Lund University
Master of Science in International Development and Management
May, 2015

"If you want to go fast,
*go alone*.
If you want to go far,
***go together****."*
(African Proverb)

A case study analyzing the role of collaboration in
development projects in Malawi

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# Abstract

This study questions the linear and top-down planning and implementation methods of mainstream development projects, as they do not seem to: achieve its expected outcomes; respond to the complex development context; or allow development beneficiaries to be a part of deciding their own development, despite promotions of inclusive approaches. The purpose was to explore if collaboration could serve as a better solution by introducing the concept of "*Collaborative Project Planning and Implementation*" (CPPI). A qualitative case study of one UNICEF project in Malawi, the Project, analyzes both the Project's structure and the various stakeholders' values of optimal project practices. The findings show that collaboration between multiple stakeholders with beneficiaries as main actors were highly valued by all respondents and also a key for sustainable results. However, the Project's structure does not allow for collaboration or flexibility in practices. The main bottlenecks seem to be the donor-driven policies, procedures and resource management. The study supports that CPPI offers relevant and more valuable project practices, and that cross-cutting collaboration is the promoted way to re-structure development for greater and more sustainable project outcomes. This stresses the need for CPPI to be further discussed, researched and applied by both academia and development institutions.

***Keywords***: Development projects; Project planning and implementation; Collaboration; Collaborative Project Planning and Implementation (CPPI); Complexity theory; Adaptive systems; Critical Theory; Communicative Rationality

*Word count: 15000*

## Foreword

This thesis is founded on the frustration, rewards and happiness that I have experienced during my hands-on experiences of carrying out development projects in Tanzania. Sure, I was probably too idealistic in the beginning, but never did I expect the challenges and complexity that later became my reality when trying to support other people's development in a country so different from my own.

My field experiences tell me that development needs to embrace the uniqueness of human beings and their communities, and that we need to realize the value of doing things together. What I have come to realize is that the mainstream development system fails to achieve this, where the people you aim to strengthen are excluded from taking part in deciding upon the objectives of their own development. This study aims to be a contribution towards creating a more inclusive and collaborative development system.

## Acknowledgements

This study would not have become reality without the contribution and support from a number of important people: Nankali, Malla and Mirriam from UNICEF; Tarzan, Arnold, Edith and Maxwell from Blantyre Synod; Beatrice and Aswell my valuable interpreters; and all my respondents and other people that I interacted with during my research when I visited the communities – THANK YOU for so openly receiving me, believing in my study, taking your time, and having the trust to share your values and beliefs with me. I have learned so much from you and these will forever be important.

In addition, I send warm thanks to my supervisor Elsa Coimbra at Lund University for invaluable guidance. Your enthusiasm and positive spirit have really strengthened me along the way.

And last but not least, my dearest family, friends and boyfriend. You are the ones that make life worth living. Special thanks to Joao for enhancing my English. And mom, what would I have done without your endless support.

Thank you so much!  Zikomo kwambiri! Tack så mycket!

*With love,*
*Anna*
Malmö, Sweden, May 2015


(Dancing with the youth of Cholokoto village, Malawi)

## Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AAA | Accra Agenda for Action |
| ADC | Area Development Committee |
| BS | Blantyre Synod |
| CBCC | Community-Based Childcare Center |
| CPPI | Collaborative Project Planning and Implementation |
| CRC | The Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| DFID | Department For International Development (the United Kingdom) |
| GHV | Group Village Head |
| JOL | Journey of Life |
| PCA | Partnership Cooperation Agreement |
| PD | Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness |
| PPR | Policies, Procedures and Resource management |
| NPA | National Plan of Action |
| SIDA | Swedish International Development Agency |
| TA | Traditional Authority |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| VDC | Village Development Committee |
| VH | Village Head |

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

"*If I get trousers but I need a shirt, I would still be thankful, but it will not be with my full heart, [...] and I will still be naked on top.*"
(Kelvin)

## 1.1 Setting the scene

My previous experiences have made me question the way development and development projects are planned, structured and carried out. Most of all because the system does not result in the best outcomes for development beneficiaries, as the quote above illustrates. As Anderson et al. (2012:2,135) argue based on their study in 25 aid-recipient countries: the development system is not achieving its aim of creating long-term sustainable development[1]. Thus, fundamental changes are needed for supporting a positive development, socially, economically and politically (ibid.).

One area where I find this prominent and practically suitable to study is within projects, which have been the main development tool since the 1960s (Cusworth & Franks, 2013:2-3; Rondinelli, 1993:5-6). Projects are also highly relevant as they give the best opportunity of illustrating the great discrepancy between the methods of planning and implementation used by many development actors, and the dynamics and complexity of development problems (Rondinelli, 1993:6).

With this study, I wish to challenge the existing common praxis of development projects, and contribute towards finding ways on how it can be altered and improved. Considering that most development actors carry out their work via programs and projects, I also hope this could be of value for many actors, and in turn contribute towards improved development outcomes.

The focal problem identified is that the development system does not seem to allow for local participation and ownership, despite decades of promotions to change practices. Most development projects keep on being top-down and results-driven, with "already-planned-and-ready-to-implement-projects" based on standardized models and procedures

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[1] The "development system" incorporates all kinds of bilateral and multilateral assistance, as well as international/national civil society organizations and private corporations' efforts in providing international/national assistance to recipient(s) in/and developing countries.

(AbouAssi & Trent, 2013:1151; Anderson et al., 2012:125-7; Escobar, 1995,1997; Rondinelli, 1993). This is highly problematic as development is about improving the lives of human beings in complex, uncertain and context-unique environments, where standardization undermines projects' abilities to do so. It also suppresses the local peoples' voices and possibilities to be a part of their own development, which is fundamental for a projects' sustainability (ibid.).

Instead, what is needed is a more collaborative approach where the concept of "*co-development*" has become promoted by many actors (Anderson et al., 2012; Chambers, 1997; Escobar, 1995,1997; King, 2011; Rondinelli; 1993; AbouAssi and Trent, 2013). Co-development requires a system based on trust between donors, implementers and target groups, where local culture and community involvement are key. Development should emerge from the voices and capabilities of the target people, instead of donor-identified needs (Anderson et al., 2012:143-44).

Participatory approaches have been promoted in development since the 1990s by scholars and practitioners, as well as in international development agendas and policies (Chambers, 1983,1995; Escobar, 1995,1997; Rondinelli, 1993). However, the concept of participation has become vague, where it is used as everything between a simple information meeting with one person from a whole community, to a process whereby key stakeholders decide and plan a project together (Anderson et al., 2012:125).


Anderson et al. (2012:139-40) argue that in order to change the current system on how we carry out development projects, we need to change the key instruments of development: policies, procedures, and resource management. Instead of being top-down, these instruments need to be decided upon in a collaborative and transparent fashion (ibid.). Influenced by my practical and theoretical experiences, I would like to introduce the concept of ***collaborative project planning and implementation*** (CPPI). A simplified definition is summarized as:

> *The process where all key stakeholders come together for face-to-face dialogues to plan and implement a project addressing a common concern. This process assures that all are equally heard and incorporated in the project planning for reaching shared consensus, which creates ownership and commitment by all, and the adaptability that is needed for implementation in that specific context* (see Chapter 3 for full definition).

Projects should thus include shared control and decision-making, and mutual insider-outsider analysis, which leads to a consensus where project target groups are seen as equals, or even more important actors compared to others, such as donors and implementers (Anderson et al., 2012:137-8; King, 2011:97).

Collaboration has not yet been introduced as a clear concept within the development terminology. Little research has been made on the value of collaboration for development, how it should function, and why collaboration can have beneficial impacts on development projects (AbouAssi & Trent, 2013:1135). My hope is that this study and the CPPI concept will be able to make an important contribution both practically and theoretically.

I have chosen a specific case to qualitatively research, a UNICEF project in Malawi. By examining this illustrative case in-depth, using a retroductive approach, I aim to produce a greater insight into one particular issue, which in my case is collaborative planning and implementation within development projects (Creswell, 2007:74; Silverman & Marvasti, 2013:164).

## 1.2 Framing the Case

### 1.2.1 UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund, in short UNICEF, was created by the United Nations (UN) in 1946, with the mission to support children after World War II (UNICEF, 2015). UNICEF has since then become one of the most well-known and influential actors working with children's development in 190 countries worldwide.

UNICEF is an intergovernmental organ comprising of 36 member state representatives that rely on funding from governments and private donors. UNICEF's overall management is based in New York and Geneva, and seven regional offices guide their respective region[2]. However, most of UNICEF's actual work is carried out via country offices and their various country programs (UNICEF, 2015).

### 1.2.2 UNICEF Malawi and the Project

The Malawi country office was established in 1964. Their current country program runs from 2012-2016 and the case for this study, *the Project*, is a part of the "Child Protection

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[2] UNICEF Malawi belongs to ESARO: Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office.

Strategy" (UNICEF, 2012). The Project of 2 years is based on a UNICEF "Partnership Cooperation Agreement" (PCA) with the organization Blantyre Synod, which was approved in March 2013. The implementation started in May/June 2013, and due to various reasons the project period has been extended up to October 2015.

### 1.2.3 UNICEF and participation

UNICEF has long been one of the bigger actors of explicitly promoting a human rights-based and people-centered approach, with participation critical for reaching development goals (UNICEF, 2015). This entails the whole spectrum of inclusiveness, from child and community participation, to close partnerships with local governments and alignment to their development plans (ibid.). These values are founded upon the CRC, Article 12, as well as the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action (OECD, 2005,2008; UN, 1989).

### 1.2.4 Relevance of chosen case

The Project is relevant considering that UNICEF is one of the biggest development actors worldwide, and that Malawi, located in Sub-Saharan Africa, is developmentally identified as extra challenging, and also economically one of the poorest countries in the world[3] (King, 2011:97; World Bank, 2013). It is also representative as UNICEF is a big promoter of participatory approaches.

## 1.3 Purpose and Research questions

The overall purpose of my thesis is to explore the role of the conceptualized collaborative planning and implementation concept CPPI within development projects. This will be conducted by analyzing the Project from two angles. The first angle includes the project's planning and implementation structure. The second analyzes the involved stakeholders' values on how projects optimally should be planned and implemented, and why this is important. The aim is to analyze how collaboratively the Project has been planned and implemented, and to what degree the respondents' optimal processes align with CPPI. The approach also enables a comparative multilevel analysis including donors,

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[3] Malawi has experienced a decreasing GDP of $364.1 per capita in 2011 and $226.5 per capita in 2013. Gross Domestic Product, GDP, is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products (converted to U.S. dollars) (World Bank, 2013).

implementers and target groups, as well as the possibility to theorize the results for a better understanding of collaboration's potential within development.

The following research questions have been created for studying the Project, in order to fulfill the purpose of my thesis:

*How is collaborative planning and implementation taken into account and valued within the Project, and how and why is it important for development projects?*

The sub-questions that help to guide the research are:

- *What are the levels of collaboration in the Project's planning and implementation process?*
- *How do the Project's stakeholders describe an optimal planning and implementation process of development projects, and why do they find this important?*
- *How does the Project's planning and implementation process affect and align with stakeholders' optimal and valued processes?*

## 1.4 Definitions

"Align with" means how much and how well the Project's processes are in agreement with/correspond to respondents' optimal project processes. "Optimal" means respondents' most favorable process that would be of most value for them.

### *Projects and programs*

The definition of projects applied in this study is the American Project Management Institute's: "*Projects are goal-oriented. They involve coordinated undertakings of interrelated activities. They are of finite duration, with beginnings and ends. They are each, to a degree, unique. In general, these four characteristics distinguish projects from other undertaking.*" (Engwall, 1995:44). The projects that this thesis focuses on are development projects carried out in development contexts with specific target groups.

The difference of programs to projects is defined in this study by its scope and duration. Programs are more extensive and encompass a larger goal-oriented scope, and

they are implemented during a longer period of time, whilst projects often are one part of a bigger program.

***Target community and community***

This study uses the concept of target community as those people that live in the targeted villages in the Project. Thus, a community is seen as a social unit that shares a social context with values and social norms within a specific physical space.

## 1.5 Thesis disposition

The next chapter provides a background of development, projects and planning, and participation, in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the theme, research problem and relevance of this study. The third chapter conceptualizes the analytical framework, with the created concept of "collaborative project planning and implementation" (CPPI) and its applicability. My methodology is presented and discussed in the fourth chapter, including key methodological choices, ethical concerns and quality measurements. The fifth chapter presents and analyzes this study's findings, followed by a discussion of its main implications for development projects in the sixth chapter. The last chapter provides conclusions of findings and a final discussion of CPPI and its importance for development.

# 2. BACKGROUND

## 2.1 Understanding the Theme

This part gives a summarized overview of development[4] until today, which throughout its history has changed profoundly (Ohiorhenuan, 2011:7; Rondinelli, 1993:3). This aims to give an understanding of the overall frame whereby development projects and practices have been created and are carried out.

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[4] The concept of "development" has constantly been conceptualized and strongly questioned by many scholars. This discussion goes beyond this thesis, but please see e.g. Escobar (1995,1997); Chambers (1997); Sachs (1992); and Sen (1999).

### 2.1.1 Historical overview of development

The first "development era" started in the aftermath of the Second World War in the late 1940s and focused on industrialization and agricultural technicalization leading to an acceleration of nations' economic growth (Chambers, 1997:1; Escobar, 1997:4; Ohiorhenuan, 2011:7). A re-conceptualization in the early 1970s added "equality" and "basic human needs" on top of the macroeconomic growth (Ohiorhenuan, 2011:8-9; Rondinelli. 1993:1,9-10).

