

Social Lab Report

Activities & Learning from the Social Labs in
Rumphi and Mulanje, Malawi



February 2018 - August 2019



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About This Report

This Social Lab Report was developed with participants of the Mulanje and Rumphi social labs to showcase the activities that took place between February 2018 and July 2019, highlight learnings that emerged and introduce next steps. This report was created for stakeholders in Mulanje and Rumphi, and throughout Malawi, including funders both local and international, local government, traditional leaders, community structures, CBOs, NGOs, active citizens and more. The content was generated from social labs workshops and interviews with lab participants and district actors.



“The idea of an inclusive forum for discussion sits deep in our culture. The idea that we can harness this part of our culture to undertake actions to reform the aid system is new and exciting. We have complained about the jet-set foreign aid experts. But it is on us to step up and become the experts of our own development. We are the experts in the Rumphi social lab.”

– Oliver Mkandawire, lab member, Rumphi

Social Labs in Malawi

Social labs bring together changemakers who play different roles in a community to test ideas for making the development process at the local level work better. Developed by Zaid Hassan, social labs are a collaborative experimental approach that has been used around the world to tackle challenging problems.

The Rumphi and Mulanje social labs are district-level efforts to identify development challenges within the development system and test possible solutions. Launched in February and April 2018, each lab is made up of more than 60 participants, including active citizens, district government, Traditional Authorities (TAs), faith-based leaders, Village Development Committees (VDCs), Area Development Committees (ADCs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Over a year and a half, lab members have worked together in 11 groups to implement short-term activities called “micro-actions” to better understand district development challenges and experiment with solutions. The social labs come back together every two months to present the results of their micro-actions, exchange feedback, and work together to design their next micro-actions.

What is Different About Social Labs?

Unlike traditional development projects, social labs do not follow a defined plan and they do not have clearly identified outputs or outcomes. Instead, social labs are made up of multi-stakeholder teams that work together to identify problems and issues that are relevant and important to them and communities, and carry out micro-actions, or short-term, low cost activities to test solutions. Experimenting with ideas before scaling them up allows social lab members to learn from the process. A social lab brings together people who may have never worked together. Members are able to develop shared goals and

ways of working together more equally and openly. The lab increases trust, embraces diversity, promotes learning, encourages self-organizing.

How the Social Labs Began

The social labs were launched by Root Change and Keystone Accountability, international non-profit organizations (INGOs) from the United States and the United Kingdom respectively, and Youth and Society (YAS), an NGO in Malawi, as part of an action research grant under the USAID Local Works program. The idea for the social labs emerged from a country-wide listening tour, which aimed to understand how Malawians felt about being on the receiving end of aid.



"The social lab approach is more about empowering the community as well as beneficiaries to take action on issues affecting them.... In these other projects the solutions are already drawn and imposed while the social lab gives the community the opportunity to feel ownership. The social lab is unique and different in this way from other projects."

- Rowani Kaluba, lab member, Rumphi

Rumphi Social Lab

In Rumphi, the social lab was facilitated by Youth and Society (YAS), a human rights and governance NGO based Mzuzu. Facilitation was led by Charles Kajoloweka, the founder and Executive Director of YAS. The Rumphi Social Lab began in February 2018 and implemented five rounds of experiments.

Mulanje Social Lab

In Mulanje, Root Change hired two Field Managers, Myson Jambo and Emas Potolani, to lead facilitation of the Mulanje social lab. Before launching the social lab, the Field Managers spent more than 50 days meeting and building relationships with district stakeholders.

Participants

Participants in Rumphi and Mulanje were invited to join the social lab through a nomination process. Root Change, Keystone Accountability, and YAS met with district government stakeholders and civil society organizations to solicit nominations of local changemakers, who were actively leading and influencing community development. Nominated individuals were invited to participate in a social lab design workshop in their respective district. Members in both social labs volunteered their time to participate.

Design Workshop

To start the social labs, participants were invited to engage in a five-day design workshop in Mulanje and Rumphi. Over 60 leading changemakers from community structures and groups, local government, Traditional Authorities (TAs), CBOs, NGOs, INGOs participated. Participants learned about the principles of a social lab and how it is structured. They assessed the level of trust between and among district actors. They discussed the challenges facing the development system in the district and agreed on a central theme for the social lab. Participants learned a process of experimentation, using micro-actions to test ideas.



