

Parks, Youth and Rural Entrepreneurship

*Exploring possibilities and conditions for youth to succeed in
establishing businesses in the Majete project area in
Chikwawa district, Malawi*

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“Numbers, but not *only* numbers. The world cannot be understood without numbers, and it cannot be understood with numbers alone. Love numbers for what they tell you about real lives.” (Rosling, Rosling, & Rönnlund, 2018, p. 202).

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Abstract

In the Majete project area in Malawi, communities could no longer rely on the natural resources in the park due to the fencing of the Majete Wildlife Reserve and had to find alternative livelihoods. Since 2011, various economic opportunities have been created by The Hunger Project and African Parks. As (young) people in Malawi heavily depend on self-employment, activities that put youth in the position to start-up a business are conducted. However, while youth have a desire for achieving their entrepreneurial aspirations, the unavailability of, limited access to, and insufficient knowledge about particular infrastructure, blocks this. This research aims to explore possibilities and conditions for youth to succeed in establishing businesses in the immediate vicinity of protected areas. Using the Majete project area in Chikwawa district, Malawi, as a case study. This thesis shows the urgency for youth of access to loans without a need for initial capital, and the adjustments needed to be made to make infrastructure and opportunities, like Village Savings and Loans Associations, dry season and cash crop farming and (vocational) trainings, work for youth. Theoretically, this contributes to literature about youth businesses, empowerment and financial inclusion, in relation with the poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus.

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List of Figures

Figure 1 desire for change (Carling, & Talleraas, 2016).	18
Figure 2 context of youth savings group membership (Flynn & Sumberg, 2017).	23
Figure 3 conceptual framework (own work, based on the work of Carling and Talleraas (2016)).	25
Figure 4 median years of school completed by Malawian youth (aged 15-29) (own work based on figures of the OECD (2018a)).	27
Figure 5 percentage of business owners facing these particular problems when setting up businesses (own work, based on figures of FinMark Trust (2012)).	27
Figure 6 methods of savings (own work based on figures National Statistical Office (2019)).	29
Figure 7 source of credit used by households that have access to credit (own work based on figures National Statistical Office (2019)).	29
Figure 8 gender of the respondents.	38
Figure 9 household situation of the respondents.	38
Figure 10 highest level of education of the respondents.	39
Figure 11 marital status of the respondents.	39
Figure 12 respondents that mention whether or not they have children.	39
Figure 13 business experience of the respondents.	40
Figure 14 main economic opportunity for youth in the Majete project area (own work, 2020).	46
Figure 15 other economic opportunities mentioned by youth in the Majete project area (own work, 2020).	47
Figure 16 percentage of respondents that are running a business in the Majete project area (own work, 2020).	49
Figure 17 employment opportunities in the Majete project area (own work, 2020).	50
Figure 18 kind of seasonal migration and temporal movement from the Majete project area split out by gender (own work, 2020).	54
Figure 19 total seasonal migration and temporal movement from the Majete project area by respondents (own work, 2020).	55
Figure 20 most important infrastructure in the Majete project area (own work, 2020).	61
Figure 21 percentage of respondents' part of a VSLA-group (own work, 2020).	62
Figure 22 number respondents' part of a VSLA-group split out by gender (own work, 2020).	62
Figure 23 other saving mechanism used by respondents (own work, 2020).	65
Figure 24 percentage of respondents vocational trained (own work, 2020).	68
Figure 25 holistic approach The Hunger Project (The Hunger Project, 2019c).	97
Figure 26 four phases epicenter strategy (The Hunger Project, 2018).	98
Figure 27 self-reliance exhibits (Compernelle, & Dzilankhulani, 2018).	98
Figure 28 the epicenter strategy (The Hunger Project, 2016).	100

List of Maps

Map 1 the Majete project area (The Hunger Project, 2019d).	31
Map 2 research area (own work, 2020).	120

List of Tables

Table 1 operationalization of concepts.	34
Table 2 average age of the respondents.	38
Table 3 differences in most important economic opportunity between Majete 2 and 3 (own work, 2020).	46

Table of contents

1. Introduction	8
1.1. Introduction to the topic and relevance to development studies	8
1.2. Case study: the Majete project area	9
1.3. Problem statement	10
1.4. Knowledge gap	12
1.5. Research objective and research questions	13
1.6. Thesis structure	13
2. Theoretical framework	15
2.1. Major theories and approaches	15
2.1.1. Poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus	15
2.1.2. Waithood	17
2.1.3. Desire for change	18
2.1.4. Infrastructure for economic empowerment and its effects	19
2.2. Analysis theoretical debate	23
2.3. Conceptual framework	25
2.3.1. Explanation conceptual framework	25
3. Regional thematic framework	26
3.1. Geographical context: Malawi	26
3.1.1. Opportunities for youth	26
3.1.2. Nature of businesses	27
3.1.3. Nature conservation	28
3.2. Chikwawa	28
3.3. Majete project area	29
4. Methodology	32
4.1. Study Area	32
4.2. Operationalization of variables	33
4.3. Methods and techniques	35
4.4. Reflection on positionality	42
4.5. Limitations and risks	42
5. Opportunities for youth in the Majete project area	45
5.1. Economic opportunities	45
5.1.1. Self-employment	49
5.1.2. Piece works	50
5.1.3. Farming	51
5.1.4. Natural Resources	53

5.1.5. Migration	54
5.1.6. Trading opportunities	56
5.2. Desire of change for young people in the Majete project area	56
5.2.1. Opportunities, aspirations and attitudes	60
6. Available infrastructure in the Majete project area	61
6.1. Infrastructure to generate and store money	62
6.2. Physical infrastructure	66
6.3. Skills and trainings	67
7. Needed infrastructure and making this infrastructure work for youth in the Majete project area ..	69
7.1. Infrastructure to generate and store money	69
7.1.1. Making VSLA work for youth	69
7.1.2. Making loans work for youth	70
7.2. Infrastructure for farming	71
7.2.1. Making farming work for youth	73
7.3. Skills and trainings	74
7.3.1. Making vocational skills work for youth	75
7.4. Park infrastructure	77
7.4.1. Making park infrastructure work for youth	78
8. Discussion and conclusion	79
8.1. Sub-questions	79
8.2. Reflection and future studies	84
8.3. Concluding remarks	87
References	90
Appendices	97
Appendix 1: The Hunger Project	97
Appendix 2: The epicenter strategy	98
Appendix 3: Survey	101
Appendix 4: Focus group discussion guide	111
Appendix 5: Ethical review	113
Appendix 6: Co-creation	115
Appendix 7: Negative impacts of the park on the communities in the Majete project area	117
Appendix 8: Research area	120

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the topic and relevance to development studies

Global goals, like Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 (life on land) and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, have led to an increase in fortress conservation areas¹. For achieving these goals, to protect the world's biodiversity, the establishment and expansion of these protected areas² is of crucial importance (Protected Planet, 2019; Dinerstein et al., 2017; Bhola et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, 1.1 billion people worldwide (partly) depend on protected areas for their livelihoods (Bhola et al., 2016), and stricter controlled protected areas limit local communities surrounding these parks in the use of natural resources (Van der Duim et al., 2017, p. 147; Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015; Dowie, 2009, pp. xix-xxvii; Adams and Hutton, 2007; Wilkie et al., 2006; Van Amerom and Büscher, 2005; Newmark & Hough, 2000; Kepe, 1997). This negatively influences the livelihood opportunities of these people and can impoverish them further (Kabra, 2018, p. 124; Van der Duim et al., 2017, p. 147; Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015; Wilkie et al., 2006; Newmark & Hough, 2000; Kepe, 1997). Also, poverty alleviation of communities surrounding parks is lagging behind (Wilkie et al., 2006), and even if in place, the distribution of created benefits within affected groups is unclear (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015). Besides, scholars fail to explain how poverty can be addressed alongside conservation (Büscher, & Fletcher, 2020, p. 96), and according to Wilkie et al. (2016), the role parks play in local development is negligible.