During the 1970s the economic growth levels in most countries dropped and the strategy was therefore replaced in the early 1980s promoting structural adjustments and economic stabilization policies, reconstructing countries' economies from state-planned to market-led (Ohiorhenuan, 2011:7; Rondinelli. 1993:1,13-4). This approach has later emerged into "neoliberalism", championing a global and self-regulating free market with a strong focus on competiveness, international trade and privatization (Chambers, 1997:16; Escobar, 2004:212). This approach is until today the economic and ideological roof the later development approaches are operating within.

The structural adjustment policies became heavily criticized during the 1990s for neglecting the social dimensions of human welfare (Ohiorhenuan, 2011:9). Focus changed to the individual, centering on: minimum living standards, enhanced capabilities, empowerment and well-being (Ohiorhenuan, 2011:10-11). This later emerged into the "aid effectiveness agenda" which was exemplified with the UN-led Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2001, endorsed by nearly 200 nations (Kim & Lee, 2013:788). This agenda further developed into the Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness (PD) in 2005, and the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) in 2008. Both promote donors to align their agendas with each country's development plans, enhancing local ownership, and harmonizing efforts for maximum effectiveness (OECD, 2005/2008; Mawdsley, 2014:28).

However, the "aid effectiveness era" has not been fulfilled as wished (Mawdsley, 2014:28-9). Analysts are criticizing the unequal power over development politics between donor and recipients, and the perverse effects of the neoliberal framework that development operates within (Mawdsley et al., 2014:28). Other key aspects are the increased role of the private sector with public-private partnerships (PPPs), and the explosion of emerging states like China, India and Brazil, introducing "South-South-Cooperation" (SSC) (Mawdsley, 2014:29).

The Busan Conference in 2011 is seen to symbolize the birth of a new agenda, the "development effectiveness era", with concepts of transparency, accountability and local ownership (Esteves & Assanção, 2014:1775,1785; Kim & Lee, 2013:787). This era is disputed on how to be conceptualized; however, one key aspect is the concept of "sustainability": development that is environmentally, politically, economically, and socially sound (Gore, 2013:769; Hajer et al., 2015:1652). The upcoming UN-led "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) tries to embrace this, and will be agreed upon in September 2015 (Hajer et al., 2015:1652).

## 2.2 Framing the Problem

Project planning and implementation, transforming plans into action, has despite the great changes in development approaches changed considerably little (Vähämäki et al., 2011:4; Rondinelli, 1993:vii,3,5). However, it has always been one of the most challenging tasks for development practitioners, where the discrepancies between plans and actual implementations are profound (Rondinelli, 1993:6). This section aims to present an overview of these challenges, stressing the need for alternatives.

### 2.2.1 Development projects and methods of planning and implementation

The 1950-60s included comprehensive national planning with *centrally controlled* and top-down decision-making for macroeconomic growth (Cusworth & Franks, 2013:1; Rondinelli, 1993:3). In the late 1960s–early 70s a *linear planning* based on cost-benefit analyses was adopted, influenced by private corporations and bureaucracies in the West (Rondinelli, 1993:5). Most development actors adopted a rationalistic planning approach, with the belief that complex social problems could be solved by a thorough problem analysis translated into detailed plans (Rondinelli, 1993:3-4,7). The keyword was *control*, with a direct relationship between identified problems and outputs (ibid.).

The planning methods became even more pre-planned and detailed during the 1970s–90s, despite heavy critique and the widened understanding of the complexity of development (Rondinelli, 1993:90). With the right turn to neoliberalism, the planning shifted towards *efficiency* (Thornley, 1991:143). Various planning tools were thus introduced during this period, such as the "Logical Framework Approach" (LFA) in various versions. LFAs came to support most of the bigger agencies with concrete and

contextualized project frameworks built on comprehensive analysis; however, the cause-effect and rigidity were still there (Cusworth & Franks, 2013:15-16; Vähämäki et al., 2011:10).

In the 1990s the concept of "Results-Based Management" (RBM) became strongly promoted and has become common praxis for the majority of the bigger development actors since then (Vähämäki, et al., 2011:6-7). It aims to improve the efficiency of development efforts by focusing on the *results*. RBM is built on the rationalistic assumption that specific inputs, carried out through identified suitable interventions, will eventually lead to specific outputs, outcomes and impact. Emphasis is also on detailed performance tracking and reporting with baselines, targets and indicators, in order to fulfill financial *accountability* and *transparency* of results (ibid:6-7,43).

Figure 2.1 below exemplifies the multiple levels and the command and control structures that can be present within a mainstream development project. Although not all project structures look like this, the possibility to encounter complications when trying to follow a top-driven RBM planning and implementation are obvious (Vähämäki et al., 2011:18).

*Figure 2.1: A project example illustrating the various levels that can be present within a RBM project.*
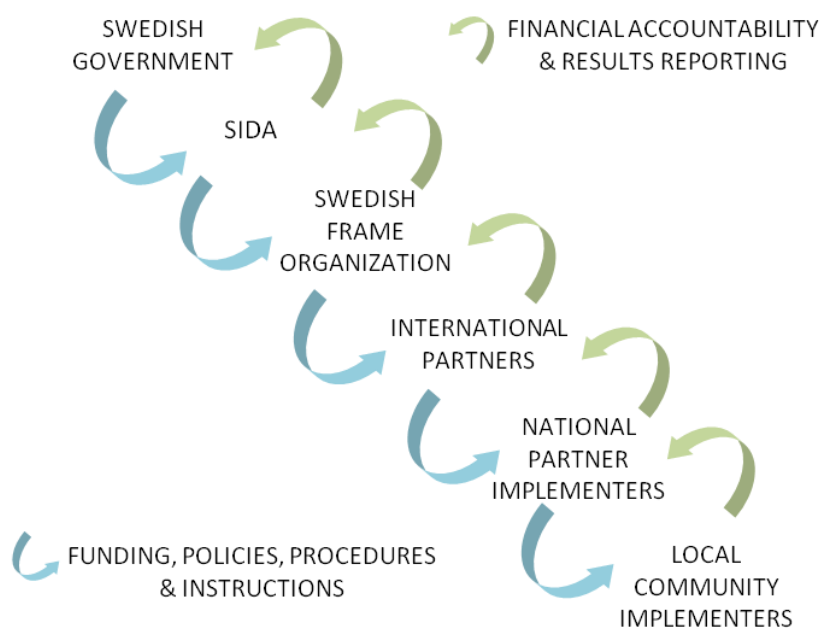


(Source: Vähämäki et al., 2011:18, adapted by author)

Shifts in donors' priorities, policies and procedures are challenging for all actors below them, and implementers often feel caught in the middle between expectations from two directions (Anderson et al., 2012:61). Anderson et al. (2012:145-6) found in their study that most local implementers are aware that their working methods are inefficient and/or not for the best benefit for the beneficiaries, but they are caught under their donors' policies, as expressed by one respondent: "*I know that we are providing things that are not needed, but I have to keep the delivery on schedule in order to be ready to apply for the nest tranche of funds*" (ibid:145).

Despite decades of implementing various approaches built on linear theories of change, the success stories remains limited (Van Ongevalle et al., 2012:3). Evaluations[5] by various influential development actors have shown that the linear models are unable to plan for or achieve its objectives (Vähämäki et al., 2011:17). The linear causality chains are not applicable in complex development contexts, and the detailed tracking of results are challenging and time-consuming, and even inefficient and counterproductive (ibid.:19-21). Consequently, projects focus on easy-to-get results rather than change processes of local value (Van Ongevalle et al., 2012:3).

Since the 1990s, some more participatory planning approaches have been tried out, and some less linear alternatives to RBM have been developed, however, they have not become mainstreamed. Despite the major critique and obvious limitations of linear planning, the methods of planning do remain, paradoxically, mainly top-down-driven, pre-planned and standardized, with few possibilities to create the flexibility, beneficiary participation and local ownership that is promoted as fundamental (Anderson et al., 2012:57,66,136; Vähämäki et al., 2011:14-5). Most actors still find RBM and similar tools as the best or only option, and they continue to use them with the aim to improve its usage and form (Van Ongevalle et al., 2012; Vähämäki et al., 2011:4,20,31).

One study evaluating RBM practices stresses the importance of four key aspects for improving development planning: strong relationship-building between multiple actors; strong social learning between actors; strong adaptive capacity; and cross-cutting accountability between actors (Van Ongevalle et al., 2012:54-8). However, given the current development context, these four aspects *would require profound changes for*

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[5] See e.g Vähämäki et al., (2011) for a summary. Examples of organizations include the UN, OECD/DAC, USAID and Cida.

*development actors and the way development projects are planned*. As long as the project planning policies promote top-driven and pre-planned projects, the people receiving assistance continue to have little say over their own development, and inclusiveness remains a consensual abstraction (Anderson et al., 2012:57).

## 2.3 Participation in development

A brief understanding of how participation has been understood, promoted and implemented is useful before conceptualizing the collaborative framework.

Participation was born as a counter-reaction to the top-down system of development (Cusworth & Franks, 2013:9; Enns et al., 2014:361). It can in broad terms be explained as the inclusion of development beneficiaries to act as experts and drivers of development processes (Enns et al., 2014:361). However, the epistemological aspects of participation can range between economic rationality imposed by the donor community, to critical theory as responding to the great power imbalances (AbouAssi & Trent, 2013:1116). In practical terms participation is often used on a continuum from weak to strong participation where weak is the most widely used (ibid.). Weak relates to participation as a tool where only informing or consulting beneficiaries is sufficient, with the aim of a better and more efficient implementation, thus an instrumental view of the concept. The other side of the continuum, strong participation, prioritizes beneficiaries' values over donors' interests, and aims to create a strong local ownership and sustainability of results (ibid.:1116-20).

Participation became fashionable during the 90s after some decades of promotion from researchers advocating for participatory action research in the 1970s (e.g. Freire, 1970), and development actors such as UNICEF and the World Bank encouraging people-centered development approaches in the 80s-90s[6] (Hickey & Mohan, 2004:5-9). During the same period, academics with Chambers (1983,1997) at the forefront strongly advocated for inclusive development processes based on target groups needs with his concept of PRA, Participatory Rural Appraisal (Chambers, 1997:102). The PRA and similar approaches have become the most widely used participatory methodologies in development project practice (Flint & zu Natrup, 2014:280; Mohan, 2001:5).

[6] UNICEF and the World Bank published several reports, e.g. "Adjustment with a Human Face" for UNICEF by Cornia et al., in 1989, and the "World Development Report" by the World Bank in 1990 and 1991.

In the 2000s participation was illustrated by high-level policies such as the widely applied PD and AAA, which promote local ownership and partnerships supporting recipient countries development objectives (Holland et al., 2015:79; Mawdsley et al. et al., 2014:29; OECD, 2005/2007). Even in the upcoming SDGs era participation is at the forefront of priorities (Enns et al., 2014:362).

Participation has become mainstream in development but is elusive, since it builds on the notion to "take part", not be an "equal part" (Enns et al., 2014:362; Flint & zu Natrup, 2014:274). Neither has the implementation of PD and AAA been achieved as hoped (ibid.). The West is still the dominant force where rationalistic planning dominates the procedures (Anderson et al., 2012:135-136; Mawdsley et al., 2014:32). Participatory approaches have thus become highly questioned and criticized[7]. Evaluations show that there are major challenges, where "weaker" participatory techniques often are applied as an end by itself for creating donor credibility (Enns et al., 2014:359,362; Flint & zu Natrup, 2012:273,279-81; Mawdsley et al.et al., 2014:27). More importantly, participation has not been able to break down the donor-hegemony and top-down system of development (ibid.). As exemplified by one respondent in Anderson et al.'s (2012:69) study: "*This is how the verb 'to participate' is conjugated: I participate. You participate. They decide.*"

## 2.4 Importance of Change: towards Collaboration

As argued above, there is a need for finding new and improved ways for development. Neither fully externally-driven and standardized projects nor fully internally-driven processes[8] have shown to be strong facilitators of positive change (Anderson et al., 2012:136-7). What instead is promoted by many are collaborative and flexible processes that integrates the resources and experiences of donors and implementers together with the target groups' values, knowledge and capacities (Anderson et al., 2012: Flint & zu Natrup, 2014; King, 2011; Rondinelli, 1993; Shrimali et al., 2014). The suitability of collaboration for development projects can be summarized into three simple points:

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[7] See e.g. Cleaver (1999) and Mohan & Stokke (2000).
[8] As they are in need of supporting resources from outside and the processes are often mirrored in tradition and habit that often hinders change as they are prone to maintain traditional power relations (Anderson et al., 2012:136).

(1) The issues that development addresses are highly complex and uncertain in nature, thus impossible to control and predict;

(2) Development incorporates multiple and diverse actors in order to address issues;

(3) Development issues are not solvable by only one single actor's knowledge, experience or action (Babtista, 2005:5).

These conditions argue for acknowledging actors' high interdependence by promoting cross-cutting interactions between multiple actors. That will increase the ability to implement a collective action that is able to address development issues in comprehensive and successful ways (ibid.). As collaboration is a seemingly new concept within development project planning, I draw insights from collaborative planning scholars and practitioners outside the development agenda.

