



Cash for Work participants at Sungusya Watershed being sensitized by Titukulane Technical Leads on the importance of watershed treatments for soil and water conservation. Photo: ©Titukulane RFSa 2021/ Fundi Kayamba-Phiri

*Titukulane*, is a five-year USAID Resilience Food Security Activity being implemented by CARE together with partners (Emmanuel International, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM), Save the Children, and WaterAid). *Titukulane* aims to reach 723,111 people in 290,413 households directly over five years, including 72,595 adolescent girls and boys (aged 10-19) and 80,528 young women and men (aged 20-29) who face uncertain futures as farming becomes less viable. The Activity aims to support implementation and ensure effectiveness of the Malawi National Resilience Strategy (NRS), which is established to guide investments in agriculture, reduce impacts and improve recovery from shocks, promote household resilience, strengthen management of Malawi's natural resources, and facilitate coordination between government institutions, civil society organizations, and development partners.

## Synthesizing Resilience: Key Insights from a Technical Working Group Meeting

### Background

*Titukulane* was designed to reduce the number of chronically food insecure households by enhancing the capacities of local and national governance structures to implement resilience-focused policies. To achieve this *Titukulane* is implementing interventions that build resilience and improve food security and nutrition outcomes for communities. Specifically, under Purpose area 3, these interventions are aimed at building institutional and local capacities to reduce risk and increase resilience among ultra-poor and chronically vulnerable households. Specific interventions implemented under Purpose 3 are disaster risk management, natural resource management and overall coordination of the National Resilience Strategy especially at district level.

Purpose 3 Technical Leads organized a three-day Technical Working Group (TWG) Meeting from November 9th to 11th, 2022, with the arrival date being November 8th, in Liwonde. The objectives of the meeting were fourfold: to appreciate the implementation of purpose three field activities in Zomba, to review the purpose 3 performance indicators, to strategize the implementation of the FY23 purpose activities, and to realign the plans for FY23 Q1. On the first day of the meeting, there was a field visit to Zomba to appreciate the implementation of purpose 3 field activities.

The Purpose 3 Technical Working Group (TWG) is composed of the Disaster Risk Management Natural Resource Management and NRS coordination teams under *Titukulane*, including technical leads and coordinators who are based at

the district level. The TWG also includes District Council sector leads, such as Relief and Rehabilitation Officers, District Forestry Officers, and Land Resource Conservation Officers. In addition, the national level NRS pillar leads for pillars 2 and 4 are also included. To ensure the mainstreaming of crosscutting issues, District Youth Officers and District Gender Officers also participate in the TWG. This composition enables the TWG to leverage the collective expertise and experience of these diverse stakeholders to facilitate the effective implementation of Purpose 3's activities which cover NRS pillars two and four.

During a pause and reflect session held during the TWG meeting, key issues were discussed, including what is going well, areas for improvement, recommendations, and new approaches to be considered. This learning brief captures the highlights of the discussions during the session and provides insights into the progress of Purpose 3's activities, as well as recommendations for improving the implementation of the project.

## Reflections

### What is working well

**Coordination:** The good coordination observed during the field visit is a positive development that supports the effective implementation of *Titukulane's* programs. The collaboration among community level structures such as Village Civil Protection Committees (VCPCs), Village Natural Resources (VNRMCs), and Village Development Committees (VDCs), ensures that resources and efforts are maximized towards achieving common goals. This is in line with *Titukulane's* Integration Strategy, which emphasizes involving all stakeholders in decision-making and implementation processes across different interventions for sustainable outcomes.

The coordination between VCPCs and VNRMCs, in particular, is an example of how different committees can work together towards achieving common goals. The tree planting initiatives coordinated by these two committees demonstrate the potential for natural resource management to support disaster risk reduction, environmental conservation, and livelihood improvement. This is in line with *Titukulane's* objective of promoting sustainable and resilient communities through the integration of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation measures into development programs.

The **establishment of tree nurseries** by VNRMCs is another positive development that supports the goal of improving the nutritional status of vulnerable groups. The availability of fruit trees can contribute to the diversification of diets

and improve the availability of essential nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals, that are critical for child growth and development.

**Composition of decentralized committees:** The correct composition of community level committees is an important aspect of community participation and ownership in development programs. The government of Malawi guidelines on VCPC composition aim to ensure that all members of the community are represented and have a voice in decision-making processes. This is essential for promoting social inclusion, reducing inequalities, and empowering marginalized groups.

The adherence to these guidelines is a positive development that supports the principles of good governance and accountability. It ensures that the interests of all members of the community are taken into account and that decision-making processes are transparent and participatory.

**Commitment to dyke construction:** The construction of dyke is a positive development that provides protection to farm fields and people. Dyke are essential for reducing the risk of floods and ensuring the availability of water for irrigation and other purposes. This is particularly important in rural areas where agriculture is the main source of livelihoods. The ability of communities to construct dyke that meet the standards despite their limited skills is a positive development that demonstrates the effectiveness of *Titukulane's* DRM technical staff and government staff in providing technical guidance and support to the community. This is in line with the principle of capacity building, which emphasizes the importance of equipping communities with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to take ownership of development programs and sustain their impact.