Although various models of poverty alleviation have been implemented, as none seem to be effective, and “dramatic poverty continues to persist alongside conservation areas” (Büscher, & Fletcher, 2020, p. 96), the achievement of SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 2 (zero hunger) around protected areas could be endangered.

Yet, to achieve the interconnected global goals, collaboration between the goals – and between parks and people – is of crucial importance. Decisive in this is the involvement of youth, as they make up a large part of the population in the Global South, and it is more

¹ Fortress Conservation: is a conservation approach “that seeks to preserve wildlife and their habitat through forceful exclusion of local people who have traditionally relied on the environment in question for their livelihoods” (Van der Duim et al., p. 147); an approach that protects wildlife in designated areas, like national parks and nature reserves, from which local communities are excluded, ignoring their traditional rights and needs (Van der Duim et al., 2017, p. 147).

² “a protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystems services and cultural values” (Bhola et al., 2016).

sustainable to create opportunities – hence reducing pressure created by people on parks (Büscher, & Fletcher, 2020, p. 96; Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015) – at a younger age, than try to overcome their problems later in life (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2018a).

Drawing on experience in the Majete project area, this thesis explores how poverty alleviation can be envisioned around protected areas by creating self-employment related opportunities for youth, by studying the project implemented by The Hunger Project and African Parks as a case study.

1.2. Case study: the Majete project area

As one of the examples of youth inclusion in poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship, this thesis investigates the experience of the Majete project in Malawi. Surrounding the Majete Wildlife Reserve³, The Hunger Project Malawi works, together with local communities and African Parks, on the conservation of nature, and ending hunger and poverty. The Majete Wildlife Reserve used to be an empty forest (Briers-Louw et al., 2019); animals were hunted out and trees were used for charcoal burning. Then, African Parks, a non-governmental organization (NGO), which is currently managing and conserving over 14 million hectares in eleven countries (African Parks, 2020), signed a 25-year agreement with the Malawi Department of National Parks and Wildlife to manage the park in 2003. This changed the trajectory; rhinos, elephants, leopards, buffalos, tourist and jobs returned.

Nonetheless, the surrounding communities had to find alternative livelihoods, as the 142-kilometer perimeter fence line was completed in 2011 (Briers-Louw et al., 2019) and communities previously used this land and its natural resources. Despite investments in education and community development, people in the villages around the park remained poverty-struck. African Parks recognized that for local communities to value the wildlife reserve people must benefit from it. To turn the tide, one of African Parks' early donors, Dioraphte Foundation, pointed at The Hunger Project as possible partner. The Hunger Project, an NGO, running programs in thirteen relative stabilized developing countries, with supporting offices in ten developed countries, promotes community-led change, that

³ If not mentioned otherwise, for this entire paragraph the impact paper: Community Impact Around Majete Wildlife Reserve, made by The Hunger Project (2019d), is used.

improves the well-being of local communities. At request of Dioraphte Foundation, The Hunger Project started working, together with the local people and African Parks, through its ‘epicenter strategy⁴’ in the Majete project area in 2011. Currently The Hunger Project is working in six epicenters, all financed by Dioraphte Foundation, with the ambition is to encircle the entire park with eight self-reliant epicenters before the end of 2025.

1.3. Problem statement

The epicenter strategy implemented by The Hunger Project is holistic, yet, this research focusses on the part that targets individuals to strengthen their entrepreneurial abilities and skills, with the use of vocational and business trainings and the implementation of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA). During a preliminary field visit to Malawi in October 2019, after conducting multiple focus group discussions, the effectiveness of this approach to create economic opportunities for young people was questioned. In the conversations young people mentioned that after receiving (vocational) training given by The Hunger Project, they face difficulties in accessing financial capital needed to buy the material input to start-up their business. The youngsters as well mentioned the few employability opportunities and their dependence on self-employment. Furthermore, although youth never benefited from the use of natural resources from the Majete Wildlife Reserve themselves, generations before them did so, and during the discussions in October 2019 youth explained that it still feels like a lost opportunity that no one in the area can benefit from the natural resources in the park anymore⁵.

As “timely interventions directed at young people are likely to yield a greater return for sustainable development than attempts to fix their problems later in life” (OECD, 2018a) and a growing number of conservation organizations argue that securing local livelihoods is crucial for the long-term success of protected areas (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015), the financial inclusion of youth in development programs surrounding parks is of major importance. However, 96.7% of the rural youth in Malawi reports challenges in starting-up their business and access to finance is the main challenge (Scale2Save, 2019; OECD, 2018a; 2018b). In Malawi financial markets are poorly developed and the non-conducive business

⁴ For more information about The Hunger Project and the epicenter strategy, please see [appendix 1](#) and [2](#).

⁵ However, maybe not often, but through resource gates the communities are allowed to enter the Majete Wildlife Reserve to thatch grasses, reeds and indigenous bamboo (Gordon, 2017).

environment is strongly influenced by lack of access to capital⁶. High interest rates and collateral requirements play a major role in limited access to these formal forms of finance. But also, inadequately youth-friendly financial products, low financial literacy, excessive restrictions (e.g. age for opening a bank account) and limited awareness and knowledge about opportunities cause difficulties for youth that want to access credit. According to the Youth Well-being Policy Review of Malawi, more youth-friendly financial products are needed, and youth entrepreneurs need to be encouraged to form VSLA-groups, that have the opportunity to improve their financial base and contribute to youth empowerment⁷.

Because of the limited possibilities for financial inclusion of youth, the chance to unlock their entrepreneurship potential is narrow. Thereby the development potential of youth is 'wasted', as "investing in youth entrepreneurship and local value chain development will ultimately increase employment opportunities and earnings, improve working conditions and livelihoods, reduce poverty and boost economic growth in rural areas" (OECD, 2018a). In the case of Malawi, it is especially important to incorporate young people as they make up a large proportion of the population: youth (aged 15-29) account for more than a quarter of the population.