## 3.  ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 Conceptualizing: Collaborative Project Planning and Implementation

The analytical framework created for this study builds upon two concepts: (1) Collaborative Planning with consensus-building (Innes & Booher, 1999), and (2) Adaptive planning and implementation (Rondinelli, 1993). The purpose of creating this framework is to use it as an analytical frame when analyzing the Project, in order to explore an alternative project planning strategy that could better understand and respond to the complexity of conceiving and implementing development projects. Such analysis would also contribute to the discussion of collaboration in development research.

Both concepts were conceptualized during the 1970s-80s and emerged based on practical real-life experiences of the inefficiency and/or failure with more conventional rationalistic planning methods (Babtista, 2005:1; Innes & Booher, 1999:412; Rondinelli, 1993:1). Considering that our world has become far more complex, uncertain, fast-changing and networked, we need planning approaches that can respond to this. This is particularly important in development contexts, as these involve multiple actors with challenging conditions, and uneven power and information distribution. These two concepts are thus built on the notion of innovation, flexibility, social learning and strong

linkages between many and diverse actors (ibid.). The research of applying these interactive planning techniques in practice has showed seemingly great benefits with better agreements and transformative actions, thus helping to cope with the diversity, uncertainty and power dynamics (Babtista, 2005:1; Innes & Booher, 1999:412-4,421; Shrimali et al., 2014:379).

The created concept of Collaborative Project Planning and Implementation (CPPI) is defined as:

> *The process where stakeholders, selected to represent different interests, come together for face-to-face dialogues to analyze, conceptualize, plan, and implement a project addressing a common concern. This process includes methods to assure that all involved are equally heard, respected and incorporated in the project planning. Open communication, trust and relationship-building are keys for challenging assumptions and controversies between stakeholders, and for reaching shared consensus, with a project that goes beyond the sum of its parts, creates strong commitment, ownership and learning by all, and with the adaptability that is needed for implementation in that specific context.*

CPPI is a *process* that requires all the relevant project stakeholders to conceptualize, plan and implement a project together, putting focus on interactions and dialogue, and embracing the diversity of perspectives and values. Particular attention rests on ensuring that the least powerful actors in the context are treated as equals. These actors could in my case be identified as the target groups, which now would become drivers of change (Anderson et al., 2012:139). By listening to each others' experiences, interests and values, we can learn how and why people behave in certain ways or value certain things at specific times. This understanding is fundamental for development planning and implementation of projects. It offers a transformative process that enables a greater understanding of the context and culture (Nicholas et al., 2011:26). Another important aspect is the high level of adaptability, where stakeholders need to function as an adaptive system throughout the process in order to cope with its environment in satisfying ways (Rondinelli, 1993:118-9). Please see CPPI exemplified in Figure 3.1 below.

*Figure 3.1: Example of various stakeholders in a Collaborative project planning and implementation process (CPPI)*
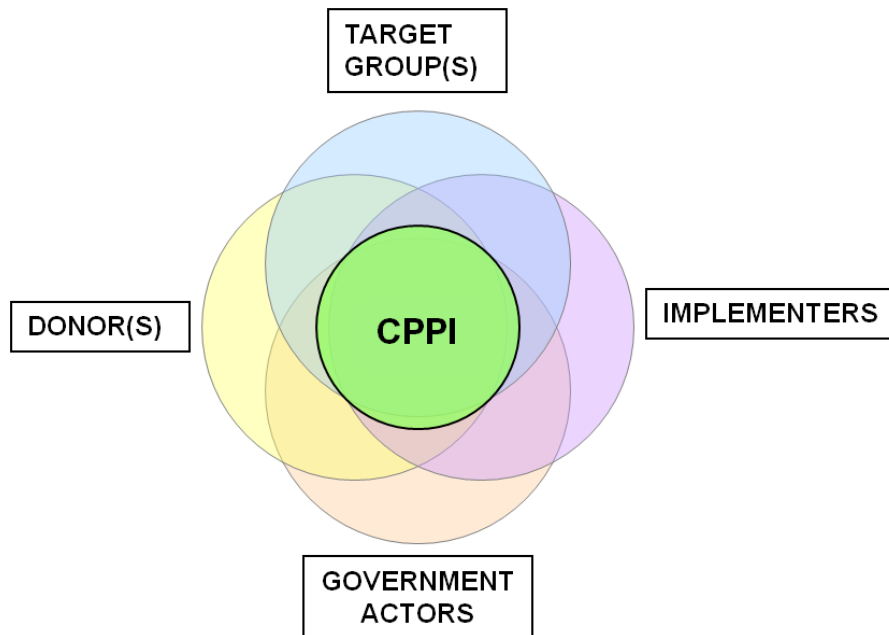


### 3.1.1 Applying CPPI

As this CPPI framework is uniquely developed for this study, a small note on its application as an analytical framework is needed. The framework offers a form of ideal project planning and implementation process, which could be achieved in degrees, with the higher degrees representing the better chances to generate greater outcomes (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson's, 2008:10). Following my research questions noted above, this framework will help to analyze how collaboratively the Project has been planned and implemented, and how the respondents' optimal planning and implementation process could be understood in the light of the framework. When analyzing the benefits of respondents' optimal planning and implementation, these will be analyzed in relation to the outcomes of CPPI. Overall, the aim is to analyze and discuss CPPI's potential within development projects.

## 3.2 Theoretical Building-Blocks

The CPPI framework draws insights from two main building-blocks: complexity theory[9] and adaptive systems (Innes & Booher, 1999; Rondinelli, 1993) and critical theory and communicative rationality (Habermas, 1981,1989; Innes & Booher, 1999). Important to notice is that CPPI does not pretend to present these theories in its original full form. Instead, it aims to be built on the spirit of them, and to explain enough to understand its importance for CPPI as well as for this study.

### 3.2.1 Complexity theory and adaptive systems

These sets of ideas and principles originally emerged from the natural sciences, but have later been influenced and applied by the social sciences particularly in order to understand and explain change and complexity in social systems (Innes & Booher, 1999:417). They oppose the linear planning methods, as well as the top-down command and control (Vähämäki et al., 2011:27). They offer an understanding of the importance of mutual feedback and social learning in projects, which in the long run will help to reach the high-level decisions and creativity that are needed in a constantly changing world (Innes & Booher, 1999:416).

Development needs to move away from a mechanistic worldview of predicting and controlling interventions' success, to embrace a complex worldview seeing the world as an organism (ibid.:416-7). The metaphor of an organism is appropriate because an organism has the ability to adapt to change as a response to the influences and information it receives from its environment. Projects are in this way seen as social systems that are uniquely bounded by its stakeholders, history and context, and where the stakeholders continuously interact with, learn from, and change their environment (ibid.).

One way to illustrate this is with the complex adaptive system of an ant colony. The ants have the creativity and mobilizing capacity to rapidly respond to a threat or possibility in collaborative ways. Ant colonies rapidly change strategy if failure or obstacles occur, thus accomplishing things you would not believe to be possible, despite their small brains and limited sensory capacity. Seeing development projects as self-organizing organisms help us to understand that the sum of the project stakeholders can as a whole show a far-reaching ability to: learn from each other, create new knowledge together, and adapt in order to respond to complex and changing environments.

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[9] Please see Ramalingam et al., 2008 or Jones (2011) for discussions on how complexity science and theory could be applied and is discussed within development.

This thinking builds on the concept of emergence which nature creates as a response to changes: where individual actors, led by a few rules and operated by mutual learning and trial/error, together have the competence to create a system with a unique adaptive ability that goes beyond its original actors (Innes & Booher, 1999:417). This complex adaptive system that can be created through CPPI has the possibility to create the responsiveness, learning, coping strategies and innovation that is needed for planning and implementing development projects within the development context (Rondinelli, 1993:viii).

### 3.2.2 Critical theory and "Communicative Rationality"

The concept of communicative rationality was developed by Habermas (1981,1989) and could in simple terms be explained as "*making sense together while living differently*" (Healey, 1997:51). It is built on the notion that knowledge is subjective, and that our consciousness and knowledge is socially constructed through interaction with others and our environment (Babtista, 1995:8). Communicative rationality is a set of ideal conditions where individuals' private spheres are brought together in the public sphere with the aim of creating an open and transformative debate (Healey, 1997:49-53). These inter-subjective interactions are able to go beyond the private self-fulfillment by initiating a process of interactive collective reasoning. This reasoning then transcends individuals' private interests, conditions and institutions, to intersubjectively create collective emancipatory knowledge with solutions that lead to greater societal change and better responses to the individuals' private sphere (Healey, 1997:52-3; Innes & Booher, 1999:418). As consciousness is socially constructed, we cannot solve collective societal problems with only one form of knowledge or reasoning from one single actor (Healey, 1997:53). This thinking challenges the more linear "instrumental rationality" that the mainstream development planning in many ways is built upon, where one or a few actors are trying to find the most efficient and cost-effective way to achieve a goal, regardless if that goal in itself is of value for the people it affects (Healey, 1997:50-1). It also challenges the legitimacy of institutions and the power relations that are present between different actors in a society (Babtista, 2005:8).

Communicative rationality can be achieved through creating an honest dialogue about a specific task where all the relevant actors representing different interests concerning that task are bringing their experiences and know-how to the table (Innes & Booher, 1999:418). For that, all actors need to be equally informed about the task, be free to express their voices, be listened to and respected, but also have self-reflection and

openness to other people's perceptions. One important criterion of CPPI is that it must allow actors to challenge assumptions and the status quo. One critical part of this is that the authority and decision-making power must be distributed to the face-to-face interactions, ensuring that each actor has the same level of influence over the process (Babtista, 2005:5). If such a group collaboratively reaches a common solution, that solution would be rational, and most of all, it would benefit the whole group (Healey, 1997: 52-3; Innes & Booher, 1999:418).

## 3.3 Adjusting CPPI to development

The three key instruments of development, policies, procedures and resource management, add great value to this framework as these are identified as the instruments for changing the current development practice (Anderson et al., 2012:139-40). They help to exemplify the areas that are needed for emerging into a self-organizing and adaptive organism (Innes & Booher, 1999:416). Within CPPI, it is thus fundamental to underline the importance of project stakeholders collaboratively deciding upon these elements of the project, on top of conceptualizing the project. These need to be mutually agreed upon in order to be functional for them as a group as well as for the project. Finding a mutual solution for how resources are provided and managed is not only seen as the most challenging aspect to reach consensus around, but also the most critical (Anderson et al., 2012:140). The guiding rules would be to make them as simple and flexible as possible, considering the multiple actors and dynamic task at hand (Anderson et al., 2012:140; Innes & Booher, 1999:417).

Deciding collaboratively upon these instruments would lead to mutual ownership of the whole project, as well as transparency that could help diminishing corruption (Anderson et al., 2012:141). The mutual trust[10] and shared decision-making applied throughout the process are of much importance here because these instruments generally are highly donor- and/or implementer-driven (ibid.:139).

Founded on the theoretical standpoints described above, CPPI offers a planning and implementation process that builds upon all actors' knowledge, values, experience and intelligence within a development project, mirroring the diversity of that specific context (Innes & Boober, 1999:421). The high-level solution that can be reached through a CPPI

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[10] Please see e.g. Wals (2009), Terje Karlsen et al., (2007), and Child (2001) for more information on trust-building in development contexts and projects.

process is able to create results that are context-specific and mutually valued and committed to by everyone. Consequently, the transformative solution is able to better adapt to changes in the highly networked, uncertain and evolving development context (ibid.).


## 3.4 Theory of Change: Outcomes of CPPI

Based on the above, CPPI is seen to create and implement a shared plan that is capable of providing tangible and positive project results, but the outcomes go well beyond this. CPPI also creates invaluable intangible results such as mutual understanding and meaning, enhanced stakeholder capacities and strong commitment (Shrimali et al., 2014:278-9; Wals, 2009:21). It also acknowledges the benefits of shared power, interdependence and working together (Innes & Boohers, 1999:413).

There are many reasons to argue that the planning and implementation that follow a CPPI process also lead to expected outcomes. The project is more likely to be well-informed and create mutually beneficial solutions that are implementable, holistic and transformative, compared to a process that only includes few actors on an unequal basis (Innes & Booher, 1999:420). A process that questions the status quo and challenges the stakeholders' previous assumptions is more likely to produce new and creative ideas that respond well to the context. If this process also enables stakeholders to collaboratively explore the various options and consequences of actions and interventions, the chances are higher that the implementation enables innovative and adaptive responses to challenges (ibid.).

As the target groups will be one main actor, the project would be built to enhance their capacities, and they would feel that they "own" the project from start. This is fundamental for sustainability of project outcomes because the targets are more likely to sustain the project after it has formally been finalized (Anderson et al., 2012:67-8). CPPI thus enables both tangible and intangible outcomes of a project that are seen to create long-lasting results of value for the whole community (Innes & Booher, 1999:420; Wals, 2009:25).


The CPPI process differentiates between three levels of outcomes, where the outcomes on the first level often are immediately identifiable during or by the end of project implementation. As you can see in Table 1 below, the outcomes on the second and third

level, such as changes in values and attitudes, and enhanced conflict resolution, go beyond the project at hand and may not be evident until much later. This is essential as CPPI could spur future processes in a butterfly effect that could help strengthen the societal development as a whole.

