

Implementation of Household Approach 'Views from Key Informants': Case of Chalwita Model Village, Rumphi, Malawi

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Abstract

Household Approach is one of the extension approaches being advocated in Malawi for promoting the participation of all gender categories in farm planning and management. Adopting an interpretivist's view, this pilot study assessed the implementation of Household Approach in the Rumphi district, Malawi. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews using a checklist. In addition, documents, including reports and farmers' record books, were analysed and focus group discussions were arranged to triangulate data. Household Approach implementation in Mhujju, Rumphi, was carried out by using a model village as a special interest group. The study has established that all stakeholders are aware of the Household Approach, however, many Household Approach tools were not adequately articulated among frontline staff and local facilitators. Joint planning and implementation of farming activities were observed among the targeted population after the implementation of Household Approach. Some resistance was noticed from male partners on women gaining access to and control over resources; however, there is a steady move towards equal access and control of resources across all gender categories.

Key words: Household Approach, peer household, local facilitator, model village

Introduction

Located in the sub-Saharan Africa, Malawi is one of the developing countries, whose economy remains predominantly agro-based despite development of other economic sectors (GoM 2012a, p. xiii). In Malawi, agriculture accounts for 30 per cent of Gross Domestic Product, generates over 80 per cent of national export earnings (Government of Malawi, 2016) and employs 64.1 per cent of the country's workforce (2013 Malawi Labour Force Survey report cited by the Government of

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Malawi, 2016). Women constitute 70 percent of the work force and produce 80 percent of food for home consumption (Government of Malawi, 2012a).

Although agriculture is an important sector in the Malawian economy, gender disparity is a major constraint that affects its contribution to sustainable development in the country (Government of Malawi, 2012b). For instance, despite the fact that women play a crucial role in the economic development of the country, their participation in decision-making processes in the agricultural sector is limited, as these processes are dominated by men (Government of Malawi, 2012b). According to a report, “The cost of the Gender Gap in Agriculture”, Malawi stands to gain if women are involved in the agriculture value chain. There will be an increase in crop production and a USD 100 million increase in Gross Domestic Product, and 238,000 people will be pulled out of poverty if the gender gap is closed (Government of Malawi, 2018).

In an effort to promote active participation of all gender categories in decision-making processes, among others, in 2009, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security adopted Household Approach (HHA) from Zambia under the Agriculture Support Programme (ASP). Household Approach is an extension approach that promotes power relations among adult and youth household members in order to promote equitable access to and control over resources, assets and benefits (Government of Malawi, 2015).

Background for implementation of Household Approach in the Malawian Agriculture Extension System

History records of Malawian agriculture extension, Kabuye and Mhango (2006), inform us that in the 1950s, the agriculture extension system in Malawi adopted the master farmer approach in which selected farmers, considered early adopters, were supported with logistical support services and all extension efforts were concentrated on them with the hope that their crop and livestock production would increase, followed by the enhanced prosperity of their families. It was envisaged that in the long run, other small holder farmers would follow suit and adopt improved technologies, resulting in increased overall agricultural production in the country. This was in line with modernisation theory principles.

According to Hopper,(2012), modernisation theories were criticised for persistent and deepening global inequalities that were thought to be supported by modernisation theory principles. The issue of inequality was also noticed with the

master farmer approach in Malawi, as reported by Kabuye and Mhango,(2006). It was observed that as the master farmers became prosperous, non-participating farmers did not follow suit in adopting the improved technologies as they envied and resented the master farmers' prosperity. Criticism against the modernisation theory led to the rise of the dependency theory.

Andre Gunder Frank, (1972) the leading theorist of the dependency theory, argues that colonialism and imperialism impeded the independent development of the Third World. He proposed a radical political transformation and delinking of third world economies from world markets. According to Engel 2010, the dependency theory was criticised for not putting a nation-state-based analysis of class relations at the forefront. These shortcomings led to other perspectives being developed. People were identified as the missing element in development efforts (Egger, 1995, cited in Gack, 2007); hence,there was the emergence of a people-centred development approach, also called a participatory approach.

