

Climate-induced Rural-Urban Migration-A Narrative Account of the Gender Dimension in Malawi Disaster-prone districts of Nsanje and Chikwawa.

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Introduction

This case study, using data obtained from Nsanje and Chikwawa districts in Malawi, reveals impacts of climate change induced hazards on the migration of individuals from rural areas to urban areas.

Chikwawa and Nsanje districts are some districts in Malawi sharing the country's international boundary with Mozambique. Chikwawa district has a land size of 4,755Km² and a population of 566,283 individuals (Chikwawa SEP 2020). Nsanje district has a total land area of 1,942 Km² and a population of 295,900 individuals (Nsanje SEP 2020). Some parts of both districts lie along the shire river. The districts share similar weather patterns (MMC, 2023). They are both hot areas and have similar environmental hazards such as tropical storms, floods, dry spells, strong winds, and crop pest infestation (GOM, 2019). In Chikwawa, floods often affect Senior Chief Lundu, Traditional Authorities Makhwira, Katunga, Maseya, Mlilima, Ngabu and Ngowe while dry spells are mostly prevalent in T/A Chapananga, Ndakwera, and Ngabu (Chikwawa SEP 2020). In Nsanje, the most affected Traditional Authorities are Mlolo, Mbenje, Malemia, Nyachikadza, and Tengani (Nsanje SEP 2020).

Methodology

Data for the case study was obtained from Chikwawa and Nsanje districts using a mixed method approach with more emphasis on qualitative methods. Quantitative methods were only used to collect demographic information and quantify perceptions around the topical areas. Chikwawa and Nsanje districts were purposely sampled as districts recurrently affected by climate and environmental related disasters.

A detailed list of households that were affected by floods in Chikwawa and Nsanje was obtained from the two district councils based on Cyclone Freddy disaster reports. 30 out of 187 affected households in GVH Kapasule (Chikwawa) were sampled while in Nsanje district, 140 out of the 900 affected households in GVH Nyachilenda were sampled.

Since this study was essentially qualitative in nature, primary data were obtained using expert in-depth interviews, stakeholder consultations and focus group discussions. Supporting secondary information was obtained mainly through review of key documents such as District Environmental Action Plans (DEAPs), District Social Economic Profiles (SEPs), District Development Plans (DDPs), District State of Environment and Outlook Reports (DSOERs), and disaster reports.

70 percent of respondents were women while 30 percent were men. 40 percent were elderly and most of the respondents in this category were men while 60 percent were

youth (not above 35 years of age). Majority of the respondents were involved in informal employment mainly agriculture, hawking, fishing, and kabaza (motorcycle and/or bicycle taxis) as their main sources of income. All the households were involved in farming and grow crops such as maize, rice, sorghum, and vegetables. 60 percent indicated that they also relied on financial support from their relatives (husbands, sons, daughters) living in urban areas.

Findings

Evidence on Climate induced Rural-Urban Migration

The study found that rural-urban migration has been there for many decades. However, the increase in frequency and intensity of floods and dry spells since 2014 has continuously increased the vulnerability of households to further climate and environmental shocks. The livelihoods of approximately 80% of all the households have been severely affected, derailing progress in attaining household resilience and prosperity. Households have been displaced severally over the last decade and this has affected efforts of households to rebuild even in safer areas due to inadequate resources. In order to avert the impact of climate risks households are using migration as an adaptation strategy. However, the decision to migrate is determined by several factors including age, gender, financial capacity, etc. Household members especially men and youth leave their families and migrate to various urban areas across Malawi in search of better livelihood opportunities.

Specific to Nsanje, individuals migrate to work as casual laborers at Illovo Sugar Company in Chikwawa (Nchalo) and Nkhotakota (Dwangwa) districts. Some individuals, particularly young men, migrate from Nsanje and Chikwawa to Blantyre to engage in informal businesses or work as laborers. In Blantyre, the common destination areas are the highly populated and hazard prone locations such as Chilobwe, Soche, Ndirande, and Mbayani townships. Some young men with basic education, vocational skills, and English and/or Portuguese language proficiency migrate to Mozambique to work in construction companies as either laborers or interpreters. Another destination for some of the young men is South Africa.

One elderly FGD participant said that,

“In rural community young men are expected to economically active and support their parents or families. Some of the young men from the village strive to get Mozambican National Identity Cards (IDs) so that they can easily get jobs as English translators in construction sites and companies in Mozambique. If they fail, they resort to move to Blantyre to search for jobs. However, due to low incomes they are forced to stay in fragile areas where they are exposed to disasters as it happened during Tropical Cyclone Freddy.”

A female Key Informant lamented,

“When you a woman the rural areas, society expects you to stay at home and take care of the entire family. This forces us to continue living in fragile areas even when our spouses have migrated to urban areas. We feel deprived of better life and safety.”

The study observed that social capital also shapes whether individuals pursue rural urban migration or not. Individuals who have financial capacity and relations/friends in the destination areas are the most likely to migrate.

Who migrates: youth or adults, males or females?

Respondents indicated that the elderly and people living with disabilities are the least likely to migrate to big trading centers or urban areas. In terms of sex, women and girls are the least likely to migrate while men and boys are the most likely to migrate. Specifically, the study established that young male individuals (not above 40 years) are the ones who migrate the most. The motivation and limitations to migrate are partly linked to social norms and expectations bordering on expected family roles of males and females. One of the key informants said that.

“Migration of women to urban areas is largely constrained by social restrictions that are rooted in cultural norms regarding the family roles of women, expected behavior for women, and childcare.”

In addition, the decision to migrate is linked to capacity (financial, age, and skills), and marital status. The study observed that among the young male individuals, those with secondary education and skills such as carpentry and bricklaying are more likely to migrate compared to older and/or married men.

Although males migrate more than women, they face a wide range of risks in both transit and destination areas. Female members of households do not often migrate due to lack of capacity and society norms which expect women and girls to take care of their families. These migration patterns have led to distortion of households due to distance. In some case migrant men may choose to marry new spouses in the destination areas and this further contributes to break down of families.

Motivation for Migration

- **Search for jobs and other economic opportunities**

Both the FGD and KII respondents observed that most men, especially young people, migrate to urban areas because of lack of income earning opportunities in their villages and locations. Respondents cited lack of job opportunities, poor fertile lands for agriculture production, limited access to farm inputs, and lack of access to economic resources that can enable them to engage in non-farm economic activities as some of the key motivators for rural urban migration. Across all the FGDs, respondents observed that

urban areas provide greater and better chances to earn money as job and economic opportunities are plenty compared to the rural areas.

- **Desire to improve the socioeconomic conditions of their families.**

The study observed that rural poverty and food insecurity as evidenced in lack of better housing, health and education is one reason that motivates rural urban migration. Respondents indicated that those who migrate, support their families with money and other necessities to better their livelihoods. It was further noted that families that have relations in urban areas are cushioned against economic shocks caused by disasters. In addition, these families are quick to recover from disasters because of the economic support that they receive from their urban based relations.

- **Declining crop productivity due to environmental factors**

Livelihood in rural Malawi is heavily dependent on agriculture. Respondents observed that climate change and environmental degradation has negatively affected crop productivity in the last decade leading to food insecurity. In Nsanje and Chikwawa, people rely on both rain fed and irrigated farming to survive and earn income. This is exacerbated by increased frequencies and intensities of heavy rains, pests, prolonged dry spells, and floods. This condition has provided a direct disincentive to young people to stay in the villages, forcing many of them into urban areas.