INITIATIVE ON
Diversification in East and Southern Africa

CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR DECISION-MAKING IN CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE: USING THE GENDER ACTION LEARNING SYSTEM METHODOLOGY

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CGIAR Initiative on Diversification in East and Southern Africa

The CGIAR Initiative on Diversification in East and Southern Africa also known as Ukama Ustawi aims to help smallholders transition to sustainably intensified, diversified, and de-risked agri-food systems based on maize in 12 East and Southern African countries. Specifically, it seeks to enable 100,000 value chain actors, including farmers (40% women, 40% youth (mutually inclusive)), to adopt climate-smart maize-based intensification and diversification practices, and 2 million agro-value chain actors (40% women, 40% youth (mutually inclusive)) to regularly access digital agro-advisory services. Emphasizing the role of the private sector in driving such transformation, this initiative targets to support 60 start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises. US$ 200 million (50% promoting biodiversity) is enabled to promote climate resilient agriculture and US$ 25 million for investment in scaling work in ESA for resilient agrifood systems. Learn more about Diversification in East and Southern Africa here: https://www.cgiar.org/initiative/diversificationin-esa/

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ACRONYMS

AEDC	Agricultural Extension Development Coordinators
AEDO	Agricultural Extension Development Officers
CA	Conservation Agriculture
CAT	Challenge Action Tree
CDO	Community Development Officers
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GBT	Gender Balance Tree
GTA	Gender Transformative Approaches
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
MADD	Machinga Agricultural Development Division
MSC	Most Significant Change
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SLEM	Social and Leadership Empowerment Map
TLC	Total LandCare
TOT	Training of Trainers
UU	Ukama Ustawi
VSLA	Village Saving and Loan Associations
WP	Work Package

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CGIAR Initiative on Diversification in East and Southern Africa also known as Ukama Ustawi (UU) Initiative's goal is to empower millions of vulnerable smallholder farmers to transition from maize mixed systems to sustainably intensified, diversified, and de-risked agrifood systems is well underway. The initiative is being implemented in 13 African countries using coordinated transformative change interventions driven by an understanding of the unique multidimensional challenges and the opportunities they present in the different local and national contexts.

Gender Action Learning System (GALS) is a powerful household Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) that guides people toward the desired development and growth within the household and communities. The methodology helps to nurture and grow the desire and passion of those involved to invest their efforts and resources towards sustainably achieving realistic desired futures, the vision. It brings satisfaction to household members by encouraging togetherness and united focus to coordinate their work energies and share equitably their material and financial resources. When GALS users experience challenges, the methodology builds their resilience by addressing them appropriately before seeking external assistance. This brings about a mindset change in people to see leadership responsibility as an opportunity and not a challenge.

GALS provides an effective means for planning as well as for monitoring the implementation of the planned individual or household activities and for evaluating the attainment of results. It helps all people involved to generate lessons that guide future planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (PM&E). The flexibility in adapting the GALS methodology tool allows for use across age groups, genders, ethnicities, educational levels, and other social classification criteria.

The CGIAR Initiative on Diversification in East and Southern Africa, therefore recruited the expertise of MERAMO Consulting through Work Package Five (WP5) to facilitate the implementation of GALS in the communities of two of its implementing partners namely Machinga Agricultural Development Division (MADD) and Total LandCare Malawi (TLC).

The implementation of this activity was delivered to 4,095 beneficiaries surpassing the planned target of 4,000 households. UU WP5 managed to sensitize and involve the stakeholders of TLC and MADD in the respective communities of Nkhotakota and Balaka on GALS as a household gender transformative methodology. The process imparted GALS knowledge and its facilitation skills to the 40 selected 'GALS Champions'[1] and 404 household trainers as well as training 3,651 household members. It has mobilized the communities to work together as households in pursuit of their jointly developed visions, enabling them to analyze their household gender division of roles and find ways of addressing their anticipated challenges while creating ways of creating valuable networks and relationship building. A summary of the GALS implementation has been captured in this GALS YouTube video from across different communities with participants sharing key insights and lessons learned.

The main recommendation emanating from this work is that UU and future CGIAR Science Programs consider delivering its other community programs using adapted GALS tools to achieve adequate mobilization of communities, active participation, and effective utilization. By embarking on participatory GALS impact monitoring and evaluation, UU will not only motivate the communities to achieve more using the methodology but also expand the initiatives' ability to provide coaching, ensure continued GALS momentum, and co-create, and co-design participatory research with local households and communities.

[1] The GALS Champions were created by stakeholders as the lead trainers who through training on GALS will spread the knowledge using a cascading approach to reach 4000 households in the 2 designated districts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The CGIAR Initiative on Diversification in East and Southern Africa, also known as Ukama Ustawi (UU) is addressing food and nutrition security risks in the region caused by an overreliance on maize. The initiative has adopted a climate-resilient, water-secure, and socially inclusive approach to supporting communities in East and Southern Africa to diversify crop productivity. Work Package 5 (WP5) of UU led by IWMI, focuses on empowering women and youth in agribusiness ecosystems and addressing gender and social inequalities in the region's agribusiness and agriculture value chain sectors through gender transformative approaches such as the Gender Action Learning System (GALS). In Balaka GALS was conducted in the catchment areas of the Machinga Agricultural Development Division (MADD) in Herbert, Lemu, Matandika, Malula, and Songani communities. Implementation in Nkhotakota was done in the catchment communities of Total LandCare (TLC) in the communities of Mwansambo, Chinguluwe, Chipeni, Linga, and Zidyana. In both locations, the overall goal was to create a sustainable gender-inclusive, and responsive environment for conservation agriculture adoption through a household and community-driven approach known as the 'Gender Action Learning System'.

1.1 Overview of the Malawi Context: Climate change, agriculture and gender

Climate variability and continued degradation of agricultural soils, with negative impacts on food production leaving smallholder farmers in developing countries susceptible to the consequences of soil and land degradation and reduced (Singh et al. 2020). Evidence now suggests the use of sustainable farming practices such as conservation agriculture (CA) to help improve productivity. CA as an approach, simultaneously uses three principles: no-till, mulch cover, and crop diversification with potential benefits linked to moisture conservation of crop residues, reduced run-off and erosion, increased infiltration, and reduced evaporative losses (Kidane et al. 2019; Nyagumbo et al. 2024). Enabling farmers to consider an approach that advocates for sustainable intensification with options applicable to their given agroecological zones and conditions (Nyagumbo et al. 2021).

In Malawi, CA has the potential to improve crop productivity currently severely affected by weather pattern changes driven by El Niño events – unusual warming of surface waters in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean – and their impact on maize production in Malawi (De Weerdt et al. 2024; Ngoma et al. 2024). However, gender roles are tightly defined and controlled by men both at household and community levels which means that women and other vulnerable groups' limited influence over decision-making and control of valuable assets including land, underscores the need for additional support for their meaningful participation in land governance and technology adoption and uptake (Bessa et al. 2023). There is continuous recognition for research and development interventions that promote women's cohesion and confidence, alongside engaging men and boys on the need for gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) to accelerate gender transformation, especially in rural communities (Kimonyo et al. 2024; Lovel 2021) where adoption of technologies such as CA is important. This intervention explored how a gender transformative approach could enable women to have a greater say in household decisions about conservation agriculture.

Gender transformative approaches (GTAs) are generally known for their ability to revolutionize the lives of individuals and households especially women, and their families, groups, and communities to achieve meaningful gains in decision-making, leadership, resource ownership, gender division of labor and food security (FAO et al. 2020). One such GTAs is the gender action learning system (GALS). GALS is a method with a record of success within agricultural households, value chain groups, and financial cooperatives to develop, own, and pursue the future of their choice (Reemer and Makanza 2014). It is a change philosophy based on underlying principles of social and gender justice, inclusion, and mutual respect while promoting women's human rights based on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (FAO et al. 2020). The methodology helps to bring unity among couples and other household members to work towards a unified goal. It grows the confidence of people especially women to contribute towards household and community decision-making. The creative use of poems, sketches, songs, local dance, and free interaction simply makes GALS "serious business with fun!" (Mayoux 2014).

Typically, GALS is a household and community-led empowerment methodology that uses principles of inclusion to improve income, food and nutrition security of vulnerable people in a gender-equitable way to develop and own achievable visions (Mayoux and IFAD 2020). The GALS methodology increases jointness between couples promoting the sharing of tasks that are traditionally performed sorely by either men or women (Farnworth et al. 2017). It allows flexibility for adaptation to suit various cultural and organizational contexts. Evidence proves that researchers and development practitioners have successfully generated meaningful findings and results by using GALS tools in their approaches. Adaptation of the GALS tools helps deliver financial inclusion (financial literacy) workshops to financial cooperatives and voluntary/village savings and loan associations. These and many other benefits make GALS an inclusive methodology for achieving UU's GESI outcomes.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

In both zones (Balaka and Nkhotakota), the overall goal was to create a sustainable, inclusive environment for conservation agriculture adoption through a community-driven approach. Specifically, the GALS intervention was aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- To engage stakeholders on the UU WP5 GALS implementation and its expanded utilization through stakeholder mapping and prioritization
- To co-design and enable the planning of desired inclusive futures at the individual, household, and community levels
- To equip households involved in conservation agriculture with skills for household gender analysis for improved household income
- To strengthen the resilience of households by equipping them with skills for challenge analysis
- To establish strong and impactful GALS networks and relationship-building within households and communities

1.3 Context of the intervention sites: Key livelihoods activities, biophysical, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics of Balaka and Nkhotakota zones

The districts of Nkhotakota, Salima, Dowa, Balaka, Machinga, and Zomba are all located in Malawi, precisely within the Nkhotakota and Balaka zones - each with unique characteristics (Figure 1). Due to differences in the data, their key livelihoods, culture, biophysical characteristics, and socio-economic activities are presented separately.

