



Report of a workshop on participatory
approaches in agricultural extension, Dedza,
Malawi, November 2012

Regis Chikowo, Krista Isaacs and Sieglinde Snapp

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Through action research and development partnerships, Africa RISING will create opportunities for smallholder farm households to move out of hunger and poverty through sustainably intensified farming systems that improve food, nutrition, and income security, particularly for women and children, and conserve or enhance the natural resource base.

The three regional projects are led by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (in West Africa and East and Southern Africa) and the International Livestock Research Institute (in the Ethiopian Highlands). The International Food Policy Research Institute leads the program's monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment. <http://africa-rising.net/>



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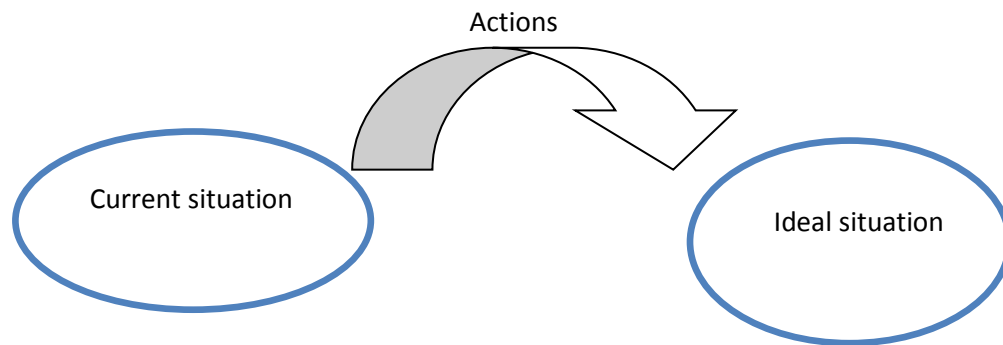
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Executive summary

A participatory learning workshop was held in Dedza between 6-10 November 2012, involving 40 participants from Dedza, Ntcheu, Muchinji and Lilongwe districts, all within the INVC target districts. Workshop participants were taken through participatory approaches that are critical in the development of trust with communities, leading to successful implementation of research or development projects. True community participation in initiatives leads to local ownership and higher chances of success and sustainable development. Participants were exposed to principles of facilitation and got to practice in smaller groups and plenary. Principles of agro-ecology and agronomy were presented and discussed with participants, including presentation of case studies by participants from the different districts. The workshop struck a balance between providing information and tools for people to carry out participatory action research and incorporating the participatory process into the workshop framework, thus co-creating with the participants the local meaning of participation and participatory research. Various facilitation tools were used by the core facilitators, while participants had numerous role play facilitation opportunities, including a real life situation interacting with a smallholder farming community in Dedza.

Workshop plan and process

Aim: To support local extension and other stakeholders to develop a concrete strategy for moving from the visioning processes to actions that result in impact on livelihoods of smallholder farmers, especially through sustainable intensification approaches, including grain legume production.



Principles

- Action can be by individuals or groups, communities or outsiders
- Actions can be about increasing knowledge, about changing behavior, or about changing the behavior of others
- Actions must include approaching outsiders

Approach: The workshop struck a balance between providing information and tools for people to carry out participatory action research and incorporating the participatory process into the workshop framework. In other words, instead of presenting on what participatory is, or why we do participatory research, we can co-create with the participants our meaning of participatory research and how and why we might do it. Various facilitation tools were used by the core facilitators, while participants had numerous role play facilitation opportunities, including a real life situation interacting with a smallholder farming community.