Following the participatory movement, the agriculture extension system in Malawi adopted the pluralistic, demand-driven agriculture extension policy in the year 2000. This agriculture extension policy advocates community participation in development interventions. In line with these participatory principles, the agriculture extension programme in Malawi, among others, is promoting the use of innovative participatory development approaches and methods to facilitate agricultural development planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation as one of its strategic objectives (Government of Malawi, 2012a). In the Malawian agriculture extension system, the model village approach is one such participatory method that was adopted; however, it has been criticised for treating communities as homogenous, leaving out some of the adult and youth members of the household who are crucial in the planning and implementation of household and community activities(Government of Malawi, 2012a). Household Approach addresses this gap by promoting the involvement of all household members, including women and youth.In the case of Malawi, Household Approach was adapted to suit local conditions. For instance, apart from incorporating a number of aspects from different Household methodologies into this approach, the participatory extension approach in Malawi is being facilitated by lead farmers, called local facilitators, backstopped by extension workers among peer households. Unlike other participatory approaches, which consider village an entry point for addressing various development issues, including gender, Household Approach considers a

household an entry point to address gender issues (Government of Malawi, 2015). In 2016, Household Approach was implemented across all districts in Malawi. Though the approach is participatory in nature, however Parry et al. (2005), argue that the ability of participatory development in fulfilling its promise rests in part on the manner in which it is undertaken. Therefore, this study assessed views on how Household Approach was implemented in Rumphi.

Theoretical framework

Household Approach uses participatory methodologies to engage with the farming community. In order to understand how Household Approach was implemented, this study was carried out within the framework of the participatory development theory. The key elements of participatory development theory include inclusion and equity, transparency, empowerment and sharing (Simango, 2015). The participatory development theory provided an opportunity to explore how inclusive, transparent and empowering Household Approach processes were. It also allowed us to look into what initiatives were taken to promote sharing and equity among targeted participants in the area under study.

Research paradigm

A qualitative approach guided by an interpretivist paradigm was adopted in this study. Interpretivists' view reality as subjective and think that it differs from person to person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemologically, interpretivists believe that knowledge and meaningful reality are constructed in and out of interaction between humans and their world and are developed and transmitted in a social context (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of individuals who are participating in it (Cohen et al., 2007). This is in line with what this study did: understand how Household Approach is implemented from the perspectives of participating stakeholders.

Research design

This was a phenomenological study. Somekh and Lewin (2005) in Ndengu, 2009, define phenomenology as “the study of lived human phenomena within the everyday social context in which the phenomena occur, from the perspective of those who experience them.” This research design provided an opportunity to understand the phenomenon of HHA implementation through the experiences of key informants themselves.

Description of study area

This study was conducted in Mhujira Extension Planning Area (EPA), in particular the Chalwita model village, because it has longer experience of implementing Household Approach in the district.

Sampled participants and sampling method

Marshall, (1996) defines a key informant as an expert source of information. To isolate people involved in HHA implementation, purposive sampling was carried out for the extension staff, Model Village Agriculture Committee members, local facilitators and peer households. A total of, 26 participants was purposively sampled.

Data collection methods and tools

In order to get a real and subjective view of the key informants about the implementation of the Household Approach, face-to-face interviews were conducted using a checklist. This enabled an in-depth understanding and sustained experience in the implementation of the approach. In addition, the analysis of documents, including reports and farmers' record books, was carried out and finally, focus group discussions were arranged to triangulate data.