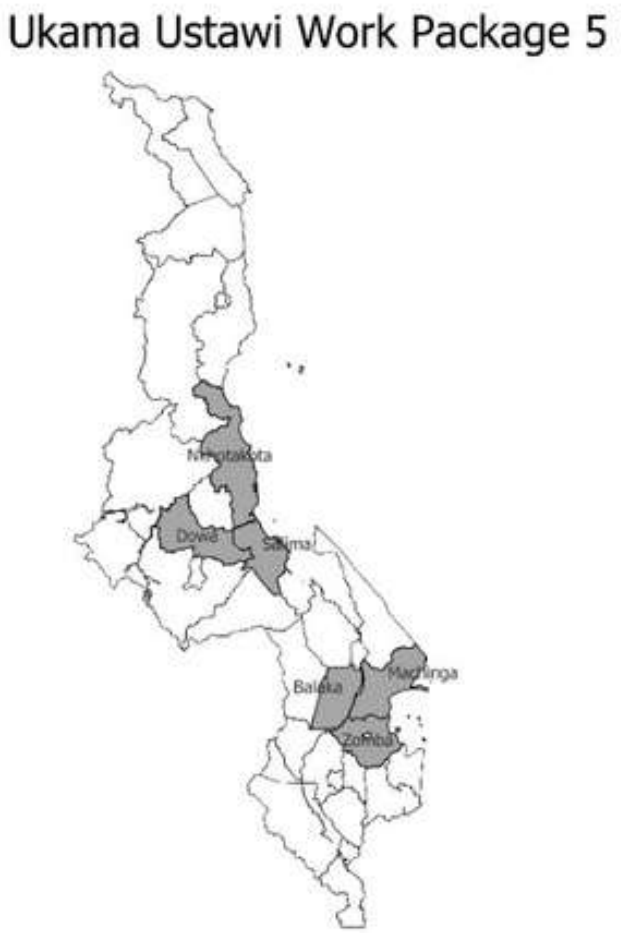


Figure 1: Showing shaded district boundaries for UU area of work in Malawi

1.3.1 Nkhotakota district

Fishing on Lake Malawi is one of the primary economic activities in Nkhotakota due to its proximity to Lake Malawi. Households generally rely on the cultivation of crops such as maize, rice, beans, cassava, groundnuts, and sugarcane for their livelihoods. Some communities engage in forestry and honey production due to the district's rich biodiversity (Local Action 2024). Nkhotakota is home to diverse ethnic groups, primarily the Chewa, Tonga, and Ngoni. Their key traditional dance Gule Wamkulu is a secret cult, involving a ritual dance practiced among the Chewa in Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique. The dance was selected in 2005 as the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Program. The dancers wear costumes and masks made of wood or straw and represent a great variety of characters, from wild animals, spirits of the dead, and slavers to more recent objects such as motorbikes and helicopters (Limbabi, P 2021).

The district has a tropical climate, influenced by its proximity to Lake Malawi, with fertile soils in the lowland areas. Being surrounded by the lake and a national game reserve makes it an ideal tourist destination. This initiative aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9, which promotes the development of resilient infrastructure, sustainable industrialization, and innovation (Local Action 2024). Nkhotakota is known for the Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve, the oldest and largest in Malawi. The development of mega-farms is expected to greatly benefit smallholder farmers by providing them access to technology for increasing their productivity. However, this is left to be seen with smallholder farmers having to deal with productivity challenges.

1.3.2 Salima district

In Salima, agriculture plays an important role in the livelihoods of households in the district. The district is known for its fertile soils, favorable climate, and proximity to Lake Malawi, making it an ideal location for agricultural activities. The agriculture sector is diverse with crop production, livestock management, and agribusiness. Staple crops grown in Salima include maize, rice (a major crop in the riverine areas), beans, and various vegetables (National Business Database 2023). Fishing is also a crucial activity, given its location along the shores of the lake. The livestock subsector largely has cattle, goats, sheep, and chickens. Salima is Malawi's leading producer of mangoes grown under the Malawi Mangoes brand which has 426 hectares of land and a state-of-the-art fruit processing plant (International Finance Corporation 2024).

Salima is culturally diverse, with the Chewa, Yao, and Tonga being the major ethnic groups. Traditional dances, festivals, and ceremonies are part of the local cultural life (Makwemba et al. 2019). The district has several hotels, lodges, and resorts, contributing greatly to both local and national tourism. The district has sandy soils along the lake shore and is characterized by a semi-arid to tropical climate. It experiences moderate rainfall, with some areas facing water scarcity challenges.

1.3.3 Dowa district

Dowa is predominantly agricultural, with the majority of the population engaged in subsistence farming, growing crops such as maize, tobacco, beans, groundnuts, and soybeans. Livestock farming is also common where farmers keep cattle, goats, and chickens. The Chewa are the dominant ethnic group, and the Gule Wamkulu is significant in cultural and spiritual life. Traditional practices are deeply rooted in community life. Dancing is performed for entertainment and cultural ceremonies such as tombstone unveiling and funerals.

Geographically, the district stands out for its highlands which are called Dowa Highlands, others also call them Chitembwe-mwera. They are of a rectangular formation covering an area of 930 square kilometers. The highlands are bounded on three sides by steep slopes, forming the Eastern (Great) Rift Valley wall to the east and overlooking the Bua and Lilongwe River valleys to the north and south, respectively (Britannica. 1998). Dowa has a hilly terrain with fertile soils, especially in the valleys. It has a subtropical climate, receiving moderate rainfall, which makes it favorable for farming. Agriculture therefore forms the backbone of the economy, particularly tobacco farming, which serves as a cash crop. Small-scale businesses and trading also provide income, but poverty levels remain high.

1.3.4 Balaka district

Agriculture is the mainstay in Balaka, with maize, rice, and cotton being the dominant crops, although livestock rearing is also common for livestock types such as goats, sheep, chicken, and cattle. Maize is the main food crop grown, often in monoculture but sometimes intercropped with cowpeas, pigeon peas, and groundnuts. Other crops include soybeans, sorghum, sesame, chilies, rice tobacco, cotton, cassava, and horticultural crops (Makate and Mango 2017). The district also has small industries and trading hubs that contribute to the local economy. Some residents are involved in small-scale mining of gemstones.

Balaka is ethnically diverse, mainly with Yao, Lomwe, and Chewa people living in the area (Britannica. 1998) Figure 2 summarizes the composition of tribes in Balaka[2]. Traditional dances like ‘manganje’ (initiation dance) and cultural ceremonies are important in local communities (Limbani, P 2021).

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balaka_District

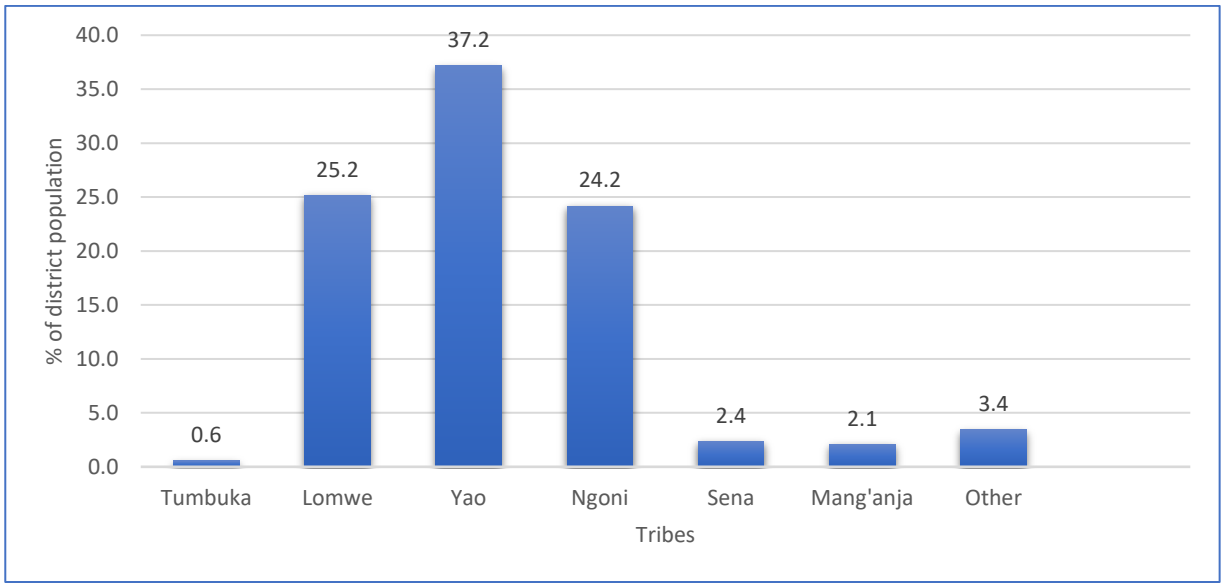


Figure 2. Proportions of Tribes of Balaka District

Balaka experiences a hot, semi-arid climate with periodic droughts. The land is generally flat, with some river systems that support rice cultivation in irrigated areas.

1.3.5 Machinga district

Like other districts, agriculture is the major economic activity, with the cultivation of maize, soybeans, groundnuts, tobacco, and rice being predominant. Fishing also plays a role in some communities especially those close to Lake Malombe and the Shire River given the district's proximity to the Shire River. Machinga is home to the Yao people, with a strong influence on Islamic culture due to historical Arab and Swahili interactions. Cultural practices include male circumcision ceremonies and traditional dances such as ‘manganje’ and ‘mbwiza’.

The district is characterized by both highlands and lowlands, with fertile soils in the river valleys. The district has a tropical climate, with ample rainfall supporting agriculture. Farming and fishing are the primary livelihoods. The district also has small-scale businesses and a growing interest in tourism due to natural features such as Liwonde National Park.

1.3.6 Zomba district

Agriculture remains the dominant livelihood in Zomba where maize, soybeans, groundnuts, pigeon peas, cowpeas, and tobacco are prominent. Zomba is also known for its historical educational institutions with some residents employed in teaching and civil service. Its educational institutions, including the Chancellor College, have a long-standing reputation as one of the country's leading institutions of higher learning, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programs across various disciplines. It also has a significant number of government employees and a growing tourism sector due to its scenic landscapes, particularly the Zomba plateau. The district is still one of the busy trading districts in Malawi for raw agricultural and processed goods. Fishing takes place in Lake Chilwa and rivers such as Likangala. The district is diverse, with both Lomwe and Chewa people being the dominant groups. Zomba also has a rich colonial history, having been Malawi’s first capital, which has influenced its cultural development. It is known for its highlands, particularly the Zomba Plateau, which has a cooler climate and supports forestry and tea farming. The district experiences moderate rainfall and has fertile soils in the lowland areas.

In summary, across these six districts where UU is implementing its activities, agriculture is the main economic activity, with variations in fishing, livestock, and tourism depending on the district's geography. Culturally, these areas are rich in traditional practices, dances, and ceremonies. Biophysically, the climate and soils vary, with lakeside districts benefiting from fishing, while others rely more on crops and livestock. Socio-economic activities are closely tied to natural resources, with small businesses, education, and tourism sectors supporting livelihoods.

2. METHODOLOGY OF GALS IMPLEMENTATION

The development and implementation of Phase 1 of UU WP5 GALS targeted 4000 households in the Balaka and Nkhotakota zones (Figure 1). In Balaka it was implemented in the catchment areas of Machinga Agricultural Development Division (MADD) in Herbert, Lemu, Matandika, Malula, and Songani communities while in Nkhotakota it was done in the impact areas of TLC namely, Mwansambo, Chinguluwe, Chipeni, Linga and Zidyana.

2.1 Method Design and Implementation Mechanism

The following methodological approach (steps) were taken in the design and implementation of the GALS work:

The review of UU's work in Malawi was conducted focusing on technical documents such as reports for the WP1 Climate-Smart Agriculture, gender assessment in agriculture (WP5), youth and agribusiness landscaping analysis (WP5), and other works of literature. This stage informed the content of the UU WP5 'GALS Training Manual' which was developed for the intervention (Figure 3).