Wednesday, 7 November

1. Introduction of people present
 - a. Who we are, who we work for, why you're here, etc
 - b. Organization of workshop

Explanation of the workshop: the idea of this workshop is to create a reflective environment where we are learning together about how to do participatory research and generating a discourse about participatory research in agro-ecology and farming systems

- c. what do we want to achieve
- d. Purpose – brainstorm on what people want from this workshop
 - i. Whose workshop is this?
 - ii. What do you want to learn from this?
 - iii. Why are we here?
- e. Laying of ground rules

2. What is Participatory Action Research
 - a. history of the development of Participatory Research and Action Research
 - b. Theory of action research - empowerment and co-learning
 - c. the power of true partnerships and engagements to solving of local problems
 - d. what are the case studies that participants have (sharing experiences) - group work
 - e. report back and discussions
 - f. participants enact plays depicting specific subjects

Thursday, 8 November

3. Agro-ecology and agronomy
 - a. What is it?
 - b. What practices inform agro-ecology?
 - c. What are the theoretical underpinnings of agro-ecology and agronomy?
 - d. resource use efficiencies and food security - what are the opportunities at hand
4. Bridging the Gap
 - a. Putting farmers first -
 - b. building on indigenous/local knowledge to facilitate accelerated knowledge acquisition
 - c. Generating a co-learning research cycles
 - d. Group discussions - scenario mapping exercises
5. Research for development - what is it?
 - a. Africa RISING project - Research
 - b. Integrating Nutrition in Value Chains (INVC) - Development
 - c. How to facilitate partnerships in our districts
 - d. How do we work together
 - e. What is the place of theatre in participatory approaches (drama and songs)

Friday, 9 November

- a. Depart in the morning by bus for field work to Golomoti EPA - meeting with farmers and problem diagnosis
- b. Problem trees (farmers in different groups by gender, age, etc - this should be very dynamic
- c. facilitators will give tasks for different groups
- d. report back and lunch with farmers

Saturday (morning), 10 November

- f. Feedback from field trip lessons
- g. how can projects be implemented efficiently in places such as Golomoti
 - i. who are the power players - power relations
 - ii. what should be avoided
 - iii. discuss possible scenarios in other districts, EPAs
- h. Participatory on-farm trials in agronomy - what is the role of extension?
- i. Africa RISING case study

Introduction

The workshop started through welcoming remarks. An innovative participant introduction approach was used - in which participants were paired, got to know each other and then later the groups reconvened, and participants introduced themselves using their pair's particulars. This is done to make sure participants familiarize themselves with each other throughout the workshop. As the workshop was to be centered on participation, facilitation of this to happen is a vital ingredient. Sound facilitation has to be based on the following principles:

- Informality – a belief that all the people are on the same level when starting the workshop, ownership –so that participants take the workshop as their own,
- Openness and transparency, inclusiveness – where the entire participants are encouraged to be part of the workshop,
- Honesty, and thinking beyond the box – where participants are encouraged to think about different ways of doing things and not same old ways all the time, and
- Open dialogue.

The workshop ground rules were spell out: – cell phones off or on silent, one participant at a time, punctuality and contribution by everyone. Participants were allowed to make comments on the ground rules.

Workshop expectations from participants

- ✚ The expectations were of what should happen during the workshop were:
 - Know more about participatory approaches that will be used by both the INVC and Africa RISING projects
 - To know about how the projects would work with the agricultural staff
 - To share experiences
 - Field visit should not fail
 - Guiding principles of project implementation
 - Group work, energizers, practical experience and detailed explanations to be given
- ✚ What should not happen?
 - Participants should not be treated like kids
 - No drinking when coming to attend workshop
 - No late coming, no disruption of the program
 - Participation should be democratic
- ✚ Expected Outputs
 - Gain knowledge and train farmers
 - Achieve objectives of the project
 - Become knowledgeable with implementation
 - Develop realistic action plans and budgets
 - Well equipped with facilitation skills
 - Well-designed experiments regarding the project

Communication and participation – The Bus Code

Participants were introduced to the objectives of participation through a role play known as the bus code. This was about a bus in which the passengers would not reach a consensus as to where the bus should go as they were all going to different places. A lot of lessons were drawn as outlined below;

- Every individual in the bus had a different view just like any other person in the group and since everyone wanted their views to be held at the same time, they could not reach a consensus as to where the bus should go.
- The driver himself was weak in the sense that he didn't indicate where his bus was going before the passengers boarded the bus.
- There was lack of accurate information regarding where the bus was going i.e. the information was insufficient for the passenger to make a decision on whether to board the bus or not.
- Passengers in the bus could not effectively communicate due to lack of communication skills.
- Progress was never achieved as consensus could not be reached among the passengers who were intending to go to different destinations.