*Table 3.1: Examples of first-, second-, and third-level outcomes from a CPPI process.*

| First Level Outcomes | Second Level Outcomes | Third Level Outcomes |
|---|---|---|
| • High-Quality Agreement | • First level outcomes extends into the community and society | • Enhanced community and societal development and services |
| • Social Capital: Cross-cutting relationships, Mutual trust | • Sustainability of project outcomes | • Enhanced conflict resolution |
| • Intellectual Capital: Mutual understanding and meaning, Shared Problem Frames | • Creation of new collaborative systems and joint action | • New Social norms |
| • Political Capital: Ability to work together for mutually agreed ends, Shared power | • Changes in Perceptions | • New Institutions |
| • Adaptability: Self-organizing project group, Innovative and creative ideas, Cross-cutting monitoring and information collection | • Changes in Values and Attitudes | • New Discourses |
| • Valued and Improved project outcomes | • Changes in Practice and Behavior | |

(Source: Innes & Booher, 1999:419, adapted by the author)

## 3.5 Reflections upon CPPI

Despite its advantages, it is important to acknowledge that CPPI is challenging in many ways for the individual actors, development institutions and project planning, and for the system as a whole. Firstly, it requires time and energy from many actors; secondly, it must acknowledge and transcend from the often inherited cultural and historical positions and power imbalances between actors; thirdly, the process needs to acknowledge and transcend from various people's worldviews, values and interests; fourthly, it requires shared control and decision-making power, and lastly, actors need to build relationships, trust and respect amongst themselves (Nicholas et al., 2011:12-3).

The critique towards collaboration is scant and mostly focused on Habermas communicative rationality in non-development contexts that CPPI goes beyond. However, two main debates are still relevant. Firstly, scholars claim that it is not realistic to think that power can be equalized without first changing the existing political and socio-economic inequalities in that context (Hillier, 1998:15; Roy, 2015:59,61; Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998:1978). Secondly they argue that it is unrealistic to think that you can create mutual solutions, and that actors would be interested in creating those, due to the various actors' backgrounds, values and interests. These critiques claim that a collaborative process always will mirror the underlying power relations, thus maintaining or even strengthening the powerful actors' interests and control (ibid.).

As acknowledged above, these aspects are indeed challenging and this study will help to bring insights into these aspects. CPPI would nevertheless argue that these could be countered by acknowledging the actors' high interdependency and by understanding that complex development issues cannot be overcome by one actors' power, knowledge and solutions (Babtista, 2005:5). Collaborative dialogue thus enables actors to discover that individual interests can merge into mutual solutions that respond to everyone and that those solutions will be more beneficial than the ones that build on their individual interests from the start (Innes, 2004:14).

# 4. METHODOLOGY

## 4.1 Overarching frame

This study is influenced by a worldview of critical realism, which aligns with the analytical framework above. By interpreting the subjective representations of my respondents, I aim to understand, explain and assist to change the more objective mechanisms and structures of development and development projects (Archer, 1995:1). The belief is that these structures are both the outcomes of, and conditions for human agency, where individual actions constantly reproduce and change these structures simultaneously (ibid.). It is thus impossible to understand or change development projects without unraveling the underlying structures that create the conditions for them.

## 4.2 Research design: Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative case study approach has been applied for this study. This approach is suitable as I aimed to interact with respondents in their natural environment and analyze their subjective representations and values by using myself as an analytical tool of interpretation (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:57). The case study is applicable due to the Project's clear boundaries in time and scope (Yin, 2003:2). It is also relevant because the chosen case is representative and instrumental where one illustrative project is studied in-depth in order to produce a greater understanding into one particular issue, namely collaborative planning and implementation in development projects. This case aims to represent the experiences of UNICEF Malawi projects, and give useful implications for both UNICEF projects and other similar development projects in the future (Creswell, 2007:74; Silverman & Marvasti, 2013:164).

## 4.3 Data construction methods

### 4.3.1 Interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis

Several data collection methods have enabled to get an in-depth understanding of the Project, as recommended for a qualitative case study (Creswell, 2007:132; Yin, 2003:2). Participant and non-participant observations, individual interviews, and focus group discussions comprise this study's primary data sources, and document analysis of project documents is used as secondary data source (Creswell, 2007:129,132).

The observations and document analysis have helped to create an overall understanding of the structure and context of the Project, and interviews and focus groups comprising semi-structured to open-ended questions have helped to more specifically answer the research questions with a focus on the why's and how's (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Silverman & Marvasti, 2013:145-147). All primary data construction methods were carried out within all the identified levels in Figure 4.1 below, which included office environments, meetings and field visits. Please see Appendix 1 for interview and focus group guides, which were translated into the local language Chichewa.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were chosen to enable the participation of children's voices. This was highly important as they are the main target group of the Project, and this study is built on the belief that you need to include all the main groups for getting a comprehensive understanding. I have been fully aware of children's vulnerability and the critical ethical considerations that apply for including them in the research. FGDs were

thus chosen as a suitable method to include them instead of one-to-one interviews that easily can make children feel exposed, uncomfortable and hesitant. In FGDs power imbalances can be reduced and children can feel supported by each other[11] (Creswell, 2007:133; Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:174-175). The children were all teenagers from 12 years and above, due to the smaller children's high level of vulnerability. Their inclusion added an important voice to this study, by emphasizing children's fundamental role in planning and implementing projects that target them. The teenagers showed great interest of taking part, and de-briefings displayed that this inclusion became an enriching and meaningful experience to them where they felt valued and encouraged.

### 4.3.2 Sampling strategies

An appropriate sampling of respondents is a key criterion for high-quality in qualitative research. I have applied a purposive and theoretical sampling as recommended for qualitative studies, where the theoretical is enabling an instrumental qualitative study to relate findings to situations beyond the Project (Creswell, 2007:125; Silverman & Marvasti, 2013:167-174). This is important as the aim is that findings will influence the planning and implementation process of future projects.

The CPPI framework guides me to include all the different groups and levels in the project, ranging from UNICEF down to targets groups, with a specific focus on the latter as they generally have the least influence. This maximizes the chance of findings that reflect maximal differences within the Project, something that is ideal and optimal in qualitative studies (Silverman & Marvasti, 2013:167-174). I believe this helped to achieve a good sampling quality of breadth and depth, as recommended by Tracy (2010:841). Please see Figure 4.1 for the identified sampling groups.

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[11] Please see section 4.5: Ethical Considerations for more ethical considerations with the regards to include teenagers.

*Figure 4.1: Theoretically sampled respondent groups*
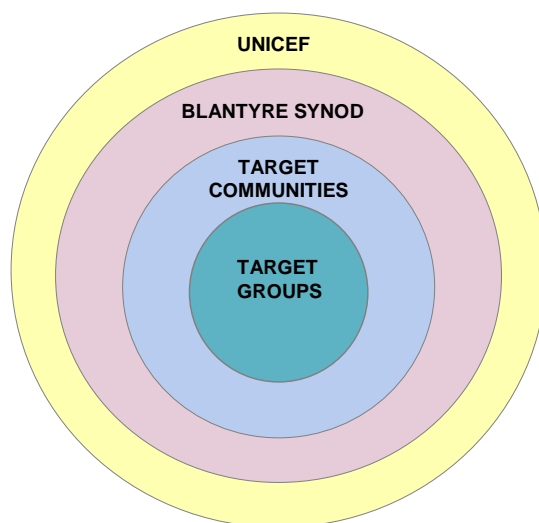


For target communities and groups I aimed to create a situation as natural as possible for the research and respondents. As I spent one full day in each community I was able to randomly choose respondents after initial presentations and discussions, and people were also able to approach me for an interview or FGDs. I found that this approach became very beneficial as it not only turned out to include a good representation of various groups within the target communities, but more importantly it enabled a more relaxed environment for my research, where power imbalances and pre-perceptions from both me and my respondents were minimized (Creswell, 2007: 126-127).

For the document analysis the strategy was to identify and include the main project documents guiding the Project, as well as monitoring reports from the implementation.


**4.3.3 Data collection**

The study was carried out in Malawi in ten different communities in three districts, Blantyre, Zomba and Phalombe. Observations were carried out during a six month period between August 2014 and mid-February 2015. In-depth understanding and knowledge of the Project, its environment and its various actors were enhanced by this. This was also to the study's advantage as I was able to gain the trust from UNICEF and Blantyre Synod, consequently visited target communities without their involvement. This was beneficial because as gatekeepers they could have hindered my access, or their presence could have biased the results (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:153).

The interviews and FGDs were carried out during one month (mid-Jan to mid-Feb, 2015). They included a total of 73 respondents, where one person came from UNICEF, three from BS, and 69 from target communities and target groups. Individual interviews included 27 persons aged 27-70 years, whereas the six FGDs included 46 teenagers/young adults of 12-22 years. The length of the individual interviews and FGDs ranged between 25 minutes to 1 hour, 32 minutes.

All interviews and FGDs were recorded with the consent of the respondents, and interpreters have been used due to language barriers for all the FGDs, and for 23 of the individual interviews. I used one interpreter for individual interviews and two for the FGDs in order to facilitate a more interactive process with the teenagers. Please see Appendix 2 for detailed information about respondents and data collection.

## 4.4 Data analysis

The critical worldview guides a retroductive approach of data analysis. This not only enables this research to analyze the respondent's representations in relation to my analytical framework, but it also increases the possibility of analyzing data that goes beyond my framework, helping conceptualize and identify new mechanisms and circumstances for development and projects (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013:12).

The analytical process has followed Creswell's (2007:156) recommendations for case studies, and used the qualitative data analysis program NVivo[12] for ensuring a systematic and transparent process. I have also aimed at a constant self-reflexive approach in order to prevent my previous perceptions and expectations from affecting the analytical process and results. However, although it is a qualitative study using myself as an interpretive tool, I believe that my critical reflexivity and focus on creating knowledge based on my empirical material, together with theory have maximized an unbiased research process (Sultana, 2007:382).

All my recorded interviews and FGDs were first transcribed verbatim and the document analysis and observation notes were summarized. These were read through in order to gain a comprehensive understanding, and thereafter uploaded to NVivo. The material was then initially coded after particular themes emerged, which later were summarized into broader themes and categories. Theory guided this interpretive process,

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[12] Please see http://www.qsrinternational.com/ for more information about NVivo.

but it has not imposed or limited other themes to emerge, as following the retroductive approach (Maxwell, 2005:45-6).

## 4.5 Quality of study

The study has aimed at reaching a high quality throughout the whole research process. There are several quality criteria that have been embraced to achieve this, as outlined by Tracy (2010:840) and Creswell (2007:207-213). My long time in the field enabled a greater contextual understanding as well as enhanced trust and reciprocity between me and the respondents. Various data construction methods have been used in order to reach an in-depth understanding of the Project and enabled cross-validation of my findings. A constant reflexivity on my own background, expectations and positions as well as my respondent's positions and views on me and this study have been essential in order to minimize researcher bias and enhance respondent's openness and honesty. I used clarifying questions and summarized all respondents' responses to ensure I understood them correctly and minimized misinterpretations, thus enhancing respondent validity. The analytical process has been transparent and systematic, where findings are presented using rich descriptions and verbatim citations of my respondents. All these strategies have been employed to ensure that procedures have been as reliable and transparent as possible, with validation, credibility and trustworthiness of findings (Creswell, 2007:206-210).

## 4.6 Ethical considerations

An informed consent was read out loud and then orally or verbally consented by all respondents prior to all interviews and FGDs (see Appendix 3 for an English version). Children's consent was done by both them and their caretakers. The consent included key information and ethical concerns, such as the purpose and procedures of the study, the use of respondents contributions, benefits and potential risks, guarantee of confidentiality, and their possibility to cancel their participation at any time during the process (Creswell, 2007:124; Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:142). This was verbally appreciated by many respondents and was helped to ensure their protection. In order for respondents to feel valued, I will summarize this study's findings and share with all the respondents and the communities that I visited. I have also chosen to give respondents fictive names in the presentation of findings in order to achieve confidentiality.

An open-minded, reflective, and culturally sensitive approach has been applied to minimize the inevitable ethical concerns in a qualitative research process (Meadow, 2013:2). Reflections about my own and the respondents' positionality and behavior were helpful, and have helped to reduce the power imbalances when conducting interviews and FGDs (Sheyvens & Storey, 2003:166; Sultana, 2007:375,382).

I have tried to embrace the local culture and context to the maximum, by spending whole days with communities, dressing in traditional clothing, and carrying out daily chores such as cooking and eating together. This created a unique situation that was highly appreciated and perceived as respectful, and I think it built trust from the respondents' side, which also improved the quality of their responses. This was extra critical considering the inclusion of teenagers, where I used more playful and interactive methods as recommended by Scheyvens and Storey (2003:174-175). I tried to create an environment where respondents felt relaxed and free to express themselves openly, letting them steer the discussions. I aimed to create knowledge together in a dialogical and mutually beneficial process (Kapoor, 2004:644). I constantly adapted the situation, questions and techniques according to what I, with the help of my interpreters, perceived that my respondents were comfortable with. The choice of using a young additional translator for the FGDs was helpful in interpreting their notions and feelings in order to stay sensitive and adaptive to them. Debriefings with both adults and teenagers showed that both my visits and their research involvement were highly appreciated.

What also needs to be taken into consideration is the potential problems of using interpreters. Inevitable circumstances such as their previous perceptions, their understanding of the study, and the accuracy of translations may, to a greater or lesser degree, influence results. However, I tried to counter this to the highest extent by verifying respondent's answers through confirming follow-up questions throughout the interviews and discussions. I also daily discussed the research procedures and respondent's responses with my interpreters to enhance mutual understanding. This also helped me to get a more comprehensive understanding of how we best could adapt to the local culture and context.

# 5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents and analyzes my empirical findings in relation to theory and the analytical framework, and includes three sub-sections: the Project; respondents' optimal processes; and the analytical angle between the two.

