Hello,
my name is
Elias!

EXPERIENCES WITH COMMUNITY-LED RESEARCH:

MALAWI

Elias Jika worked with Citizens for Justice (CFJ) to conduct community -led research with communities that would be affected by the Diamphwe Dam in Malawi. You can read the results of the community-led research in the community's report at [bit.ly/LWPReport] and see their infographic in English at [bit.ly/MalawiInfographic_EN], and in Chichewa at [bit.ly/MalawiInfographic_CH]

The survey used in Elias' research was adapted from and created by IAP's **Global Advocacy Team**. The Global Advocacy Team initiative brings together community organizers who experience development projects first-hand, to conduct community-led research and mobilize their communities to change how development is conceived and implemented. Read more at:

[bit.ly/IAP_GAT]

You can find the survey template at

[bit.ly/CommLedRschSrvy]

I support communities in Malawi to voice their ideas so that they are part of the development processes that affect them.

In 2016, we found out that the government of Malawi wanted to build a dam on the Diamphwe River. The project would have directly affected the homes, livelihoods, and environment of over 6,000 people! At the time, there was not much information on what people knew about the project and its impacts.

To understand this, my organization partnered with IAP to conduct community-led research. Over a period of 3 weeks, we surveyed 129 people, held focus group discussions, and convened meetings to share information with over 700 people who would be affected. We wanted to use the findings of this research to support communities in their efforts to raise concerns with project planners and funders. To begin our research, we first formed research teams with each of the affected communities. Each team was made up of 5 to 7 people, includ-ing people from my organization and community members.

We tried to make sure each team had at least one woman from the community itself, so that women in the community would feel comfortable sharing their opinions. After adapting the survey template to fit the local context, we organized meetings to interview a sample of those affected.

We made sure community leaders were involved in the entire process, and they helped us understand the community's schedule. For example, they told us that during the growing season, people were very busy and would not have much time to talk. Meetings were usually held at soccer fields, schools, or churches. We would speak with the community as a whole and then break into smaller discussions and one-on-one interviews. We actively encour-aged the participation of women, the elders, and other underrepresented groups. In meetings, men often outnumbered women, but we used the one-on-one surveys to ensure an equal number of men and women were interviewed.
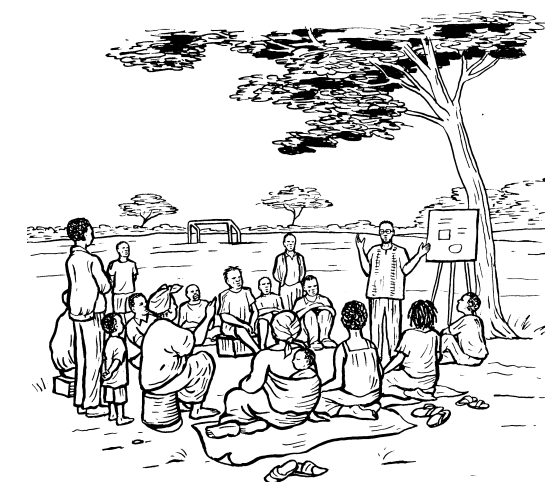
We gathered and analyzed everyone's answers and shared our findings in a report. With help from IAP, we were able to share our research with the three development banks that were considering funding the dam. The government of Malawi was also contacted and made aware of the research findings. In order to protect community members from any backlash, we did not include information about the names of the people who had participated in the research, or the exact communities they had come from.

After reading the community's recom-mendations on compensation, resettlement, and livelihood restoration, the three devel-opment banks realized that a dam on the Diamphwe River would cause too much harm. So, one by one, each of the three banks decided they would not give money to the project. While other banks and com-panies could still fund the dam in the future, for now, the communities' voices were heard and respected.

Throughout this research process, I was amazed to see how communities took matters into their own hands, and were empowered to act for themselves. They sat down together and collectively made deci-sions about what their next steps should be. Because of the success of their campaign, they are claiming their power to shape their own development!