Interestingly, they are preferred because are more flexible and adaptive than governments, and are quick to respond to people's needs (Lekorwe and Mpabanga, 2007 and Ulleberg, 2009). The expanding sphere of NGOs has enjoyed great support from first world governments and especially from charity-based aid agencies (Preston, 1996).

Kang'ethe and Manomano (2014) observed many challenges affecting South African NGOs' survival. These challenges are regarded as opposing forces against their success and future growth (Hecker, 2009). All these challenges affect their success and survival more than moderately. Kaplan (1999) and Hailey (2014) defined an effective and sustainable NGO as the one that has adequate resources to turn its mission statement into activities and can sustain this over time. Therefore, in order to have a broader view on how they are surviving in other parts of the globe, the researchers reviewed the NGOs scholarship for Asia and Sub Saharan Africa.

1.1 Asian countries

Asian countries have millions of NGOs that have long played a crucial role in the development cooperation in Asia, both in service delivery and in policy advocacy (Mulakala and Lu, 2016). Statistically, India alone has more than 1.5 million NGOs whereas Philippine civil society is estimated at 500, 000 (Lowry, 2008). Each country within this region has its own unique history, and NGO landscape is not similar due to differences in

economic growth. Many of them in this region were service-oriented and were mostly supported, if not established, by foreign aid and have diverse means of survival (JANIC¹, 2008). NGOs have influenced and been influenced by the aid system (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). Despite a diversity of contexts and histories, the quest for self-sustainability has become a common and dominant concern (Aldaba, Antezana, Valderrama and Fowler, 2000). Though unevenly spread, many developing countries are experiencing a decline in aid flows (Aldaba and et al, 2000). The precariousness of donor funding do not seem to change in the future (Parks, 2008). While many may prefer to rely on self-help and voluntarism, others struggle to carry on their work in the face of limited resources (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). According to Hailey (2014), the search for financial sustainability has significant implications for individual NGOs and the NGO sector as a whole.

Parks (2008) noted that most of these organizations in South-East Asian countries are being forced to change their activities and objectives to suit donor priorities, in an attempt to attract new funding due to lack of alternative funding sources. This makes the ones concerned to gradually lose their autonomy from donors. According to Sell and Prakash (2004), many NGOs secure funds from multiple sources, and these funds can be from external or locally mobilized sources (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). The uncertainty in funding as noted by Hailey (2014) raised a growing interest in new financing paradigms and the development of alternative funding models that reduce their dependence on traditional means. Lewis and Kanji (2009) observed that official funding for NGO projects and programmes follows several different routes or uses different models such as the grant and contracting models.

1.2 Sub Saharan Africa

Africa is among the regions that has seen a growing number of NGOs, increased funding from donors, and increased NGO potential for delivering services to the poor. It is based on this growth that several African countries like Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Malawi and Zimbabwe have put in place regulation frameworks (Fafchamps and Owens, 2009). Lately, their existence has been shaken by funding challenges, poor management of finances, poor synergy and poor relationship between NGOs and the government, and inadequately skilled labour force as argued by Kang'ethe and Manomano (2014). Availability of funds plays a major role to their survival Lekorwe and Mpabanga (2007) observed that they collapse whenever donors have pulled their financial support. Studies from South Africa, Uganda and Ghana confirmed on the aforesaid claim and they struggle to survive (Agere, 2014; Burger and Owens, 2013; Okorley, and Nkrumah, 2012 and Kang'ethe, and Manomano, 2014). They raise resources in different ways, for example, financial grants, and membership fees, volunteer work and complimentary use of equipment and facilities (Fafchamps and Owens, 2009). NGO's dependence on donations and grants makes their survival unpredictable especially with the slowing down of global economies (Agere, 2014 and Lekorwe and Mpabanga, 2007). This explains the low levels of success among them in African countries (Kang'ethe, and Manomano, 2014).

In addition to resources, skill building was the most critical factor that was found influencing the survival of local NGOs in Ghana (Okorley and Nkrumah, 2012). Their study revealed that lack of capacity can prevent a them from attracting funding to support their programmes. They further found that organizational sustainability can be improved when local NGOs choose to broaden their scope of sustainability factors by including human resource management especially leadership. Besides, rebranding and restructuring was found as one of the survival strategies human rights NGOs in Ethiopia had adapted to conform to legal changes (Dupuy, Ron and Prakash, 2014). The Ethiopian case suggests that public regulations influence their behavior and survival in predictable ways and can also shape patterns of their emergence (Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash, 2014).