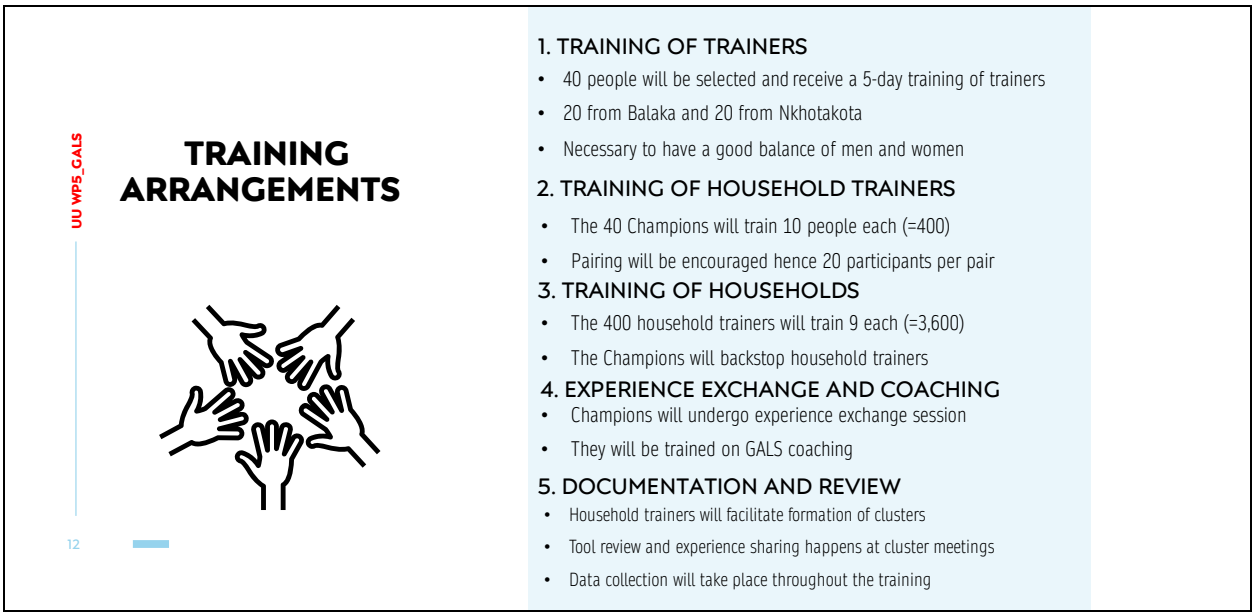


Figure 3. Showing GALS Training Approach for implementation in Balaka and Nkhotakota zones

A five-day GALS change catalyst training followed from June 17 to 21 involving 40 people identified by the stakeholders as GALS Catalyst/ Champions. The training used tools for household visioning and action planning, household gender analysis, resilience building, and monitoring framework for cascading learning (to 4,000 targeted households in this case), see Figure 4.

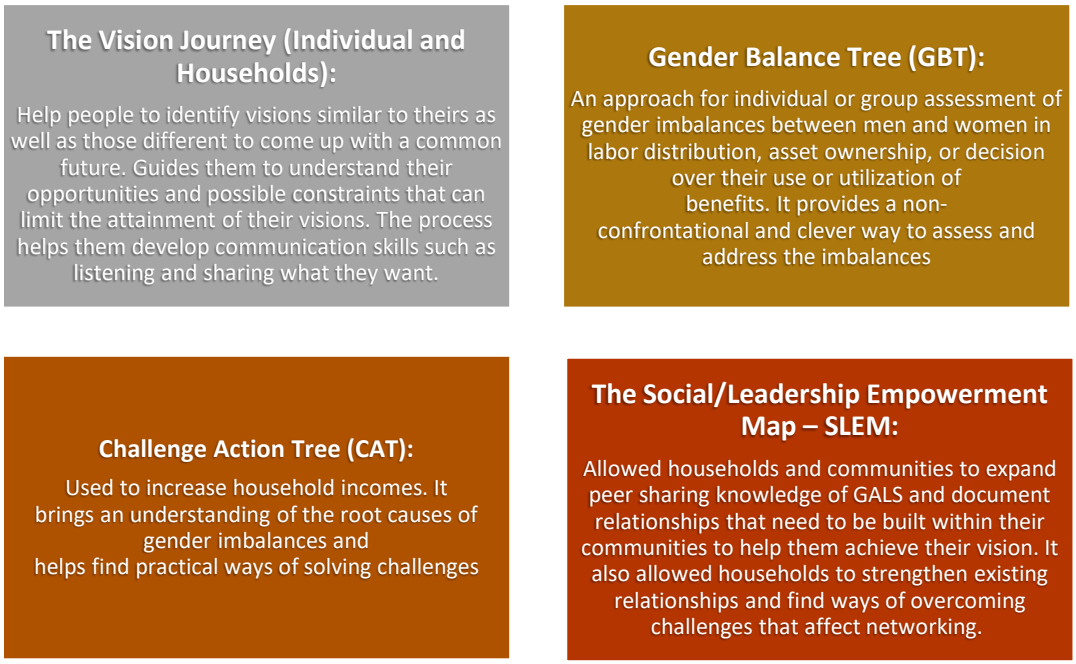


Figure 4. GALS training tools capturing the main GALS approaches

To ensure the effective delivery of GALS, most of the training content was presented in the local language to enable those struggling with the English language to understand the material. The necessary considerations for adult learning were put into practice to allow flexible participation by all. Delivery of the GALS was implemented in four main stages namely the GALS stakeholder sensitization, the GALS catalyst training also known as the training of GALS Champions, the training of householder trainers, and the training of household members (See Figure 5). Some communities struggled with the approved scheduled time for their training due to other community engagements such as funerals and traditional ceremonies that included chieftaincy celebrations. In such scenarios, these communities were allowed to reschedule their training days to allow households and Champions to attend.

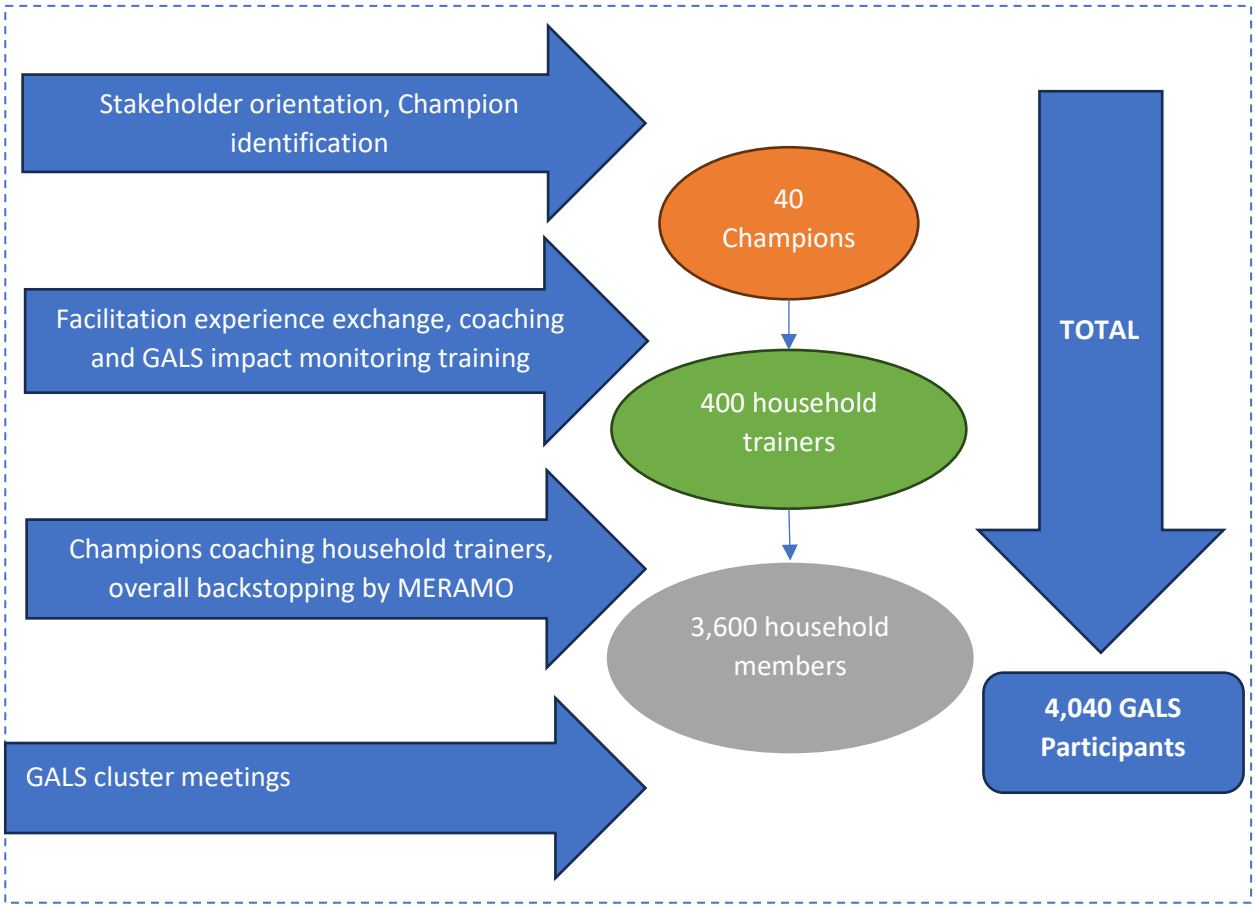


Figure 5. Diagram showing the cascading process of GALS implementation

2.2 Capacity building workshop processes for GALS

To effectively reach the 4000 household targets with an inclusive approach to CA adoption, a series of capacity-building workshops were organized.

2.2.1 Stakeholder sensitization

One-day workshops with MADD and TLC together with their stakeholders were conducted on June 13 and 14 respectively reaching 42 people in both zones i.e. (20 in Balaka – 6 women/14 men and 22 in Nkhotakota reaching 5 men/17 women). The workshops aimed at:

- sensitizing stakeholders about the UU WP5 GALS content for inclusive agriculture and conservation agriculture practices and its plan
- guiding stakeholders on the specific actions expected of them to aid effective UU WP5 GALS implementation
- allowing stakeholders to make suggestions for expanding the utilization of the UU WP5 GALS

Picture 1. GALS stakeholders in Balaka (left) and Nkhotakota (right) at sensitization workshops

The stakeholders' sensitization workshop discussed the UU WP5 GALS implementation strategy through a co-design process focusing on the targeted communities, the number of participants, the selection criteria for the participants,

and their expected role in its execution. The stakeholders included local and religious leaders, community representatives, extension officers, farmers groups, and community elders. Participants at the two workshops produced two lists of 40 people (20 from each zone) to be trained as GALS change catalysts, also known as GALS 'Champions'.

2.2.2 Training of GALS Champions

A five-day GALS Champion training started with a descriptive presentation of the GALS methodology as a Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) and its origin. It was stressed that the GALS just like other GTAs have revolutionized the lives of participating individuals and their families, groups, and communities to gain traction over the years in food security and agriculture value chains (FAO, IFAD and WFP 2020). The GALS basic tools were defined as other transformative approaches. It also presented the importance of GALS over other transformative household and community methodologies and the specific benefits and shortfalls that people experience while using GALS. The presentation explained the adaptability of GALS for use in research and other community resilience activities. It helped the Champions to seek clarifications of the content on specific GTAs while making suggestions for improvement, especially on what facilitators must or must not do when facilitating GALS (building the ethics of acceptable principles within the communities).