## 5.1 Collaboration in the Project

> *"The planning of this project was with BS and UNICEF, and they just passed the message through the ADC and VDC[13] saying we are coming with this project, it is not community members who have planned."* (Kelvin)

As the quote exemplifies, the Project was created and planned without the involvement of people in the target communities. It is instead founded on a project proposal developed by BS, built on their experiences from the field combined with strategies from the Malawi government and UNICEF. However, "*the proposal was developed according to the tune of UNICEF*", as Mary explains, so it is clear that this proposal follows UNICEF requirements. Figure 5.1 below presents the identified stakeholders and their respective levels within the Project. The colored actors represent the main project stakeholders, and the grey ones are supporting project stakeholders[14].

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[13] ADC and VDC are part of the governmental and traditional societal structures in Malawi. ADC stands for Area Development Committee and VDC for Village Development Committee. The societal structure in Malawi is built as following: National level → District levels → Traditional Authorities (TA) levels → Area levels → Group Village Head (GVH) levels/Communities → and Village levels.

[14] These supporting actors represent government and societal actors. They will not be fully explored due to their little influence on the Project, however, it is important to acknowledge their presence.

*Figure 5.1: The identified key project stakeholder groups on various levels, linked with their identified involvement in the Project's planning and implementation. Please note that the grey actors are not a part of the key stakeholders.*



TA: Traditional Authority  GVH: Group Village Head
ADC: Area Development Committee  VH: Village Head
VDC: Village Development Committee  CBO: Community-Based Organization
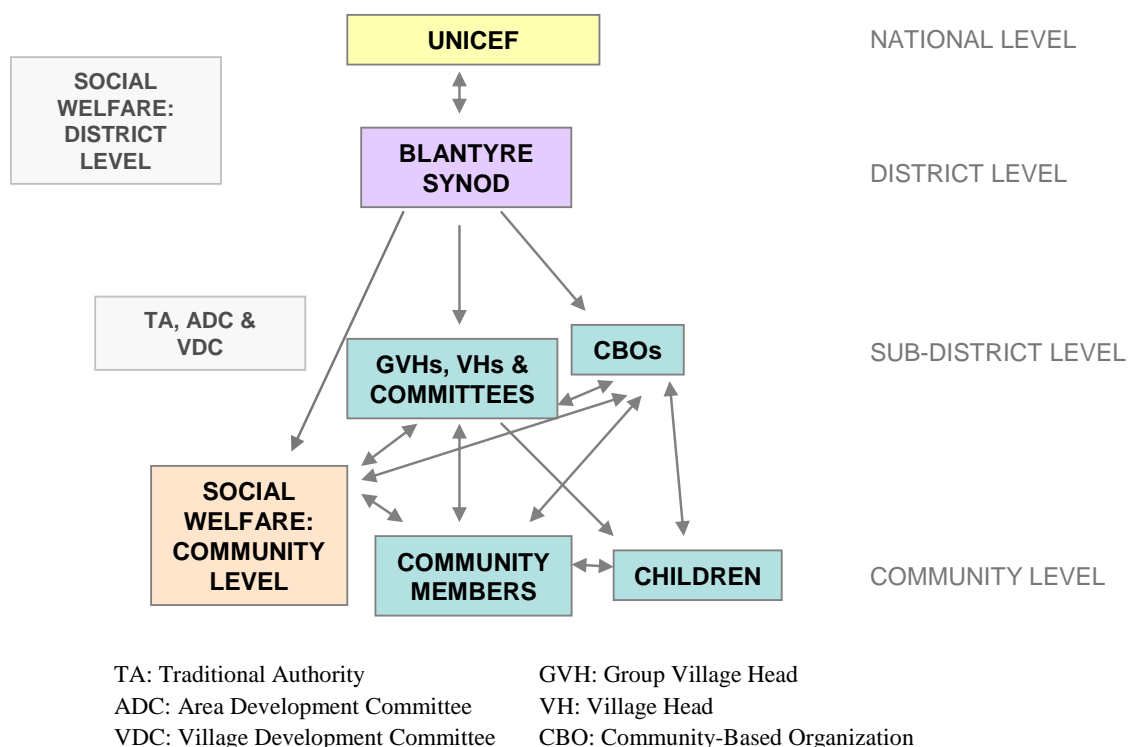
The figure clarifies that the majority of the main stakeholders: GVHs, VHs, Committees, CBOs, community members, and community social welfare workers, have not been included in the planning of the Project. Not even the main target group is heard: "*these are programs for children, and we find children invisible, from planning all the way to implementation.*" says Grace.

The proposal process included various meetings between UNICEF and BS in order for BS to "*generate a standard PCA that was able to link the objectives to the results*", as explained by Grace. The PCA includes detailed planning with set activities for every quarter and quantifiable targets and indicators. These findings clarify that the Project is applying the mainstreamed RBM practices with a pre-planned project built on linear planning methods (Vähämäki, 2011:6-7,14-5). This static planning can be highly time-consuming and does not allow for flexibility in implementation. The Project is thus also encountering challenges that are difficult to overcome. It took around 1½-2 years for UNICEF to approve BS's proposal, and the Project has been delayed an additional 6

months due to rigid financial liquidations and reporting. Another example of inflexibility is described by Eric:

"*In this project we were supposed to provide farm inputs. But the quarters were not consistent with the rainy season […]. Farm inputs will be coming in the next quarter, but by then the rainy season would already be gone.*"

It is clear that the Project's RBM practices limit responsiveness to contextual changes and undermine community involvement (Anderson et al., 2012:57). By linking this to the concept of CPPI, it is clear that the Project does not include any face-to-face discussions including all relevant stakeholders, which is the foundation for a collaborative process. Target groups are not present, and BS and UNICEF have not planned the project on equal basis. The Project has therefore not been able to overcome assumptions and power relations between certain actors or institutions, and consequently not created mutual consensus over a shared project and implementation plan that is mutually beneficial for all (Innes & Booher, 1999: 418).

### 5.1.1 Policies, Procedures and Resource management

Not only the Project's content has been top-driven, but also the policies, procedures and resource management system (PPR). In a CPPI process decision-making power over a project is appointed to the discussions with all stakeholders, and this is where stakeholders together decide over PPRs in order to find a mutual solution that would respond to the capabilities and wishes of them all (Babtista, 2005:5). Instead, the Project's overarching PPR system is set by UNICEF, which Eric clearly exemplifies: "*if we still become resistant to the instructions that we are given by the donor, then we will just be wasting our time, and also resources and energy.*" This has even wider consequences on the ground, were community members not only lack the power to influence PPR, but do not even have full knowledge of the project that is supposed to be helping them. The lower you reach in Figure 5.1 means the closer you are to actual beneficiaries, and ultimately, the less knowledge and influence over the Project stakeholders hold.

This is particularly clear for the resource management system, where UNICEF is doing regular check-ups to ensure that BS is using the money as intended. "*If the cash is misused UNICEF will stop funding BS*", says George. This control mechanism is inherited in RBM, where financial accountability and efficiency is fundamental

(Vähämäki, 2011:6-7). BS does therefore not have the flexibility to use money as they find suitable during implementation: "*because if I propose something that is totally different, the spot checks and the audit will not be ok*" (Eric). Neither do they have the flexibility to change what is in the PCA without a formal amendment by UNICEF, which is a process that could take months.

This overall structure of a more or less fixed proposal with applied RBM practices is thus undermining any kind of equal collaboration between stakeholders, which is highly problematic as it restrict BS and excludes the main actors: the target groups. (Anderson et al., 2012:70-2; Curtis, 2004).

### 5.1.2 Limited Participation, Interaction and Communication

The Project does include some participatory interventions that have positive implications for the target groups and implementation of the project. The Project is based on the Malawi government's National Plan of Action (NPA), in order to harmonize the development efforts with the local government, as promoted by the PD and AAA (OECD, 2005/2008). BS has tried to engage stakeholders on sub-district and community levels (from now on called target communities unless otherwise specified). They have also used the local governmental and traditional power structures when implementing the project[15], and tried to strengthen CBOs and community workers on the ground. This is positive as respondents do value capacity-building and to be sensitized through societal structures.

The main activity for inclusiveness is however a community mobilization tool called "Journey of Life" (JOL), which was implemented as a starting activity in all communities[16]. JOL is a one week community workshop whereby BS gather a multi-faceted group of around 30 people from the community to discuss the challenges, capabilities and opportunities of children in that community. This builds on the creation of a community action plan with certain goals on a timeline, which is owned by the community and managed by a created committee. Many respondents express ownership over their action plan and it has been of great importance and value for the Project. As George expresses: "*The communities should guide the project more than they do right now. But at least we have been having workshops, because if you had a project that didn't*

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[15] Please see the TA, ADC, VCD, GVHs, VHs and CBOs in Figure 5.1.
[16] A community mobilizing tool aims to help people within a community to mobilize themselves to take action and address a certain issue, in this project the prevention, mitigation and responses to child vulnerability and protection related issues as well as enhancements of children's rights.

*include that, then it would be a difficult issue.*" This shows both the benefits of collaboration in projects, but also the inadequacy of not including target communities from the beginning.

As presented, it doesn't matter if the Project has been more inclusive during implementation, used the local power structures, fully aligned the project with the NPA, or included successful JOL sessions, as they have not from start the created a shared solution based on mutual understanding between key actors (Innes & Booher, 1999:418). When analyzing project documents and the specific action plans developed during JOL, it is clear that they are all very similar. As Kimanzi explains, they have been strongly directed by the proposal: "*We were making our own action plan […] during JOL, as community members. But the actual plan of the whole project was with BS.*" It is obvious from community observations that communities are overly dependent on BS and UNICEF for implementing their plans. Communities are still under the Project's proposal, and they have no power and control over financial resources, nor over project interventions where they depend on outside support. As Adele expresses: "*It is becoming difficult for us to implement some essential parts, despite that we are a part of the implementation process*".

Another important aspect that shows the Project's lack of collaboration is their limited communication and interaction between the stakeholders, as described by Chisomo:

> "*We communicate with UNICEF through writing reports, and the reports are going through the CBO, but […] we have never seen any person from UNICEF come and monitor the work, neither BS to come and monitor or evaluate how the project is running.*"

Although UNICEF has visited some communities, these visits have not focused on planning and unified implementation, but rather on monitoring the results. This was also very clear in the feedback I got from respondents after our interviews/discussions, where every respondent from target communities emphasized how unique the situation was of me visiting to hear their opinions "*I just want to appreciate that you came, because it is rarely happening whereby other people come all the way just to visit and ask about your challenges or what you think about some things*" (Ameena).

This has also led to the Project's insufficient transparency where only the upper levels have the full understanding of the project, leading to both frustration and non-valued interventions. As Kimanzi expresses:

*"Like this project, you have to ask about everything that is supposed to be part and parcel of the project, you don't know whether it is included in the plan or not. You just have to ask randomly, so instead, you find that whatever you think is supposed to be done, it doesn't take place in the project."*

This has also led to the lack of commitment and ownership of target communities where many individuals express frustration, and some have even stopped engaging in the project at all. Kelvin reasons over this:

*"This project can easily be mismanaged […] people can just destroy that construction and take things like grass or whatever, because there is no ownership on that. But the moment you involve people, you get their ideas, people own that project […]. So even when the project phase out, people still have that ownership spirit and can still take care of the project that has been there."*

### 5.1.3 Summary

The findings show that there are fundamental aspects that according to both CPPI and the respondents will hinder the sustainability of the Project's outcomes. Figure 5.3 below summarizes and exemplifies the planning and implementation process between stakeholders within the Project, in comparison with the CPPI figure. By putting them together, it becomes highly visible that the Project lacks collaboration between all stakeholders, with only weak participation between some of them.

*Figure 5.2: The Project's planning and implementation to the left, compared to the CPPI to the right.*
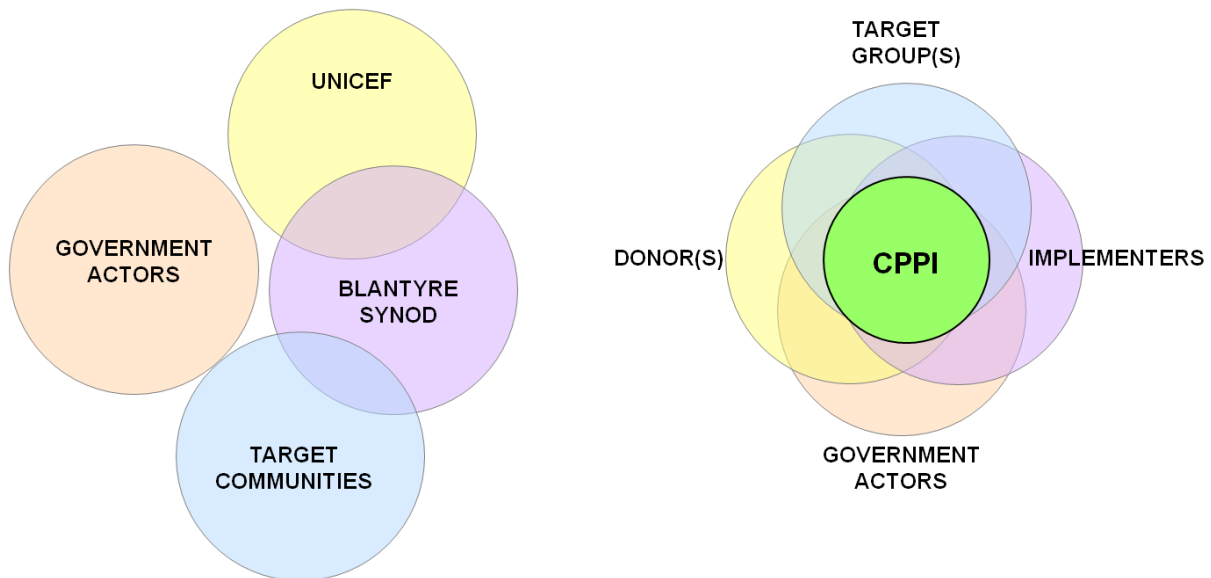


Despite promoting participation of target groups and local ownership in UNICEF's policies, this Project uses limited activities for participation. The Project is top-planned based on a proposal where interaction and communication between the stakeholders is insufficient. The JOL has clearly been a positive element for inclusiveness of target communities; however, unfortunately this has not been enough to overcome the overall structure with an already pre-planned project and imposing PPR. The Project has thus not been able to create the adaptive system that is needed in development context (Healey, 1997:52-3; Innes & Booher, 1999:418). This shows the importance of setting the overall structure in a collaborative fashion directly from a project's conception, enabling the creation of a dynamic organism. Moving on from the Project, we will now conceptualize respondents' optimal planning and implementation processes.