Against this background, the Hunger Project has introduced several (vocational) training opportunities to strengthen business skills in the communities. Also, VSLA has been introduced to enhance the financial base. Nevertheless, to encourage ownership, the policy of The Hunger Project is to not give handouts, and youth, just like the rest of the community, is expected to save for and buy the material assets (e.g. a sewing machine or carpentry tools) needed to run the business they aspire to set up themselves. However, although the human capital of young people to start and run a business is enhanced, youth still face problems in their economic empowerment, as the implementation of VSLA in the area might not be suitable or sufficient to strengthen their financial capital enough to really buy the needed assets, and therefore youngsters face difficulties in starting-up businesses. The intervention

⁶ For the rest of this entire and the next paragraph the Youth Well-being Policy Review of Malawi, made by the OECD (2018a), is used.

⁷ Empowerment is the process in which youth acquire authority, agency and ability to make decisions and implement social, economic and political change regarding their lives and the lives of other people (Mary, & Wanjira, 2018). To put it differently, youth empowerment is about improving the quality of life (Mary, & Wanjira, 2018) or the ability to make choices and entail the process of change (Kesanta & Andre, 2015).

is not working effectively enough, and thus this thesis tries to explore what is needed for youth based on the conditions faced, to improve the current situation.

1.4. Knowledge gap

Although parks can create tourism- and other opportunities, which might contribute to poverty reduction in the immediate vicinity of parks, this data is spatially aggregated and still leaves open questions about the distribution of such benefits within affected groups. In previous literature about the poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus⁸, few is mentioned about how specifically young people can become economically empowered around protected areas. Furthermore, the influence savings groups can have on other marginalized groups has been studied a lot. What is missing in previous literature is how these VSLA-groups influence opportunities for young people. Also, how particular conditions and infrastructure can influence the achievement of migration aspirations for young people has been discussed by scholars, yet, this model has not yet been adjusted to achieving entrepreneurial aspirations.

All in all, there has been a lack of attention for the economic empowerment of young people, especially in existing studies that talk about fortress conservation. As the expansion of these protected areas is going to happen either way, and many (young) people depend on parks for their livelihoods, it is important to study the economic opportunities nearby parks for young people more extensively, especially as for the long-term success of protected areas the securitization of livelihoods is important, and involving people at a younger age in development-related activities is more sustainable than fixing their problems later in life.

This research is filling the aforementioned gap in literature by focusing on which infrastructure is important for young people surrounding protected areas to achieve their entrepreneurial aspirations. In this thesis, existing and needed infrastructure that contributes to establishing businesses, economic empowerment and financial inclusiveness for youth is identified, and ways to improve the availability, suitability and accessibility of, as well as knowledge about, this infrastructure will be presented.

⁸ Rural poor often depend on natural resources in parks for their well-being, yet, “conservationists, development practitioners and policy makers often have differing opinions on how—and whether—to link biodiversity conservation with poverty reduction”. The complex and dynamic linkages between biodiversity protection and the alleviation of poverty, and ways to address these real issues, are discussed within the poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus (Billé, Lapeyre, & Pirard, 2012).

1.5. Research objective and research questions

Due to the combination of the issues discussed above, this thesis asks the question: ***how can young people start-up a business in the Majete project area in Chikwawa district in Malawi?***

This research will emphasize on youth empowerment and financial inclusion in the immediate vicinity of protected areas in development countries, as well as on the effect of VSLA-programs on youth. And on (livelihood) opportunities for local communities in the immediate vicinity of protected areas, and the distribution of these opportunities. The main objective is to understand what infrastructure is of crucial importance to help young people in succeeding to start-up a business. This way the research can conclude to what extent the VSLA-program of The Hunger Project, and the epicenter strategy in general, contributes to youth setting up businesses, financial inclusiveness and youth empowerment, and what other infrastructure might be needed to reach these goals.

To have a stronger grasp on the research question, the following five sub-questions have been established:

1. *What are the economic opportunities for youth in the Majete project area?*
2. *What is the existing infrastructure, such as savings groups, to enable youth to set up a business in the Majete project area?*
3. *What infrastructure is needed to enable youth to set up a business in the Majete project area?*
4. *How can this infrastructure be leading to a successful business in the Majete project area?*
5. *To what extent does the VSLA-program within the epicenter strategy, and the epicenter strategy of The Hunger Project Malawi in general, contribute to youth empowerment?*

1.6. Thesis structure

In the next section, the literature will be examined; relevant development approaches, theories and debates will be outlined. The regional thematic framework discusses in which context the communities, and especially young people, in Malawi and in the Majete project area operate. These first two sections will elaborate on the context, concepts and theories behind the research questions. In chapter four; the research methodology, the data

collection process will be described. Hereafter, the findings based on the data collected in the Majete project area are presented. Three result-chapters answer the sub-questions. Thereafter, in discussion, these findings are discussed in relation to theoretical framework. In conclusion, the main question is answered with a set of recommendations to support youth in starting-up their businesses in areas suffering from poverty around fortress conservation areas.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Major theories and approaches

2.1.1. Poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus

Large western NGOs, like the Worldwide Fund for Nature, Conservation International and The Nature Conservancy, are involved in the establishment and expansion of Protected Areas (Dowie, 2009, p. 46). Conservationist argue that environmental regulations are necessary to sustain the planets' biological systems, as well as for the health and welfare of people (Wilkie et al., 2006), and that protected areas are of crucial importance to achieve this (Wilkie et al., 2006). However, management and establishment of protected areas is contested by social advocates (Wilkie et al., 2006), as local peoples' rights and livelihoods are threatened (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015). The negative impact these protected areas have on the lives of local people is often mentioned in literature (Kabra, 2018, p. 118). These land reforms, in the name of nature conservation, according to Brockington and Wilkie (2015), Dowie (2009, pp. xix-xxvii), Adams and Hutton (2007), Wilkie et al. (2006) and Van Amerom and Büscher (2005), often happen at the costs of local communities. These 'controlled areas' might exclude rural communities surrounding a park, or resettlements of communities might occur as a consequence of the establishment or expansion of a protected area (Dowie, 2009, pp. xix-xxvii; Adams & Hutton, 2007; Van Amerom & Büscher, 2005). This way of preserving wildlife is also known as fortress conservation (Van der Duim et al., 2017, p. 147; Brockington, 2002). According to Brockington and Wilkie (2015), local people might suffer from physical or economic displacement. The sooner entails the involuntary removal of local people from their homes and homelands, and the latter refers to restrictions that makes pursuing a livelihood more difficult (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015). Both have socio-economic consequences for rural communities surrounding these protected areas (Oldekop et al., 2016), as access to natural resources that are crucial for the livelihoods of these communities might be restricted or blocked (Van der Duim et al., 2017, p. 147; Newmark & Hough, 2000; Kepe, 1997). Furthermore, according to Kabra (2018, p. 124), individuals within rural communities might become landless, unhealthier, lose access to commons, and among other things, might become socially disconnected and lose access to cultural belongings. Moreover, according to Wilkie et al. (2006), even if parks generate economic value, few of this ends up in the pockets of local people and the role parks have in local development is

negligible, as loss of property and rights is often not compensated well, and poverty is not alleviated enough.