Participants from Rumphi Design Workshop

Purpose of the Social Lab

During the design workshops for the Rumphi and Mulanje social labs, participants chose to center the purpose of the lab on the theme of **citizen voice and accountability**, to strengthen relationships, trust and accountability between district actors to improve citizen voice, participation, and ownership of development projects.

Lab participants voted a top set of issues to be the focus of the lab and formed micro-action groups around each idea. In Mulanje, six big ideas were selected and experiment teams formed. In Rumphi, a total of five experiment teams were formed around big ideas.

Guiding Principles of the Social Labs

The following guiding principles were introduced in the design workshop and referenced throughout the duration of the social labs:

- **Radical Equality and Voice:** Every member, no matter their position or status, is an equal partner in lab affairs and has a right and responsibility to make his/her voice heard.
- **Learning and Experimentation:** The social lab is not a project, implementing a pre-determined solution. It is a learning initiative. Teams test ideas, reflect on what they learn, and create follow-on experiments.

- **Collaboration and Partnership Building:** Members make a commitment to collaborate with each other in micro-action groups, to build partnerships in the district with other stakeholders.
- **Feedback:** Members are invited to give their opinions openly about how the lab is going to build an environment of honesty, transparency, and problem solving.
- **Accountability:** Micro-action groups are accountable to each other for doing the best job possible and using resources wisely.
- **Flexibility:** The social lab makes changes to adapt to the needs and interests of its members and the community.
- **Volunteerism:** Members volunteer their time to work towards the betterment of their communities and districts.

Micro-Actions

Micro-actions are small-scale activities that are carried out with a community or district actors to test an idea or assumption for how to address a problem. By design, they should not require large amounts of resources or time to complete. Groups were given two-months to carry out their micro-actions. The design and implementation were determined by each group, which had complete control over the process. For each micro-action cycle, groups received a small amount of resources of \$500 USD. The resources were not to fund project activities, but rather to facilitate transportation, communication, and convening of the group members. Groups decided how to best use their resources and were not required to submit receipts or reports for the money spent. Groups that these resources did not belong to them, but to the whole social. Every group was accountable to the lab and every lab member had the right to question how money was spent.



Rumphi Social Lab Reflection Workshop, April 2018; participants engaged in collaborative icebreaker activity

Reflection Workshops

All social lab groups reconvened every two-months to share what they had learned. Over a 2-day meeting, groups presented the results of their micro-actions and shared feedback with one another. Groups incorporated feedback to re-design their micro-actions and launch another cycle of activities for two-months.

Feedback Surveys

Both social labs used short, feedback surveys during reflection workshops to understand the levels of trust, open communication, and accountability among members. Questions included:

- How well are the lab members working together as equals?
- What is the level of trust between members of micro-action groups?
- Are the micro-actions helping us to learn new ways of working?

Results were shared back with all members and explored in an open dialogue where actions were identified to resolve issues that emerged. Feedback was found to be a powerful tool for conflict resolution and trust building.

Rumphi Social Lab:

Changemakers Innovation Challenge

Micro-actions were not always easy to conduct at the community level. Groups shared results to identify possible solutions to common problems. During the first micro-action cycle, groups experienced a systemic and cultural challenge created by the foreign aid system: demand for allowances (or monetary compensation) for participation in meetings.



Innovation Challenge winners with Charles Kajoloweka, Executive Director of YAS

To address this problem, the Rumphi social lab published a solicitation in the national newspaper to identify innovative ideas to increase participation without allowances, and called it the Changemakers Innovation Challenge. Of the 16 submissions, the Rumphi social lab members selected three winners to share their ideas at the lab and have them tested by groups.

Rumphi Micro-Action Groups

Open Council Group

Challenge: As a result of some resistance to decentralization by central government bureaucracy, the district council was protective of its powers and closed to other stakeholders

Purpose: Test approaches to “open” the council to various stakeholders to be more transparent and responsive to constituents; conducted micro-actions in TA Zolokere

Activities & Lessons Learned:

- **Gathered feedback from the community stakeholders:** Stakeholders shared their disappointment with the poor access to information and with not being involved in the implementation and monitoring of projects. The community expressed a lack of ownership of projects happening in their community.

