LIFE-AR

LDC Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience

MALAWI

Long term climate adaptation and resilience building through a devolved planning

Introducing LIFE-AR

The Least Developed Countries' (LDCs) Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (LIFE-AR) aims to achieve the LDCs' 2050 vision for a climate-resilient future.

Led by the LDCs, LIFE-AR encourages a change in the prioritisation, financing, coordination and evaluation of climate responses. LIFE-AR seeks to develop long-term interventions and investments in climate adaptation and works with governments to sustainably strengthen national and local institutions, systems and capabilities. By demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach, the aim is to influence the architecture of climate finance to enable direct access to LDCs.

LIFE-AR is in line with the principles of locally-led adaptation and is developing mechanisms for including the specific needs of local communities, which will help enrich national and regional adaptation plans and nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

LIFE-AR in Malawi

Malawi was one of the first countries to join LIFE-AR. To deliver long term climate adaptation and resilience, Malawi has chosen its existing local development planning system as the delivery mechanism. By introducing changes to align it to the LIFE-AR principles, the local government planning system will be strengthened to allow sub national and local governance structures to integrate climate risks in development. This would pave the way for systematically channelling at least 70% of climate finance to the local level. Malawi's delivery mechanism comprises five components:

- **Finance:** a funding mechanism that focuses on strengthening existing legal, financial, and fiduciary frameworks to promote transparency and accountability at the local level, thus ensuring regular and sustained access to predictable climate finance.
- **Participatory planning and social inclusion** of communities in investment prioritisation.
- **Climate Information in planning**: Systematic use of climate information and introduction of resilience planning tools to integrate climate change risks and resilience into development plans and budgets.
- **Strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems** at national and local level, enabling local governments to assess, learn from, and report on their climate risk management strategies and the outcomes of their investments in climate-resilient development.
- **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)** to address power imbalances, gender bias, and harmful cultural norms that prevent communities from fully participating in development.

Aligning LIFE-AR with national priorities for adaptation and resilience in Malawi

To align strategic thinking with technical oversight for LIFE-AR, Malawi is leveraging existing governance structures under the Climate Change Policy (2016). The National Steering Committee on Climate Change (NSCCC) serves as the top decision-making body, supported by the multi-agency Joint Technical Committee on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (CC&DRMTC).

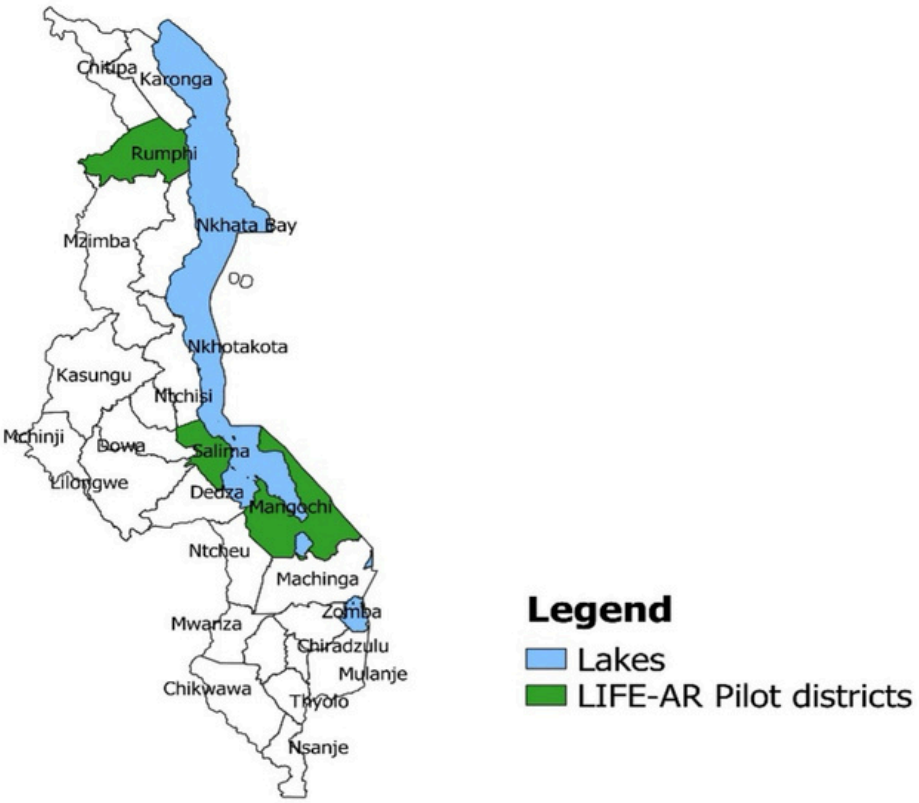
Malawi Vision 2063 aims to transform the country into an inclusively wealthy and self-reliant nation by 2063. Its implementation follows 10-year development cycles focused on agriculture, industrialisation, and urbanisation, aligned with the SDGs. The 2021 NDC highlights both mitigation — targeting a 51% reduction in GHG emissions — and adaptation, prioritising climate-resilient agriculture, early warning systems, disaster management, water resources, and resilient infrastructure.