2. Overview of Non-Governmental Organisations involvement in Malawi's Development

Malawi's population is estimated at 16 million with about 80% of the population living in rural areas whose economy is predominantly agro-based. Agriculture accounts for about one-third of the country's GDP and 90% of export revenues. Over dependence on agriculture which is mostly rain-fed makes the economy vulnerable to adverse weather conditions, which causes fluctuations in agricultural output and consequently national income. Price fluctuations resulting from interplay of economic forces of demand and supply on the international market and a high dependence on foreign aid also contribute to the vulnerability of the country's economy. In Malawi's development field, NGOs are among the prominent players in addition to public and private stakeholders. This community of civil society affiliates plays a major role in the social-economic development of Malawi (CONGOMA², 1997) in the areas of education, poverty reduction, health, climate change adaptation, agriculture and food security (Malunga,2007).

As much as the number of NGOs in Malawi has kept on increasing since their inception in the 1990s, many

¹ JANIC: Japan NGO Centre for International Cooperation

² CONGOMA stands for Council for Non-Governmental Organisation of Malawi and is the Non-Government Organisation coordinating body in Malawi and is responsible for representing and promoting their collective interest Malawi in which they get affiliated on voluntary basis.

of the local organisations have continued facing many challenges that threaten their survival (Malunga, 2007; James and Ndalama, 1996). Most of these local organisations are not sustainable and they depend more on donor funding (Malunga, 2007). Some local NGOs formed during the 1990s refugees' crisis period closed down and those that survived found it increasingly difficult to access donor funding for administrative and operational costs (James and Ndalama, 1996). However, international NGOs were far much better in terms of funding and in tackling challenges they faced. The available literature has emphasized a lot on availability of funding or more explicitly; donor funding as the only surviving means giving an impression that this was the only available option keeping them afloat. In addition, development commentators and the public have been worrying on what would happen with dwindling donor support or if they pull-out all together.

Based on this situation, the study aimed to fill existing gaps in research by establishing the survival strategies employed by local NGOs in Malawi especially those working in the agriculture sector and explore the challenges affecting their survival. The agriculture sector has been deliberately chosen because it is one of the sectors that have enjoyed increased donor support in areas implementing programmes or projects concerning livelihoods, food security and or nutrition.

3. Conceptual Framework

The study has used cause-effect logic as advanced by E. M. Goldratt (Dettmer, 1997 and Mabin, 1999) in the theory of constraints¹. The theory has helped the researcher to understand what makes local non-governmental organisations working in the agriculture sector to continue surviving in Malawi. The study assumed organisation's survival as an on-going agenda that every NGO strives to achieve (the core objective), survival mechanisms (means or roots that help an organisation achieve its objective) as the key means (Burger and Owens, 2013). The survival mechanisms referred to in this framework are the *causes* which include financial, capacity building and public relations while *NGO survival* is the core objective organisations seeks to sustain.

4. Synopsis of the civil society organizations and their development in Malawi

4.1 Historical background of non-governmental organizations in Malawi

In Malawi, Non-Governmental Organisations are part of the civil society hence called Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). CSOs encompass Non-Governmental Organisations, faith based organizations, trade unions and associations. The work of these groups remained largely developmental during pre and post multiparty era (CONGOMA, 1997). CSOs have been there since 1900. After a short democratic dispensation (between 1964 and 1966) then, CSOs were no longer wanted to continue with mobilization of the people for a better Malawi. However, the term NGO became more popular in the Malawian development domain during the inception of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s. This is why the early 1990s are regarded as the period when most of them were established due to the need for relief intervention among the refugees fleeing a civil war from neighbouring Mozambique in the late 1980s (Malunga, 2007). But refugees' departure in 1992 created survival challenges and most of them shifted their focus to rehabilitation of the environment (Malunga, 2003).

It was during the first ten years of the democratic system that Malawi established Council Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi, NGO Board (NGOs regulating body) and formulated and passed the NGO Act. Nevertheless, there has been a significant growth in the NGO sector since 1994 (Malunga, 2007). There are many factors that have contributed to their rise, existence and development in Malawi. Notable ones included the structural adjustment programmes, change in the political system, institution of regulatory systems (NGO Board and Act) and change of the Malawian socio-economic conditions. All these have affected their survival in one way or the other. Furthermore, Booth and *et al.* (2006) observed that in the 1990s government of Malawi re-orientated its public expenditure away from economic infrastructure towards the social sectors signalling a need for other players like NGOs to come in to assist government. This development is also one of the factors that fuelled their establishment in Malawi in line with what Ulleberg (2009) noted where they get established in most developing countries to provide essential social services to the public. Some of the factors fuelling their increase included high incidences of food insecurity and natural disasters, poor public service delivery, increased availability of funding opportunities and donors influence.