However, over the years a slowly evolving debate, with confrontations and collaborations between human and conservationist interest, emerged (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015). Since the 1980s, efforts to make conservation more profitable, or at least not as costly for local people came up (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015). Local people can, for example, control natural resources directly and benefit from the sustainable use of it (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015). Nevertheless, some conservationist still feel development activities are an unwelcome distraction; their core business is conservation, not poverty reduction (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015). While others argue that for the long-term success of protected areas securitization of local livelihoods is of crucial importance (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015). According to Oldekop et al. (2016), protected areas that involve local communities achieve better results on both ecological and community development targets.

A growing number of conservation parties recognizes the importance of community involvement, both as ethical obligation and as strategy to achieve conservation goals (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015), and they do create (livelihood) opportunities for rural communities surrounding these protected areas. Conservationist, for example, create ecotourism opportunities, employment opportunities, provide training, implement micro-finance schemes and supply food, livestock and/or high-yielding crops varieties, in the hope to reduce the dependence of local communities on the park (Kabra, 2018, pp. 131-132; Snyman, 2012; Andam et al., 2010; Dudley et al., 2010; Agrawal & Redford, 2006; Adams et al., 2004). Also, conservationist might contribute to physical infrastructure improvement in the area (Snyman, 2012; Dudley et al., 2010; Karanth, 2007; Agrawal & Redford, 2006) and to mitigation of inequalities within communities (Kabra, 2018, p. 130; Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015). These new opportunities could lead to both the alleviation of poverty in the area, as well as to the achievement of biodiversity and conservation targets (Agrawal & Redford, 2006). Furthermore, some scholars point out that although the effect might differ in the short-run, the net impact of ecosystem protection in the long-run is to alleviate poverty (Andam et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, as a consequence of conflicting interest, reaching conservation- and community development targets simultaneously might not be possible for conservation

organizations⁹. Merging the two aims, is seen to undermine both goals (Büscher, & Fletcher, 2020, p. 92). It might be better to work on these targets in parallel; separate, but linked. According to Newmark and Hough, conservationist should act as facilitators, and not as executors; to achieve more impact, they should delegate these development activities to organizations with expertise about, and experience in, community development.

2.1.2. Waithood

As more and more conservation parties acknowledge the importance of community involvement and the securitization of local livelihoods, and “timely interventions directed at young people are likely to yield a greater return for sustainable development than attempts to fix their problems later in life” (OECD, 2018a), empowering youth in the immediate vicinity of parks is of major importance, yet, knowledge on the conditions that enable this empowerment for youth is limited.

However, scholars point out that young people’s aspirations are blocked by ‘waithood’¹⁰. As a consequence of social and political structures, young people fail to make the transition to socially recognized and independent adulthood. They are being trapped in the category of ‘youth’, as they might, for example, do not have the resources to marry or sustain a family.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)¹¹, many youth lack access to credit and have difficulties to earn a livelihood. Moreover, the high pressure on land makes it difficult for them to start a farm. Due to customs and inheritance laws the transfer of land, particular to women, is problematic in most developing countries. Furthermore, there is lack of loans or leasing arrangements through which youth can acquire ownership or user rights of farming land. According to the FAO, the major constraint in access to capital for rural youth, next to lack of collateral, are the high financial illiteracy rates. The design and promotion of youth-friendly financial products, mentoring programs and encouraging youth to form informal youth savings groups can help to overcome these issues.

⁹ For this paragraph the paper written by Newmark and Hough (2000) is used.

¹⁰ For this paragraph the paper written by Carling and Talleraas (2016) is used.

¹¹ For this paragraph the report: Youth and Agriculture (FAO, 2014) is used.

In other words, due to the conditions, habits and regulations, young people fail to make the transition to independent adulthood; they face difficulties to break with their waithood. Nevertheless, even if people are extremely poor, and are likely to remain in a marginalized position, this says nothing about how they might imagine, and actively seek for a better life.

2.1.3. Desire for change

Carling and Talleraas write about the root causes and drivers of migration¹². They present a model that is useful to explain why entrepreneurial aspirations arise. Figure 1 shows how migration, but also other responses arise as a result of a desire for change. This mechanism implies that some 'root causes', or conditions, eventually together with the prospects produce an outcome, in the case of their model this is migration. However, different aspirations might arise. As in Malawi the dependence on self-employment is high (OECD, 2018b), this model could be adapted to a version more suitable for this research. It can be used to explore the conditions and infrastructure that contribute to the process of business start-up for youth. When embedding this model into the youth business literature, it could explain how young people try to realize business outcomes, by first the formation of entrepreneurial aspirations, and second the ability to accomplish these aspirations.

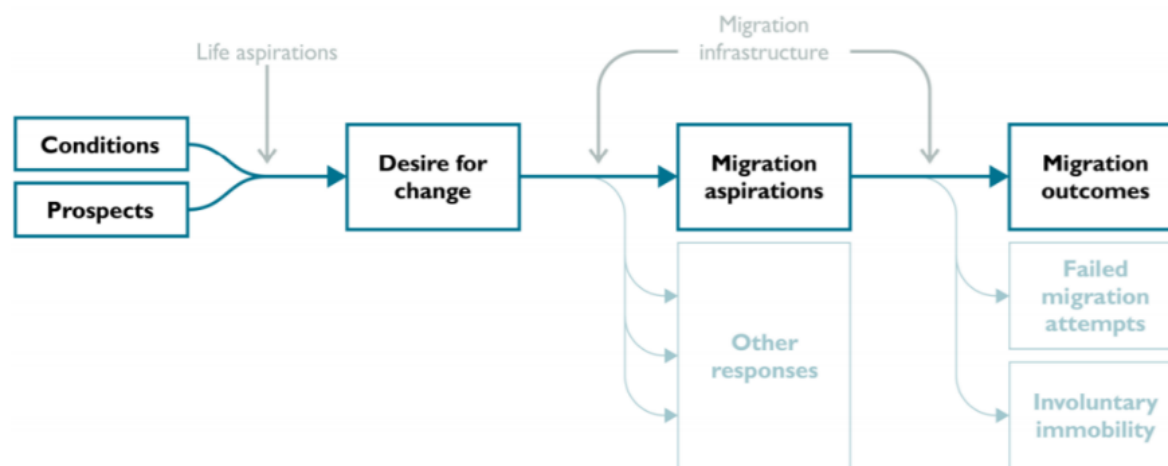


Figure 1 desire for change (Carling, & Talleraas, 2016).

The aspirations are the first step to actually act, and try to reach the desired outcome. Yet, to be able to reach a particular outcome, the available and accessible infrastructure must be suitable to do so. Infrastructure affects the processes in figure 1 in

¹² If not mentioned otherwise, for the entire sub-chapter 2.1.3. Desire for Change, the paper written by Carling and Talleraas (2016) is used.

two ways. First, it affects how different possibilities are perceived, and whether aspirations arise. And second, the infrastructure affects whether or not the desired outcome can be realized. To be more specific, infrastructure are important physical and non-physical supporting structures that give young people the opportunity to reach their entrepreneurial aspirations; to reach their desired business outcome, and break with their waitness.