“The understanding has deepened. I see the need for opening up so that all development actors in the district are able to share information...and have platforms where different actors should help themselves, that in the long run will help foster development.”
- Lusungu Kaira, lab member, Open Council Group
- **Engaged with 40 NGOs:** The group implemented a survey with NGOs and found that NGOs in Rumphi have a low level of satisfaction with council services, mostly because the council does not have an equitable process for investing in projects. NGOs acknowledged that sometimes the issues are caused by NGOs themselves. The group was surprised to hear the NGOs taking ownership of some of the breakdown in the relationship.
- **Shared findings with District Council:** Feedback collected from both community structures and CSOs were shared with the district council, which was unaware of the different perceptions in the community. Recommendations were shared among the social lab and the council.

Monitoring CDF/DDF Group

Challenge: Little community participation in Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and District Development Fund (DDF) decision-making despite guidelines outlining community engagement in project identification and monitoring.

Purpose: Test alternative approaches for supporting communities to monitor the CDF and DDF in four TAs of Chisovya, Mwankhunikila, Mwahenga, and Katumbi



DDF/CDF Group meeting stakeholders

Activities & Lessons Learned:

- **Measured the feasibility of accessing key information:** The group found that, while they were eventually able to access information from the council, the process was difficult.
- **Monitored CDF projects:** Following up on two CDF projects, the team discovered some breaches on procedures such as the selection of contractors with little community involvement. The lab suggested that the group develop the capacity of the community to monitor projects independently.
- **Used 'Bush Fire' approach to sensitize the community on CDF and DDF guidelines:** Based on the feedback from the lab, the team began to sensitize the community on DDF and CDF guidelines through agricultural extension officers who then reached out to ADCs and VDCs to spread the word.
- **Communities started taking ownership of development projects:** Two communities are starting to monitor development projects. One community has secured increased participation, but the other has struggled to shift the mindset that development projects should be carried out and monitored exclusively by the government. They have also seen delays in the procurement process by the council.

"One of the best things that social lab has brought is the relationship between the community and the council. Previously to get information from the council or any department at the council was difficult...We went looking for guidelines, they gave us [the guidelines], they even came to teach us how guidelines are followed and later on they even went further...the procurement team came to teach us how procurement is done in government departments. That shows that we have made good progress."

- Lab member, Monitoring DDF/CDF Group, Rumphi

Citizen Charter Group

Challenge: NGOs in Malawi often implement projects at the TA level without consulting the citizens who live there

Purpose: Test the use of a citizen charter as an approach for improving transparency and accountability between communities and NGOs in TA Chikulamayembe

Activities & Lessons Learned:

- **Explored community perceptions:** The group met with the community to gather perceptions about NGOs. The community agreed that a citizen charter would be useful and the group was able to move forward.
- **Consulted with District Council:** The group brought the charter idea to the district council, which initially had trouble distinguishing it from an existing MoU. The group explained the difference, and the district council was able to share some gaps in the MoU that they wanted to be addressed in the charter.
- **Feedback informed the first draft of NGO Charter:** After collecting feedback from different stakeholders in Rumphi district, including NGOs, the team developed the first draft of the charter.
- **Feedback collected and charter finalized:** The draft was shared back with the community, the council, and NGOs to document their reactions and recommendations. Feedback was incorporated and the charter was finalized.



Agness Nkhwazi (left), lab member of Citizen Charter Group with Blessings Chirambo (right), lab member of DDF/CDF Group

"In the past, most organizations working in development in this community would leave some of the work unfinished. Currently we have rules which govern the workers to finish the work that they have started and we are thankful to the social lab."

- Chief Kamzinga Mkandawire, Principle GVH

Health Advisory Committee (HAC) Group

Challenge: While HACs were established to be a formal link between the community and health facility, committee members and citizens are not aware of their functions

Purpose: Test approaches for improving the accountability of Health Advisory Committees (HACs) in TA Mlowe and Chitimba

Activities & Lessons Learned:

- **Identified gaps in HAC capacity:** The group surveyed patients at two clinics, one private and one public. Survey responses revealed that communities were unaware of the services offered by the HAC. For example, one community was being asked to pay for medication that should be free.
- **Informed the public on functions of HAC through a sports bonanza:** The group disseminated information about the roles and responsibilities of HACs in Mlowe and Chitimba through a football event. It also held a meeting with the HACs, chiefs, and citizen groups to raise awareness about the functions and services of HACs.