## 5.2 Stakeholders' optimal processes

"*From the inception of the project, to the evaluation of the project, as a circle, we need to include the communities.*" (Mary). "*If the project is about children they should also get some children that can represent their group, including their parents, and also other people in the community. They have to sit together and discuss.*" (Youth of Chikabwereza)

The striking matter when analyzing my findings are the great similarities between respondents' optimal processes, regardless of their role or level within the Project. The perceived benefits of the respondents' explained optimal processes did not differ between respondents either, and can be summarized into: *meaningful project interventions*, referring to a project's content; and *greater project implementation*, relating to the policies, procedures and resource management (PPR). These two are in turn perceived by respondents as vital in generating greater change and sustainable results.

The quotes above represent the central message conveyed by every respondent in this study: the importance of working together and the importance of including project beneficiaries and their communities' values, needs, capabilities and potentials in planning and implementation from the start. This should be the foundation of any project for creating meaningful project responses that make optimal impact, as the youth in Maselema village expressed: "*Donors cannot know what we need, what can help us, they can just plan things that will not bring an impact to us.*" This confirms what is promoted by community rationality: that it is impossible to create a transformative and collective solution that is able to respond to individual interests without the involvement of all stakeholders, particularly target groups, as they are representing the main area of focus (Innes & Booher, 1999:418). Collaborative solutions need to mirror the diversity of stakeholders as well as their context.

Other commonalities in the findings are to use the local power structures to plan and implement projects, and the importance of adaptation, as Rose expresses: "*I think we need to be flexible, because there are some unforeseeable circumstances that we cannot determine ahead of us. So if that time comes, then we can change, because we are flexible in planning time.*" Stakeholders do acknowledge the challenging development context which one cannot control, and do therefore enhance the value of flexibility as well as responsiveness to local structures and needs in all aspects of a project, from adapting or changing interventions, to policies and procedures such as reporting structures. This also applies to resource planning and management:

> "*You can just have a broader budget where you are saying, based on this child's needs he wants to do driving, and respond to that need, not forcing this child to become a tailor because you only have the resources for tailoring.*", says Grace.

Complexity theory's responsiveness to new information and changes throughout the implementation is here emphasized. Involving target communities also promotes the use of a holistic approach that responds better to complex issues such as social norms, as further explained by Rose: "*Social norms are not easily…maybe revealed. But when you allow communities to manage themselves with the help of some technical support, you find that those social norms can be addressed.*" One is thus also able to better understand and address the root causes of existing problems by letting communities steer the discussions.

### 5.2.1 Collaborative and Community-based and -driven projects

By analyzing the respondents' optimal planning processes in-depth, two different approaches emerge, one collaborative process where all stakeholder groups work together, and one community-based and -driven process. Important to notice is that respondents above commonalities still apply to both approaches. The **collaborative** process has majority support and is based on Adele's idea that "*you create better decisions together*", as further explained by Joseph:

"*An optimal planning and implementation process would include equal presentation from the donor and the community, where it is important to include all the different people within the community that will be affected by the project, where the donor and the community members sit together and plan together. As well for the implementation it should be around 50/50 between the donor and community, the community should have a big part and also the donor should have a big part of the project.*"

Important to notice is that donors are referred to as a group of actors, meaning the funding and implementing actors functioning from outside the target communities, for example UNICEF and BS in the Project. Adele explains how this practically could be operationalized:

"*I would prefer that both the community members and the donors should have their own ideas and merge. Because both sides can negotiate to come up with one common idea. If only the community members would suggest what to happen, they don't know if the ideas that the donor is bringing in would be helpful in the community. But also the donor cannot know what the community would suggest and want. So in that case if you merge together, since you communed together, then you can come up with one idea that will benefit the whole community.*"

This reasoning reflects the same theorization that CPPI is built upon, that knowledge is subjective but that you can come up with shared ideas that go beyond the subjective knowing if you negotiate on equal grounds (Babtista, 1995:8; Innes & Booher, 1999:418). This would also help to overcome the power relations between donors and target groups, and the common practice that only a few actors from the top are planning and controlling the project (Babtista, 2005:8). This collaboration would lead to a greater project implementation, as summarized by Chisomo:

*"You make the work easier. When the people in the village have already started to do the work in the community, by mobilizing each other, bringing the ideas together, it is like you already have started the work. […] you have already created the platform which makes it easy to implement the project."*

This could be seen as the initial stages of a self-organizing organism in the CPPI process, which also is more likely to make the project implementable. This collaborative process would also create transparency, which could help to avoid conflicts and mismanagement within projects: *"That will prevent corruption among the members of those people that will be running that project"*, says Tom. This is stressed by Anderson et al. (2012:99,141) as hugely important because corruption and distrust often are highly present between actors in development projects. Genuine and equal relationships between project stakeholders are promoted as the heart of development assistance and CPPI, however, rigid project approaches with strict policies and procedures such as RBM undermine this (Anderson et al., 2012:82).

The **community-based and -driven** approach promotes a stronger community foundation, as Ada expresses: *"Community members should sit down and come up with the things and areas that the project should concentrate on and sense the donor"*. This is also highly important for the implementation, as Kelvin explains:

*"Community members are close to the project implementation place, they know what is supposed to be done at a particular time, but when you are managing from a far distance, then you don't know what is supposed to take place in that particular area."*.

Community governance is the key here, where the collaboration between the various stakeholders is focused on facilitating the local processes. Some respondents suggest

ideas of how a community-based approach could be put into practice: "*It would have been good to have special offices, whereby people in the community can bring their issues and ideas, that we need such a project in this area. That will be good for direction of projects*", says Benjamin. These ideas could then be discussed and consolidated by all important stakeholders into a mutual solution.

Resources should also be community-led under this approach, as Benjamin continues:

"*The community members should also have the responsibility to take care of the resources, they should choose a committee that will manage the resources, and the donors should just have to monitor […]. And for the procurement of other things, I think they should ensure as a committee that there is a receipt so when the donors come they can present and show the transparency over the procurement process.*"

However, it is important to adapt the resource flow based on the communities' capacity, as Adele describes:

"*If the money would be given at once, then I think there will be some mismanagement of the funds, because handling huge amounts of money in the village is so difficult, but if it could be given per activity, that would be manageable.*"

This community-based process does promote collaboration, but enhances one stakeholder group's values as more important than others: target groups. This promotes a bottom-up process where target groups are the most important project actor, stressing that change should start from within the communities, instead of being applied by outsiders. As Eric expresses: "*Only by involving the perceived project beneficiaries […] are you ensured of success of that project, and sustainability as well.*".

Please see Figure 5.1 below where the above approaches are illustrated. The coincidence between respondents' optimal processes and CPPI becomes evident, strengthening this study's findings, and thus supporting the relevance of CPPI for development projects.

*Figure 5.3: Respondents' optimal project processes: collaborative with target communities as main actor to the left, and community-based and -driven collaboration to the right.*
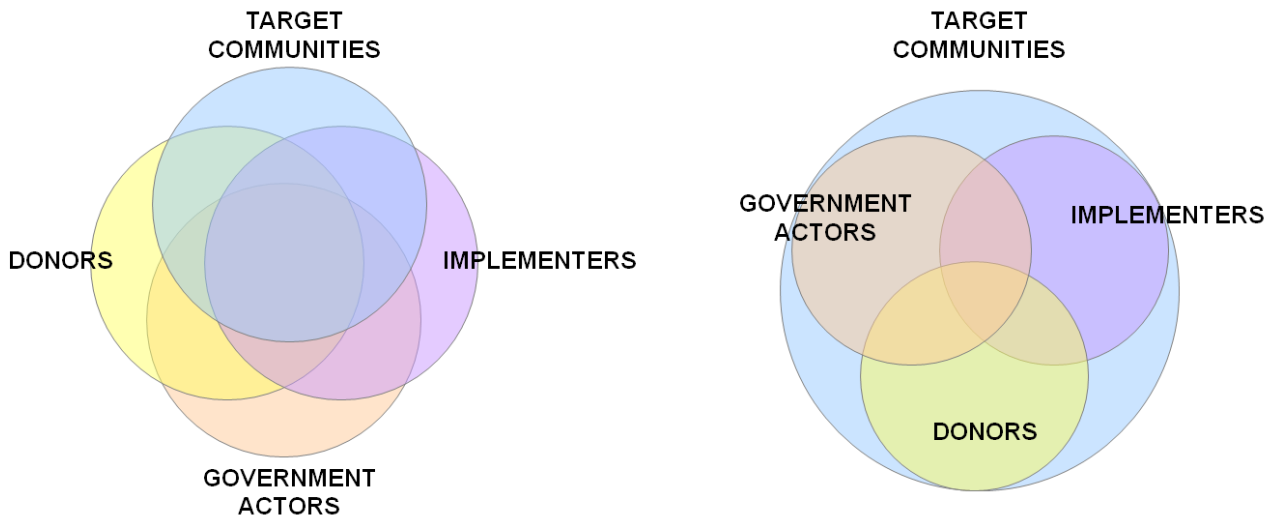


### 5.2.2 Resource management

One critical aspect that deserves extra attention is resource management, which undoubtedly is the one aspect that respondents have the most diverse views on. Resource planning and management is also a critical point for CPPI, and identified as the most challenging area to find mutual solutions within development projects (Anderson et al., 2012:140).

The controversy between respondents lies in whether target communities should be given the authority to handle a project's financial resources or not, as expressed by Sam:

> "*I think the donors, the BS or UNICEF in this case, they are supposed to keep the money and resources. Because if the resources could be kept here in the village, people in the village can abuse the resources, and they cannot be well managed.*"

This hesitation was found by a small minority within all stakeholder groups, and could be seen as another approach to optimal planning and implementation. However, after further analyzation and understanding the fundamental obstacles, namely their lack of capacity and expertise in managing and keeping records of money, I choose not to see it as another approach. Instead it demonstrates that enhancing stakeholders' different capacities is a critical aspect that needs to be considered in collaborative projects. Neither

can one expect everyone to have a voice on all aspects of a project process. These aspects must not be neglected, as George expresses:

> "*We need to build their capacity, even when it comes to keeping data, book-keeping issues, I tell you, it is a problem down on the ground, and literacy levels are low. So we should start from there, to build capacity.*"

### 5.2.3 Summary

Four main commonalities are emphasized when summarizing respondents' optimal planning processes: collaboration between stakeholders; projects founded on the values, needs and capabilities of target groups; flexibility in planning and implementation; and responsiveness to local structures. All of these highly respond to the idea of seeing a project as an organism, a complex adaptive system based on learning and shared values that is able to respond to the influences and changes in its environment in functional and creative ways (Innes & Booher, 1999:416-7). Important to notice is that respondents agree on higher visionary levels of project planning and implementation, such as the overall objectives of a project and the importance of including target communities. However, some diverge on the operational levels of putting these into practice, such as PPR and particularly procedures for resource management. This challenge is well-acknowledged by Max-Neef (2005:7) and his concept of strong "transdisciplinarity", which could be understood as the level-transcending collaboration in CPPI. Mutual agreements and understandings between stakeholders concerning all areas within a project are far more challenging than just agreeing on the overarching concept and values (ibid:9). However, complex societal challenges are not overcome without these transdisciplinary solutions.

Respondents' belief is that the four commonalities will have long-lasting outcomes for the people the project aims to help. As Stanley explains:

> "*If we do it together, really all stakeholders together, like UNICEF, BS, and the community, we will manage these things so that there will be sustainability in the project, so our children in the future, they should also benefit the same, from the same project that we are today implementing.*"

Mary explains why: "*Because if people own the project, they are able to sustain it*". Community ownership thus seems to be a key of sustainability of development projects.

Wals (2009:7,11) would enhance that sustainability only happens when a project group acknowledges its mutual dependency and functions like a learning system, implementing the project as a learning process. Only then can a strong ownership of both the project objectives and processes of implementation be developed, leading to a transformative system in complex and insecure development contexts (ibid:8,11). This could also enable communities' independence as Joseph explains: "*If the community members were involved in the beginning, like planning, and also implementation as well*, […] *that would create self-support based on the community, so the community no longer will be dependent on other people*." This responds to second and third level outcomes of CPPI (See Table 1), and is promoted to be the overall aim of any development effort: to support people to not need support anymore (Anderson et al., 2012:47; Innes & Booher, 1999:419).

