



MILLENNIUM  
CHALLENGE CORPORATION  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

EVALUATION BRIEF | APRIL 2020

## SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT IN MALAWI

Targeted practices were widely adopted in grants studied by the evaluation

### Program Overview

MCC's \$351 million [Malawi Compact](#) (2013-2018) funded the \$20 million Environmental and Natural Resources Management (ENRM) Project, which [aimed](#) to reduce disruptions and increase efficiency of hydropower generation by decreasing aquatic weeds and sediment in the Shire River Basin. The ENRM and Social and Gender Enhancement Fund (SGEF) activities established a grant facility that provided 11 grants to promote sustainable land management and gender equality, since women are often land-use decision makers.

---

MCC commissioned Mathematica to conduct an independent interim performance evaluation of the ENRM Project's Grant Facility grants. Full results and learning: <https://data.mcc.gov/evaluations/index.php/catalog/210>.

### Key Findings



#### Implementation of case study grants

- › All five case study grants were established through community buy-in and in partnership with government agencies and local leaders.
- › All five grants used participatory, hands-on ENRM training methods, which were appreciated by community members.



#### ENRM outcomes

- › The evaluation found widespread adoption of ENRM practices in sustainable agriculture and forest restoration for all five grantees, as well as participation and adoption of ENRM activities by women.



#### SGEF outcomes

- › Village savings and loans (VSLs) were popular and succeeded in increasing women's economic empowerment and participation in financial decision-making in households.
- › VSLs and Reflect Circles, a participatory approach to adult learning and social change, supported change in decision-making in households, in the division of labor in households and on farms, and in community leadership.



#### Overall outcomes and sustainability

- › Grants were found to be more effective when environmental practices and gender equality activities were integrated.
- › Participants were confident that grant activities would be sustained because of the benefits gained from adopting ENRM practices and participating in VSL groups, such as higher yields and economic empowerment.

## Evaluation Questions

This interim performance evaluation of the ENRM and SGEF grant activities was designed to answer the following research questions on implementation, adoption of key practices, gender, and sustainability.

1. How was the program implemented?
2. To what extent did the intervention lead to adoption of conservation agriculture (CA) and land management practices?
3. To what extent did the intervention affect gender roles in the household and communities?
4. Were grants that focused more on ENRM or SGEF activities more or less effective than grants that targeted both types of activities?
5. What are stakeholders' perceptions of the sustainability of grant activities to improve sustainable land management and address social and gender barriers?

## Detailed Findings

### Implementation of case study grants

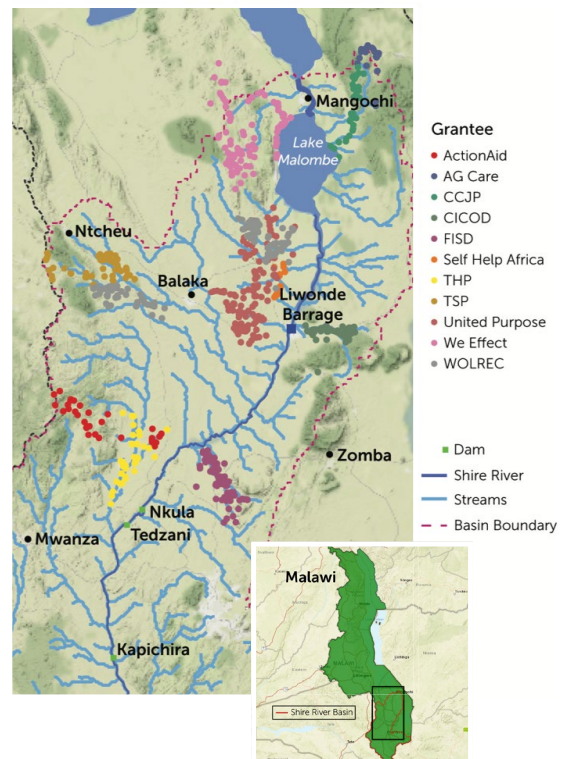
All five case study grants were established through processes of community buy-in and in partnership with government agencies and local leaders. This ensured that communities understood the goals of the grant activities and were interested in supporting them, thus increasing the likelihood of implementation success.

All grants used participatory methods, which aimed to bring community members together to discuss issues important to them, ensure all voices could be heard, and encourage participants to continually analyze power dynamics within their communities. Participants appreciated the participatory methods, and some attributed the success of the activities to their use.

Grant implementation was facilitated by the grantees' responsiveness to donor and beneficiary needs. Grantees were flexible and made changes to their planned activities during implementation, which helped improve outcomes.

### ENRM outcomes

There was widespread adoption of conservation agriculture and land management practices by case study activity participants. The most readily adopted land management practice was tree planting. Although both men and women adopted land management practices, women played central roles and/or adopted practices at higher rates than men in all case study grants.