The GALS Champions training was attended by 40 people (21 men and 19 women) as summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Attendance summary for training of GALS Champions

Zone	Male	Female	Total
Nkhotakota	12	8	20
Balaka	9	11	20
Total	**21**	**19**	**40**

The training used hand-drawn pictures throughout to convey how households and communities can design their desired future using agriculture as a pathway to improved livelihoods. It used five tools namely Soulmate Visioning, Vision Journey, Gender Balance Tree (GBT), Challenge Action Tree (CAT) for increasing incomes, and Social/Leadership Empowerment Map (SLEM). These tools are grounded within other gender conceptual frameworks such as the Moser Gender Planning Framework (Moser 1989; Moser 2014) and the Havard Analytical framework (Candida et al. 1999). The GALS tools are described below:

Soulmate Visioning: A process of grouping people with similar independently created visions. Soulmates are identified by asking one volunteer to say the vision they have drawn and by show of hands, the other participants with similar drawings join the volunteer to form a group to discuss their shared visions.

Vision Journey: A simple plan for attaining visions. It displays the vision, present situation, opportunities to exploit in pursuit of the vision, anticipated challenges and obstacles, and actions to be undertaken as well as their corresponding milestones.

The GBT: A tool for household gender analysis that focuses on labor distribution (i.e. who does which activities for pay or for free); decision making and ownership over assets; expenditure or utilization of incomes (i.e. probing about who spends on what).

The CAT: The analysis of challenges likely to stifle the attainment of good harvests in value chains conducted using the CAT. It involves categorizing the root causes of the challenge related to production, household dynamics, and marketing. Individual causes of the challenge from each category are listed followed by the analysis of implementable ways of addressing the causes. This is important as agricultural value chains are the primary source of income for attaining visions in most rural Malawian communities.

The SLEM: The tool helps to identify people with opportunities or who are opportunities in their own right for the participants to utilize within the agricultural value chain. Examples include chiefs, family members (as a source of labor, remittances, and other support), extension agents, cooperatives, churches, police, and others. It also identifies people that the participants would like to help with the GALS knowledge. As their network grows, the participants acquire leadership skills.

The delivery of these tools was aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- To facilitate the setting of a preferred household or individual future
- To help participants develop plans for achieving preferred individual or household futures
- To impart skills for analyzing household gender dynamics
- To build the resilience of participants through effective analysis of challenges
- To build powerful networks and support systems for CA uptake and other agricultural innovations
- To impart leadership skills to the participants
- To facilitate the creation of decision-making opportunities for the participants, especially women and youth

Several approaches were used in the trainings guided by the objectives of the modules as well as the size and complexity of the participant groups. Among others, questions and answers, frequent confirmation of the participant's understanding, creative participatory energizers, discussions and debates, guided group tasks, and relevant case studies were used.

Using A4 papers and pens, the GALS Champions were asked to draw pictures of anything they wanted and felt comfortable to draw. The exercise was aimed at helping the Champions:

a) To be more alert and active
b) To get to know and understand one another
c) To identify people with similar thoughts (similar drawings).
d) To identify Champions with unique thoughts (unique drawings).
e) To build the confidence of Champions in drawing.
f) To make all Champions feel at ease (breaking the ice)

Each explained the meanings of their drawing to the other including mentioning their names. Presentations were done in pairs explaining each other's details after which they showed the drawings to everybody. The session gave confidence to the participants to feel that they could draw pictures so that others could appreciate their quality and meaning. By using the drawings of people who had similar ideas, the Champions were encouraged to speak when they felt like doing so because it could be possible that their thoughts were similar to someone else's. The unique drawings were used to encourage the Champions to make contributions even when they felt that they were the only ones with such thoughts as doing so would help everyone know about their unique thought. It also acted as an energizer which relaxed the mood of all Champions.

The participants underwent pre-training assessment interviews which gave baseline data to help facilitators quickly understand areas of the training that required special emphasis. Each interview was guided by questionnaires drawn from the module of the training. On the last day of the training, at the end of the ToT, the participants were asked to undergo a post-training evaluation to determine the knowledge gained using a similar survey approach (Picture 2). This was all captured using Kobo Collect as a software tool.

Picture 2. Pre-training evaluation in progress

2.2.3 Training of household trainers

The training was offered to 404 household trainers (151 men and 253 women) surpassing its target of 400. Overall, there was an almost balanced participation in the training (53% women and 47% men) with Balaka registering more women (79%) than Nkhotakota (47%). The reason for more men in Nkhotakota was due to the fact the identification of household trainers was done largely through lead farmers - the majority of which are men who in turn selected more fellow men than women. Nkhotakota had 7 training centres while Balaka had 5. Table 2 presents the number of people who attended the household trainers' training.

Table 2. Attendance record for the training of GALS household trainers

No	Community	Zone	Attendance			% women
			Men	Women	Total	
1	Chinguluwe 1	Nkhotakota	12	8	20	40
2	Chinguluwe 2	Nkhotakota	12	8	20	40
3	Mwansambo	Nkhotakota	25	15	40	38
4	Chipeni	Nkhotakota	23	17	40	43
5	Zidyana 1	Nkhotakota	12	8	20	40
6	Zidyana 2	Nkhotakota	8	12	20	60
7	Linga	Nkhotakota	16	26	42	62
	Subtotal		**108**	**94**	**202**	**47**
8	Malula	Balaka	9	31	40	78
9	Matandika	Balaka	8	32	40	80
10	Lemu	Balaka	5	37	42	88
11	Herbert	Balaka	10	30	40	75
12	Songani	Balaka	11	29	40	73
	Subtotal		**43**	**159**	**202**	**79**
	Total		**151**	**253**	**404**	**53**

Picture 3. Training of GALS household trainers in Linga and Mwansambo

The Champions applied flexibility in their delivery of training to match the numerous demands of people in the communities. For example, in both zones, some centers conducted training in the afternoons while others in the morning to allow other community interventions us the training locations or to accommodate those that were busy in some cases.

2.2.4 Training of Champions on GALS Coaching

The coaching session started with taking the Champions through a phenomenon they were all familiar with, football. Champions were asked to explain the role of the coach and their responses were summarized as follows:

- To prepare the player psychologically for upcoming matches
- To give the observers' feedback to the player
- To share with the player additional tactics of the game
- To guide the player to conduct effective fitness drills
- To conduct motivational sessions for enhancing mental attitude and discipline
- To act as a role model to the player

The outcome of this process highlighted the need for the Champions to prepare the coaches as coaching was seen to unlock potential, nurture skills, promote growth, and instill confidence in those being trained. It is a transformative undertaking that empowers individuals to achieve excellence and success. In pursuit of their visions therefore, the GALS households needed coaches to assist them with various aspects of their everyday lives such as helping them make good financial plans and expenditures, exploring available opportunities with them, and providing motivation towards the attainment of their visions. Considering the enormous task associated with coaching households individually, the coaches were advised to consider creating special coaching days where GALS participants would meet with their coaches one-on-one and in clusters.

2.2.5 GALS impact monitoring training to monitor change

The Champions were sensitized to the need to capture relevant GALS impact data. They were provided with a presentation on effective participatory monitoring approaches suitable for gathering evidence of change that results from GALS interventions. They were also informed of the challenges associated with assessing the impact at the household level for interventions that impact the participating households differently. Most Significant Change (MSC) impact monitoring methodology was introduced to allow them to appreciate its strength in gathering impact stories and hence, using MSCs (Smith, R 2023). The MSC technique is a qualitative and participatory form of monitoring and evaluation based on the collection and systematic selection of self-reported stories of change resulting from development activities. The technique was developed by Dr. Rick Davies in the mid-1990s to meet the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating a complex participatory rural development program in Bangladesh, which had diversity in its implementation and outcomes. The technique facilitates project and program improvement by

focusing the direction of work away from less-valued directions toward more fully shared visions and explicitly valued directions (Serrat, 2009).

GALS, being an intervention approach with diversity in implementation and outcomes, demands an impact monitoring methodology and tools that ably track and gather evidence of the diverse changes. By using the MSC technique the UU WP5 GALS will ably establish domains of change such as:

- changes in the quality of households' lives resulting from achieving their visions
- changes in the nature of households' participation in GALS and livelihoods activities
- changes in the household gender relations for the household members participating in GALS and any other changes resulting from GALS
- changes in norms, attitudes, and decision-making power over assets and resource allocation

Although at the early stages of GALS implementation, it was worth identifying key people who are excited by MSC and could champion the technique and act as catalysts in the process. These people would be involved in designing how to implement MSC across UU WP5 GALS. They will need a greater understanding of MSC to better respond to the questions that will inevitably arise. Once MSC stories are collected from the field, they will be assessed at various levels of the organizational hierarchy. The stories will then be grouped into sectoral domains such as health, education, agriculture, business, and many more depending on the organizational and intervention objectives.

The MSC stories will inform periodic UU WP5 GALS reviews such as mid-term or final evaluations. The decision to employ MSC for GALS impact monitoring is based on characteristics that make it appropriate. MSC is better suited for impact monitoring of GALS because conventional M&E tools do not provide sufficient data to make sense of the GALS' HH level impacts and foster learning (Davies, 2005). GALS is one of the interventions that are not adequately catered for by orthodox M&E approaches and can gain considerable value from MSC because it:

- is complex and generates complex outcomes at individual, household, and community levels
- is qualitative and participatory in nature
- focuses on social change which is largely measured qualitatively
- thrives on repeated contact between field staff and participants
- is not easy to monitor GALS with conventional monitoring systems
- is focusing on learning rather than accountability
- gives a chance to the storyteller to explain the significance of a reported change.

The Champions pledged the following roles they would play in the process of collecting GALS impact data using the MSC:

- Preparing the community members for the MSC approach
- Close monitoring to observe positive change stories
- Help in the identification of MSC stories
- Fostering trust between GALS Champions and GALS participants
- Providing regular feedback to household members on the MSC story selection process
- Work closely with the UU WP5 research team to co-develop protocols to ensure confidentiality where necessary

The consolidation of data from all the ten communities namely Linga, Zidyana, Chinguluwe, Mwansambo and Chipeni of Nkhotakota zone and Lemu, Herbert, Malula, Matandika, and Songani of the Balaka zone shows that 4,095 people (1,167 men and 2,928 women) received the GALS training surpassing the contract target of 4,000. Balaka zone trained 1,985 (300 men and 1,685 women) while Nkhotakota had 2,110 (867 men and 1,243 women) as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of participation in UU WP5 GALS

Level of Participation	Balaka			Nkhotakota			UU GALS Consolidated		
	Men	Women	Subtotal	Men	Women	Subtotal	Men	Women	Total
Champions	9	11	20	12	8	20	21	19	**40**
HH trainers	43	159	202	106	96	202	149	255	**404**
HH members	248	1,515	1,763	749	1,139	1,888	997	2,654	**3,651**
Total	**300**	**1,685**	**1,985**	**867**	**1,243**	**2,110**	**1,167**	**2,928**	**4,095**

The Champions recruited their household trainers in various ways such as identifying them through the Local Government Decentralization System of traditional leaders and chiefs. Each village nominated one person to be trained as a household trainer. In Linga and surrounding communities, they recruited lead farmers in the agricultural sector. The lead farmers are also trainers who work with TLC in the dissemination of their various technologies. Some Champions invited fellow members of various interest groups such as VSLAs, religious groups, youth clubs, VNRMCs, forestry groups, their business colleagues, and many more.