Analysis of data

Narrations from the field regarding how Household Approach was implemented were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and then thematically analysed. In this regard, the researcher utilised the Tesch (1990) coding technique. Transcripts were read to generate codes that were grouped to form categories, and the categories were further grouped to form themes. Themes were then compared with the guidelines for the implementation of Household Approach. The following discussion is based on the themes that emerged from this exercise.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Knowledge of Household Approach among key informants

Rogers (1995) described knowledge as a situation where individuals (or other decision-making units) learn about the existence of an innovation and seek understanding of how it operates. All key informants under study learnt about Household Approach through trainings and briefings, although variations regarding the duration of training were noticed among them, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Duration of Household Approach Training received by key informants

Key informant	No of respondents	Duration of training	Source of support
Subject Matter Specialist	1	1 week training	Director of Extension
Frontline extension staff	3	1 day training	DADOs office
Local facilitators	2	1 day training	EPA office
Peer households	10	2 -3 hrs training	Local facilitator
Village Agricultural committee	10	A briefing by the local facilitator	Local facilitator

It is only the Subject Matter Specialists who were fully trained on the concept of Household Approach. The rest had trainings that ranged from one-day to a few hours to a few-minutes long briefing on HHA. This may affect the way Household Approach is implemented, as argued by Food and Agriculture Organisation (1981), which says that the degree of completeness or adequacy of knowledge will affect the manner in which a technology is applied. The following extracts narrate the understanding of Household Approach by some key informants:

“HHA is a tool on its own. Basically, it’s a tool that looks at how to bring social justice with respect to how we share roles and responsibilities as well as how we share profit, which is realised in a household so that the profit is shared between everybody in that household. Not only that, in terms of resources to be used, HHA makes sure everybody has equal access to resources. If properly implemented, it’s a wonderful tool for households”. (An extension worker.)

“Inepakuiupulika Household Approach, nkhaipulikakutumunthuukwendelamkaya, mumabanja, kuonakutikandondomekoyaukhalilowawouliuli, ulimiwawoukwenda-wuli, kusatulangamaunononoawowalimiwakusangamaka makakuwamama”. (I understood Household Approach as an extension approach where a lead farmer supervises farming activities, monitoring the livelihood of farming families in terms of their livelihood plan and inquiring about issues they face, specifically focusing on women’s issues). (A local facilitator.)

“Kupangamapulaninakusambiramalusokutitikwaniliskemapulaniyithu”. (HHA is about formulating plans and learning how to fulfil those plans). (A peer household member.)

“Ni ulimiwakhomonakhomouwopakuwakukhalilanapasikwa mama, dada, wanakutivinthuwendengemakola”. (HHA is a door-to-door farming approach

where households sit down together, including husband, wife and children, so that things move along well)". (A model village agriculture committee member.)

It can be concluded that all stakeholders implementing Household Approach in Chalwita model village were educated about how the Approach functioned. However, variations were noted in the understanding of Household Approach among the stakeholders executing it. An outlying case was based on the understanding of HHA as an approach that focuses on women's issues, which is contrary to what HHA advocates. The approach empowers all adult and youth male and female household members with respect to the planning and implementation of the household farming business by building the knowledge and skills of the household members, including decision making, resource mobilisation and utilisation of benefits (Government of Malawi, 2015). This can be attributed to the type of Household Approach training received by these stakeholders. Some participants undergo just a one-day HHA training, while some have a mere 2-3 hours briefing, which is not enough time for one to fully grasp what a particular extension concept is all about.

Household Approach utilises a number of tools. These include visioning, gender balanced tree, action planning and HIV/AIDS timeline, among others. The following section presents sampled extracts from key informants regarding their knowledge of the tools used in HHA.

"In the first place, HHA necessitates each household to have a vision so that they should not just be working anyhow; they should be working towards achieving the vision within a stipulated period of time. Of course, when coming up with household vision, they look at the current situation they are in and what they want to achieve in a certain period, also looking into the opportunities and constraints they have in achieving their vision. They break them down into milestones, such as stipulating what they can achieve in the first year, second year and so forth in regard to the activities they can do in a certain period. Secondly, a gender balanced tree basically looks at the current situation in a household in terms of division of labour by looking at aspects such as who does most of work. It divides these roles into those that bring income duties to help take care of household. It also looks at how phindu (profit) is shared among family members, who uses most of the money or phindu (profit), who enjoys most of phindulijakwambili (profit to a greater extent), whether there is anybody who gets a bigger share than his/her family members. Then, it looks at assets at home and who has the most access to