## 5.3 The Project and the stakeholders' optimal processes

When comparing respondents' optimal processes and the Project, Chikondi says: "*There is a total difference, because there was no presentation of somebody from the community that could contribute their ideas during planning session*." Figure 5.4 shows a continuum that aims to visualize this. Although the continuum tries to embrace the variations of project planning and implementation practice, please note that this is a simplified version. However, it presents a clear picture on how this study's findings could be understood in its wider context.

*Figure 5.4: Continuum of development project planning and implementation, ranging from a community-driven process to the left, to a donor-driven process to the right. Positioning the respondents' optimal planning processes, the CPPI process, and the Project and mainstream development projects.*
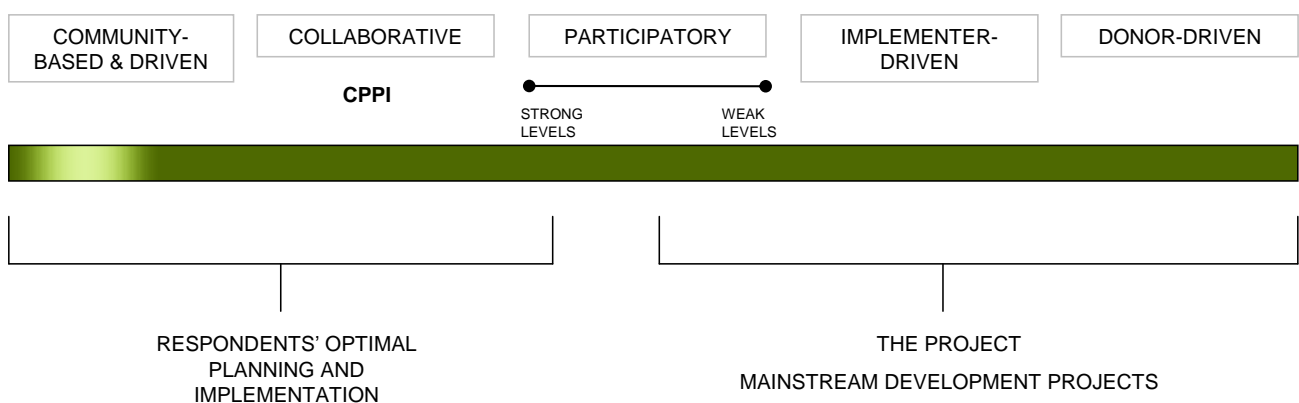
As seen above, the respondents' optimal processes spans over the left part of the continuum promoting community-based/driven and collaborative processes. The Project on the other hand is situated on the other half of the continuum together with mainstream development projects[17]. This part represents a donor- and implementer-driven process with weak levels of participation of target communities. CPPI is also deployed in order to illustrate its location on the continuum.

The consequences of not including target communities are mainstream and less valuable interventions, as the children in Chikabwereza express *"This building that they built is totally different from what the community would have liked to have."* Due to not involving target communities collaboratively from the beginning, the Project consequently became impossible to adequately respond to the target communities' wishes and potentials (Healey, 1997:52-3; Innes & Booher, 1999:414,421).

This theoretical explanation is also very clear in terms of resource management, where target communities have no power and BS is unable to influence the policies and procedures of UNICEF. The Project's system is not following the principles of CPPI: simplicity and flexibility. It is built on quarterly tranches between UNICEF and BS where BS implements for three months, to later liquidate within the fourth month. Despite the fact that this system supports financial accountability, it has made the implementation delayed, causing frustration on the ground:

*"We have little knowledge of the project, we don't know what is in the proposal. So we are doing those things blindly. That's why some of the challenges are coming out, [...]. We were waiting to be told that ok, this quarter we are doing ABCD [...]. So that is why we are failing"*, says Mary.

In fact all respondents highlighted some kind of challenge with resource management. This clearly shows the problems of strict financial- and results reporting, resulting in stakeholders' unequal power and control in deciding upon the PPR for the Project.

With the help of our analytical framework in understanding the findings, it is clear that the structure of the Project has affected the respondents' perception of optimal processes.

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[17] This is based on the available literature review for this study.

The most evident cause can be understood by the problems and delays in implementation and the frustration over this by respondents from all levels. As mentioned, these challenges occurred at least partly as stakeholders never created the adaptive system that is needed to collect information and respond to the changing and complex environment, nor were they guided by simple and flexible rules mutually decided upon by everyone (Anderson et al., 2012:140; Innes & Booher, 1999:417). This also coincides with respondent's own reasoning about their optimal processes and why those processes are important for development projects. What is clearly evident is that the Project does not allow for the ownership and governance from target communities that is needed, "[…] *which means that there is a challenge within this project to create sustainability and ownership.*" (Mary). This is highly problematic for the Project, as sustainability is the core of the intervention. This overall perspective of the Project makes it apparent that the overall structure the Project is operating within does not allow for collaborative processes.

# 6. DISCUSSION

This section will focus on discussing what implications the above findings have for development and development projects. As Figure 5.4 above reveals, there is a clear gap between respondents' optimal processes and the structure of the Project. Respondents argued for flexibility, working close together and having target groups as the main actor, but the Project was unable to embrace that. Why is this so? By using the above literature review and analytical framework to analyze these findings in-depth, it appears obvious that the system the Project operates within does not allow for adaptive and collaborative approaches that put target groups as the main actor in the planning and implementation process. As Anderson et al. (2012:70) argue: the current system of RBM is donor-driven and overly complicated, undermining collaboration and flexibility.

The most apparent findings that illustrate this are the proposal and the Project's policies, procedures and resource management. These are top-down and thus impede to involve target groups on equal basis, and UNICEF's rigid financial system and results reporting are imposing. The lower you get in the Project's structure (Figure 5.1), the less

power and influence you have. The system of project proposals is also hindering stakeholders from reaching a shared solution that is mutually valued.

Why does the development system still not adopt a flexible learning approach and embrace the voices of the beneficiaries, despite decades of recognizing these aspects to have crucial and beneficial outcomes? There is not a clear answer to this question. Based on Anderson et al.'s (2012) study, the obstacles to why development fails to include target groups are because it requires: time; access and presence; resources; skills; and evaluation. It takes time and resources to engage face-to-face with community members; access to communities can be time-consuming and challenging; most people lack the appropriate skills to facilitate participatory approaches; and lastly, outcomes of collaboration, such as trust and ownership are challenging to evaluate with quantitative measurements (Anderson et al., 2012:ch10).

This study's findings argue that resource policies and procedures seem to be the main bottlenecks, where UNICEF is setting the scene for the other actors. Understood from a reverse angle, target communities are accountable to BS, and BS is accountable to UNICEF. However, each level within the project has challenges: even UNICEF is caught in the rules of its international and regional policies and procedures, as well as their donors, as mentioned by Grace "*We have seen even in UNICEF that donor X is no longer interested in CBCCs[18]s, it has now moved to education, so what happens is that you move that person to education, and then what happens to the interventions started, they suffer*!" The Project is thus reinforcing a systemic structure that none of the respondents fully support – so who is responsible for the overall structure of the Project? And most importantly, who has the power and ability to change that system?

Instead of only looking at the three stakeholder groups in this case study, UNICEF, BS and target communities, maybe we need to look at the other side of UNICEF, knowing that UNICEF in turn is accountable to their respective donors? One clue might lie in what Gunilla Carlsson, the former Swedish minister for development wrote in 2011: "*If we cannot transparently and systematically report on how our aid budget is spent, and what is achieved in the form of results, the credibility of development cooperation itself will be undermined.*" (NAI, 2011). This is clearly expressing the foundation of the aid

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[18] CBCC stands for Community-Based Childcare Center, as is one of the main interventions in the Project.

effectiveness era with a RBM philosophy of financial accountability, which also the Project is founded upon. They are in theory rationally reasonable, you wish to know where your money has gone, what impact your money has done, and ensure that it has been spent as efficiently as possible. However, the ethical and practical implications this have on development and development projects are far-reaching. This causes a project's focus to revolve around whether the donor's financial requirement are met by detailed pre-planning for specific results and thereafter, detailed reports of the results. Naturally, this shifts a project's focus from the necessary collaboration with the people you aim to help, and their prioritizations and needs. This problem is clearly expressed by this study's respondents and findings, as seen in the above chapter. The study shows that one cannot control social change and societal development with this line of thought, as the Project otherwise would succeed in all its interventions that have been built on these linear and non-inclusive foundations, which is not the case. The rigidity of the RBM system undermines the uniqueness of human beings and communities, and impairs the important flexibility required in development projects.

Is the overall development system created solely by initial donors such as SIDA, USAID, DFID and funding governments, and their strong requirements of results efficiency and financial accountability? The quotes above promote that the structure goes beyond the stakeholder groups of this study, however, we must not make the mistake of putting blame on an easy target. Instead, guided by our analytical framework and its philosophical and theoretical foundations, we can see that every project is a social system that is made up of various actors that together create a structure that goes beyond the single actors. However, it is still these actors that together are creating the structure (Innes & Booher, 1999:416). Although some actors have more power over resources than others in the present system, all actors within the system are responsible for either reinforcing or changing the system.

Is the solution instead to embrace our interdependence instead of working as separate units? Maybe the overall structure cannot be changed and re-structured until all the relevant actors enter an equal discussion where they together conceptualize what the system should look like and how it should function? This study's findings promote this reasoning as all stakeholder groups are promoting changes in how the Project functions, but none of them are able to change the structure as single actors. If the Project had

enabled collaborative efforts and included target groups from start, it had been possible to see by now the far-reaching outcomes that could have been created.

As promoted by this study as well as CPPI, the answer to who is responsible for the overall structure seems to be everyone: meaning that only collaborative efforts have the ability to re-construct the development system for development projects to find mutual solutions that are beneficial for all. The question is whether the involved stakeholders are open to this in practice? As Max-Neef (2005:8-9) emphasizes: it is far more challenging to agree on how to operationalize a higher solution than to agree on the higher solution. However, collaboration between all the various levels within the system of development projects is needed in order to change the structure (ibid.).

To facilitate this requires fundamental changes in the way that development actors think about the development system and about the roles they have within the system. Bigger development institutions and their policies and procedures need to open up for change. Higher donors such as governments are practically not able to be included in collaborative processes with target groups, however, their policies, procedures and resource management could be re-structured to facilitate collaboration on lower levels, and allow for flexibility by reducing their strong reporting and accountability requirements.

Every actor must expose themselves and learn from each other, share decision-making, and create new knowledge together, which could be highly challenging for those that in the present system have more influence. Not to forget, the often neglected personal dimension is the essential starting point to spur transformation in organizations and institutions (Chambers, 1997:232). As every system is made out of individuals, the need of individuals' openness to change is fundamental. As Cornwall and Fleming (1995:11-12) argue: "*radical institutional, personal and professional changes are necessary*" for re-structuring the development system. This consequently requires continuous interaction and communication on equal grounds including all the various levels identified for that development project in order to come up with a versatile solution that responds to each of the levels.

In addition, there is a need to acknowledge the importance of intangible outcomes in development projects, instead of only relying on tangible quantifiable results. One suggestion is to make the intangible visible by making them more tangible, for instance by ensuring that the benefits of collaborative processes are shown in concrete and

measurable results (Wals, 2009:24). One example could be a project plan with clear objectives and measurable milestones (tangible), created through a collaborative process with all the relevant stakeholders (intangible). This could be a starting point for understanding and visualizing the benefits of CPPI.

As understood, CPPI requires profound changes in the development system. Regardless of these challenges, both this study and the theory support the argument that the solutions to complex issues such as development cannot be created without the reciprocal relation between the knowledge and perspective from each level within a project (Max-Neef, 2005:15). This study's findings clarify that this is the better way to operate and thus respond to some of collaborations' challenges and critiques. Although collaborative processes require time and effort from all involved, the mainstream RBM practices showed to be inefficient, causing major delays for the Project. Considering collaborations' challenge to counter the inherited power imbalances between actors due to the more powerful actors' interest, this study shows that all respondents, regardless of level within the Project, acknowledge and promote target groups as the main actors of development projects. They also open up to collaboration with shared decision-making for the benefit of a project's outcomes. One way to counter those power structures could be to embrace a more community-driven process promoted by respondents.

What it all comes down to is that collaboration with target groups as the main actor is also promoted as the foundation for *sustainability*. The findings of this study convey that sustainability is created when target groups feel a strong ownership, decision-making power and commitment over the project as well as the processes. Wals (2009:28) would argue that these are the intangible outcomes of a collaborative process, where the reciprocal process of reaching a shared solution is the key to sustainable results. What this tells us is that sustainability is not something that you can pre-plan in terms of tangible project results; sustainability of a project's outcomes can only be created by the *process* of collaborative efforts where target groups are the main actor.

Is that not in the end what development is all about, that target groups will no longer need outside support: a development system to become obsolete?

# 7. CONCLUSION

With this study, I wished to challenge the existing practice of development projects by introducing the concept of "*collaborative project planning and implementation*", CPPI. By analyzing the Project in-depth it is evident that the Project is applying the mainstream RBM methods of planning and implementation, which put challenges on carrying out projects as intended and wished by the Project's stakeholders. The findings do confirm the disadvantages and problems of the existing practices.