2.3 Challenges faced and general perception of the methodology

2.3.1 Challenges faced

- Revision of allowance rates by the government forced MERAMO to incur higher costs than budgeted
- GALS training coincided with village activities such as community meetings, funeral ceremonies such as the death of the Vice President of Malawi and of the country's most popular musician, church events, and chieftaincy functions forcing the training to be rescheduled
- Transportation challenges affecting GALS participants due to long distances and very poor roads

2.3.2 General perception of the methodology

- There was fear of failure to recruit household trainers; to their surprise, they had to send others back.
- That people especially men would not be committed to attending full-time on all days due to their community engagements such as market days, funerals, village meetings, and formal business. Those who missed attendance for various reasons were given special time to make up for the lost time.
- Being committed to government work especially those employed by the government in various capacities
- Fear that trainees would demand allowances because many organizations pay them
- Fear that they would not manage to facilitate GALS
- Some appeared bored at first but they surprised everyone that they ended up being the most committed over time
- The thought of working with a government extension staff as a co-facilitator became a challenge at the beginning but it became an opportunity to come closer to them and learn technically. Some of the farmers challenged the extensionists that they should do the facilitation more and extensionists only played the necessary backstopping role
- Fear that they would not complete the GALS content within the specified times of the day; everything worked out well

3. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES OF GALS IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of GALS successfully allowed men and women to participate in four stages as stakeholders, GALS Champions, household trainers, and household members. It achieved and satisfied the required numbers in the targeted communities. Figures 6 presents the targeted numbers versus the actual achieved.

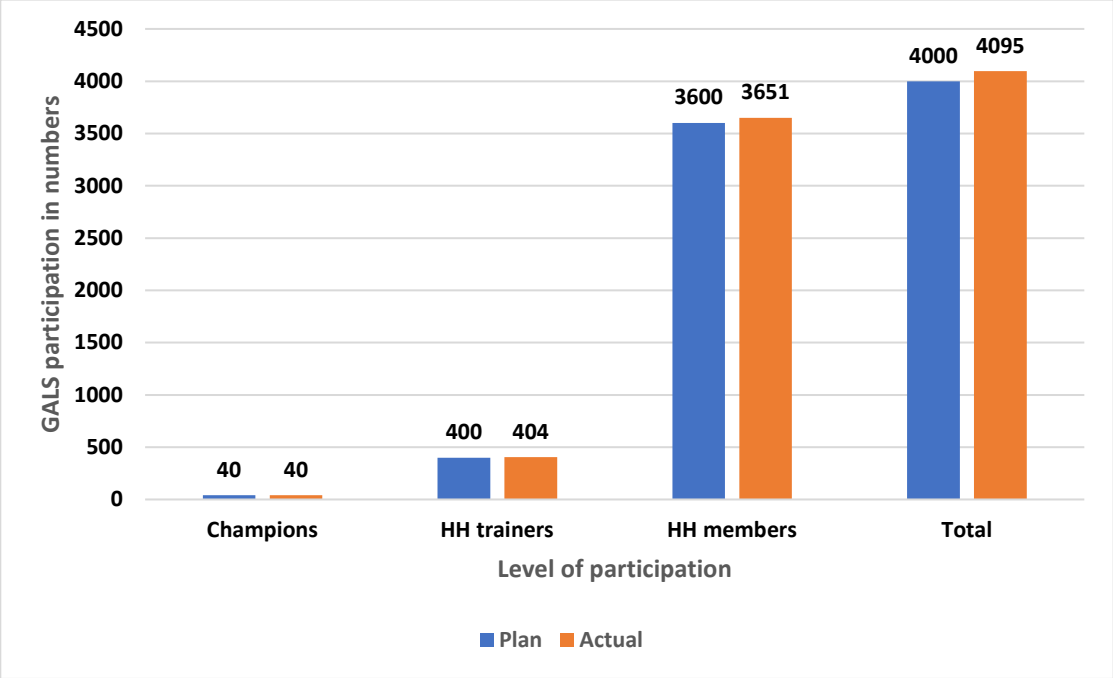


Figure 6. Numbers planned versus achieved

The findings presented in this section provide insights into key themes emerging from assets, decision-making, leadership, social networks, peer-to-peer learning, roles, and norms as depicted across the four main GALS tools used. The results further highlight how to create inclusive safe spaces for conservation agriculture adoption and uptake. Although the broader discussions went beyond conservation agriculture to livelihoods broadly.

3.1 Soulmate visioning

The vision selection process was subjected to the following guiding questions that each participant would ask themselves:

- How will the vision benefit me and those around me?
- How will the vision guide me toward future growth?
- Does the vision have the potential to move me out of poverty?
- Do I have the capacity to achieve it in the years planned?
- Am I ready to invest time, effort, and other resources in the vision?

The Champions were encouraged to consult members of their households when they went back to their homes to lobby for support and/or merge their visions. They were asked to work in groups of people with similar visions to produce a common vision with elements of everyone's vision included. This nurtured the sharing of ideas regarding their visions and to understanding of who to look for in support of their visions.

3.1.1 Key results and outcomes from soulmate visioning

Participants were happy that their visions matched other peoples' visions. They explained that knowing people who have similar visions to theirs presented an opportunity for sharing experiences, motivating each other, and sharing existing opportunities that they could use while chasing the visions.

Some participants did not have soulmates i.e. they had no one that matched their visions. For example, a female champion had a vision of buying a solar-powered water pump to expand her irrigation practice. She was happy that she was able to make and stand for her decision about what vision she wanted to accomplish without being influenced by fellow participants. She explained to fellow participants that she never had the opportunity to explain to others about her vision except her household members. She believed that GALS presented her with the opportunity to lead her community members who were willing to practice medium-scale irrigation. Figure 7 shows house and vehicle soulmates.

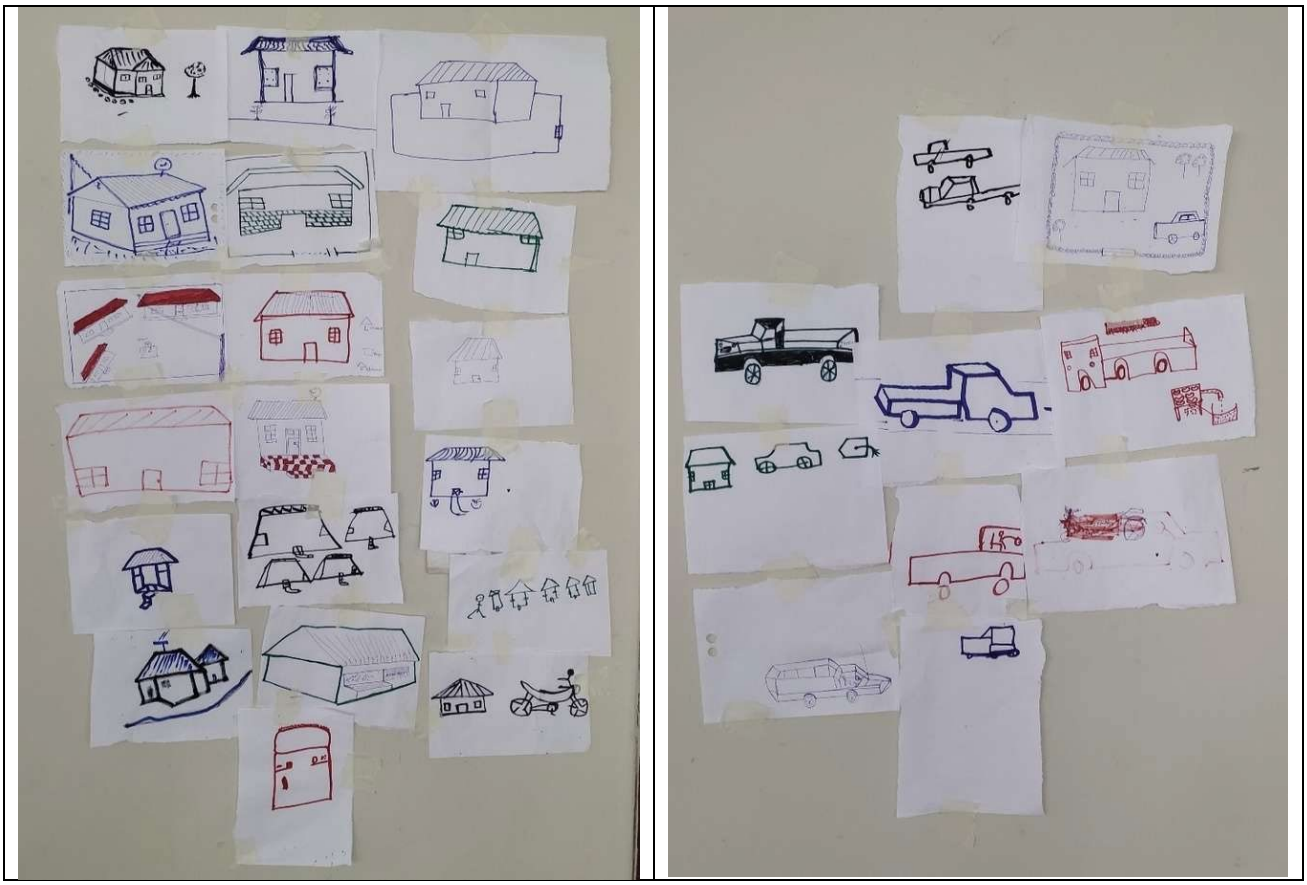


Figure 7. Examples of house and vehicle soulmate visions

While they were happy that they managed to create good visions, participants raised concerns that it was not easy to achieve them. They acknowledged the need for hard work, sacrifice, teamwork, and dedication. This observation made the introduction of the vision journey to be relevant in responding to their fear of failure to achieve visions.

3.2 Vision Journey

The participants were taken through four steps to guide them to develop plans for achieving their visions. Firstly, they were asked to transfer their visions to a big circle drawn at the top right-hand corner of the page of their books (Figure 8). The circles were then made to look attractive and shining by putting red spikes around them, this marked their desired future.