A major lesson from the bus code is related to the need for dialogue to find solutions for different challenges, and the importance of good leadership and clarity of objectives and goals.

Objectives of participatory approaches

Drawing key lessons from the drama enabled the participants to learn how participatory approaches are important in work places or during project implementation, leading to:

- Efficiency - use of resources in the most efficient manner
- Harmony – in participation, diverse actors can come up with a unique product
- Indigenous knowledge – with participatory approaches, we need to listen to farmers to accommodate their previous knowledge and experiences.
- Understand constraints – participatory approaches help in the understanding of constraints on each environment and facilitate the precipitation of appropriate entry points that 'best-fit' the local environment.
- Smart implementation of projects – This is also one ingredient of participatory approaches hence farmers benefit from our products.
- Sustainability of projects is also achieved with the same resources available.

Group work and case studies

After the basic concepts of participation and facilitation had been presented to the workshop participants, assignments were given that were to be deliberated in groups based on district. Below, we state the nature of the assignments and then give a brief narration/views from the respective districts, following 1 hr group discussions for each of the two tasks (only key messages captured here)

Task 1: Understanding of participation in districts regarding working with farmers – field experiences and experimentation

Group 1 – Lilongwe district

Lilongwe district participants understood participation to involve:

- Awareness of whatever project is to be implemented in the area,
- Meetings with people to know areas where they need support.
- Getting views from farmers about interventions they need to be implemented in their areas.

Group 2 - Ntcheu district

Ntcheu district participants understood participation as demand driven, and demand-driven approaches must be employed, including

- Trainings, and meetings to gather issues from farmers
- Field days and demonstrations
- PRAs when starting a new project
- being gender sensitive for all interventions

Group 3 – Mchinji district

According to Mchinji, participation starts on village level as an entry point:

- Sensitization meetings are conducted with village group headmen and farmers.
- Needs assessment is also conducted with farmers
- Then the action plan is developed from views of farmers
 - ✓ The activities are then formulated to address farmer problems
 - ✓ Resources required are identified and
 - ✓ The responsible personnel to carry out each activity are also identified.
- Finally the participatory monitoring and evaluation exercise is conducted.
- In all these activities, an extension agent only acts as a facilitator

Group 4 – Dedza district

According to Dedza, participation is also a demand driven exercise :

- The first activity is an area stakeholder panel which is conducted in model villages
- Then the action plan is formulated together with development of activities as well as the time frame for each activity.

Finally, the participatory monitoring and evaluation exercise is conducted. This was agreed upon by all the participants from Dedza.

Plenary synthesis

In addition to the above, further insights on participatory approaches/ concepts and the place for research were deliberated in plenary. Key messages from this included:

- Involvement of all stakeholders including the community members who are the beneficiaries of interventions
- Situational analysis which includes all stakeholders (farmers, extension workers, researchers etc.) to air their views and this brings empowerment to farmers
- Problem solving and sharing with farmers
- Valuing of every individuals idea
- Flexibility to changes in any environment during project implementation
- Demonstrations, field days and research trials (on farm trials) which involve participation from all stakeholders
- Learning - thus sharing of ideas and this benefits all stakeholders involved in a particular project.
- Risk taking – this risk comes where individuals are participating in an activity or they accept an idea even though they are not sure about the final outcome.
- Sharing – this means in participation people share many things such as Ideas, Materials, Costs and benefits among other things.
- Joint action planning, and implementation of activities
- Joint monitoring and evaluation, reporting and reviews.