The **technical guidance provided by *Titukulane's* DRM technical staff and government staff** is essential for ensuring that the construction of dyke is done in a safe and effective manner. This includes providing guidance on the appropriate materials to use, the design of the dyke, and the construction techniques to be employed. It also includes providing training and support to the community members involved in the construction process.

The fact that the communities were able to construct dyke that meet the standards is an indication of the success of this approach. It demonstrates that with the right support and guidance, communities can take ownership of development programs and effectively implement them. It also shows that disaster risk reduction measures can be integrated into community-led development programs, resulting in sustainable and resilient communities.

The construction of dyke demonstrates Titukulane's commitment to supporting disaster risk reduction measures and improving the resilience of communities. It is a proactive approach to addressing the impacts of climate change, which is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts.

### Areas for improvement

**Beehive Productivity:** The field visit identified that VNRMCs need to ensure that all beehives have bees to maximize production. This highlights the need for improved beekeeping practices, which could include training on hive management, swarm prevention, and disease prevention, as well as providing access to quality beekeeping equipment and resources. To address this issue, Titukulane should provide technical support and training to VNRMCs on beekeeping best practices and facilitate access to quality beekeeping equipment and resources.

**Dyke Design and Construction:** The field visit also noted that specialist involvement in dyke designing and construction is necessary to ensure that the standard is the same in all sites. This is important for ensuring the safety and effectiveness of dyke in reducing the risk of floods. To address this issue, Titukulane should engage with technical experts to provide technical support and guidance to VNRMCs involved in dyke design and construction.

**Governance Issue:** The field visit identified a governance issue related to the representation of each village in group level VNRMCs. It was discussed that it is better to work with VNRMCs at village level, than the model that Titukulane is using of having a VNRMC at GVH level. However, the justification of working with GVH VNRMC was to minimize the groups that require direct capacity building from Titukulane, with the assumption that the GVH VNRMC is now responsible for further capacity building at village level. To address this issue, Titukulane should engage with community leaders to develop a more inclusive and participatory governance structure for VNRMCs, which ensures representation from all villages and facilitates effective decision-making and implementation.

**Coordination with Government Counterparts:** The field visit also identified the need to improve coordination with government counterparts at the district level. This is important for ensuring the alignment of Titukulane's activities with national policies and programs, as well as for facilitating access to government resources and technical support. To address this issue, Titukulane should strengthen its partnerships with government counterparts at the district level, through regular meetings and consultations,

and by aligning its activities with national policies and programs.

**Participation of Women in Leadership Positions:** The field visit noted the importance of women's participation and engagement in leadership positions in VCPCs. However, it was observed that women are often included in VCPCs to meet the quota, without being empowered to have a voice and contribute to decisions made in their committee. To address this issue, Titukulane should prioritize the inclusion and empowerment of women in VCPCs, through training and capacity building on gender mainstreaming and leadership, as well as by ens

### Recommendations

**Increase Cash for Work Beneficiaries:** The field visit identified that increasing the number of cash for work beneficiaries under watershed management could significantly benefit project participants, especially during the lean season when people do not have enough food. This gives them an option to buy food, while conserving the watershed. To address this issue, Titukulane should increase the number of beneficiaries under the cash for work program and prioritize those who are most vulnerable and in need. This can be done through regular consultations with community leaders and by assessing the needs of the community.

**Improve District Councils' Role in Implementation and Monitoring:** The field visit also noted that there is a need to improve the role of district councils in the implementation and monitoring of activities for sustainability. This is important for ensuring that the activities implemented by Titukulane are aligned with national policies and programs, and that they are sustainable in the long-term. To address this issue, Titukulane should engage with district councils to establish partnerships and collaboration, and involve them in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of activities.

**Increase Monitoring Visits:** The field visit also identified the need to increase monitoring visits to empower beneficiaries. This will also ensure that issues are swiftly addressed, such as the distance between trees planted in some areas not being according to the standard. Frequent visits would also provide guidance on how to attract bees to maximize the productivity of beehives that Titukulane has provided to the VNRMCs. To address this issue, Titukulane should increase the frequency of monitoring visits, and provide technical support and guidance to beneficiaries to ensure that activities are implemented effectively and in line with the standards.

**Sign Memorandum of Understanding with Landowners:** The field visit identified the need to sign a memorandum of understanding with landowners where the dyke is passing through to avoid conflicts after constructing on their land, as well as conflicts arising with their families when the owner of the land had moved elsewhere or died. This is important for ensuring that the dyke construction process is transparent, participatory, and accountable, and that it is aligned with the needs and interests of the community. To address this issue, Titukulane should engage with community leaders and landowners to establish partnerships and collaboration, and involve them in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of dyke construction activities.