The NGO sector in Malawi is generally developed as evidenced by the presence of various institutions established to facilitate their regulation and management. To establish a local NGO, the law demands an approval letter from line ministry and the fee is affordable. However, most of them have no clear and reliable funding mechanisms and they struggle a lot to access funding. Therefore, understanding of the institution frameworks governing their operations and the linkages and relations they have with different stakeholders at different levels can help them to ably get established and operate without contravening the set regulations. This thereby affirms their existence and reduces the conflicts that are currently arising because of lack of

¹ The theory of constraints (TOC) is an overall management philosophy introduced by Eliyahu M. Goldratt in his 1984 book Titled, "The Goal" which is geared to help organizations continually achieve their goals. Goldratt adapted the concept to project management with his book Critical Chain, published in 1997 (Dettmer, 1997 and Mabin, 1999).

understanding of NGOs governance structures and systems.

4.2 Classification of NGOs in Malawi

According to Vakil's (1997) framework, non-governmental organisations can be classified and understood, based on orientation (refers to the type of activities that non-governmental organisations engage in), level of operation and sectoral focus. But in Malawi, the NGO Act classified them into two classes; international and local NGOs. However, local NGOs can further be categorized into three based on level of operations. The categories included national, district and grass root. Local organizations form 70 % of all of non-governmental organisations and every district in Malawi has at least one putting them at an advantage over international NGOs when it comes to reaching out all Malawians. But scanty information on the actual number working in Malawi is making it difficult not only to other players but also government to consolidate their contributions towards achieving Malawi's development goals. If such data is available and properly managed, could make the information easy to access and reduce duplication of efforts thereby saving some costs and making NGOs more accountable not only to donors but also government. In the meantime, there is no well consolidated data available at National level on the number of CBOs available in Malawi and how CBOs are distributed by district council or region.

The agriculture sector has a network known as Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) which is a policy advocacy organisation, working on agriculture and food security policy issues affecting not only the smallholder farmers but generally the poor people and their livelihoods. Affiliation to this network is voluntary. Its work mostly centres on two key policy areas thus policy advocacy which is the central part of the organizations work and the networking objective. Apart from CISANET, other CSO networks existing in the agriculture sector include the Civil Society Network on Climate Change (CISONEC)¹ and Civil Society Organisation Nutrition Association (CSONA). Local NGOs are among the affiliates of these networks in addition to international ones, the media, academia and the trade unions. Their areas of interest are diverse but are either directly or indirectly related to agriculture development.

4.3 NGOs' statistics in Malawi

According to NGO Board, Malawi has more than 650 non-governmental organisations of which 70% are local. The district-based directorate of non-governmental organisations established by the NGO Board was seen not exhaustive and comprehensive as many of them (mostly local) were not captured during the first phase of the mapping exercise conducted by the Board in 2015. Out of the 399 that were captured during the mapping exercise, 70 % are registered with the Board. But as of August, 2016, 431 of them (161 international and 270 local) renewed their registration status with the Board. However, CONGOMA's 2016 directory as of 30th November, 2016 registered a membership of 541 (374 local and 167 international; representing 70 % and 30 % respectively). The conflicting figures from the Board and CONGOMA about NGOs statistics in Malawi indicate the kind of confusion that exist on the management of their statistics, roles and importance of these two bodies.

In terms of their distribution, the 2015 NGO directory indicates the southern region of Malawi having the highest number of the local organizations (108) seconded by the central region (80) then finally the northern region (48). Some of the reasons could be that the Southern region ranks high in terms of population (44.3 % versus 42.6 % and 13.1 %), population density (184 per km² versus 155 and 63), and percentage of the poor (48.6 % versus 37.6 % and 14 %) if compared with the central and northern regions respectively (National Statistical Office, 2015). The increasing population growth in Malawi and Southern region in particular exerts extreme pressure on already limited resources like land for agriculture and housing, water, wood energy, the environment and other essential services like health and education (House and Zimalirana, 1992). This means that a lot of people are vulnerable to so many risks like hunger due to inadequate land to grow their food predisposing them to food insecurity as seen by the high population density, hence, the presence of so many NGOs to complement government effort in providing essential services to its citizens.

5. Challenges affecting local NGOs in Malawi

Like any other sector, non-governmental organisations in Malawi are facing many challenges that are affecting their operations and even existence in one way or the other. Outlined below were some of the key challenges affecting the local ones and the kind of danger they pose to the NGO sector and their survival in particular.