and control over the assets. So, you check whether the tree is balancing or not. If it is not balancing, you ask them what should be done for the tree to be balanced. You look at aspects such as issue of work, akugwirantchitokwambirindiwina (somebody working more than the others), tipangebwanji (what should we do), Aah!, ntchitoizi, tizithandizana (we should be helping each other in this), zikhonzakukhalabwino (it can be good) and other such things. But most importantly, we should look at how to use phindulijalikapezeka (profits realised) or who is using the most phindu (profit) for personal gains and question what can be changed. Recommendations emanating from consultations in households included: stopping drinking of beer or not necessarily stopping but reducing. We also look at nkhaniza (issues of) HIV/AIDS; Tikuziwammene HIV/AIDS ikupangilandimiyoyoyathuyi (we know what HIV/AIDS does to our lives), so then you look at the HIV/AIDS timeline kwakukulutimawathandizaanthuajakunikilama (in most cases, it helps people to look at stages of HIV/AIDS) kuchokela pamenemunthualibekufikilapamenewamwalira (from the time they are infected to the time they die). We also look at which interventions we can conduct at each stage, ndicholinga choti ngati munthuujalibekachilombo, kuti asakatenge , atani (what one should do if they are not infected) or ngatialindi kachilombo, atanikutiasayambekudwala, kapena gantiakudwal kale apangebwanjikutiasabwelele back ku (or if they are infected , what they should do so that they don't get sick, or if they are sick, what they should do to not go back to) an asymptomatic stage cholingakutiazithakupangantchitozawobwinobwino (so that they remain productive). Finally, ndinkhaniya (there is the issue of) the action plan". (An extension worker.)

As derived from conversations with the frontline extension staff and local facilitators, planning and visioning seem to be the only tools that were briefly mentioned; details regarding how these were implemented were not adequately articulated. This implies that frontline extension workers and local facilitators have inadequate knowledge of Household Approach.

Theme 2: Household Approach implementation model

According to the frontline extension staff under study, they were taught that Household Approach has to be promoted among participants who are within the same locality; hence, *mindandandas* (green belts) or model villages were targeted. As a model village already existed, Household Approach in Mhuju EPA was implemented in the Chalwita model village. The other aspect that was considered

with this village was the good receptivity of the people from past experience of working with them. This was followed by briefing the village head and the committee that was running the activities of this model village, called Model Village Agriculture Committee (MVAC). What HHA is and the lead farmer concept used in this approach were covered, followed by a selection of local facilitators who were trained on HHA at the EPA day training centre. It was also reported that some people volunteered to be local facilitators. The program started with 7 local facilitators (5 females, 2 males), who in turn trained 32 peer households, of which 21 were females and 11 were males.

As part of on-going activities, local farmers are now teaching fellow farmers, indicating a form of sharing information on HHA among targeted farming families, extension workers periodically supervise participants to appreciate their progress and monitor the challenges they faced with HHA. This is important as Rogers, 1995, reports that in the implementation stage, the implementer may need technical assistance from change agents and others to reduce the degree of uncertainty about the consequences, which increases the chance of the adoption of an innovation.

As a whole, in the Rumphi district, it was reported that the concept of Household Approach was well received in 2015. One agriculture extension officer in Katowo, Mwazisi and Bolero Extension Planning Areas, respectively, started with the implementation of Household Approach, but not much is happening in these areas now. Two agriculture extension officers have also been implementing Household Approach from the last year in Mphompha and Ntchenachena EPAs. The rest of the EPAs are not implementing it, which was attributed to inadequate knowledge of the staff there. This is what one respondent had to say:

“Most of them started 2 to 3 years ago but you find that they have just managed to implement household visioning or not even get the baseline data of farming families they are working with, and there’s no gender balanced tree”. (An extension worker.)

In total, the district has 60 local facilitators for Household Approach.

Theme 3: Opportunities and Challenges

Regarding opportunities available to upscale HHA in Rumphi, Farm Income Diversification Project (FIDP), for example, was a window of opportunity. However, it only allowed farmers in the impacted areas to be trained and not

the staff. According to the researcher's experience, this is the trend among most NGOs and projects. When they have trainings, in most cases, they target farmers in the project impact areas and not the staff, the understanding being that it is the responsibility of government line ministries to train the staff.