"We have ensured that there is sanitation at the hospital. We would mobilize groups of ten people to conduct a cleaning exercise at the hospital, all thanks to the social lab."
- Mark Munthali, school committee member, Livingstonia
- **Expanded approach to Livingstonia:** After discovering the same issues in Livingstonia, the group informed various stakeholders of the roles of the HAC and the service level agreement. The Livingstonia HAC was primarily made up of chiefs, so the group raised awareness about who should take part in the HAC. As a result, the committee was selected new community members.

"Most of the times there was no transparency and accountability, but when the social lab came it helped to enforce a good working relationship between the community and the health facility. The community deserves to know which drugs come to the health facilities."
- Peace Nkhwazi, lab member, HAC Group
- **Investigated cholera outbreaks in Chitimba and Mlowe:** The group investigated why Chitimba and Mlowe had annual outbreaks of cholera Which resulted in the community setting up a committee focused on finding local solutions to this issue.

Citizen Voice Group

Challenge: Citizens are often unsure how development decisions are made by local government, including setting priorities, contracting work, and purchasing equipment

Purpose: Test the use of citizen forums to inform and engage citizens in setting the development agenda in Ng'onga and Chozoli ADCs.

Activities & Lessons Learned:



Citizen Voice Group meeting with stakeholders

- **Implemented survey to assess trust:** The group conducted a survey to assess the levels of trust between citizens and duty bearers. Surveys revealed low levels of trust and confusion over the roles and responsibilities of duty bearers and citizens.
- **Clarified roles and responsibilities of citizenry and duty bearers:** A training of trainers approach was used to help disseminate information about the roles of citizens and community leaders.
- **Focused efforts in Rumphi ADC:** Upon the recommendation of the lab, the group focused their micro-action in the ADC of Rumphi. They trained the local duty bearers and citizens on the CDF guidelines and the roles of the MP. One VDC and one ADC were trained to disseminate the information to the wider community. Community members report that they are now able to voice concerns if development projects are not being completed or if purchasing procedures are not transparent.

"Personally, I have seen fruitful outcomes in the work of the social lab mainly because they have united us as VDC with the ADC and the local council...We have achieved what we thought was impossible in this community through this cooperation, thanks to the social lab."

- Gilbert Gondwe, VDC Chairperson

"The social lab has impacted my life in the sense that I am aware of how I can help in the development of my community. I know how I can find counsel and what my responsibilities are in seeking clarification on various development projects."

- Matilda Banda, member of Chozoli ADC

Mulanje Micro-Action Groups

Direct Funding Group

Challenge: Decentralized structures, such as ADCs, require the funding and capacities to provide adequate public services and meet local needs

Purpose: Test ways for Milonde ADC to access funding directly, without intermediaries, to support community development

Activities & Lessons Learned:

- **Affirmed community interest:** Strong interest among stakeholders for the Milonde ADC to receive direct financial assistance.
- **Explored options for direct funding:** Collaborated with Milonde ADC and the District Council to approach development projects and businesses about granting funds directly to the ADC. Despite initial interest, the ADC did not receive a commitment.
- **Secured support from MP:** The MP recognized the role of the ADC of ensuring that money meant for development addresses the needs of communities and pledged MK300,000.
- **Established special Committee and opened bank account:** The Milonde ADC created a special committee and opened a bank account to collect funds from the MP, religious bodies, TAs, CBOs, and other stakeholders.



Direct Funding Group meeting with Milonde ADC

"As I speak, we have opened an account for the ADC and make contributions monthly so that someday we will have an exemplary project to showcase our ability."

- Shadreck Malora, Chairperson, Milonde ADC

"A villager has a say in the type of project they want, because you can come here and tell us that you will drill a borehole, yet what we want is a school block. The social lab has given us a negotiating platform for the development projects that we really want and need."

- John Chiwa, member of Milonde ADC

Strengthening Citizens' Voice Group

Challenge: Citizens and community structures, such as VDCs, are not empowered to participate in decision making

Purpose: Test approaches to increase citizen participation in local development processes in TA Nkanda in Chambe ADC

Activities & Lessons Learned:



Strengthening Citizens' Voice Group members

- **Collected community feedback:** Citizens experience a lack of transparency and inclusion when development projects are implemented. Community structures do not receive information on project budgets, timeframes, or the process of hiring contractors.
- **Held dialogue with District Council:** The purpose of the dialogue was to have the District Council share information on the implementation of a current project with community stakeholders,
- **Identified community skills:** The VDCs and communities felt that their voices were not incorporated into this project and are unhappy that the workforce comes primarily from outside the community. Mapping was carried out to identify skills and capacities that they could contribute to the project as employees or contractors.