2.1.4. Infrastructure for economic empowerment and its effects

One of the main infrastructures to promote entrepreneurship, economic empowerment and financial inclusiveness in current day development cooperation throughout the Global South are savings groups. In this, NGOs play a central role, by proliferating this microfinance model, in order to alleviate poverty.

The more central role of NGOs in development activities came with the neoliberal turn in the late 19th and early 20th century (Murray, & Overton, 2016; Peet, & Hartwick, 2015; pp. 98-99). Keynesian, neoclassical economics, with huge government spending's lost terrain (Murray, & Overton, 2016; Peet, & Hartwick, 2015, p. 66; p. 89). Keynesianism economics was already criticized by scholars like Harry Johnson in the early 1970s (Peet, & Hartwick, 2015, p. 87). According to Johnson, problems in developing countries did not come from global inequalities, nor colonial legacy, but from misguided Keynesian development policies, full of inefficiency and corruption (Peet, & Hartwick, 2015, p. 87). However, it was not until the 1980s when the neoliberal turn took place, with the hollowing out of the state and privatization on a large scale (Murray, & Overton, 2016). In these neoliberal times the civil society became a key element of aid regimes, with a reduced role of (recipient) states (Murray, & Overton, 2016). In a way, NGOs can be seen as a form of social infrastructure for youth in the place where the state presence is limited or ineffective.

Savings groups

In these saving groups programs, NGOs train villagers in rural communities in the Global South to empower them to create and lead savings-led microfinance groups (Karlan et al., 2017). Villagers establish groups to save and then lend out the accumulated savings to each other (Karlan et al., 2017). Savings groups can be seen as a formal alternative within the informal sector (Brannen, 2010). Financial inclusion is not only about formal banking systems, according to Flynn and Sumberg (2017), individuals involved in savings groups contribute to and benefit from active social networks of financial inclusion.

International organizations and donors, like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, have pushed for expansion of these savings groups (Karlan et al., 2017), as these initiatives succeed in providing financial services to the poor, with grassroots and low costs mechanisms (Karlan et al., 2017).

Current day savings groups vary depending on the context and the implementing organization (Karlan et al., 2017). However, the basic features follow the model introduced by CARE in 1990 in Mali: Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) (Karlan et al., 2017). In the VSLA-model, members meet regularly, contribute a fixed amount and in turns the pot is assigned to one of the members (Karlan et al., 2017). VSLAs do not receive grants or external loans, the pots simply grow overtime by accumulation of savings of individuals and interest (Karlan et al., 2017). Most VSLA loans are short term and determine an interest around of 5 percent per month (Brannen, 2010), which is low compared with moneylenders who often charge up to 30 percent per month (Brannen, 2010). Moreover, to help members through times of crisis, VSLA-groups might have a solidarity fund (Karlan et al., 2017; Brannen, 2010).

Share-outs happen at the end of the savings period (Karlan et al., 2017), often in a period when extra cash is needed (Brannen, 2010). The amount shared-out, savings plus interest, is divided among member in proportion to each's savings (Brannen, 2010). After the share-out groups normally reform and start a new cycle of savings and lending immediately (Brannen, 2010).

Effect of having access to financial capital

Advocates of saving groups write that these groups contribute to rising income, alleviating poverty, improved resilience, building of assets, and, among other things, improved quality of houses (Brannen, 2010). Furthermore, these VSLA-programs have the opportunity to lead to improved household business outcomes and women's empowerment (Karlan et al., 2017), and have delivered positive impacts on children's education, health and livelihoods of participating families (Kesanta & Andre, 2015).

According to Abubakari, Sadik and Keisan (2014), participating households had better nutrition outcomes and healthier children than households that did not participate. Pronyk et al. (2007), Littlefield et al. (2003) and Hossain (1988), cited by Brannen (2010), had the same conclusion; especially households of female clients tend to have better nutrition

outcomes and health statuses. Furthermore, according to Brannen (2010), the fish and meat intake of VSLA participants increased. Besides, Malawian adults that were able to save \$17.66 per year on average prior to the program, were able to save the same in 17 weeks' time after a VSLA-program was introduced (Hendricks & Chidiac, 2011).

Micro-lending has the opportunity to empower local communities, and increased savings, the promotion of local cooperatives, as well as the creation of self-employment opportunities due to micro-lending are significantly related to poverty reduction (Nkpoyen, & Eteng, 2012). Also, according to Sultana, Zaaba, & Umemoto (2010), micro-lending gives women the opportunity to set up businesses and become economically empowered, and when their parents are microfinance clients, it is more likely that children go to school and stay in school longer (Brannen, 2010). So far, many scholars have found the positive effect of microfinance; these initiatives allow rural communities in the Global South to protect, diversify and increase sources of income (Brannen, 2010), which thereafter increase resilience during times of crisis (Brannen, 2010).

However, others such as Karlan et al. (2017) contend that there is no evidence for impact on average consumption. Besides, micro-lending could be seen as a form of *financialization* of development assistance¹³. Financialization is about creating new investment instruments and the incorporation of parts of the world market that were previously skipped by huge financial institutions. This is putting local communities at greater risks and making them vulnerable; individuals might not be simply enrolled in a not-for-profit NGO-run microfinance scheme, but in "globalized circuits of financial accumulation".

A loan indeed comes with a debt, yet, that is why, according to Brannen (2010), savings-based VSLA-programs have become more important overtime. As, "the VSLA-model is based on the belief that for the extremely poor, particularly women, the best approach is to begin by building their financial assets and skills through savings rather than debt" (Hendricks & Chidiac, 2011). Also, through saving groups local communities have the opportunity to build skills and assets, which can help them to move into the formal financial sector later on (Hendricks & Chidiac, 2011).

¹³ For the rest of this paragraph the paper written by Mawdsley (2018) is used.

Engagement of youth in savings groups

While the literature on effects of saving groups on development in general abounds, the effect of saving groups on youth is unclear. According to Flynn and Sumberg¹⁴, VSLA research literature that specifically addresses youth savings is limited. This is in line with Zimmerman et al. (2010), who conclude:

“Evidence suggest promoting youth savings may have the potential to be a high-leverage intervention, with positive effects on youth development and financial inclusion. However, little is known about what types of youth savings products and services would best contribute to both goals, or how these contributions might differ with context. Especially in the developing world, financial institutions, donors, NGOs, and governments have little empirical evidence upon which to base decisions regarding whether and when to invest resources in promoting youth savings on a large scale. This is true even though, as detailed above, interest in YSAs [youth savings accounts] as policy tools is growing” (p.18).

