

SOILS, FOOD AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

CATEGORY:

POLICY RESEARCH FIELD CLIMATE

LOCATION/SCALE:

Malawi (National)

ORGANISATIONS:

Cornell University, Friends of SFHC

PERIOD:

2000 - now

IN A NUTSHELL

SFHC works to empower smallholder farmers in Malawi to build sustainable, healthy and resilient communities.

Farmer-led, participatory research based on ecological approaches is the most important component of the approach. This includes strengthening local indigenous knowledge and democratic processes to address inequalities in Malawi.

The programme consist of various activities to educate and empower farmers. Special attention is put to the role of women and the Malawian youth. SFHC introduces a set of agroecological practices on the farm level, promotes local orange maize varieties and organizes recipe days to improve the diversity of diets and the role of men in their households.

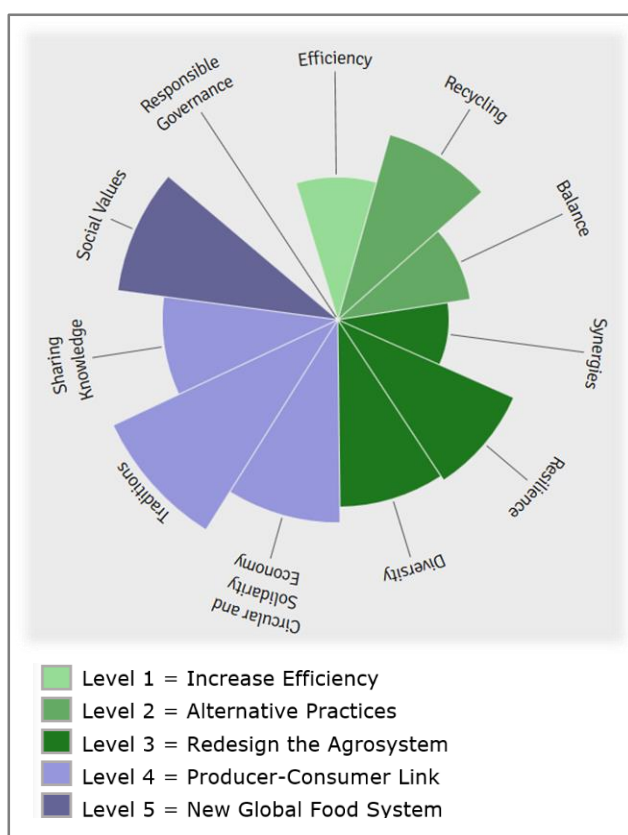


Figure: Assessment of the SFHC based on FAO Elements of Agroecology and Gliessman's five levels of food system change

CONTEXT

Malawi has a current population of over 16 million. About 80% of the inhabitants live in rural areas and rely on agriculture for their food and livelihoods. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world with over 70% of the population living below the poverty line. An estimated one-third of Malawian households experience chronic food insecurity and calorie deficiencies. High rates of gender inequality in Malawi has contributed to these high rates of food insecurity and malnutrition, as women have little control over agricultural decisions, experience high levels of physical violence, and have lower education and training opportunities.

OBJECTIVE

All of the project activities focus on improving soil fertility, child nutrition and food security. For example, seed distribution and farmer training and annual field days are important elements to achieve these goals. The project has also integrated several activities to promote agricultural, nutritional and social practices, especially for the poor, HIV-infected and other marginalized groups.

KEY INTERVENTIONS/RESEARCH

FARM LEVEL:

- Planting legumes for natural nitrogen fixation
- Incorporating crop residues for improved soil fertility
- Improved food diversity and preparation, especially for young children

REGIONAL/NATIONAL LEVEL:

- Seed distribution systems
- Farmer Research Team(FRT) derived from village communities
- Organization of training camps
- Organization of field days and exchange visits to show fellow farmers the use and impact of agroecology (farmer-to-farmer)
- Developing local food enterprises to improve income

LESSONS LEARNED/CHALLENGES

A key for success in this project is the increasing support of the government, which has not always been there. Because of their agriculture input subsidy program, they were not fond of this project at first. However, support has risen over time and now the extension staff of the ministry of agriculture are taking part in training and field days. At the moment, only a small part of government money goes into agroecology as they still have the input subsidy program where the most part of the money flows into.

RELEVANT LINKS & REFERENCES

- SFHC: "Soils, Food and healthy communities"
<http://soilandfood.org/>
- Friends of SFHC: "Soils, Food and healthy communities"
<http://centerfortransformativeaction.org/projects>
- FAO: "Malawi Farmer-to-Farmer Agroecology Project"
<http://www.fao.org/3/a-br095e.pdf>



Foundation for
ecological development

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