"We have established by-laws at the ADC, that all projects would go through the ADC and the community members directly or through the project committee. These by-laws are in every village; that projects will be discussed by the people before they are implemented."

- Francis Mkwapa, Vice Secretary, Chambe ADC

"It was not easy to realize that people have the power to say something on the projects that are happening in their community because all along we were made to believe that it is not within our role. But after sessions with the social lab we understood that we have the right to make our voices heard."

- Lab member, Strengthening Citizens' Voice Group

Youth in Development Group

Challenge: Forty percent of Malawi's population is aged 10 to 35 years but youth lack basic opportunities to influence development decisions that affect their lives

Purpose: Test approaches to empower young people to participate in development activities and community structures in TA Njema



Youth in Development Group meeting with youth in TA Njema

Activities & Lessons Learned:

- **Formed Youth Network:** Young people were disaggregated and not aligned with any community structures. The group engaged with the chief, and collaborated with the Mulanje District Youth Office and the ADC to establish a Youth Network.
- **Developed capacity of Youth Network:** Provided leadership training and overview of relevant policies.
- **Held meetings with stakeholders to encourage youth participation:** Engaged CSOs, NGOs, ADC, VDCs, local leaders, and District Council to explore opportunities to improve youth participation and to establish youth component of programming.
- **Surveyed development committees:** Surveyed Njema ADC on youth involvement to engage ADC, VDCs, and other community stakeholders in dialogue about results.
- **Youth Clubs emerged on their own:** Young people are excited to belong to and benefit from the Youth Network and have begun to form small Youth Clubs on their own. It will be important for the social lab to continue to empower youth to organize and represent themselves in meetings.

"We have a full council, comprised of different heads of development, but there was no one representing youth... we had to mobilize young people and have a discussion with the youth office to have representation in the full council. Now we have a representative, who is also a member of the social lab."

- Rita Rino, lab member, Youth in Development Group

"Right now, I am a leader of confidence, organizing meetings and campaigns with my fellow youth. We were invited by the hospital committee to be part of events. In the past we were not being useful, but now we have unleashed our potential."

- Lab member, Youth in Development Group

MoU with NGOs Group

Challenge: NGOs in Malawi often implement projects without consulting the citizens who live there

Purpose: Test whether a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) can be used to rebuild accountability and trust between NGOs and citizens in Ntenjera ADC



Mou Group meeting with Ntenjera ADC

Activities & Lessons Learned:

- **Held meetings with ADC and NGOs:** The ADC expressed its support for an MoU and eagerness to be consulted in the identification and implementation of development projects by NGOs. Initially, NGOs shared hesitations about an MoU.
- **Identified an NGO partner:** Worked with Ntenjera ADC to identify an NGO willing to work with the ADC to draft an MoU and test its impact on accountability and trust.
- **Secured buy-in from the District Council:** The ADC worked with the District Council to validate that the terms of reference in the MoU conformed to the local government's guidelines and collect feedback.
- **Draft MoU reviewed by NGOs:** NGOs were invited to a meeting to share feedback on the MoU drafted by the ADC.

"Our thinking capacity has changed. In the past we were not aware of the wrongs that were happening. We were just there listening and taking orders and signing documents ignorantly. But now that cannot happen. We have questions that we ask organizations whenever they are here. We ask about their plans and the implementation and when the similar projects are already in our community, we ask them to introduce something different"

- Samson Chingwengwe, Chairperson, Reuben VDC

"In the past, we would participate in the projects, but we never made follow ups on how projects were implemented. With the coming in of the social lab, we are not leaving it in the hands of the organizations. The committee is able to follow how the work is progressing. We are also able to persuade the organization to give monthly reports to the ADC."