5.1 Lack of policy or guidelines to help operationalize the NGO act

Malawi has no policy at meantime to guide NGOs working in Malawi. This has even complicated operationalization of the NGO Act. It is for this reason that plans are under way to have one. However, non-governmental organisations are not comfortable with the urgency and approach government has used to consult

¹ See <http://cisonect.org/index.php/2014-05-18-18-26-46/members>

them. The consultations are alleged not to be open which has made the NGO community to think that Government would want to use the policy as a tool to punish them or otherwise. Such fears have prompted them to think of pulling out from the consultation forum if Government could not give them a draft of the policy for them to see the issues included in the draft. On the contrary, some local organizations have been looking forward to have a policy, for they think that some international NGOs are doing things beyond their jurisdiction instead of leaving that responsibility to local organizations or CBOs. It is envisaged that the policy will try to address these kinds of conflicts happening in the sector. For instances, funding mechanisms, reporting systems, and how should partnerships or subcontracting be done. The policy may not only protect local NGOs but also ensure that they benefit from the partnerships being made with their counterparts (international NGOs). First things first, its high time Malawi should learn the importance of putting appropriate frameworks and policies before introducing anything. Observations have shown that lack of prior visualisation of what it takes to achieve something, has made the country to use the piece-meal approach instead of an all-inclusive one in creating a conducive environment for NGO operations. This has created problems that the NGO sector has suffered that could have been avoided if prior considerations were made.

5.2 Role conflict between Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi and NGO Board

Some CSOs thought the Council is the regulatory body while others think of NGO Board. This is happening because most of them are still having difficulties to understand the two-tier registration system. With this system, organisations are required to register first with the Council for them to show a proof that they are members of this organization. This kind of arrangement is making their affiliation to this regulatory body a mandatory one contrary to what is stipulated in its constitution.

Even though the Board has tried to sensitise the NGO community and donor agencies, there are still many cases where local organizations and some donor agencies do not know which body among the two is mandated to register them. Apart from that, number of NGOs renewing their membership to these two bodies has been varying for the past two years. CONGOMA has recorded a higher number of NGOs renewing their membership with the council than the Board. These variations signal lack of awareness on how important these two bodies are to their existence in Malawi. It also shows the value NGOs attach to these two bodies. This reflects the kind of confusion that exists within the sector and it also signals members' reluctance in adhering to what the NGO Act stipulates.

5.3 Poor management of resources

Poor management of resources has cost non-governmental organisations a lot of opportunities. In some instances it has led to withholding or withdrawing of funding opportunities because they failed to manage project resources properly. This was common among local organizations (national local NGOs or CBOs), where donors, government and some key informants cited most of them lack comprehensive financial and controls systems to ensure proper management of finances and other resources and also lack of qualified personnel to manage organisation's finances or resources. Some local organizations fail to justify how they used project funds irking the funders to either withdraw or reduce the amount of funding. Most of the donors have lost trust in most of them due to high incidences of poor management of funds and founder syndrome tendency especially those that are not faith-based. It was noted that donors have placed much trust in faith-based organisations because from the four faith-based local organizations that participated in this study, no serious financial challenges were expressed. Loss of funding opportunities is very detrimental to NGO's existence for it cannot deliver the much needed services without funds.

5.4 Lack of capacity

Most of the non-governmental organisations especially CBOs lack capacity in managing not only donor funded projects but also organisation's resources. CBOs do not have qualified staff to manage projects and they depend on voluntary services from members. It is in this area that bars most them from accessing donor funding for various projects. They cited a lack of capacity as a major stumbling block to their efforts of winning donor support. Lack of capacity entails lack of expertise, sound management structures and control systems. Donors are not interested to fund organizations that do not have the right personnel to manage its resources and programmes it is supporting. This has led to NGO's poor performance and untimely implementation of programmes.

5.5 Lack of a national development fund meant to fund local non-governmental organisations

In meantime Malawi has no any special fund where local organizations can get funding for their projects. This is also contributing to challenges of survival as most of them depend on donations or grants from international NGOs, bilateral and multilateral institutions which are not reliable and very difficult to predict. Absence of this fund makes it difficult for the government to track down progress and utilization of resources meant for the

people. Many local NGOs are really having challenges to access donor funds which affect their survival and the extent they can alleviate people's pressing needs.

6. Operational Definition of Terms

6.1 Non-Government Organisation

Self-governing, private, registered and not-for-profit organisations that are task-oriented and driven by people with common interests, and that pursue activities (social, political and economic) to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor or marginalized groups and those of the general public (Malawi Government, 2001; Lewis and Kanji, 2009; Enyioko, 2012; Dupuy, Ron and Prakash, 2014).

6.2 Survival

According to Online Oxford dictionary (year) defined survival as the state or fact of continuing to live or exist, typically in spite of difficult circumstances.