Buzz words in participation and action research that participants became familiar with:

Participatory concepts and approaches		
Joint planning	Gender Sensitivity	Transparent
Participatory planning	Field days	Accountable
Participatory - implementation	Inclusiveness Demand driven	Involvement - Ownership
Participatory monitoring	Co-learning	Sharing
Participatory evaluation	Interactive	Empowered
Joint planning	Research trials	Flexibility
Needs assessment	Sustainable	

Thus involving stakeholders kindles the inherent inclinations in humans for innovation. The associated iterative research process :

- Identifies questions and technical options
- leads to co-design of experiments with farmers
- results in farmers and researchers jointly evaluating technologies, leading to critical analyses and co-learning
- leads to refining of further investigation nodes and questions

While research and development initiatives have in the past been in a parallel mode with little communication/feedback between the two, the INVC project that represents a development agenda, will benefit directly from the research inputs from Africa RISING research project, that is also funded by USAID under the Feed the Future program. The researcher/development -farmer continuum results in a seamless technology development and utilization pathway.

Task 2 – Sharing practical experiences from the respective districts for projects that may have or may not have used participatory approaches

The task called for discussion of projects/case studies in the different districts where participatory concepts were either used appropriately employed or initiatives that later collapsed due to top-down approaches. The outcomes of discussions and case studies are summarized below:

Group 1 - Lilongwe

Case study I: Fish Farming - The Irrigation Rural Livelihoods and Agricultural Rural Development Project (IRLADP)

According to the presentation

- ✚ Fish ponds were constructed and beneficiaries were given inputs (Input for Assets – IFA)
- ✚ Fish ponds were stocked by IRLADP
- ✚ The Fish ponds were handed over to farmers
- ✚ Finally, poor output from ponds after the funding agency left

Case II – Demand Driven Fish Ponds

- ✚ PRAs were conducted in another village
- ✚ Fish ponds were demand driven
- ✚ Committees in fish farming were formed, and a group constitution was formulated
- ✚ Resources were locally mobilized by the group, and fish ponds were constructed
- ✚ Finger rings (small fishes for seed) were bought and stocked in ponds
- ✚ The group was responsible for the ponds.
- ✚ The project has remained sustainable way beyond the external funding period.

Reasons for failure of case I included

- The project was not demand driven
- Farmers were working to get inputs not assets (the fish ponds)
- No training was given to farmers

Group 2 –Ntcheu district case study – Agricultural Sector Wide Approach (ASWAp) Trials

According to the presenter from Ncheu, farmers are involved in each and every stage in ASWAp trials such as site selection, plot layout, data collection, field days, trial management and evaluation

Achievements

- ✚ Farmers are able to choose suitable technologies based on their preferences.
- ✚ There is team work in implementing the trials.
- ✚ Farmers are adopting the technologies easily because there is full involvement in all the stages.
- ✚ Sustainability is expected because of this farmer participation.

Group 3 - Dedza case study – Chitsanzo Dairy Cooperative – Linthipe EPA

The whole idea was to develop the dairy industry in the area which was inactive by then.

The whole exercise started with

- ✚ Needs assessment – the approaches used were meetings and focus group discussions (FGDs) to identify problems in the area.
- ✚ the initial investigations established that milk producer price was too low, feed unavailability and small land holding sizes for raising fodder

After prioritizing the problems in the value chain together with farmers, poor availability of feed was ranked. A training program was then formulated with farmers towards:

- ✚ Training and demonstrations on dairy feed formulation
- ✚ Demonstrations on land preparation and pasture establishment
- ✚ Training and demonstrations in feed conservation

The lined up activities were implemented by farmers while the researcher and extension workers were just facilitating the process collaboratively. All stakeholders did monitoring and evaluation and they concluded that milk production can be improved through:

- ✚ Feed conservation
- ✚ Intensifying pasture establishment and usage
- ✚ Homemade feed rations
- ✚ Bulk purchasing at wholesale markets.

Sustainability

- ✚ Since farmers were involved in all stages, they are still continuing with the actions that were developed like pasture establishment, feed formulation and preservations.