- Patricia Naluso, Treasurer, Njema VDC

Transparency and Accountability Group

Challenge: Citizens are not comfortable expressing their views honestly to power holders

Purpose: Test approaches to increase transparency and accountability among community leaders in TA Mthiramanja, especially between citizens and VDCs in GVH Chisutu



Transparency and Accountability Group meeting with stakeholders in GVH Chisutu

Activities & Lessons Learned:

- **Held community meetings:** Conducted consultative meetings with citizens, the ADC in TA Mthiramanja, and the Chisutu VDC and discovered that participants were not comfortable expressing themselves honestly.
- **Implemented questionnaire:** To allow for confidentiality, a questionnaire was administered. Participants indicated that they were not aware of the development projects implemented in their village.
- **Formed committee to monitor projects:** A committee was formed to monitor projects in Chisutu VDC.
- **Regular meetings held between ADC and VDC:** The ADC and VDC have established a monthly meeting to share updates and decisions regarding development in their communities.

"People did not realize their power to question or seek audience with people in leadership positions, and through our reflections with them, they realized what role they have to play. In meetings they would testify that they are indeed following up on things they are interested in knowing."

- Lab member, Transparency and Accountability

"The people are now able to know what is actually happening as far as development is concerned. They are able to know the funders and the budgets. Now the projects are started and completed very well as they are happening in a transparency way."

- Lydia Kathumba, lab member, Transparency and Accountability Group

Cohesion Between Stakeholders Group

Challenge: As a result of competition for resources and few incentives for collaboration, NGOs do not work together at the community level

Purpose: Test methods to improve coordination between NGOs in the development process in Sub-TA (STA) Ndanga

Activities & Lessons Learned:



Cohesion between stakeholders meeting with STA Ndanga

- **Held stakeholder mapping:** Through a stakeholder mapping exercise, the group found that there are 11 NGOs working in STA Ndanga that do not collaborate to distribute their work throughout the STA.
- **Formed a stakeholders committee:** A special committee was formed to oversee collaboration among development stakeholders. The committee agreed to meet monthly and invited traditional leaders, ADC, VDCs, NGOs, Councilors, and MPs to attend sessions, with mixed results.
- **Created a WhatsApp group:** The stakeholder committee created a WhatsApp group to facilitate the exchange of project information.
- **Established a local social lab:** Local structures, including the ADC and VDCs established their own social lab and drafted a constitution to work together on development efforts.

"My perception before the social lab was that when projects were happening and resources abused, we were feeling powerless and felt that it is not our responsibility to ask or contribute. But with the knowledge from the social lab, we have realized that we are the owners of those projects and it is up to us to see to it that they are being successful in our areas."

- Raphael Joseph, Chairman, Pastors Fraternal, STA Ndanga

"I am talking about some organizations that come to the ADC and express interest to implement a project, and state that there will be a report every two months. We are expecting to be holding such organizations accountable if they fail to deliver according to their promises and asking them questions pertaining to our working relationship."

- Patrick Nambazo, Chairperson VDC and ADC member, STA Ndanga

Learning and Outcomes

In June 2019, Root Change, Keystone, and YAS recorded 103 conversations with social lab participants and district actors to understand their experience with the social labs in both districts. The quotes shared throughout this report were captured during these interviews.

Analysis of these conversations and stories revealed that the social labs contributed to exciting and significant changes, including:

- 1. Citizen Voice and Participation:** The most change reported was in the area of citizen voice and participation. Stories demonstrated a change in how citizens participate in decision making and ensure that their voices are heard and instances of district actors changing their behavior to respond to citizen feedback.
- 2. Improved Relationships:** This was found to be the second highest area of change. Social lab members and district actors established new relationships and improved existing relationships.
- 3. Trust:** The third highest type of change reported was related to trust. Lab members and district actors saw a change in the way that they experienced respect, trust, and openness by others.
- 4. Accountability:** Stories reported changes in how district actors hold each other accountable to their roles and responsibilities.
- 5. Knowledge and Skills:** Lab participants and district actors report Stories indicated that lab participants and district actors gained new knowledge and skills, including technical knowledge of district development procedures and team building skills.
- 6. Increased Confidence:** Lab participants experienced increased confidence to voice their opinions, organize and lead meetings, take initiative, and engage district actors.
- 7. New Ways of Working:** Lab participants and district actors identified new ways of working together to achieve their goals, including new ways of sharing information within communities, managing resources, and adapting in response to learning.
- 8. Funding Opportunities:** The least amount of change reported was in the area of funding opportunities. A small number of district actors and lab participants shared changes in the way they accessed financial resources to advance their development work, including reallocating resources and community fundraising.