7 Research Methodology: Sampling Techniques, Study Area, Data Collection Techniques and Analysis

The study used a qualitative approach to help the researcher have a deeper understanding of the issues and better explain some of the findings however some quantitative methods and tools were also used. Quota sampling technique was used to select 12 local NGOs that were involved in this study working in the agriculture sector. The selected local NGOs were key respondents in this study. In total, 72 respondents were sampled for this study.

They were first of all grouped into three clusters based on their level of operation which were national, district and grass root levels. A quota of 4 local NGOs per cluster was used to select the respondents from the three aforementioned clusters totalling to 12. From every sampled local NGO, 1 key staff member and 4 beneficiaries were selected for interview and focus group discussions totalling to 12 staff and 48 beneficiaries respectively. The study also contacted 12 key informants comprised of 2 (1 from the NGO Board and 1 from CONGOMA), 8 from the two district councils where the study was conducted (with one district contributing 4 key informants comprised of the, District Agriculture Development Officer, District Community Development Officer, District Social Welfare Officer and Agriculture Extension Development Coordinator). In addition, 2 International NGOs that were ever involved in subcontracting local NGOs were also sampled for interview.

Primary data was collected in Chikwawa and Nsanje districts. The two districts are in the Southern Region of Malawi and they lie in the Lower Shire Valley whose economy is agro based. These districts have 177 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and 64 NGOs in which 21 local ones (excluding CBOs) are involved in agriculture development programmes or projects. Most of their programmes are centred on food security, disaster risk reduction, soil and water conservation, conservations agriculture, climate change and adaptations, environment management, health, education, gender and HIV/AIDS, livelihoods, vulnerable children, and women empowerment.

Key informant interviews, a survey, focus group discussions, individual interviews and observations were employed to collect primary data. The study was carried out from July 2016 to June, 2017. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis where data was grouped into themes and quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

8 Survival mechanisms of local NGOs in Malawi

8.1 Financial related strategies

These are monetary or resource related strategies which enable the organisations to execute programmes and activities. The strategies include use of grants, donations, subcontracting or partnerships, community or member contributions and income generating activities

8.1.1 Depending on grants

A grant¹ is an amount of money given, usually by a government or non-profit organization, to fund certain projects or a particular course of action. In Malawi, these grants are obtained from institutions or organisations within or outside the country through submission of an application or a project proposal. Use of grants was noted as the major source of funding among national and district local NGOs and the most dominant survival means among latter. A similar outcome was also highlighted in Uganda by Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005). Grant opportunities are made available to the public through call for proposals or through institutions like NGO Board, CONGOMA and CSOs Networks. Some CBOs involved in this study had at one point got a grant from other funding agencies within Malawi for instance National Aids Commission (NAC)² to support HIV/AIDS activities.

Apart from domestic sources, they also access grants from institutions outside Malawi which included multilateral and bilateral donors like Food and Agriculture Organisation, United States Aid for International

¹<http://financial-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/grant>

²<http://www.aidsmalawi.org.mw/index.php/about-us> ; NAC is a government organization which was established to provide overall leadership and coordination of the national response to HIV and AIDS which is one of the cross-cutting issues

Development, Irish Aid and Department for International Development. The procedure to access these grants is almost similar. However, organisation's experience in handling grants and its capacity in developing sound project proposals or grant application matters a lot in winning donor confidence.

8.1.2 Depending on donations

This is a kind of support that is provided by other organisations like government, faith-based organisations, companies, charities and foundations for a particular purpose or during emergencies. It can be obtained from within or outside Malawi. The support normally has no strings attached as long as it achieves its intended purpose. But in some cases organisations seek donations based on a written proposal where they state the purpose and how the funds will be used. NGOs have often been used as a conduit to reach out to the targeted audience. For example, during the 2015 floods which were declared a national disaster, several organisations provided relief and recovery support to flood victims. The excerpt below provides an example of this scenario.

"...During the 2015 floods, our district saw different NGOs that came in with recovery-related interventions which were mostly to do with agriculture. The funds used for this course of action were obtained through donations from within and outside Malawi. Some organisations were providing agriculture inputs like seeds, simple farm implements and even fertilisers. All these were donations that were given to the flood victims through various NGOs. For example, World Food Programme was distributing relief food where as other local and international NGOs were busy with recovery interventions. These donations were demand driven through an appeal made by Government where an external support was sought..."

Sometimes, funders demand well planned proposals to show how the funds will address the problems in question. Both donations and even grant application's success are dependent on the institution's experience, NGO's rapport with donor community, knowledge and skills in developing these documents.