According to Flynn and Sumberg, based on a study in Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Ghana, the engagement of youth in saving groups is deeply embedded in networks of family, as well as other social relations. Especially the young members of savings groups rely on money to contribute to the savings groups that is not theirs, but that is given to them by partners and family members (Flynn & Sumberg, 2017; Zou et al., 2015). In turn, youth also share parts of their loans and share-outs with friends and family members. Johnson et al. (2015) show that, 84% of the youth in Colombia, Ghana, Kenya and Nepal indicated that savings would likely come from family members. This has consequences for the design, implementation and evaluation of saving groups, as this outsiders-influence creates tensions. Within savings groups programming, the primary focus usually lies on the individual, but if youth is involved in savings groups the individual nature of involvement

¹⁴ If not mentioned otherwise, for this entire paragraph the paper written by Flynn and Sumberg (2017) is used.

could be questioned. In figure 2 is schematically displayed how the interactions within youth savings groups go further than just the interaction between members.

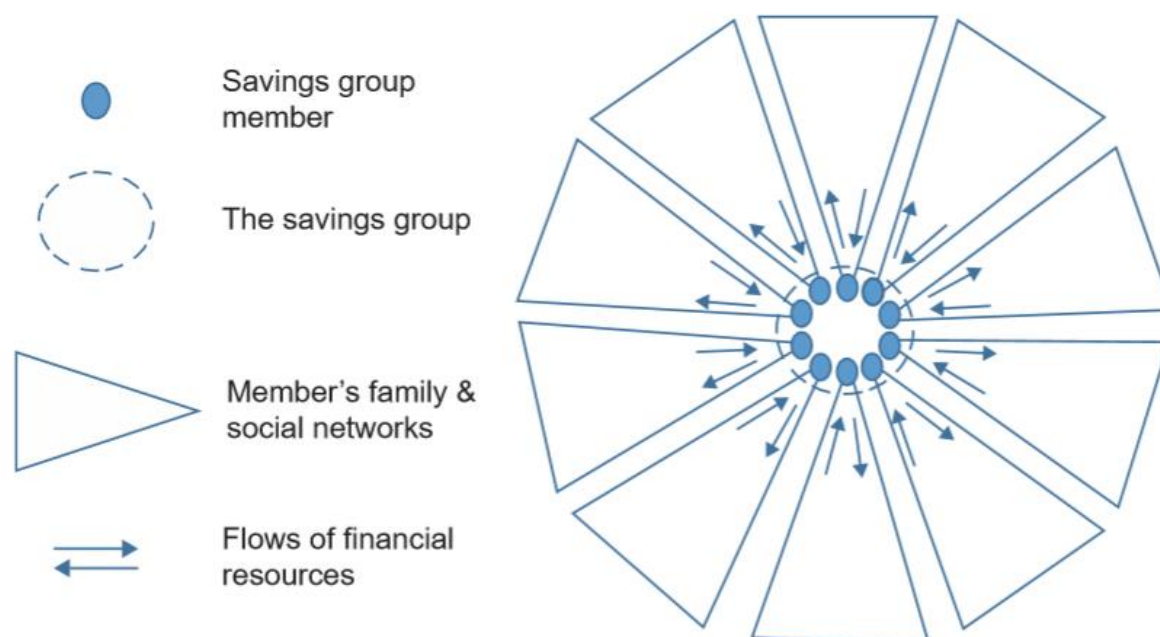


Figure 2 context of youth savings group membership (Flynn & Sumberg, 2017).

2.2. Analysis theoretical debate

The (livelihood) opportunities of communities living in the immediate vicinity of fortress conservation areas are influenced by these protected areas, this can be either in a positive or negative way. However, previous literature and available data on confrontations and collaborations between parks and people is spatially aggregated, and, if present, the distribution of benefits within affected groups is unclear. Nevertheless, more and more conservation organizations acknowledge the importance of community development, both as ethical obligation, and for the long-term success of nature conservation and the achievement of biodiversity goals. Yet, while it is more sustainable to involve youth at an early age in development activities, the conditions and opportunities for young people around protected areas remain unclear in previous literature.

Nonetheless, even if young people are extremely poor, and are likely to remain in a marginalized position, this says nothing about how they might imagine, and actively seek for a better life. Though, this desire of young people to improve their living conditions is blocked by waitness. Even if youngsters create a desire for change, the infrastructure must be right to achieve these aspirations and reach their desired outcome, which is often not the case due to a non-conducive environment. How particular conditions and infrastructure can

influence the achievement of migration aspirations for young people has been discussed by scholars, still, this model has not yet been adjusted to achieve entrepreneurial aspirations.

As the dependence throughout the Global South on self-employment is high, the model made by Carling and Talleraas is adjusted from the migration literature to the youth business literature, to explain how particular conditions and infrastructure influence young people's aspired business outcomes, in relation with the poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus.

An important form of infrastructure that might be useful to assist young people in creating self-employment opportunities are savings groups. VSLA-groups have proven to empower, financially include and alleviate poverty for other marginalized groups. Moreover, while more traditional micro-finance schemes expose people to the risk of financialization, savings groups do this less, and enhance the financial base by stimulating a savings culture, rather than indebting people. Nevertheless, these savings groups are embedded, designed and programmed to be managed within and by members of these savings groups, and the individual nature of youth savings groups, or young members within savings groups could be questioned. Yet, the effect of these savings groups on youth is not studied well enough in previous literature to disqualify the possible impact these groups can have.

Besides, next to these savings groups, other infrastructure can be useful to help young people in achieving their entrepreneurial aspirations. However, as will be explained in chapter 3: regional thematic framework, the challenges that Malawian youth face when starting-up a business are known (Scale2Save, 2019; OECD, 2018a; 2018b), but less is written about the infrastructure that do give rural youth the chance to start a business.