**ENRM project locations**

Farmers in all five case study grants reported that conservation agriculture and land management practices were adopted because participants perceived the environmental and economic benefits of the practices fairly quickly. Benefits included reduced erosion and higher crop yields.

### SGEF outcomes

VSLs were particularly popular and successful. The majority of VSL members were women who did not have previous access to savings or credit.

Reflect Circles were a successful method to identify gender-based issues and solutions, to give voice to women in both communities and households, and to help sensitize men to the value and importance of women's voices in decision-making. VSLs increased women's economic empowerment, for example by offering a way for them to start businesses.

Participants in SGEF activities reported greater awareness of women's economic and social rights, more equitable division of labor on farms and in households, an increase in the number of women participating in household decision-making, and increases in community leadership opportunities for women. Nonetheless, some resistance to these changes remains in a number of households and farms.


### Overall outcomes and sustainability


Although only two of the five case study grants were originally designed to integrate both ENRM and SGEF activities, by the end, all case study grants had integrated both types of activities into their interventions. Grantees reported that incorporating gender and land management practices into the grants improved their effectiveness. However, adding SGEF activities to ENRM activities benefited the ENRM objectives more than ENRM activities helped grantees reach gender equality goals.

In general, participants expressed confidence about the sustainability of the grant activities. The most widespread facilitator of sustainability was the direct benefits that participants experienced from adopting the activities, such as higher yields and increased savings and loan opportunities.

Other catalysts for sustainability were the number of leaders trained by the grants, as well as support from agriculture and forestry agents, local leaders, and local government. The most commonly reported barrier to sustainability was lack of funding and materials to continue activities.


## MCC Learning

 Integrate social and gender-focused activities in the context of overall ENRM interventions.

 Align the promotion of sustainable land management practices with the economic incentives of beneficiaries, which is critical for natural resource management programs to achieve their goals.



**Solar panels providing energy to the FISD irrigation scheme**

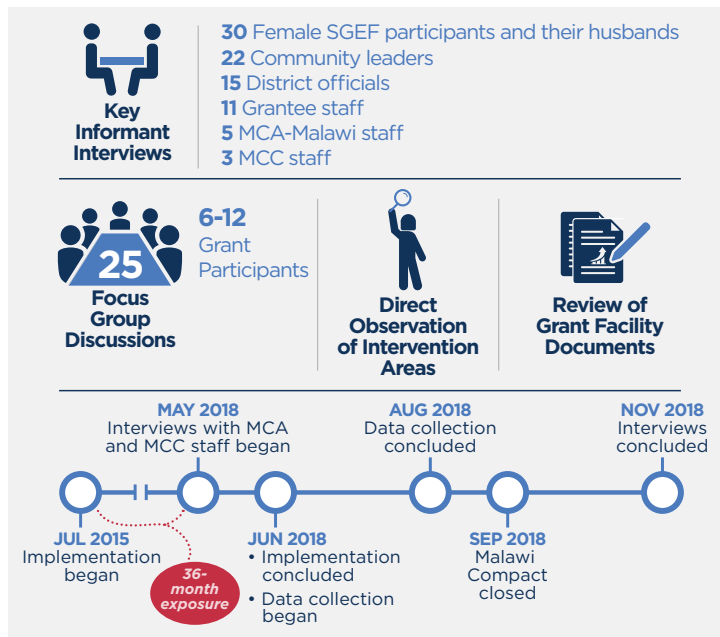
 Interventions attempting to change long-standing norms and practices must be supported with the in-depth strategies, expertise, and tools needed to effect such changes.

## Evaluation Methods

The interim ex post performance evaluation of the ENRM and SGEF activities used a case study approach that encompassed both primary qualitative data collection and a review of grant reports and MCA grant evaluations. The case study allowed for in-depth examination of each grant’s implementation, its ENRM and SGEF outcomes, and the prospects for sustaining the grant outcomes. The evaluation included a cross-case comparative analysis using the findings from the case studies to draw broader conclusions.



**An interview being conducted in a project tree nursery**



The evaluation focused on the best-case scenarios, considering grants that represented the best implementation of the ENRM and SGEF activities. Studying the cases with better implementation was important to evaluate the potential of the grants—that is, to learn what types of activities can work under real conditions, and why. Other criteria, such as geographical dispersion, presence of ENRM and SGEF activities, and strong intervention presence, were also used to select the case study grants.

Qualitative data was collected from key informant interviews, direct observation of the intervention areas, and extensively reviewed grant facility documents.

Implementation began in July 2015 and concluded in June 2018. Most interim data collection was conducted from June through August 2018, representing an exposure period of up to 36 months, although exposure varied widely by location and practices implemented.

## Next Steps

The evaluation will examine project outcomes two years after the end of the compact. The final evaluation results are expected in 2021.