8.1.3 Subcontracting or partnerships

Subcontracting involves an international or a big local NGO which identifies a smaller local NGO to help it implement a project within its area of jurisdiction in the form of a contract. Some do so because it is within their policy to implement its interventions in partnership with other stakeholders or its donor driven or the programme is huge and it requires more than one player. The aim is to build the capacity of other stakeholders to implement pro-poor interventions thereby increasing the capacity of locally based organizations.

This process has helped local NGOs in a number of ways. They have had an opportunity of being trained in financial management principles, procedures or systems as demanded by the donor. Subcontracted organizations; which are also referred to as Implementing Partners (IPs) are normally oriented about the project to be implemented and all donor requirements which have to be adhered to. IPs also gets technical support throughout implementation period in addition to regular joint planning, implementation, monitoring and reviewing of the project. Furthermore, IPs are assisted with other resources that ease their problems like vehicles.

The subcontracted local NGOs are properly assessed by looking at different factors such as their capacity in managing project funds, its ability to handle projects of similar nature, its reputation with other donors or stakeholders and legitimacy to operate in Malawi. In addition, international NGOs or the organization doing the subcontracting also consider availability of a vibrant infrastructure and institutional frameworks that can help the local organization to ably implement the project, for instance, complementarity of visions and programmes and its willingness to enter into an agreement. At the time of doing this research Malawi had no stipulated guidelines on how subcontracting should be done for the benefit of all parties involved and Malawi as a whole. Subcontracting was seen as a better financial strategy to be supported for it does not only address the financial needs of local NGOs but also the capacity building aspect as revealed by grass root NGOs.

8.1.4 Through community or member contributions

This is a kind of strategy local NGOs indicated especially CBOs where the community give to a local organization operating in their area. The support is either in monetary or material form and sometimes it is through the provision of labour. Such contributions are made upon request or whenever there is a need to do so. CBOs depend more on community or member contributions for their day to day operations as explained by one of the directors below.

"...Our organization mainly depends on contributions from both the community and CBO members. These contributions are done upon request, for instance, we asked members last year to contribute money that was used to rent land for commercial and crop production and consumption. The proceeds from the garden were meant to help the organization pay school fees for the orphans and taking care of the elderly and chronically ill patients. We requested the community to help us in managing the garden and the crops which they did..."

The community or members voluntarily participate in various organization's activities such as field operations, caring the vulnerable, and catchment conservation activities among others. This was noted as one of the benefits that local NGOs particularly CBOs enjoy from the community unlike others which mostly depend on donors for support. Such benefits give them high chances of surviving in the absence of grants, donations and other means. However, the scale of their projects or programmes is always so small if compared with organisations which receives huge funds and their audience is big as well. All the community initiatives above

are worth encouraging as it promotes a sense of responsibility, ownership from members and financial independence on part of the local NGOs.

8.1.5 Income generating activities (IGAs)

Some local NGOs depend on income generating activities as a strategy they use to raise funds for their operations. The proceeds realized from the IGAs are mainly used for administrative purposes, financing small projects and sometimes others use the funds to cushion financial shocks like absence of donor support. These initiatives are enterprise-based (Hailey, 2014). This was confirmed by one of the executives who narrated the following:

“...We know that other local NGOs keep livestock and some grow cash crops to generate money to finance their programmes but ours which is faith-based, has some houses, office space and conference centres that we rent to people and various stakeholders. The revenue we collect helps to finance mostly administration activities. Part of it is used to pay some staff that does not belong to any project or programme the organization is implementing. The money we get helps us sustain this team of staff. In other instances, the money helps us to retain some skilled staff whose project has phased out by still keeping them around as we wait for another project.”

This guarantees the organization's ability to survive without donor support and has an element of promoting financial independence.

8.2 Public relations strategies

Local NGOs' relationship with the public affects their survival as observed from field findings. Some of the strategies explained include their legitimacy, affiliation to other institutions, rebranding, and relations with the public.

8.2.1 Attaining the legitimacy to operate in Malawi

This is the first process every NGO explores for it to be established. The passing of the NGO Act in 2001 helped to institutionalize the existence of the NGOs. It led to establishment of the NGO Board as the only body mandated to certify their existence in Malawi. About 75% of the sampled local NGOs were formed between 2001 and 2010 which is extremely higher than the percentage number of those that were established before 1994 (8.3 %) or between 1994 and 2000 (16.7 %). The enactment of the NGO Act in 2001 of which NGOs in Malawi were obliged to adhere provided a conducive environment for NGOs and most of the NGOs were motivated to register with the NGO Board during the 2001 and 2010 period among other reasons like the 2001 famine which hit Malawi. No NGO can exist in Malawi without registering with the Board and no donor can commit its resources to NGOs that are not legally recognized by the law.