Group 4 –Mchinji case study – Conflict on canal development

Kanthiti Irrigation Scheme (Rural Livelihood Economic Enhancement Program project)

Developer: Foundation for Irrigation and Sustainable Development (FISD), Mlonyeni Extension Planning Area (EPA).

Problem

- ✚ FISD didn't conduct awareness meetings at ADC level (Traditional Authority (TA) Mlongeni and Traditional Authority (TA) Zulu. They only briefed the assembly about the project.
- ✚ Farmers in TA Zulu were not involved in the project planning i.e. they were not informed that the irrigation canal will pass through their area. According to initial plan, this was possible however the problem came after the mapping exercise which showed that the canal must pass the other way round (the law of gravity).
- ✚ There was little involvement of other stakeholders apart from TA Mlonyeni and TA Zulu.

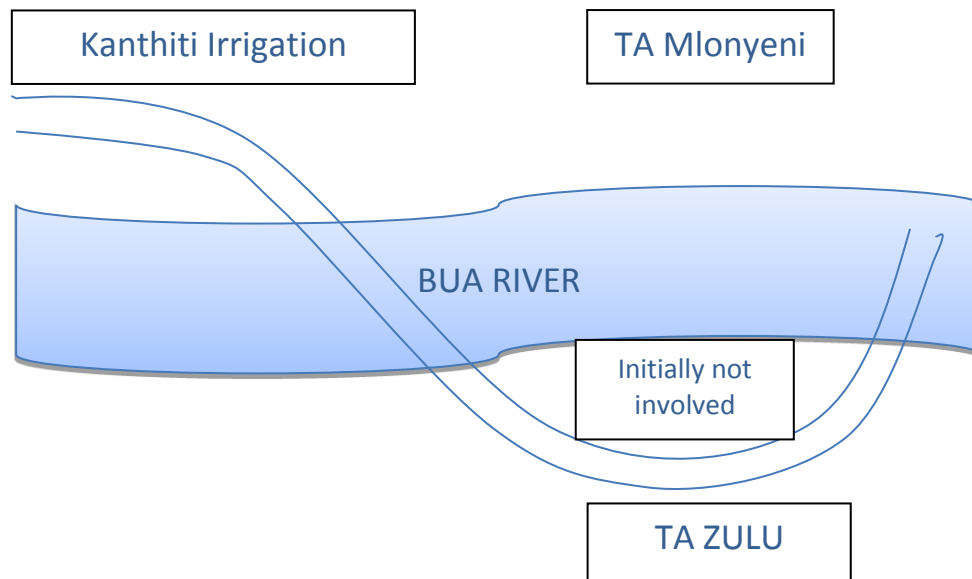
Effects

- ✚ Wastage of resources e.g. time, fuel and human capacity.
- ✚ No ownership (TA Zulu)

Solution

- ✚ Briefing ADC for both TA Mlonyeni and TA Zulu.
- ✚ Formation of main committee to facilitate the project in the area.
- ✚ Replanning of activities.
- ✚ Implementation of the project.

Diagram of the canal and communities involved



Case Studies Summaries

- ✚ For Lilongwe, Government through IRLAADP proposed a fish pond instead of farmers proposing the project.
- ✚ For Dedza, improving dairy production has to involve the farmers at all levels
- ✚ For Mchinji, conflict on irrigation canal development due to poor planning and sensitization strategy regarding the project.
- ✚ For Ncheu, in ASWAp trials farmers are involved in all stages including choice of technology hence high adoption rate.

Case study synthesis

- ✚ For Mchinji canal development : Development initiatives create conflicts if not properly planned. Hence participation, involvement during onset of the project is key solution to conflicts.
- ✚ For Dedza dairy industry : involvement and ownership brings sustainability.
- ✚ For Lilongwe fish pond project: Imposition/ top down approaches are often not associated with sustained implementation of the project by communities beyond the funding phases
- ✚ For Ntcheu ASWAP trials, if farmers are involved from a very onset, it's not so hard to push for technology adoption.