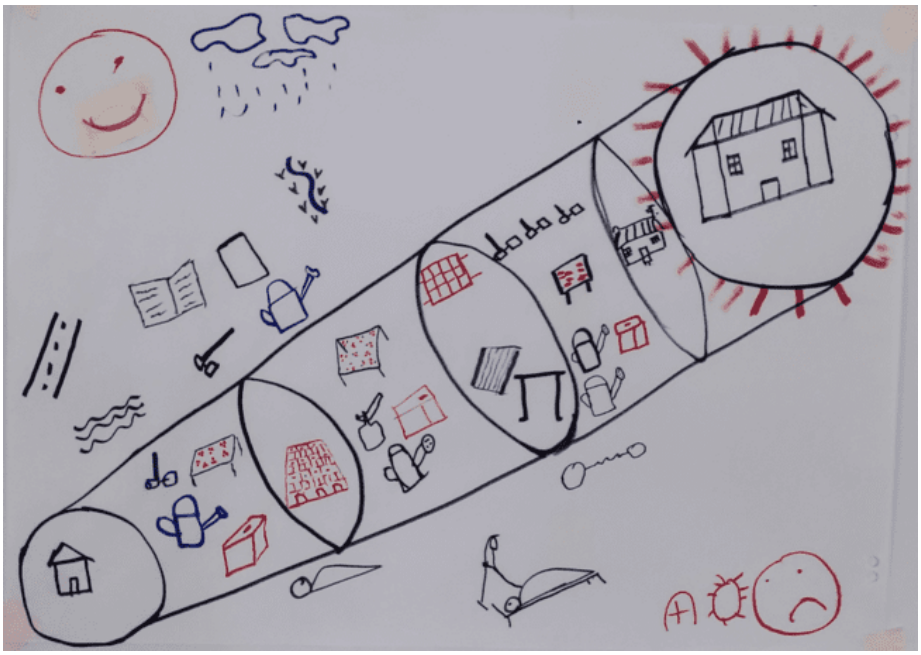


Figure 8. Illustration of a vision journey of a good house from participants

The following questions were used to have discussions:

- What is the present situation that we intend to change; poor farming practices?
- Why are we not happy with the present situation?
- How are we going to achieve the desired situation, the vision?
- What makes us believe that we can achieve the vision?
- Do we foresee any challenges that might make us fail?
- What work are we going to do to earn money for our vision?
- How will we know that we are making good progress towards achieving our vision?

3.2.1 Key results and outcomes from the vision journey

The participants gave several reasons for not liking their present situation and explained why they were prepared to work hard for their visions. These were mostly linked to limited income or resources:

- Large family size demands the need for a larger family living space as well as more land to increase productivity.
- The need to own transportation facilities such as cars and motorbikes will enable households to transport farm produce as well as generate income from those in need of transport services. This would improve the mobility of goods and services.
- Owning the **solar-powered irrigation pump** will allow households to expand the area of irrigation and we will get more yields with reduced effort. This would increase income returns for agricultural yields for households. This can also be used to provide hiring services to other farmers given the current petrol crisis in the country

Each of the participants developed their household vision journeys giving relevant examples for every key area as they relate to their households. Table 4 gives examples mentioned by participants.

Table 4. Examples mentioned by house vision participants

Visions	Present situation	Opportunities	Challenges	Activities	Indicators of progress
Spacious iron-roofed cement house with a good plan	Small grass-thatched mud house	• Good road for easy transportation of construction materials • Good water source for construction and irrigation • Already have land • Good rainfall that the area receives • Irrigation experience • Easy access to extension	• Funerals • Sickness • Poor rainfall • Pests and diseases	• Commercial farming (upland and irrigation) • Small-scale businesses (e.g. selling tomatoes) • Joining savings and loan groups	• Milestone 1: burnt bricks • Milestone 2: buying door and window frames, iron sheets, and setting up the house foundation • Milestone 3: start and finish house construction

Key highlights for effective vision journey implementation

- Strive to make the vision as clear as possible. A good vision must be the end product and not an unfinished product. A good vision must be attractive to the vision holder hence it is drawn in a shining circle at the top right-hand corner.
- It is better to think about more opportunities and fewer challenges so that one is always encouraged to seek the opportunities rather than being discouraged by the challenges. The distance between the vision journey and the opportunity or challenge signifies the influence and likelihood of experiencing that opportunity or challenge.
- Length of the vision journey is dependent on the complexity of the vision, availability of opportunities such as skills and resources, and commitment of the owner towards achieving their vision. Where there are more accessible opportunities, it becomes easier and faster to achieve the visions.
- The spaces between milestones can represent years, months, or weeks depending on the size of the vision. It has to be in equal time intervals such as months, quarters, or years. Milestones need to be realistic and point to the vision.
- The upward-tilted trapezoid shape shows that the vision owner is moving from a small left-side direction to the bigger right. It shows a dark beginning to a desirable raised and shining situation representing the rise in status and wellbeing of the vision owner once the vision is achieved.

3.3 The Gender Balance Tree (GBT)

The results analyzed household gender dynamics using GBT as an imaginary tree that is split into vertical halves (See Figure 9 for the illustration). The right side represents the man and all male members of the household and the left side for the woman and all females in the household. The number of people present in the household is shown by the corresponding numbers of symbols for male and female members inside the trunk on either side.

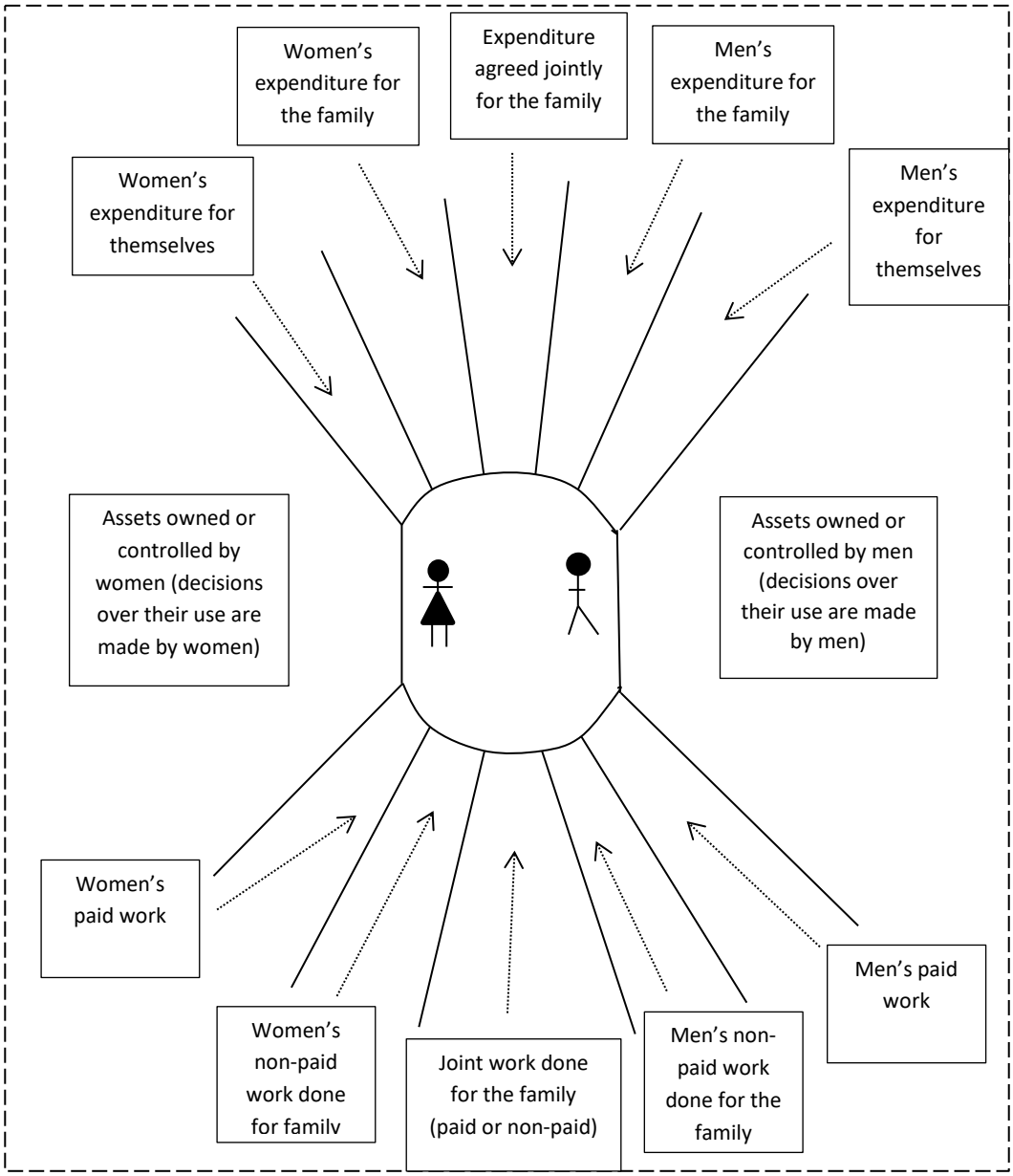


Figure 9. Illustration of the GBT

Participants were asked to think about their household activities, assets, and expenditures guided by the following questions:

Activities:

- What paid and nonpaid activities do male and female members of my household regularly carry out?
- What activities are done jointly?

Assets:

- What assets does our household have?
- Who between man and woman owns which assets?
- How are decisions for using which assets made?

Expenditure:

- What expenditure does our household regularly make?
- How are decisions for big expenditures made?

The roots explained all work done by household members carefully placing them on corresponding sides according to "who does each activity." The roots further classified activities according to which ones bring income to the household or not. Important household assets are placed on either side of the stem carefully showing who controls the use of the assets or the one who makes the final decision over their use of the assets.

The branches showed all household expenditures i.e., ways through which the household money is spent. The side on which to place the expenditure or the actual position of expenditure is guided by the one that makes the expenditure. All expenditures made by the woman are placed on the two left-side branches while the man's expenditures are placed on the branches to the right side. For each side of the men and women, the outermost branches represent expenditures whose utility is sorely enjoyed by the one making the expenditure. The two second inner branches indicate expenditure made by either the women or men but their benefits go to the whole household (Figure 10).

The exercise proved that the GBTs were a powerful tool for generating open discussions between men and women about gender imbalances and lack of equity. The process also led to the understanding of the behaviors of husband and wife that make the other uncomfortable in the household. Households were encouraged to exercise honesty within themselves as they completed their personal GBTs that depicted the actual situations in their households. They were encouraged to repeat developing GBTs with their household members. Caution was given on the placement of activities done once in a while. For example, some men reported that they cook at home but when more probing was made it was seen that they cooked not more than two times in a month, such activities were better left on the side of women.

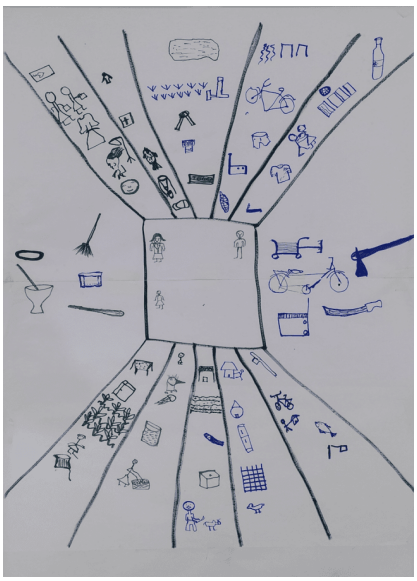


Figure 10. Actual GBT from a GALS group in Salima

The discussion was guided by the following questions to understand the key themes emerging:

- Who does more work between men and women?
- Whose work demands commitment, dedication, and discipline?
- Who owns, controls, or decides on the use of the most valuable assets?
- How do you compare the expenditure patterns between the man and woman?
- Are there things you would like to change to make the tree balance?
- From the tree how can the work distribution, asset ownership, and control and expenditure patterns affect their livelihoods?