From the viewpoint of the frontline staff, the training received was an opportunity to upscale HHA. The zeal and interest of the participants increased after the training and was seen to help implement HHA. This is in line with what Rogers, 1995, reports in relation to the perception an individual holds about the innovation being more relevant in determining his or her passage through the innovation-decision process (Rogers, 1995).

Mobility issues were highlighted with regard to challenges with the implementation of Household Approach. Frontline line staff use push bikes, and it is not easy to note the distances covered. The other challenge reported was resistance, especially from male partners about allowing their chosen local facilitator who happens to be their partner for participation fearing that they may end up in a relationship with the extension workers. Thirdly, there was the challenge of lack of confidence among lead farmers regarding their ability to share training messages with other households. Fourthly, it was also reported that local facilitators sometimes give several excuses, including that they are too busy to upscale the HHA concept. Also, the need for constant supervisory visits for HHA was emphasised by one of the extension workers. Inadequate resources was another issue reported to affect the implementation of Household Approach. In particular, resources for training and supervision are conveyed in the following extract, "*it is fuel for joint supervision that is found but as an officer to find fuel and supervise my activities is a problem*". (An extension worker).

Theme 4: Impact of Household Approach

The following observations were made regarding the impact of HHA among targeted households:

Through supervisory visits, it has been noticed that farmers are moving from one milestone to the other. It was also observed that there is an improvement on sharing of roles and responsibilities. However, the men are not much in favour of equal access to and control over resources, but we are working in that direction. (An extension worker.)

Increased involvement of women in extension activities was also reported, as mentioned in the following extract:

“I am an experienced extension worker, and in past extension systems, most of our clients were men and women were left behind. However, this household system makes sure that involvement of all genders should be promoted and you will discover that in the data I have provided, most members are women. This is in stark contrast to the past, when there were very few women because they were shy and not too confident, but now, aah, they participate fully (tone increases). It is rare for a woman to talk in a group: they don't raise their hands to talk and when you ask them to talk, they respond by saying they agree with the other speakers. The women are usually very shy, but in the household, they participate fully.” (An extension worker.)

That said, the issue of men still dominating access to and control over resources, as reported by one of the extension workers, show compromised equity for effective participation of women and children in development activities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can safely be said that most of the staff and participating farmers are aware of Household Approach, however, many HHA tools were not adequately articulated among frontline and local facilitators. This translates into gaps in the implementation of this concept; for example, according to the local facilitators in the area under study, Household Approach is for women and when they were following up, they could focus on women issues, which is contrary to what HHA advocates. This study recommends that funds be lobbied from agriculture stakeholders in order to comprehensively train implementers (frontline staff and local facilitators who can be trained together).

Being a supervisor of the frontline staff does not automatically translate into one having the opportunity to be trained in all the specialties one's juniors will be trained in. This study recommends that supervisors at all levels who have had no opportunity be trained in Household Approach but have somebody under them who is implementing Household Approach, has a keen interest in the concept and learns from them until an opportunity arises for them to be trained on it.

At the time of piloting this study, a number of staff members implementing the Household Approach have just been transferred into, within and out of the district; in some cases, they have been replaced with staff with no knowledge

of HHA. This study recommends the adoption of the plant-wise project style of transferring staff, where a plant doctor cannot be transferred from their duty station unless they cross-transfer with somebody who is also a plant doctor. This would ensure continuity in the implementation of the plant-wise project activities. This recommendation has been made because in most places in Rumphi where HHA had taken shape, staff was transferred and replaced with staff not trained in HHA, which, along with poor institutional memory, creates a lag in HHA activity implementation, as is the case with Mzotokoto, which is one area in Mhuju Extension Planning Area, Rumphi district where an extension worker, trained in HHA was transferred out without a replacement.

Considering that HHA has been welcomed among staff and farming family members who adopted this concept, the staff can take advantage of this zeal to upscale this concept to all farming families.

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