

Up-Scaling Sustainable Land Management in Malawi-The Pathway

Yasinta Ganiza

Environmental Affairs Department, Private Bag,394, Lilongwe 3, Malawi
yasintaganiza@yahoo.com

Henry Sibanda PhD

UNDP, P. O. Box 30135, Lilongwe 3
henry.sibanda@undp.org

Abstract

Land degradation in the Shire River Basin has resulted in reduced productivity of the land, flooding and siltation of rivers which, in turn increases the cost of electricity generation and water purification. The Shire River basin occupies about 3.1 million hectares and is home to more than 5.5 million people. The SLM project having worked for three years in this area has reached a point where it has achieved some reasonable success in certain areas towards addressing the dramatic land degradation that is driven by poor agricultural practices and deforestation for charcoal and opening new agricultural lands. The project felt it was opportune to zero down on a few successful technologies and approaches and to scale them up in order to reach the target figure in the project support document. The concept of up-scaling SLM activities mainly focuses on area coverage and maximizing impacts. It intends to achieve a shift from dots on the map to Visible Blocks; a shift from demonstration or trial plots to implementation phase. In other terms it is the propagation of what we are convinced works—(communicating lessons learnt), Standardizing Approaches (stop confusing farmers) splashing the best practices. The strategies which have worked well and yielded desirable results are: i) the systematic approach to Land management or reviving local governance structures then bushfire control then natural forest regeneration/indigenous woodland management which normally gives about 60% to 70% of the expected land improvement. These key activities can then be followed by complimentary activities like ridge alignment of cropland blocks, micro catchment/watershed management, gully reclamation, tree planting, Conservation agriculture and Livelihoods engagement. Another approach could start with local governance, bushfire control then land-use planning and then fitting the complementary activities into the land-use plan. Another approach can use the human-face approach or livelihoods approach to SLM, where one looks at the opportunistic entry activity into the community like beekeeping, fishponds, mushroom production. By giving people the benefits, the land and natural resources will benefit and be enhanced. The achievements from these approaches are huge as we move from achieving 10 ha to 2000 or 3000 hectares at a time. The strategy used was to use a Government–NGO Blend approach, is achieving remarkable gains by putting government and NGOs into competition and NGO to NGOs competition

1. Introduction

The Shire River basin covers over 3.1 million hectares and directly or indirectly influences the livelihoods of over 5.5 million people in the southern region of Malawi. The basin is of critical economic importance: it is the source of over 98% of the country's hydro-electrical power generating capacity, supplies water to major urban centres such as Blantyre and Limbe as well as the district administrative centres, supports a locally significant artisanal fishery, and supplies irrigation water for valuable crops. The importance of basin to Malawi as a nation cannot be overemphasized. Despite its contribution to Malawi's economic development and livelihood to about a third of the country's population depends on the catchment, Shire river basin has experienced serious and unprecedented land degradation. This dramatic land degradation has been driven by poor agricultural practices as well as agricultural expansion and deforestation for charcoal. These are in turn driven by the negative interrelationship of high dependence on natural resources of a rapid growing population coupled with poor resource management, poverty, ineffective policy implementation, and poor economic development strategies, and more recently climate change.

Land degradation in the basin has resulted in reduced productivity of the land, flooding and siltation of rivers which, in turn, has increased the cost of electricity generation and water purification. The low lying areas of the Shire have always been prone to flooding. Besides the primary effects of soil fertility depletion, land degradation has triggered a spiral of other side effects on-farm such as shortages of fodder, fuel-wood, construction wood and reduced amounts of farm residues and animal manure.

At local level, portable water quantity and quality has declined due to the destruction of the watershed which ensured the continuous flow of water. More than 75 percent of rural people rely on shallow wells and boreholes that are recharged by the local watershed which currently dry soon after the rains. The greatest impact

has however been on the cost of electricity generation and water purification.

Upon recognition of the importance of the river and the threat arising from mismanagement of its catchment, the government of Malawi set out address the challenges of the basin through a number of interventions. One of the interventions is the implementation of the Private Public Sector Partnership on Capacity Building for Sustainable Land Management in the Shire River Basin Project, commonly known as the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Project, with funding from Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and UNDP.