The Board has been involved in settling down misunderstandings between donors and local NGOs over funding issues. Such interventions have greatly helped restore funding opportunities guaranteeing the survival of the affected local organizations. Previously, a lot of them have lost funding for failure to adhere to donors' requirements. Awareness meetings conducted by the Board also helped to reduce cases of having many registered organizations deregistered for failing to comply with the law.

8.2.2 Affiliation to other institutions: CONGOMA and CSO network

NGOs that are members of any of these institutions enjoy a lot of support which plays a significant role to their survival. The organisations offer many opportunities to affiliates such as networking with various stakeholders and policy makers, linkage with donor agencies, sharing of experiences and knowledge on various facets. This strategy gives some of those struggling an opportunity to learn how their organization can deal with the challenges impeding their survival. Networking with other organisations was seen as very helpful to get funding opportunities as also argued by (Fafchamps and Owens, 2009).

8.2.3 Local NGOs relation with stakeholders and the general public

This was one of the important strategies NGOs were seen striving to maintain because relations with government, other stakeholders and the general public are critical. The level of relationship with key sectors and various stakeholders determines its prospects of surviving in a particular area. This relationship is not only important to government and the donor community, but also the beneficiaries and the society who demand good collaboration too. For those implementing agriculture related programmes, they also get affiliated to district agriculture fora at district level such as District Agriculture Extension Coordination Committee and District Agriculture Stakeholder Panel. One of the key informants made this comment related to the importance of a good relationship with the public.

“...Some NGOs have lost funding or collapsed due to poor relationship with their beneficiaries. This made their work difficult as they could not register any visible progress on the ground to justify their existence leading to some of their donors pulling out their support. In addition, good collaboration with line Ministry is very vital not only at planning and implementation stages but also at monitoring and evaluation stages. This ensures sustainability of the impact the project in question has registered during its specified period.”

NGOs chances of surviving usually get affected when NGOs are not accepted by the target audience and all

relevant stakeholders. This is why Aldaba *et al* (2000) suggested that these organizations should put effort in making good their *'relational deficit'* with a wider array of domestic constituencies

8.2.4 Rebranding and diversification of programmes

This entails changes an organization makes as a result of changes in policies, political landscape and even financing conditions. Some organisations diversify their projects or programmes other than confining themselves to a single sector or programmes. The study revealed that most of the NGOs develop proposals based on donor's needs and they mostly orient their programmes to the needs of the financing institutions. This automatically poses conflicting challenges; their area of focus versus what they indicated during registration with the regulatory body. Donor requirements have made local NGOs to rebrand with an aim of winning donor support. Change of focus indicates their efforts to adapt itself to the changing landscape as a survival strategy as also observed by Dupuy, Ron and Prakash (2014) where human rights NGOs in Ethiopia had to rebrand and restructure to suit the changing environment. Rebranding and diversification of programmes serves as cushioning mechanism in the absence of funding and a certain form of building resilience to the NGOs.

The other notable observation was diversification of programmes where local NGOs implements more than one programme involving more than one sector other than the agricultural sector. From the field findings, those operating in the agriculture sector were implementing different programmes ranging from health (34.3%), education (30.1%), governance issues (17.0%), environment (4.8%) and even economic empowerment (3.3%). These findings present a shift of focus from what Smiddy and Mkamanga (2005), found in which the key areas of focus for them then were human rights, HIV and AIDS and agriculture and food security. This shift explains the kind of efforts they have made to adapt themselves to the ever-changing environment.

8.3 Capacity building (skill-based) strategies

Capacity building is also considered in this study as one of the key categories of survival strategies local NGOs employ. This concurs with Okorley and Nkrumah (2012) whose study revealed that lack of capacity can prevent local NGOs from attracting funding, especially from foreign sources to support their programmes. This section therefore explains how resource mobilization, technical know-how and management skills affect local NGOs survival.

8.3.1 Technical know-how and management skills

Okorley and Nkrumah (2012) unearthed that managerial leadership and technical competence are among the most critical factors that can influence the survival of local NGOs. For those explored in the agriculture sector, the study revealed that organisation's expertise in their area of focus contributed greatly to their success in any programme or project they embarked on. For instance, one of the local NGOs had this experience to share regarding the importance of management and technical know-how in an organization.

"When subcontracted, International NGOs have always demanded that our implementation team be oriented on the project to be implemented to make sure that the organization has the same understanding about the projects. The other thing was to make sure we know all the technical and management requirements of the projects which reduces chances of the project failing. At some point we were forced to employ a person who had knowledge and some experience in disaster risk reduction even though the projects had some elements of agriculture in it."