Principles of agro-ecology and sustainable development

The more formal power point presentation covered the following areas:

- ✚ What Agro ecology is about – type of sustainable intensification.
- ✚ What Agro ecology means? – combination of agriculture and ecology.
- ✚ Ecology – relationship of organisms to one another and to their physical surrounding.
- ✚ Principle idea - Re-establish ecological relationships that can occur naturally on the farm instead of reducing and simplifying them.
- ✚ Manage ecological relationships
- ✚ Principles of sustainable ecology – environmental soundness, social equity and economic viability.
- ✚ Agro ecology and Research –

The doubled-up legumes technology is one of the ecologically sound agricultural intensification technologies that can improve farm performance. Two legumes that do not have direct competition for resources due to their different growth habits or architecture are grown in the same field at the same time. The grain legumes improve soil fertility, while also improving protein availability. Some of the popular legume combinations include:

- ✚ Pigeon peas + groundnuts
- ✚ Pigeon peas + Soya Bean
- ✚ Pigeon peas + Cowpea

Land equivalent ratios (LER) can be used to analyze where these intercroops are beneficial, but sole interpretation LER without considering other ecological benefits of the system may miss important sustainability indicators. The participants also contributed to the presentations by suggesting the following:

- ✚ Pest management – e.g. cowpeas are prone to pests hence farmers should be taught how to manage these pests.
- ✚ Inoculation is also necessary for some bean varieties.
- ✚ Phosphorus fertilization important for grain legumes when soil phosphorus is too deficient

Some useful tools for participatory training workshops

Story-telling and role plays can convey strong messages about problematic situations and how solutions can be produced from within. Below, we describe two of the most powerful tools - the River and the Liberator codes.

Description of the River Code

“Two men come to a river and look for a place to cross. The current is very strong and they are both afraid to cross it. A third man comes along and sees their difficulty. He leads them up the river to a place where there are some stepping stones and a small island in the middle of the river. He urges the men to step on the stones but both are afraid, so he agrees to take one of them on his back. By the time when he gets to the middle of the river, the man on his back seems very heavy, so he puts him on the little island. He then returns to fetch the second man who wants to climb on his back as well, but as his back was already hurting, he refuses. Instead he takes his hand and encourages him to use the stepping stones himself and he immediately masters the skill to manage on his own. However, the other man who had been carried all the way to the island had not learnt anything and wanted to be dependent all the way. After refusing to attempt the second part of the river on his own, he was left alone at the island while the stranger and the man who had acquired new skills crossed to the other bank and proceeded with their journey.

Interpretation (decoding)

One of the participants was able to accurately decode the story

- River – the challenges faced by farmers
- Strong man – represents donor community
- The two men – farmers themselves

The whole story to the participant means that the farmers should not rely on donor support alone. They also need to provide their input. From the onset of the project they need to contribute at least 50% as well as learning the tricks so that next time they can solve the problems on their own. This entails sustainability of the project. Further, this was also explained as one of the strategy that can be used to instill confidence in farmers, self-reliance, self-motivation and empowerment so that by the end of the day, they learn tricks and does things on their own (sustainability).

Description of the Liberator Code

“This story is about a person who was faced with a pressing problem (he was tied). The first person who was passing by saw the man and gave him some money but he just pushed the money aside. The second person who was passing by saw the person with some money beside him. He pitied him and gave him a book which he also pushed it aside. The third person also felt sorry for the man as she was passing by and gave him some food but he also pushed the food aside. Then the fourth person came. She observed the man; she looked at all the things given to him. But still the man seemed not to be satisfied or attracted to anything given to him. Then she looked closely at the man and found that he was tied. The she untied the man and just soon after that the man was very happy.”

Interpretation (decoding)

This was very obvious and one participant interpreted just the same way the story is. The lesson learnt from this story is that when bringing development project to farmers we need to understand their problems first. In addition, when trying to solve farmer problems, we must first identify root causes and this can be done by using participatory approaches.