Malawi's National Adaptation Plan (2020) focuses on vulnerable communities and sectors. It aligns with the NDC and prioritises six key areas: climate-resilient agriculture, water resource management, health systems, infrastructure resilience, disaster risk reduction, and ecosystem protection.

Three districts—Rumphi, Salima, and Mangochi—were selected to pilot the delivery mechanism based on four key criteria: climate hazards, vulnerability to climate change, and equity. The selection also ensured geographic representation across Malawi's Northern, Central, and Southern regions, each facing distinct climate risks.

By law, District Councils in Malawi are responsible for developing and coordinating 5-year development plans. Through LIFE-AR, the three pilot districts enhanced the integration of climate risk considerations into these plans, helping to inform annual budgeting processes.

Implementation of the delivery mechanism began in 2024, focusing on sub-district local government units - 'areas.' In each of the three pilot districts, one area was selected through a participatory process, prioritising those most advanced in meeting investment readiness standards. Each area received a pre-communicated budget of GBP 100,000 (around MWK 318,181,818) for small-scale investments aligned with priority sectors in the district development plans. The investment process followed a legally mandated bottom-up approach, engaging Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Area Development Committees (ADCs) to ensure community-driven planning and technical support. Additional areas will be added in years 2 and 3, expanding to a total of 12 local governments across the three districts by the end of the pilot phase.



INNOVATION

Bottom-up process for identifying investments.

An innovative approach has been put in place under LIFE-AR for each district selected: :

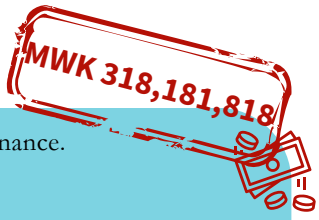
1. A **systematic and 'bottom-up' approach** to investment prioritisation responding to community needs.
2. A **performance-based resilience grant**, administered by the local government authority, with funding allocations by minimum standards and performance indicators.
3. **Climate Risk Vulnerability Assessments** at District level inform analysis, planning and decision-making to ensure investments address climate risks and strengthen communities' adaptation strategies. .
4. **Budget communicated in advance** for investments to enable more effective, participatory and transparent planning.

Rumphi

Climate Risks: floods, prolonged dry spells, drought, landslides and strong winds

Sectors: water, agriculture, natural resources conservation/environment, health

Rumphi is located in the northern region of Malawi with a population of 228,000 (2018). Small holder farming is the backbone of the economy with households reliant on subsistence farming and livestock farming in the highland areas. The district experiences delayed onset of rainfall in December, prolonged dry spells extending into March. Prolonged droughts have led to declines in agricultural yields, increased rates of malnutrition, outbreaks of pests and diseases, and the drying up of critical water sources. Landslides have caused the displacement of households, destruction of crops, and a reduction in arable land. Strong winds have damaged infrastructure and destroyed standing crops, exacerbating food insecurity and contributing to hunger. These cumulative impacts have deepened poverty levels and increased vulnerability.



- **Local institutional strengthening** to better coordinate climate resilient planning and ecosystem governance.
- **Soil conservation practices** including contour marker ridges and vertical hedge rows.
- **Ecosystem rehabilitation** through construction of grey infrastructure.
- **Nature based solutions** through afforestation and forest restoration, activation of participatory forest governance structures and income generation activities.
- **Construction of a flood dyke** with a hydrological monitoring station and early warning systems.
- **Strengthened livelihoods and income diversification** through targeted training and interventions that enhance farmers' access to markets.
- **Potable water access** increase through construction of a gravity fed water system complete with storage water.
- **Rehabilitation of critical infrastructure** like access bridge

About 6,624 inhabitants (2,500 direct beneficiaries) of the Chiweta-Chitimba ADC, Traditional Authority Mwalweni.

- Increased agricultural productivity
- Improved soil health and water conservation measures.
- Nature preservation and stronger natural resource governance structures
- Sustainable climate positive income generating activities:
- Enhanced Climate Information and Early Warning systems
- Improved Livelihoods with improved goat shelters.

Representatives from Rumphi districts, technical and LIFE-AR team

Swales and vetiver grass planted for flood and erosion protection

Mangochi

Climate Risks: drought, flooding, heat waves

Sectors: agriculture, natural resources/environment, fishing

Mangochi is in the southern region of Malawi along the shores of Lake Malawi. 90% of the 1,224,716 population is considered rural. Communities face limited access to infrastructure hampering market access and delivery of essential services. Fishing is a primary livelihood for many residents, a sector threatened by overfishing and environmental degradation. Subsistence farming is widespread. Mangochi is among the most climate-vulnerable districts in Malawi. The district faces frequent, severe climate hazards including extreme weather events. Seven out of the fourteen Traditional Authorities (TAs) in Mangochi are classified as flood-prone areas. Climate shocks have compounded existing socio-economic challenges, further deepening community vulnerability and limiting adaptive capacity.