Observations have shown that management skills and technical know-how go together and good managerial skills make better use of the latter. This argument marries well with observations made in Botswana by Lekorwe and Mpabanga (2007) in which lack of well trained and experienced staff limit the extent to which NGOs can manage their daily affairs and their capacity to effectively plan, appraise, implement and monitor their activities. However, most of the CBOs are weak in these two areas and this was there as on for their dependency on the expertise from line ministries which is detrimental to their survival in the long run. This observation was also noted by Kang'ethe and Manomano (2014) and concurs with what one of the local NGOs experienced with subcontracting due to some short falls their organization had.

"...Many are the times we have not only lost funding opportunities but also failed to meet activities schedule because we did not have technical staff. Sometimes International NGOs have refused to subcontract our organization because we did not meet the set criterion. Some of the obvious reasons behind their refusal were our lack of area-specific skilled personnel, lack of appropriate equipment and a vibrant management team with all systems and controls in place. Just imagine we had to scale down and even lay down staff because the NGO had no funds to pay them."

Out of the 12 local NGOs that were contacted, 41% of the respondents had postgraduate degrees and 17% had undergraduate degrees and the rest did not have any professional certificate other than a secondary or primary school certificate. The group of respondents having at least a degree were mostly local NGOs operating at national (N=4) and district level (N=3) which may also be regarded as a proxy indicator to their abilities to ably manage their organizations and seek for resources to run their organisations. NGO's level of competence and the qualifications of its staff are some of the aspects donors and even International NGOs look at whenever

they would want to fund or subcontract local ones. The absence of well trained staff is hugely affecting CBOs' survival among other issues. A Director of one of the organisations highlights this aspect in the sentiments below;

"...Most of the donors ask us about the qualifications of our staff and financial control systems. These are the things that we don't have which sometimes make us to think as some of the reasons donors don't fund our proposals. This goes even to proposal development. As a CBO, we don't have paid staff and we work as volunteers which reduce our prospects of getting donor funding for we don't have specialized staff."

8.3.2 Resource mobilization skills

Resource mobilization skills are among the strategies that are essential for NGO's ability to source enough funds for its programmes and projects. Grass root NGOs (CBOs) contacted were observed not knowledgeable on project proposal writing which makes them not capable of exploring emerging financial windows where others are tapping resources from. Furthermore, most of the CBOs do not have highly qualified personnel who can help in the development of project proposals as expressed in the above section. Below is one of the comments made by a representative of one of the CBOs.

"...We don't know much about project proposal writing that is why we fail to get support from big donor agencies. We have shortfalls not only in the skills but also the English language which is the only official medium of communication. Since we are not good at this, that's why in addition to contributions from members or the community we either grow cash or food crops or even keep livestock as an IGA. Sometimes CBO members sell their labour to other people at a price in order to raise money for our operations. We wish if government would have put deliberate initiatives of training CBOs on various means of sourcing funds for our organization."

Based on this comment, CBOs were seen to be more knowledgeable on other competences of mobilizing resources than project proposal writing. They have diversified resource mobilization skills which make their organisations more resilient to financial shocks than those that only rely on a single skill. On the other hand, the majority of the local NGOs were knowledgeable on project proposal development. This gives them high chances of tapping resources from all sources that require formal application or proposal submission as they have well experienced and qualified people with necessary skills to develop sound project proposals and enjoy good rapport with the donor community.

9 Conclusion

The paper has revealed that financial related strategies are key to local NGOs' survival in Malawi. These strategies are complemented by public relations and capacity building strategies which are intertwined. These two strategies (both financial-related and public relations) depend much on organisation's capacities (capacity building strategies) which all guarantee their survival. The capacity building strategies were noted as key to boost organisation's stamina to sustain itself and overcome challenges affecting its survival. NGOs relationship with governing institutions, the society, beneficiaries and stakeholders has the possibility of shaping their working environment, ability to thrive now and in future. The paper suggests restructuring or shifting of areas of focus for NGOs will continue to be there due to ever changing socioeconomic indicators because of either natural or anthropogenic factors. However, there were many challenges that were spotted posing a great threat to the sector and even the survival of local organizations in Malawi. The challenges included reliance on one strategy or source of funds, poor financial management, role conflict between NGO Board and CONGOMA, lack of capacity and policy to guide the NGO sector. Some of these challenges could have been avoided if appropriate mechanisms are put before the introduction of anything other than letting circumstances dictating the course of action. This is the case because Malawi allowed NGOs to start operating in the country without putting first institutions and frameworks to regulate their operations. The paper has revealed that local NGOs survival in Malawi goes beyond donor funding. This has the possibility of enhancing their survival as some strategies have the ability to promote financial independence, can help to absorb financial shocks that may arise, build their capacity.

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