INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN MALAWI

INTRODUCTION

The African Union Commission led AU-AIP Multi-Country Green Climate Fund Readiness Support Initiative implemented in 15 AU Member States, supported an indigenous knowledge campaign aimed at documenting knowledge that contributes to drought and flood management, water harvesting, soil and ecosystem conservation, climate forecasting, and livelihood resilience.

This learning brief documents two of Malawi's identified indigenous knowledge for flood and early warning systems, as well as drought management & soil conservation.

HIPPO MOVEMENT TO DRY LAND

Communities living near Shire River in Chikwawa District in Malawi have observed that when hippos begin wandering into nearby villages, it can be a sign of heavy rainfall and possible flooding.

The distance the hippos travel from the river is believed to indicate how far floodwaters may reach. This traditional knowledge helps communities prepare in advance by:

- Storing enough food to last through periods of flooding.
- Identifying evacuation points for people, belongings and livestock.
- Constructing small canals and dykes around homes to reduce the amount of floodwater reaching them.

For these communities, observing hippo behaviour provides an important early warning that helps them prepare for and reduce the impacts of flooding.

CONTOUR RIDGES FOR SOIL CONSERVATION (LOCAL NAME: KALOZERA)

This is an activity that involves preparing ridges that follows a contour in gardens. It has been applied as a way of preventing storm water from damaging ridges and crops. It also helps conserve water. The practice has been handed down through generations, after local farmers learnt it from colonialists.

During implementation of the Sustainable Rural Water and Sanitation for Improved Health and Livelihoods Project with financing from the African Development Bank, this was one of the practices that was scaled up in 5 districts of Rumphi, Nkhota-kota, Ntcheu, Mangochi and Phalombe. It was further reinforced by planting vetiver grass on the contour ridges. Where the contour was disturbed by a gully, farmers prepared check-dams to reduce soil loss.

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