Social Lab Ambassador Exchange

Cross learning has been a powerful experience during the social labs. Both labs have micro-action groups working on similar issues – increasing citizen's voice, establishing agreements between NGOs and community members, and monitoring public funded projects. During the July 2018 Mulanje workshop, each group selected one representative to travel to Rumphi and participate in the reflection workshop as an ambassador. Ambassadors gave feedback to the Rumphi social lab, shared observations about what they had learned through the exchange, and highlighted similarities and differences between the two labs. Rumphi Ambassadors made the trip down to Mulanje for the following reflection workshop in October 2018 and gave feedback to the Mulanje social lab.



Mulanje social lab ambassadors

Social Lab Sustainability & Next Steps

The changes that have emerged from the social labs in Rumphi and Mulanje have inspired both to continue their efforts. Each social lab received a \$1,500 USD seed grant from Root Change, Keystone Accountability and YAS to support each lab with their transition to full local ownership. As USAID-funded support for the social labs was ending, the groups have developed sustainability plans in each location. Both labs are leading fundraising efforts. Many lab participants have donated their own money towards the continuation of the labs.

Rumphi Social Lab

In Rumphi, the social lab has elected a Management Committee comprised of a chairperson, a secretary, and treasurer, as well as a leader from each micro-action group. Initial actions of the Management Committee have included re-defining the lab purpose to maintain the social lab at the district-level, registering the lab with the District Social Welfare office, and opening a bank account to support local fundraising. In addition, the lab elected a special Resource Mobilization Committee.

Mulanje Social Lab

In Mulanje, the lab chose to decentralize the lab approach to the community level, and test a “Community Social Lab” in a select ADC. This decision was voted on by lab participants and was seen as a way to reduce costs and better connect the lab to community changemakers. The Mulanje lab has also taken steps to ensure sustainability, including registering the lab with the appropriate authorities, re-establishing a social lab purpose, and electing a Transition Team (TT) to manage the lab.

Lab members embarked on a listening tour with three ADCs in Mulanje to introduce the social lab at the community level. Based on feedback from ADCs, criteria was developed for selecting a community in which to pilot this approach that included active citizen participation, centrally located, and easily accessible. The lab selected to pilot the community social lab in GVH Kazembe under Chambe ADC. The Transition Team, with input from lab members, has prepared a plan for the rest of the year to test this new community social lab approach.



Rumphi Social Lab Purpose

“An inclusive platform of local development actors for generating, testing and learning about local development innovations for sustainable community development.”

Mulanje Social Lab Purpose

“To be a hub for willing and available change agents in Mulanje, which effectively contributes to systemic change by empowering communities to initiate, test assumptions, own and lead development by collaborating with like-minded stakeholders”

“Kukhala pokumaniranapo kwa onse odzipeleka ndi ofuna kusintha zinthu momwe chitukuko chikuyenera kuyendera popeleka mphamvu kwa anthu akumudzi kuti ayendetse, kuyesera zomwe njira zosintha zinthu, komanso kutsogolorela paokha chitukuko pakugwirila ntchito limodzi ndi onse okhudzidwa mchitikuko komanso ofuna kusintha zinthu”

Contact Information



Root Change

Root Change is a non-profit based in Washington, DC founded to test alternative approaches to development that put more power in the hands of local communities. Root Change specializes in innovative approaches to systems strengthening, adaptive management, and capacity development. For the past 10 years, Root Change has been working with communities, civil society, and governments around the world to advocate for far reaching change within the international development sector. To learn more visit www.rootchange.org or contact Root Change at info@rootchange.org or contact Local Works Field Managers, Emas Potolani at epotolani@rootchange.org and Myson Jambo at mjambo@rootchange.org.



Keystone Accountability

Keystone Accountability helps organizations understand and improve their performance by harnessing feedback, especially from the people they serve. Keystone is the creator of the Constituent Voice methodology, which uses rapid feedback cycles and constituent dialogue to enable communities, organizations, governments, and more, to continually adapt their work. To learn more visit www.keystoneaccountability.org or contact Keystone at info@keystoneaccountability.org.



Youth and Society (YAS) Malawi

Founded in 2011, YAS is a non-profit human rights and governance organization with a mission to “promote and defend human rights and democratic governance through civic engagement, capacity building, advocacy, strategic litigation, and coalition building”. To learn more about YAS visit www.yasmw.org or contact Charles Kajoloweka at charleskajoloweka50@gmail.com.