Situational analysis: Field trip to Golomoti

The situational analysis took place in Golomoti Extension Planning Area (EPA), Golomoti section, in Dedza. In this area, more than 200 farmers attended the meeting. After settling preliminaries, the workshop participants enacted the River Code play. The farmers watched the role play with interest and one of the farmers interpreted the story accordingly. Among the lessons which they learnt from the play were as follows:

- ✚ “Aid corrupts peoples mind and affects them to do things on their own.” (woman)
- ✚ “Some people always want to be pushed to do things. They cannot do it on their own.”
- ✚ “Don’t rely too much on aid.”

The Liberator code was also demonstrated to farmers and they interpreted it accordingly. Among the lessons learnt by the farmers were as follows:

- ✚ “Some people don’t like short term assistance. They want to be taught how to do things not receiving all the time.”
- ✚ “When a person is strongly in need of something specific, even if people give him/her several kinds of gifts, if they don’t end his / her problem, it doesn’t change anything to that person. But when someone assists you with what you need you become very happy.”

Farmers were divided into groups by age and gender to discuss current problems in the area related to agriculture and how they perceived finding relevant solutions. The participants used this opportunity to practice facilitation skills they had acquired during the training over the past 3 days.

Workshop conclusion

Africa RISING program is about participation and how it can be used as a tool to implement projects. Dr Regis Chikowo advised all the participants of the workshop to apply the knowledge they had gained in implementing the INVC and Africa RISING programs. There would be a follow up meeting in August 2013.

Appendix 1: Participants from Mchinji and Lilongwe districts

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	EPA (and district)	MOBILE
J.C. Chisoni	Mkanda (Mchinji)	0999104705
B.S.D.M. Masebo	Kalulu (Mchinji)	0993812652
G,Maseya	Nsitu (Mchinji)	0999415607
S.C.D. Wella	Mlonyeni (Mchinji)	0999691602
Felix Tera	FUM	
Marry Gondwe	FUM	
Alice Dete	NASFAM	0999245569
H.Chagona	Mitundu (Lilongwe)	
P.Thosi	Chitsime (Lilongwe)	
D. Ibrahim	Chiwamaba (Lilongwe)	
M. Nkhoma	Mngwangwa (Lilongwe)	
H.Nkhoma	Ukwe (Lilongwe)	

Appendix 2: Participants from Dedza district

FIRST NAME	SURNAME	ORGANISATION	TITLE
Harriet	Gausi	Agriculture	DAHLDO
Charles S	Tembo	Agriculture	AEDO
Amos	Ganizani	Agriculture	AEDO
Lizzie	Shumba	Ekwendeni Hospital	Project Coordinator
Rodgers	Msachi	Ekwendeni Hospital	Project Promoter
Thomson H	Banda	Agriculture	SALRCO
Christina	Ngwemba	Agriculture	AEDC
Lughano	Tomoka	Agriculture	CPO
Jimmy	Dinesi	Agriculture	AEDO
Eric	Manjolo	Agriculture	EMO
Owen	Kumwenda	Agriculture	DADO
Martha	Pumbwa	Agriculture	AEDC
Thokoziire	Stima	Agriculture	AEDO
James	Chitseko	Agriculture	Driver
Robert	Kanyesi	District Council	DPD

Appendix 3: Participants from Ntcheu district

FIRST NAME	SURNAME	ORGANISATION	TITLE
A K	Msukwa	Agriculture	DADO
Emma	Sikoya	Agriculture	DAHLDO
Edith	Ngwaya	Agriculture	AEDC
Memory	Kamoyo	DC	DPD
Kefasi	Kamoyo	Agriculture	LRCO
Blessings	Kadzimbuka	Agriculture	AEDO
Glyn	Chitete	Agriculture	AGRESSO/WPO
Charles	Kachokammanja	Agriculture	CPO
Goodwill	Katsonga	DAO	SALRCO
Jeckner	Phiri	Agriculture	AEDO
Thomics	Lupenga	Agriculture	AEDC
Masautso	Nachamba	Agriculture	Driver