MWK 318,181,818

- Rehabilitation of the **Ang'ona Irrigation Scheme** (11 hectares).
- **Soil Fertility Restoration:** Promotion of agroforestry, organic manure production, and soil and water conservation.
- Implementation of **afforestation and natural regeneration initiatives** to reduce soil erosion, enhance ground cover, and protect water catchment areas.
- **Strengthening of local governance,** along with training for extension workers to ensure effective implementation, monitoring, reporting and accountability to the investments.
- **Climate proofing development planning** by conducting feasibility studies and mapping forestry resources and environmental hotspots.

approximately **5,000 people** from communities surrounding the 4 local governments and two urban townships

- Increased agricultural productivity and food security through reliable irrigation.
- Diversified livelihoods and improved household incomes.
- Reduced land degradation and enhanced ecosystem services.
- Strengthened local capacity for climate adaptation and disaster risk management.
- Long-term sustainability through community ownership and natural resource stewardship.

Water tank currently being used for the scheme

Flooded plot

Salima

Climate Risks: drought, fewer rainy days, flooding, temperature rise, etc
Sectors: water, health, economy, planning, energy, agriculture, natural resources/environment, gender, waste

Salima is in Malawi's Central Region, along the western shores of Lake Malawi. Its population is estimated at 562,000 inhabitants, over 80% of which is rural and depend on subsistence farming. The area is one of the country's most important fishing areas. Its relatively shallow waters attracts larger and small-scale fishers. Small-scale trade and informal businesses are common, particularly in market centres and along transport corridors. Despite its economic importance, Salima area is identified as highly vulnerable. Dry spells disrupt agricultural activities. Prolonged rainfall upstream often leads to flooding and waterlogging. This results in displacements of people to the upland zones which offer limited livelihood opportunities. Displacements disrupt household economies and increase pressure on vulnerable upland communities.

- **Soil and water conservation practices** adopted through climate smart technologies.
- **Construction of a 10-ha irrigation scheme** to support year-round farming.
- Support to farmers to install **greenhouses for production of vegetables.**
- **Construction of four fishponds for aquaculture.**
- **Development of beekeeping to provide ecosystem services and promote income generation.**
- **Implementation of afforestation and natural regeneration of trees – creation of 20 village forest areas with oversight from local governance structures.**
- **Portable water access** through the construction of a solar powered reticulated water system. Two high yielding boreholes sunk complete with storage of 20,000 litres.
- Expansion of **self-help village savings groups** to build credit and enhance to finance for the unbanked.

550 small holder families from climate smart interventions.
100 farmers from the irrigation scheme.
500 households with access to clean portable water
500 people organised into savings groups.
400 people organised into beekeeping associations


Planting of banana suckers


Fishponds for aquaculture

- 1500 ha of land restored and managed
- 2000 ha of land restored under sustainable land management practices
- Communities to harvest 1,800 kg of fish per year contributing to long term climate resilience, improved livelihoods, nutrition and income
- Enhanced household financial resilience while fostering a culture of self-reliance and collective responsibility.

Malawi's Scalable model for locally led climate resilient development

One of LIFE-AR's priority objectives is to ensure that 70% of the funding received is earmarked for investment at local level by 2030. To deliver on this, Malawi created a district-level account managed under existing policies aligned with the Public Finance Act. By demonstrating strong financial management, this approach aims to justify the creation of a fully autonomous climate fund at the district level, empowering elected District Councils with full decision-making authority. In addition, the local government planning system is strengthened to allow sub national and local governance structures to integrate climate risks in development. Elements of this delivery mechanism include enhanced participatory processes, gender and social inclusion, and improved monitoring, evaluation and learning systems.

The three districts of Rumphi, Salima, and Mangochi face diverse climate risks exacerbated by climate change and increasing the communities vulnerabilities. Investments in selected areas target nature-based solutions such as ecosystem restoration, improvement of water infrastructures and early warning systems, improved agriculture, aquaculture and diversification of income to strengthen livelihoods. In addition, trainings in all the districts aim to enhance adaptive capacity.
After the first year, new areas in each district will be added, expanding to a total of 12 local governments by the end of the pilot phase in 2-3 years.

With strengthened processes at the national and local levels, Malawi intends to deliver better adaptation and resilience outcomes in the selected districts, and learn crucial lessons for more ambitious adaptation actions.

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LDC CLIMATE CHANGE

The LDC Long-Term Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (LIFE-AR) was created and is led by the LDCs to increase climate resilience.

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