

MALAWI

**Rural Communities' Response to Climate Change in Malawi: The Case
of Mzimba District**

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Climate change poses multiple challenges to the Government of Malawi just like governments of her sister developing countries. There is a lot of literature floating in the country which demonstrates that the government and her development partners continue to go an extra kilometer in averting the impacts of climate change. It is the conviction of this author, however, that high-tech strategies lined up by government can trickle down to beneficiary rural communities only and only when and where *appropriate technologies* are identified and used optimally.

Malawi's accentuated relief makes it experience modified Sudan climate which is characterized by seasonal rainfall. The rains are produced by the migratory inter tropical convergence zone (ITCZ). The ITCZ draws in and converges Northeast Trade winds, Southeast Trade winds and the Congo Airstream. Mzimba Plain lies on the leeward side of the two trade wind systems. On the contrary, the plain lies on the windward side of Congo Airstream. Naturally, the amount and distribution of rainfall across Mzimba Plain heavily relies on which of the three air masses is dominant and for how long.

Climate change in Malawi has reached such a high magnitude that it creates a large number of "refugees" year after year. In a nut shell, rural communities in Malawi operate in very stressful circumstances. The circumstances are characterized by: pervasive poverty that is aggravated by a single, seasonal export crop economic base, a low electricity consumption rate, high levels of illiteracy, a youthful population and a governance system that is characterized by "*cosmetic laws and policies*". Given this background, rural communities feel the full brunt of climate change –induced severe weather conditions. They include:

- Erratic rainfall which pours in brief periods of very high intensity rains. Incidents of high intensity rains lead to extensive flooding. On other hand, the brief, high intensity rains are punctuated by long dry spells. There effect is obviously a direct opposite of floods. On the global scale, years of severe drought are frequently followed back to back by excessively high rainfall. Both cases lead to acute food insecurity for millions of Malawians.
- Progressively low annual rainfall which culminates into correspondingly low water tables, dwindling wetlands, dry river courses, and low lake levels.
- Substantially high food insecurity
- A high incidence of “*heat islands*” which translate into localize, intense “dry or wet” whirlwinds

Although it is common knowledge that climate change has very diverse ramifications, the major challenge for the country concerns choosing among an equally wide range of plausible avenues for handling them to alleviate their toll on humans and the environment. Basically: all ramifications of climate change need urgent attention. Furthermore, to be of any consequence, they need to be tackled simultaneously; on one hand, rural communities have a rich, but undocumented, treasure of indigenous knowledge about the ecology, pedology and hydrology of their environment. On the other hand, the country is awash with documented, scientific knowledge in the same fields. Unfortunately, there is a missing link between *the communities of practice* that are, otherwise, complementary. The two communities of practice are based on rural communities’ indigenous knowledge and another based on scientific knowledge.