Findings further convey that there are four commonalities that all respondents highly value, which highly align to our created CPPI framework: collaboration between stakeholders; projects based on the values, needs and capabilities of target groups; flexible processes; and responsiveness to the local environment. These findings thus confirm many of the theoretical assumptions that CPPI is based upon, where respondents' reasoning over the Project and their optimal processes are reflecting the theory behind CPPI. This supports the criticism of mainstream development, and the CPPI framework's relevance and usability for development projects.

The study emphasizes that collaboration and CPPI do seem to offer a more valuable and suitable solution than the current mainstream development planning practices. This strongly promotes academia, development policy-makers and development institutions to discuss CPPI and its relevance for development. In addition, more studies need to explore how CPPI could best be put into practice. Maybe Rondinelli's (1993:119) approach of small experimentally focused projects would serve as practical ways forwards for research to explore CPPI in practice. Another option for enabling collaboration with target groups is to build upon the suggestion that one of the respondents proposed: to create special offices where local people can bring and discuss their ideas. These offices could then serve as the focal point where implementers and donors can join to collaboratively plan and implement projects.

Either way, this study argues for the importance of development to question the efficiency and results-based thinking, and instead embrace the long-term benefits of working together. As the African proverb so suitable reflects: If you want to go fast, go alone, *if you want to go far*, *go together*.

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# PROJECT DOCUMENTS

Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between UNICEF Malawi, Child Protection Section and CCAP Blantyre Synod Health and Development Commission, Malawi

Journey of Life Community Action Plans

Project monitoring documents

Project baseline survey

Appendix 1: Data collection and List of respondents

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE & LIST OF RESPONDENTS** |
| **INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS** |
| **Nr** | **Fictive name** | **Date** | **Place** (Village, district) | **Role** (TG, TC, BS, UN) | **Sex** F/M | **Age group** | **Comment** |
| 1 | Stanley | 2015-01-20 | Maselema, Blantyre | TG: GVH | M | 50-59 | Interpreted |
| 2 | Andwele | 2015-01-20 | Maselema, Blantyre | TG: Teacher | M | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 3 | Salim | 2015-01-21 | Chikwembere, Blantyre | TC: CBO | M | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 4 | Rose | 2015-01-21 | Chikwembere, Blantyre | TG: Teacher | F | 20-29 | Interpreted |
| 5 | Benjamin | 2015-01-22 | Milli, Blantyre | TG: GVH | M | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 6 | Bertha | 2015-01-22 | Milli, Blantyre | Teacher | F | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 7 | Tom | 2015-01-22 | Milli, Blantyre | TC: VDC | M | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 8 | Sam | 2015-01-22 | Milli, Blantyre | TC: CBO | M | 50-59 | Interpreted |
| 9 | Adele | 2015-01-23 | Cholokoto, Blantyre | TC: CBO | F | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 10 | Jamilah | 2015-01-23 | Cholokoto, Blantyre | TG: GVH | F | 70 | Interpreted |
| 11 | Mary | 2015-01-26 | Blantyre city, Blantyre | BS | F | 40-49 | |
| 12 | George | 2015-01-26 | Blantyre city, Blantyre | BS | M | 40-49 | |
| 13 | Beatrice | 2015-01-27 | Khanda, Zomba | TG: Community Committee | F | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 14 | Lucy | 2015-01-27 | Khanda, Zomba | TG: Teacher | F | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 15 | Joseph | 2015-01-27 | Khanda, Zomba | TG: Community Overseer | M | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 16 | Chikondi | 2015-01-28 | Kataya, Zomba | TG: GVH | M | 40-49 | Interpreted |
| 17 | Chisomo | 2015-01-28 | Kataya, Zomba | TG: Teacher | M | 20-29 | Interpreted |

| 18 | Ameena | 2015-01-28 | Kataya, Zomba | TG: Community Committee | F | 30-39 | Interpreted |
|----|--------|------------|---------------|--------------------------|---|-------|-------------|
| 19 | Kelvin | 2015-01-28 | Kataya, Zomba | TC: VDC | M | 40-49 | Interpreted |
| 20 | Kimanzi | 2015-01-29 | Phetembe, Zomba | TC: VDC | M | 30-39 | Interpreted |
| 21 | Ada | 2015-01-29 | Phetembe, Zomba | TG: GVH | F | 50-59 | Interpreted |
| 22 | Patrick | 2015-01-29 | Phetembe, Zomba | TG: Community Committee | M | 50-59 | Interpreted |
| 23 | Martin | 2015-01-29 | Phetembe, Zomba | TG: Teacher | M | 20-29 | Interpreted |
| 24 | Sarah | 2015-01-30 | Chikabwereza, Zomba | TG: Teacher | F | 40-49 | Interpreted |
| 25 | Diana | 2015-01-30 | Chikabwereza, Zomba | TG: Teacher | F | 20-29 | Interpreted |
| 26 | Grace | 2015-02-10 | Phalombe city, Phalombe | UN | F | 40-49 | |
| 27 | Eric | 2015-02-11 | Blantyre city, Blantyre | BS | M | 30-39 | |

### FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSSIONS

| Nr | Group name | Date | Place (village, district) | Role (TG, TC, BS, UN) | Sex F/M | Age group | Comment |
|----|------------|------|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Maselema | 2015-01-20 | Maselema, Blantyre | TG | 4F/4M | 12-15 | Interpreted |
| 2 | Chikwembere | 2015-01-21 | Chikwembere, Blantyre | TG | 4F/4M | 13-16 | Interpreted |
| 3 | Chikwembere 2 | 2015-01-21 | Chikwembere, Blantyre | TG | 4F/3M | 14-15 | Interpreted |
| 4 | Khanda | 2015-01-27 | Khanda, Zomba | TG | 4F/4M | 14-17 | Interpreted |
| 5 | Kataya | 2015-01-28 | Kataya, Zomba | TG | 5F/3M | 12-17 | Interpreted |
| 6 | Chikabwereza | 2015-01-30 | Chikabwereza, Zomba | TG | 4F/3M | 12-22 | Interpreted |

TG: Target Groups      BS: Blantyre Synod
TC: Target Communities      UN: UNICEF


(Transcripts are available upon request)

## Appendix 2: Interview and Discussion guides

*2A: Interview guide for Individual Interviews (English version)*

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center"><b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b></td></tr>
<tr><td>Date:_____</td><td>Place: _____</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Time:_____</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Interviewees name: _____</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sex: _____</td><td>Age: _____</td></tr>
<tr><td>Occupation: _____</td><td>Education level: _____</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ethnicity: _____</td><td>Religion: _____</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Interviewee's project groups/role:<br>_____</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td align="center"><b>INTRODUCTION</b></td></tr>
<tr><td>
<ul>
<li>Your participation is voluntary and you can ask questions, interrupt or withdraw whenever you want to during this conversation</li>
<li>I am interested to listen to YOUR experiences, values and opinions</li>
</ul>
<ul>
<li>What is your general experience with this project?</li>
</ul>
</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center"><b>INTERVIEW GUIDE</b><br><i><b>Based on your experiences …</b></i></td></tr>
<tr><td>
<ul>
<li>How should a development project be structured and managed according to you, and by who/whom?</li>
<li>How should an optimal planning and implementation process of development projects be according to you, and by who/whom?</li>
<li>Why is this an optimal process that you value?
<ul>
<li>- Who should plan, implement and decide?</li>
<li>- What is important and why?</li>
<li>- What advice would you give to people/organizations like UNICEF that plan and implement projects?</li>
<li>- If we were in the initial phase of this project, how would you have wanted the project's planning and implementation process to be structured and managed for creating the best outcomes?</li>
</ul>
</li>
</ul>
</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>
<ul>
<li>Do you feel that this project's planning and implementation align with how you value and wish a planning and implementation process to be?</li>
</ul>
<p>   - Why/why not?</p>
</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

| | |
|---|---|
| • How has the CP project's policies, procedures and resource allocations been planned?<br><br>- Have you been involved?<br>- Who has been involved and when?<br>- Who has the power to decide about project content, strategies, resource flows, and report structures? | |
| • How has the CP project's policies, procedures and resource allocations been implemented?<br><br>- Have you been involved, and how?<br>- Who has been involved and when?<br>- Who has the power to decide over the implementation process? | |

| SUPPORT QUESTIONS | |
|---|---|
| **Evidence & Clarification**<br>- What is your experience of …?<br>- What do you think led to …?<br>- Could you explain again what you mean?<br>- Do I understand you correctly – do you mean…?<br>- Could you give me an example?<br>- In what way?<br><br>**Analytical**<br>- Why do you say/value/think that?<br>- Why do X lead to Y?<br>- Why do you think that is positive/negative?<br>- Why do you think X happened?<br>- What difference would it make?<br>- What impact would it have? | |

| FINALIZING | |
|---|---|
| • Summarize key things brought up<br><br>• Possibility to give feedback | |

| THANK YOU | |
|---|---|
| • Usage of results and confidentiality<br>• Sharing of main findings<br><br>• Thank participants | |

*2B: Discussion guide: Focus group discussions (English version)*

| GENERAL INFORMATION |
|---|
| Date:_____  Place: _____ <br><br> Time:_____ <br><br> Interviewees name: _____ <br><br> Sex: _____  Age: _____ <br><br> Occupation: _____  Education level: _____ <br><br> Ethnicity: _____  Religion: _____ <br><br> Interviewee's project groups/role: <br> _____ |

| INTRODUCTION |
|---|
| ▪ Your participation is voluntary and you are able to ask questions, interrupt or withdraw whenever you want during this conversation <br> ▪ I am interested to listen to YOUR experiences, values and opinions <br><br> ▪ What is your general experience with this project? |

| DISCUSSION GUIDE <br> *Based on your experiences, please discuss …* | |
|---|---|
| • How should a development project be structured and managed according to you, and by who/whom? <br> • How should an optimal planning and implementation process of development projects be according to you, and by who/whom? <br> • Why is this an optimal process that you value? <br>  - Who should plan, implement and decide? <br>  - What is important and why? <br>  - What advice would you give to people/organizations like UNICEF that plan and implement projects? <br>  - If we were in the initial phase of this project, how would you have wanted the project's planning and implementation process to be structured and managed for creating the best outcomes? | |
| • Do you feel that this project's planning and implementation align with how you value and wish a planning and implementation process to be? <br><br>  - Why/why not? | |
| • How has the CP project's policies, procedures and resource allocations been planned? | |

| | |
|---|---|
| - Have you been involved? <br> - Who has been involved and when? <br> - Who has the power to decide project content, strategies, resource flows, and report structures? | |
| • How has the CP project's policies, procedures and resource allocations been implemented? <br><br> - Have you been involved, and how? <br> - Who has been involved and when? <br> - Who has the power to decide over the implementation process? | |

| SUPPORT QUESTIONS | |
|---|---|
| **Evidence & Clarification** <br> - What is your experience of …? <br> - What do you think led to …? <br> - Could you explain again what you mean? <br> - Do I understand you correctly – do you mean…? <br> - Could you give me an example? <br> - In what way? <br><br> **Analytical** <br> - Why do you say/value/think that? <br> - Why do X lead to Y? <br> - Why do you think that is positive/negative? <br> - Why do you think X happened? <br> - What difference would it make? <br> - What impact would it have? | |

| FINALIZING | |
|---|---|
| • Summarize key things brought up <br><br> • Possibility to give feedback | |

| THANK YOU | |
|---|---|
| • Usage of results and confidentiality <br> • Sharing of main findings <br><br> • Thank participants | |

Appendix 3: Information and Consent Letter (*English version*)

| **INFORMATION AND CONSENT LETTER** |
|---|

Dear X,

My name is Anna Lundström, and I am a master student from Lund University in Sweden. I am currently carrying out a case study of one of UNICEF Malawi's projects, which you are a part of.

I am interested to listen to YOUR experiences as being a part of this project, and to your values, opinions and perceptions. The following information is provided to let you know how you and the information you give is protected, and to describe the purpose of the study. Please read it before you decide if you wish to participate:

(a) The purpose of this study is to better understand how UNICEF is planning and implementing their projects, by listening to people from different groups/roles that are a part of the project. My hope is that this study will help carrying out projects in a way that leads to sustainable and optimal impact.
(b) I am carrying out this study as a part of my master's program at Lund University, Sweden, and I am independent from UNICEF Malawi, as well as from Blantyre Synod.
(c) I have not been a part of planning and implementing the project.
(d) The study is taking place in January and February 2015 within Lilongwe, Blantyre and Zomba districts.
(e) Your participation is fully voluntary, meaning that you decide if you want to participate or not, and you have the freedom to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences for the project, or for your relationship to me, or the various actors within the project.
(f) All information about your name and identity is confidential. This means that the information collected will be stored and used in ways that make it impossible for others to identify you or to see what information you have given.
(g) Information collected will be used only for the purpose of this study purpose. It will not be used for commercial or non-scientific purposes. I wish to share the study's findings with you after completion.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. Instead the expected benefits from the study is to ensure that your voice, values and thoughts are being heard in the best possible way. I will base my findings on the information you give together with information from all the other people heard within this project. My hope is to influence the way UNICEF, and other similar development agencies, are planning and implementing their projects, with the aim of improving the impact and sustainability of development projects.

After reading/listening to this, I hope that you have the important information you need in order to decide if you want to take part in this study. I wish our dialogue to be as open, free and mutually beneficial as possible. You are free to ask questions or interrupt at any time before, during, and after the interview/group discussion.

Please give verbal or written consent that you with full knowledge of the study's purpose and procedures are interested to be a part of the study and give your voice.

_____           _____
Date and place                                            Signature of Anna Lundström

Signature of participant_____

Name of participant_____