The results indicated the following themes that emerged from the participant's discussion regarding work distribution in the household, ownership, control, decision-making over household assets, and expenditure patterns:

3.3.1 Key results and outcomes of household work (activities)

- Most of the work done by men requires the support of women. For example, for men to construct houses they need women to draw water for molding bricks, and employed men are required to wear clothes that are cleaned by women.
- Women carry out multiple activities concurrently such as cooking and childcare
- Most activities done by women such as cooking, house cleaning, and fetching water look simple but they are repeated every day demanding their dedication and discipline.
- Women's work demands seriousness, patience, and commitment
- Activities done by men are hard but they are spaced far apart. For example, once a house is constructed it takes 10 years or more to replace.
- Women do maintenance work of most assets acquired by men or their household members. For example, once houses are constructed, they are made habitable by women.

3.3.2 Key results and outcomes on assets

- The Champions agreed that the dwelling house and land are owned jointly between husband and wife
- Men owned and controlled assets of high value and those with technological advantage
- Assets controlled by women were associated with household reproductive responsibilities
- Big livestock such as cattle were controlled by men while chickens and ducks were controlled by women (in some cases the women needed to consult their husbands before deciding whether or not to send a chicken for slaughtering).

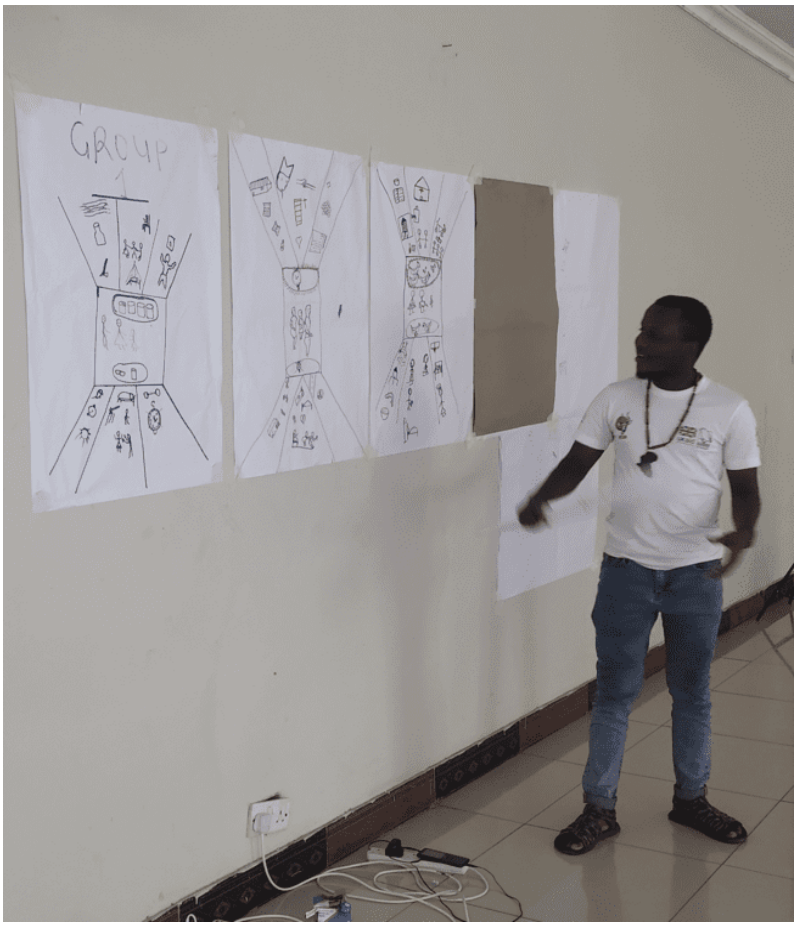
3.3.3 Key results and outcomes of household expenditure

- Men spend more than women for themselves. For example, given the same amount of money men will bring home fewer items for the household than women. Participants said men spend more on airtime for their expensive phones, hang out with friends, and spend more than women
- Decisions for high-value expenditures such as buying land or a car were controlled/made by men
- Most women's expenditures solved household needs including buying clothes for household members

These results clearly show that GBT promotes equitable sharing of household work between men and women, increases women's participation in household decision-making over the use of scarce household resources (both income and physical assets), increases their access to and decision-making power over productive resources, and enables their effective participation in leadership and production decision roles. Highlighting clear linkages between the vision journey with a desired future and the GBT which explores resources, benefits, control, and decision-making power. The GBT remains a powerful tool for giving visual evidence of gender imbalances in how household work is shared between men and women, how assets are owned and controlled, and how expenditures are made.

3.4 The Challenge Action Tree (CAT)

Participants were introduced to the basics of CAT for increasing incomes from agricultural value chains - a tool necessary for building their ability to address production, household, and marketing challenges that they regularly encounter in the value chains they work in. The imaginary tree is split into three vertical parts with the left representing agricultural production, the middle part for household gender dynamics, and the right side for marketing. Unlike the ordinary GBT, the CAT for increasing incomes has its roots representing causes of the challenge while the branches present solutions to the causes. The stem describes the challenge. Picture 4 shows a CAT that was developed during training.



Picture 4. Champion presenting group work on GBT

The following questions guided the participants when developing their CATs:

- What are the common challenges that you face in the value chains that you work in? prioritize to find the important challenge.
- What are the production-related causes of the challenge? Suggest viable solutions for each cause.
- What are the household-related causes of the challenge? Suggest viable solutions for each cause.
- What are the marketing-related causes of the challenge? Suggest viable solutions for each cause.

Participants were reminded that one cause of a challenge might have several solutions just like one solution might address several causes of the challenge. They were hence encouraged to think deeply to come up with realistic causes challenges and their associated solutions. Table 5 demonstrates the analysis of the challenge of low yield in the maize value chain.

3.4.1 Key results from the CAT related to production, household, and marketing

Table 5. Key results of the challenge of low yield in the maize value chain

Production-related causes	**Solutions for production-related causes**
a) Low soil fertility **b) Poor rainfall** **c) Low application of fertilizer due to high cost**	a) Applying manure, in-cooperating crop residues b) Making tied ridges, planting adaptable varieties, mulching c) Apply manure, formulation of local inorganic fertilizers
Household-related causes	**Solutions for household-related causes**

d) Laziness **e) Household fights/quarrelling**	a) Work in groups to inspire one another b) Seek mediation from councilors
Marketing related causes	**Solutions for marketing-related causes**
a) Low prices **b) Theft by vendors (using weighing scales that are tampered with)**	a) Sell produce through cooperatives, value addition, storage b) Demand to use scales approved by the Malawi Bureau of Standards, sell produce through cooperatives

3.5 The Social Empowerment for leadership and social networking

In a normal GALS process, the sharing of knowledge results in the formation of clusters for experience exchange by the Champions and by those trained. It is at cluster meetings that trainers and their participants report the number of people each one of them has trained as well as presenting individual experiences acquired. During such meetings, the GALS Champions use the SLEM to track those who have been trained as well as to assess how they relate with each other in terms of their emotional expressions (love), the flow of money, and the flow of influence (power) between them. SLEM also helped the participants involved in GALS to identify and form a relationship with the people who own and control the opportunities and resources that they might use in pursuit of their visions. It is ideal for guiding GALS Champions to identify or select and track the next persons, groups, or institutions to train. Symbols are used to represent the targeted people depending on the special characteristics that identify them.

The Champions were guided to identify whom to train based on three criteria;

- Which people or organizations can influence the attainment of my vision?
- Which people or organizations can stop me from attaining my vision?
- Which people or organizations must I share the GALS knowledge tools with to improve them?

The three relationships were explained and coded with corresponding-colored arrows which indicated the direction of flow of the relationship.

3.5.1 Key results emerging from SLEM

SLEM provides an opportunity to assess power relations between the trainer and the targeted people. It can either mean the people to be trained have power over the trainer or the other way around. Powerful people in society might be helpful because they can provide opportunities for others to meet their goals. For example, they can connect people with labor to those that need it or they can lend others their resources such as transport facilities. The powerful people might also be a cause of failure so it is good to bring them to a position where their power and influence do not lead to negative impact on others in the community. Such an emotional state of being can be strengthened through sharing the GALS training.

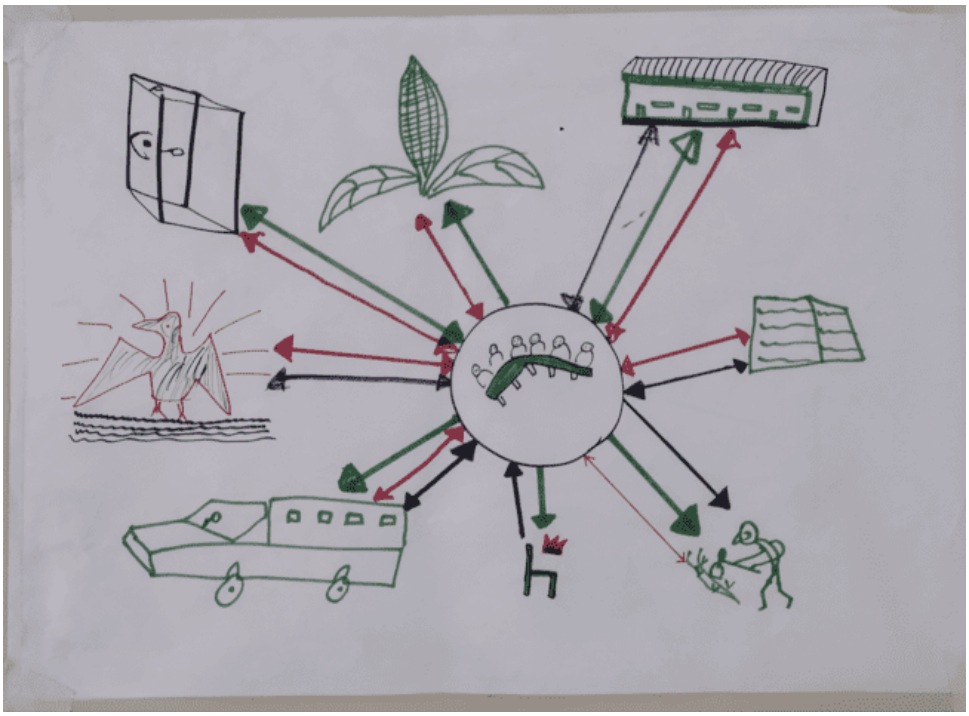


Figure 11. Example of SLEM done by a group of Champions

Table 6 gives an example of relationship analysis using SLEM as developed by participants to show types of existing relationships and their relevance in agricultural value chains.