2.3. Conceptual framework

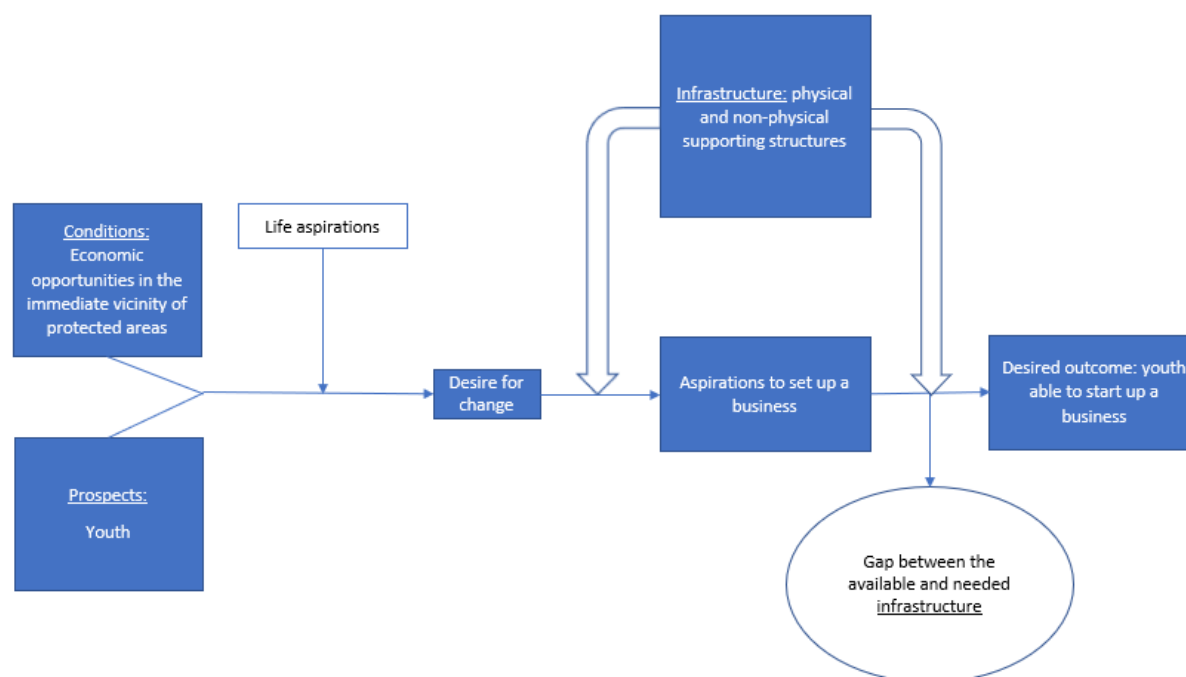


Figure 3 conceptual framework (own work, based on the work of Carling and Talleraas (2016)).

2.3.1. Explanation conceptual framework

As dependence on self-employment throughout the Global South is high, the model made by Carling and Talleraas (2016), has been modified from the migration literature to make it useful for explaining entrepreneurial aspirations for youth in relation with the poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus. This new model shows how youth can use particular infrastructure to reach their desired business outcome via entrepreneurial aspirations in the immediate vicinity of protected areas.

In order to explore infrastructure optimal for youth businesses around fortress conservation areas, this research explores the current situation for young people in the Majete project area in Malawi. In the theoretical framework presented, VSLA takes a central position. VSLA is only one example of infrastructure that can contribute to reach the desired business outcome, but it is a form of infrastructure that is actively implemented and promoted in the Majete project area. Other forms of infrastructure became clear during the fieldwork-period. By studying the conditions, and available and needed forms of infrastructure, more can be said about how rural youth in the immediate vicinity of protected areas can start-up a business.

3. Regional thematic framework

3.1. Geographical context: Malawi

Malawi, a landlocked country in the southern part of Africa with a population of 18.1 million people of which only 16.9% lives in urban areas, ranks number 172 on the Human Development Index with a score of 0.485¹⁵. The life expectancy in Malawi is 63.8 years and the incidence of Malaria and the prevalence of HIV is high; with the sooner 231.1 per 1,000 people at risk and the latter 9.6% of the population between 15 and 49 years old. The Gross National Income per capita is \$1,159, yet, the inequality is high: the Gini coefficient is 44.7. Moreover, 70.3% of the population still lives below the income poverty line of \$1.90 a day (World Bank, 2020).

3.1.1. Opportunities for youth

Generally youth in Malawi start a business out of necessity, as there are no job opportunities (OECD, 2018b). 38% of the youth gives unemployment together with the inability to find a job, as the reason for opting to start a business (OECD, 2018b).

58.9% of young rural entrepreneurs are older than 24, 57.5% are men and 85% is married¹⁶. Also, as the main business often provides not enough income, 25.3% of the rural youth entrepreneurs run multiple business, as well as 55.7% devotes less than 5 days a week at his or her business and 20.3% less than 4 hours a day.

In Malawi 80.3% of rural youth acquire business skills informal, this can, for example, be self-taught (43.9%) or via family members (36.5%), and the education levels are low. The most important obstacle for the low enrolment rates in schools are financial constraints. This may also explain inequalities, and the differences in socio-economic backgrounds: more than 80% of the youth whose mother had no education have had either no or only primary education. In contrast, more than 80% of the youth whose mother graduated from tertiary education, have either a vocational or tertiary degree.

Looking at rural youth entrepreneurs in Malawi, 74.7% has primary education at best (OECD, 2018b). Overall 35% of the Malawian students complete the primary education cycle, as a result only 18% enrolls at secondary school, 2.2% in vocational education and 1% in

¹⁵ For this entire paragraph the country profile of Malawi is used (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2018).

¹⁶ If not mentioned otherwise, for the rest of sub-chapter 3.1.1. and 3.1.2. the report: Youth Well-being Policy Review of Malawi, made by the OECD (2018a), is used.

tertiary education. Though, as can be seen in figure 4, the median years of schools completed by youth is rising.

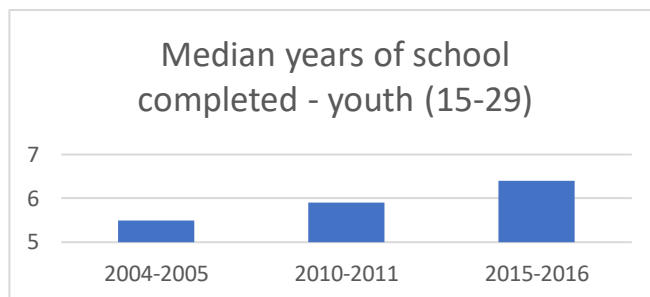


Figure 4 median years of school completed by Malawian youth (aged 15-29) (own work based on figures of the OECD (2018a)).

3.1.2. Nature of businesses

The businesses youth in Malawi have are small (68.9% are individual entrepreneurs). The entrepreneurs mostly sell agricultural products and 40.5% sell the crops in the same conditions as bought, which leads to low profit margins (OECD, 2018b): 40.4% of the rural youth entrepreneurs earn no more than 25,000 Malawian Kwacha (MWK) per month. Moreover, only 10% of the entrepreneurs provide a service (89.4% is retailer) and just 16.2% adds value with light manufacturing before re-selling the products. In most cases, rural youth entrepreneurs are ‘just’ vendors. This may be linked to low education-levels; most rural youth entrepreneurs do not have the skills to run a business successfully. Also, 98.1% of the businesses youth have are informal (OECD, 2018b) and although Malawi scores high on the ‘formal’ Getting Credit score from the World Bank (World Bank, 2019), many entrepreneurs setting up their business face capital related problems (figure 5). They depend on informal sources, like, for example, friends, family or a partner (22%), money from other businesses (19%) or own savings (10%) (FinMark Trust, 2012).