The project was initiated with the aim of reducing land degradation in the Shire River Basin through improved institutional, policy and Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) arrangements. During its 3 years of implementation on the ground, the project consolidated SLM activities that have been tested, proven and perfected over the last three seasons, and now intends to use these selected activities together with a definite pathway to up-scale the achievements in trying to reach the ambitious goal of 480,000 ha.

2. Methods/The Pathway

The concept of up-scaling SLM activities mainly focuses on coverage and impacts. It intends to achieve a shift from dots on the map to Visible Blocks; a shift from demonstration or trial size plots to implementation. This is propagating what we are convinced works—(communicating lessons learnt); and Standardizing Approaches (to stop confusing farmers).

This concept is developed upon realization that the patches of efforts implemented could not reap large impact, as they had always remained demonstrations constrained from replication. A case was made on the challenge to propagate what seemed to work, and it was established that to have impact on the ground, first things needed to come first. A systematic approach to land management through introducing or reviving local governance structures then bushfire control and then natural forest regeneration/indigenous woodland management was used. These key activities are complemented by the ridge alignment of the cropland blocks, micro catchment/watershed management, gully reclamation, tree planting, Conservation agriculture and Livelihoods engagement, bringing notable expected land improvement.

The “Government-NGO Blend Approach” was then introduced with the aim of increasing coverage and impact of the project. As government continued with its interventions in the districts, NGOs were engaged to extend to other communities with the same initiatives that proved to work well in the 4 SLM pilot districts. In Neno District COPRED was engaged, in Mwanza; WESM , in Blantyre; DAPP and in Balaka; NACOHUSO¹

Under the livelihood component, the project has partnered with One Village One Product (OVOP) of the Ministry of Industry and Trade to build capacity of communities in value addition in the pilot districts resulting in “resilient communities”.

3. Results

The “Government-NGO Blend Approach” right away increased the area of coverage under SLM. In the same vein, the blend brought in intrinsic competition between government and NGOs within each district and amongst the NGOs between the districts, and this is yielding visible achievements on the ground.

Through the SLM-OVOP partnership, communities have been trained on making a business case from natural resources and can now appreciate the value of natural resources without necessarily exploiting them. This has been evident in growing interest of the communities to participate in natural resource based income generation activities like beekeeping, fruit juice manufacturing from grown and wild fruits like baobab, tree seedlings raising and selling, integrated fish farming in ponds sustained by improved micro-catchments, mushroom picking from conserved forests among others. This has given the communities an alternative option from direct and exploitation of natural resources, to shifting their mindset from unsustainable activities such as charcoal making and poaching the sustainable ways mentioned above.

Revival of environment and natural resources local governance structures created in the communities a sense and a culture of taking responsibility for their own destiny by taking good care of the natural resources. Awareness was raised among the communities that they have the user rights of the land and its resources there in, so if they continue unsustainable utilization them they are likely suffer the more in the near future when the exhaust them. Pioneer successful communities have been opened up, and have become learning points for other communities through conducting tours in which they convincingly tell their success stories, i.e; GVH Silika in Balaka District.

4. Recommendations

Government needs to plan better and to identify addition resources for implementation of the up-scaling

¹ COPRED =Community Partnership for Relief and Development; DAPP=Development Aid from People to People; NACOHUSO=Nature Conservation and Human Support Organisation; WESM=Wildlife Environmental Society of Malawi.

initiative as well as expanding to become a nationwide approach

There is need to develop a robust result oriented strong monitoring and evaluation system with a continuous consolidated data collection to show the trend with time.

5. Conclusions

The systematic approach to sustainable land management through the introduction or revival of strong local governance structures followed by bushfire control measures and then natural forest regeneration/indigenous woodland management has proven to be feasible for Malawi

Factoring in the livelihood aspect in environment and natural resources management produces quick, tangible and sustainable benefits to the communities which continuously benefits the environment.

A case has been made of reducing efforts in planting trees while increasing efforts on the no fire-natural forest regeneration approach and there is room for up-scaling. The comparably low cost of this approach is promising for up-scaling even with minimal financial resources.

Sustainability of the SLM activities after life span of the project is ensured through the empowerment of communities, engagement of local leadership and engagement of NGOs as well standardizing the approach to SLM and reducing the usual confusion brought in by differing approaches between a government and NGOs..

6. Acknowledgements

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7. References

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