Table 6. Example of relationship analysis using SLEM

The target	Type of relationship	Direction of flow	Explanation	Relevance in agricultural chains and vision attainment
Chiefs	Power	Both ways	• Chiefs have power over people • People can demand services from chiefs	• They have land that the GALS participant can use • They can help in settling value chain disputes with operators
	Emotional	Both ways	Chiefs and their people love one another	• They lobby for value chain opportunities for their people • People attend value chain meetings with value chain players (meetings are organized by chiefs)
	Economic	One way	Chiefs receive money from people	• The money is used for land for growing value chains • Wrongdoers are charged money; indirectly protecting value chain operators
Crop buyers	Power	Both ways	• Buyers have power over producers • Producers also have power over buyers	• Buyers have the power to dictate prices (when buying from individuals) • Buyers dictate prices when selling as a group
	Emotional	Both ways	• Buyers love producers for their work	• They help each other to create/generate value for the produce

			• Producers love buyers as a produce market	
	Economic	One way	• From buyers to producers	• Buyers bring money for re-investing in value chains

The GALS participants realized at the end of the session that the SLEM offers a good tool for analyzing the directions of the flow of money, love, and power. If carefully done and findings effectively utilized, the SLEM can help reduce unnecessary expenditures while maximizing other opportunities for more income sources and growth.

3.6 Training of trainers, coaching and impact: Key results

The understanding of GALS training content is evidenced by zero cases of trainers who failed to proceed with training facilitation. They indicated that their facilitation opportunity helped to widen their understanding of all the tools. There was a high demand for more GALS training in all the communities evidenced by two centres registering more household trainers than their targets. In 4 other centers, those that came in addition to the target were sent back home.

The involvement of senior government staff such as the Agricultural Extension Development Coordinators (AEDC) in offering official opening remarks on the first day was evidence of government commitment to the training. In other cases, such as in Nkhotakota the Champions that were covering long distances were supported with transport requirements such as fuel and/or motorcycles. Other Champions who also work as Agricultural Extension Development Officers (AEDO) and Community Development Officers (CDO) were excused from other government engagements to allow them to facilitate the GALS training.

There was a wide participation of people holding various responsibilities in their communities. These included traditional leaders, religious elders, youths, members of Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLA), the youth, cooperatives, Village Natural Resources Management Committees, and many others. Recap sessions proved that participants clearly understood the training content. The few who did not understand well were given additional attention and/or paired with their colleagues who understood better. Key highlights from the process revealed the following:

- All the Champions expressed satisfaction that they successfully conducted the trainings. They effectively addressed the emerging challenges and fully utilized teamwork and trust. They understood each other's strengths in the delivery of particular tools strengthened those with difficulty.
- They ably explained the linkage between the tools, noting that one tool paves way for the other or compliments it.
- The vision journey and GBT were the two tools liked most by the participants. Both generated interesting debate that ordinarily would be difficult to initiate. Comments were heard where the participants said they never had the opportunity to set a pictorial plan of the work they did. Other facilitators reported that the GBT initiated rich cultural debate on gender that ordinarily would be difficult to do. In many communities having such debate was considered taboo. The two tools enabled the people to discuss freely while connecting and using real examples to validate their points of discussion.
- The other tools discussed were soulmate visioning, CAT for increasing incomes from value chains, and the SLEM. The Champions explained how the tools complemented each other to help transform communities.

4. VOICES FROM THE FIELD – RETHINKING AGRICULTURE AND LIVELIHOODS THROUGH A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Exceptional statements which were made by GALS participants, government officials, and local leaders were randomly collected from the cluster meetings. The voices were categorized into themes that explain the importance of GALS in decision-making, leadership, knowledge and experience sharing, cultural norms, and assets.

4.1 Decision-making and leadership

“We farmers, get excited at the end of every agricultural season, we spend money without thinking. This vision journey tool has come to bring the desired changes of people”

“Malawians need to have visions, especially the local farmers”

“The CAT will help us to prepare for the challenges before they come”

It was not surprising to hear the participants showing positive signs of decision-making and leadership because GALS is best known for expanding opportunities for decision-making, especially for women in households, and gaining some changes in property rights (Oxfam Novib 2014).

4.2 Knowledge and experience sharing

“The CAT has helped people to understand how to deal with their value chain challenges; it will help them anticipate and effectively deal with the challenges”

“With GALS every participant monitors and encourages the other and we will grow our livelihood opportunities together”

“GALS has huge potential for changing people’s tendency of expecting handouts from government and its partners when they are invited to attend meetings; I am surprised to see huge self-mobilized happy GALS participants attending meetings with neither financial nor material motivation.”

“GALS brings people together to work as a team”

“With GALS, information flows in all directions; for example, the youth can train the elderly, the semi-literate can train the literate, village members can train chiefs, farmers can train extension workers, etc.”

“The GALS knowledge goes to every household member because it makes everyone curious to know the interpretation of the pictures drawn by the participating member”

“With GALS, I have discovered that all my household members have their own personal visions”

“The gender balance tree (GBT) will help to practically bond our households”

“GALS training is like teaching someone to fish so they can eat fish whenever they want rather than giving them fish to eat and continue starving thereafter”

“It is exciting to be a GALS trainer, I will continue to train more people.” {For example, Leya Suwati of Zidyana, a household member, managed to train 14 people from her village although she was not expected to do so. As GALS participants share the methodology with others, they knowingly or unknowingly establish a culture and strategies for leadership, improve their peer-sharing abilities, and become creative in upscaling communication of the gender messages and methodologies (Oxfam Novib 2014).

4.3 Assets

“Our community has discovered that our households spend more than what they make”

“It is easy to discover with GALS that our small expenses through drinking, smoking and womanizing result into big expenditures”

“Many visions are about constructing good houses because we are all struggling to get proper houses”

“I have learned that the little money we have is a stepping stone to bigger visions; no need to wait until we get all the money”

“GALS is helping us to discover hidden talents that the communities possess”

“GALS will help minimize theft in our community because everyone will have things of their own”

Using GALS tools such as the Vision Journey and the Gender Balance Tree (GBT) brings about a sense of mutual ownership of household assets (Oxfam Novib 2014) and facilitates to effective use and adoption of agricultural technologies by women as they strive to produce more alongside men and other household members (Farnworth et al. 2017).

4.4 Cultural norms

“GALS is a stress remover while achieving big things in life. We usually meet friends at meetings organized by leaders and organizations but in GALS we organize and facilitate our own”

“The GBT has helped us to work as a household team; we have discussed many things which traditionally we do not do”

“GALS is good for expanding local networking at the community level to identify and challenge discriminatory norms”

“About gender, people are happy so they understand and appreciate each other’s roles as men and women”

The expanded interaction of people as they share GALS experiences through cluster meetings facilitates the identification and realization of discriminatory norms that people begin to challenge or address individually, at the household and the community level such as asset stripping of widows and divorcees (Farnworth et al. 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

The UU WP5 GALS intervention has mobilized the participating communities to interact with each other and nurtured their creativity towards achieving their visions, working together, and being passionate about equitable benefiting from their efforts. Conservation agriculture now has a gender and inclusive lens and this can further enhance the uptake of other innovations.

The participants are equipped with knowledge for analyzing their household gender dynamics focusing on how household work is shared; how household assets are owned, controlled, and used, and how their hard-earned finances are utilized. The training has built their resilience against social shocks enabling them to jointly analyze and find creative ways of addressing their challenges. It is believed that the networks created through GALS clusters will be sustained as participants continue sharing experiences through cluster meetings and one-on-one interactions.

Each stage of the training was adequately supported by the trainer appropriately decentralizing the facilitation control through the various stakeholders, the Champions, and household trainers. There is strong evidence of continued sharing of GALS knowledge within the households and the communities.

Monitoring of GALS is good for tracking its spread from the Champions to other people within their communities. It should involve understanding the pace at which the information is shared and the quality of pictures and messages

shared in the process. Also track qualitative aspects such as communication abilities and acquisition of leadership skills while they organize meetings and in the actual process of delivering meetings.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recommendations for Research and Practice

a. Consider adapting and utilizing GALS tools for delivering other training within UU WP5 such as climate change mitigation, financial inclusion, and general social empowerment.
b. Intensify GALS impact monitoring through a combination of GALS cluster review sessions and Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology for wider sharing of credible GALS results.
c. Support the GALS coaching and mentoring efforts by GALS Champions to expand utilization of the GALS methodology.
d. It would be good to utilize the present GALS momentum for scaling up outreach of and utilization of other GTAs.
e. Exchange visits within and/or outside the UU GALS community will expand the sharing of GALS and other learning experiences.

6.2 Recommendations from GALS Champions

The Champions were asked to give recommendations for improving the UU GALS intervention for scaling in other districts or countries. Their thoughts were summarized in Table 7 which also shows the corresponding responses.

Table 7. Recommendations and feedback for improving UU WP5 GALS

Recommendation	Feedback
Participants should draw on the ground first and then transfer onto their books.	Good as it was, the recommendation would not be implemented due to the limited time within which participants were expected to cover the tools.
All training should be conducted in the afternoons.	Participants should be allowed to decide the time of their meetings
Training should not take more than 3 hours to give participants time to do other things.	That depends on several factors including the complexity of the tool being discussed
Give out more stationery especially flipcharts and marker pens.	Four flipcharts and four boxes of markers per group for a five-day training were adequate. Encourage participants to close the markers during discussions (only open when they want to write)
Encourage learners' tours within UU WP5 GALS and outside.	To be shared with the Client
There should be rigorous monitoring and evaluation included in the program.	Impact monitoring with Most Significant Change (MSC) stories is encouraged to pick change stories that result from GALS
Pairing of extension worker and farmer to conduct GALS training should be encouraged	Exercised in UU WP5 GALS
Identity for trainers is needed (ID cards, certificates, etc.)	To be shared with the Client
Provide transport refunds and meal allowances for the household training.	Training takes place in people's homes, so no need for transport or meal allowances
Pre and post-training interviews were tiresome to the facilitators, some details were repetitive and became boring to type repeatedly	Noted for the future

Transport refunds at the local level should be considered because some farmers walked long distances – we made huge sacrifices	Recruitment of participants should be within walking distance of the communities they live in
Adapt GALS tools to address nutrition insecurity, financial inclusion, HIV and AIDS, and other themes	GALS can deliver any training depending on Client demand
Mix the youth and the elderly in GALS facilitation	Noted

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Selection criteria for UU WP5 GALS Champions

It is the responsibility of Total Land Care (TLC) and Machinga Agricultural Development Division (ADD) to identify participants of the Training of Trainers (ToT) session for the Gender Action Learning System (GALS). Such participants will become GALS Champions responsible for rolling out the gender transformative methodology within their communities and beyond. The following guidelines suggest the criteria for targeting people with the potential to become effective GALS Champions. Among others, the Champions are expected to be:

1. Resident in the impact areas of TLC and Machinga ADD
2. Active in the implementation of climate-smart activities
3. Willing to lead others during subsequent GALS trainings
4. A problem solver
5. Resilient to training shocks
6. Able to maintain confidentiality
7. Willing to participate in additional training and acquire new skills
8. Willing to work as a volunteer
9. A good communicator
10. Willing to work with men, women and youths
11. Willing to work in a team and network with others
12. Willing to work confidently alone
13. Flexible and adaptable
14. Accessible to their members
15. Willing to manage own workload and identify priorities
16. Willing to take initiative to develop the role of GALS Champion
17. Literate (although this is not of high priority)

TLC and Machinga ADD are encouraged to make necessary amendments to the list as it is not exhaustive.

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