**Approaches to introduce**

**Integration-Involvement of Different Sectors:** The field visit suggested that the integration-involvement of different sectors is necessary to provide guidance and disseminate key messages. This is important for ensuring that activities implemented by Titukulane are aligned with national policies and programs, and that they are sustainable in the long-term. To address this issue, Titukulane should engage with different sectors, such as agriculture, health, and education, to establish partnerships and collaboration, and involve them in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of activities.

**Promote Tree Species that Thrive in Environmental Conditions:** The field visit also noted that promoting tree species that will thrive in the environmental conditions of a specific area is essential for the success of the tree planting initiative. This includes selecting tree species that are adapted to the local climate, soil conditions, and water availability. To address this issue, Titukulane should work with community leaders and technical experts to identify suitable tree species for each area and provide training and support to VNRMCs on tree planting techniques.

**Vegetable Gardens within Tree Nurseries:** The group also suggested that incorporating vegetable gardens within tree nurseries could supplement diets and income for VNRMCs. This is important for ensuring food security and income generation for the community. To address this issue, Titukulane should provide technical support and resources to establish vegetable gardens within tree nurseries and provide training and support to VNRMCs on vegetable gardening techniques.

**Providing Space for Veranda on Beehive Door:** The field visit noted that providing space for a veranda on the beehive door is necessary for the safety of beekeepers. The veranda provides a landing platform for the bees before they enter the hive, which can reduce the risk of them dropping nectar or pollen before entering the hive. This can increase the cleanliness of the hive and improve the overall health of the colony. In addition, having a veranda can also provide ventilation for the hive, which is important for regulating the temperature and humidity inside the hive. This can reduce the risk of diseases and pests, and improve the overall productivity of the hive. Overall, the design of beehives is an important consideration for maximizing honey production and improving the health of the bees. Providing space for a veranda on the beehive door is one way to achieve these goals and should be considered in the design of beehives.

In reflecting on the Technical Working Group meeting and the subsequent field visit, it becomes evident that the principles of USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach have been instrumental in driving the effectiveness of Titukulane's interventions. By weaving together collaboration, learning, and adaptation, Titukulane fosters an environment conducive to sustainable development. Table 1 below further illustrates how these core elements of the CLA approach are embedded in Titukulane's strategies, their field observations, and proposed recommendations.

**Table 1** CLA Considerations during implementation of resilience building interventions in FY2022

CLA Considerations	Outcomes
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhanced collaboration between Titukulane and VNRMCs, through technical support and training on beekeeping best practices.</li> <li>- Proposed involvement of specialists for dyke design and construction to ensure uniform standards.</li> <li>- Identified the need for a more inclusive and participatory governance structure at VNRMCs, involving community leaders in the process.</li> <li>- Increased collaboration with government counterparts to ensure alignment with national policies, gain access to resources and technical support.</li> </ul>

CLA Considerations	Outcomes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recommended signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with landowners to avoid future conflicts related to dyke construction.</li> <li>- Suggested establishing partnerships with different sectors such as agriculture, health, and education for wider outreach and impact.</li> </ul>
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identified need for improved beekeeping practices through field visits, leading to the suggestion of technical support and training.</li> <li>- The field visit also highlighted the need for specialist involvement in dyke design and construction</li> <li>- Governance issues at VNRMCs were identified, which led to the discussion on the betterment of governance structures.</li> <li>- The need to increase the number of cash for work beneficiaries under watershed management was learned during the visit.</li> <li>- Understood the importance of increased monitoring visits to empower beneficiaries and ensure proper tree plantation.</li> <li>- Recognized the need for promoting tree species suitable for the local environmental conditions.</li> <li>- Suggested adding a veranda to the beehive design after understanding its importance in bee safety and hive productivity.</li> </ul>
Adapting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase the number of cash for work beneficiaries, aligning activities with national policies, and initiating regular meetings with government counterparts.</li> <li>- Promotion of suitable species for the local environmental conditions.</li> <li>- Incorporating vegetable gardens within tree nurseries as a means to provide additional nutrition and income for the VNRMCs.</li> <li>- Modifications to beehive designs to increase productivity and safety.</li> </ul>

**Conclusion**

The Technical Working Group (TWG) meeting organized by Titukulane’s Purpose 3 Technical Leads is a positive development that enables diverse stakeholders to leverage their collective expertise and experience towards the effective implementation of resilience-focused policies. The TWG is aligned with USAID’s collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) approach, which allows technical staff to reflect on implementation outcomes, identify areas for adaptation, and review the success of previous adaptations. The good coordination observed during the field visit and the correct composition of

community level committees demonstrate the effectiveness of involving all stakeholders in decision-making and implementation processes across different interventions for sustainable outcomes. The TWG provides a platform to address areas for improvement and introduce new approaches that can enhance the resilience and food security of communities. By increasing the involvement of different sectors, promoting tree species that thrive in contextual environmental conditions, and incorporating vegetable gardens within tree nurseries, Titukulane can improve the success of its interventions and contribute to the reduction of chronically food insecure households.

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**Recommended citation**

Kayamba-Phiri, F. (2023). *Synthesizing Resilience: Key Insights from a Technical Working Group Meeting. Learning Brief*. Produced by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Titukulane RFSA.

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