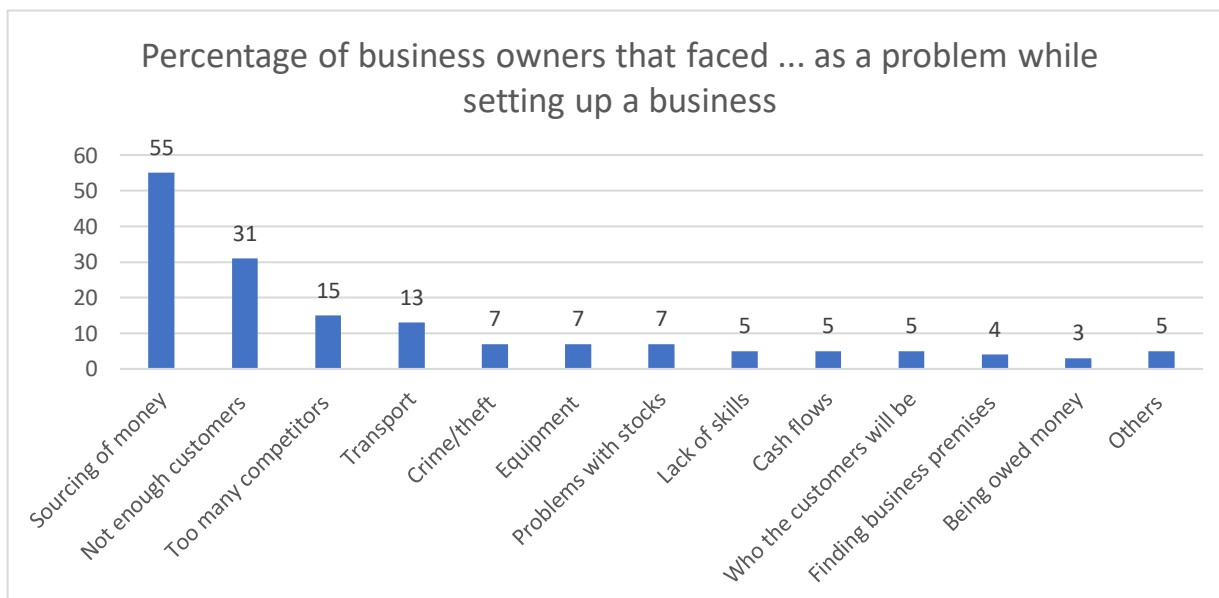


Figure 5 percentage of business owners facing these particular problems when setting up businesses¹⁷ (own work, based on figures of FinMark Trust (2012)).

¹⁷ More than one answer possible. Other problems (less than or only 1%): finding the right staff, raising awareness of products/services, what product/service to sell, laws and regulation and financial records).

3.1.3. Nature conservation

In Malawi there are 133 protected areas¹⁸. In total 22.88% of the terrestrial area is covered with parks, this is more than the goal set by the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (at least 17% by 2020) (Dinerstein et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the large majority of the protected areas in Malawi are Forest Reserves, and only 9 parks have an assigned management category, given by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (2019). In Malawi four parks are categorized as IV, these Wildlife Reserves aim to protect particular species or habitats. Malawi has 5 National Parks, all categorized as management category II. These National Parks are set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes. In Malawi the IUCN has not categorized any of the protected areas in the strictest management category. Yet, three protected areas have international designations. For example, Lake Malawi National Park is a World Heritage site.

3.2. Chikwawa

As the study area is situated in the Chikwawa district, some more information and data about this district is presented below. Chikwawa is a drought-prone semi-arid area with perennial erratic rainfall patterns, the area also faces environmental degradation¹⁹. As the agricultural production of communities residing in Chikwawa, that is already categorized as one of the most drought-prone areas in Malawi, is threatened by considerable rainfall decreases, climate change and climate variability, residents are forced to shift from Maize to more drought tolerant crop varieties, like Sorghum, as adaptation measure.

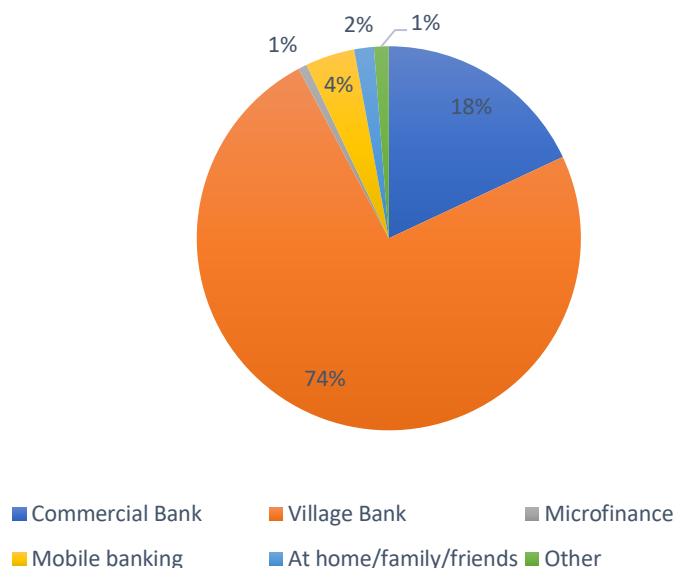
In Chikwawa 564,130 people are living in 127,200 households (National Statistical Office, 2019). Of these households 25,799 have savings (National Statistical Office, 2019). Figure 6 shows which savings methods are used by the households in Chikwawa. Moreover, 22,448 households have access to credit in Chikwawa (National Statistical Office, 2019), the distribution of used credit methods is visually displayed in figure 7²⁰.

¹⁸ For this paragraph the Protected Area Country Profile of Malawi, made by United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Center (UNEP-WCMC) (2020), is used.

¹⁹ If not mentioned otherwise, for this paragraph the paper written by Matondo et al. (2020) is used.

²⁰ The concept: village Bank, mentioned in figures 6 and 7, corresponds to what is previously described as VSLA. Yet, the National Statistics Office decided to use another concept in their report. To prevent confusing, here the same concept as used in the 2018 Malawi Population and Housing Census Report is used. Nevertheless, in the rest of this thesis Villages Banks will be conceptualized as VSLA.

Methods of saving of households that have savings (%)



Source of credit used by households that have access to credit (%)

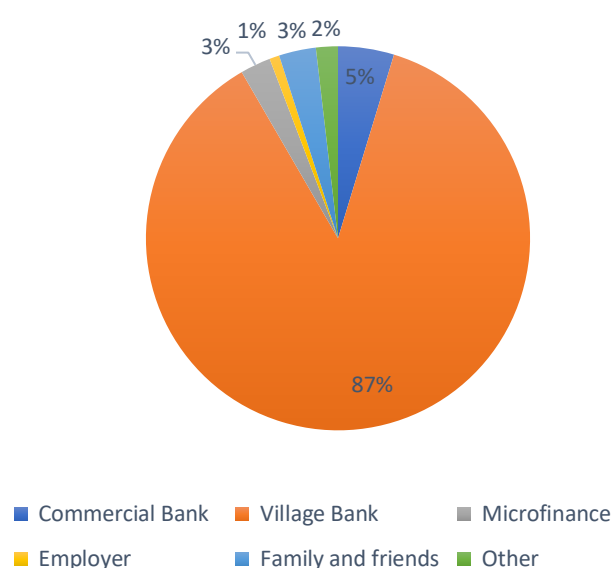


Figure 6 methods of savings²¹ (own work based on figures National Statistical Office (2019)).

Figure 7 source of credit used by households that have access to credit (own work based on figures National Statistical Office (2019)).

3.3. Majete project area

The study site consists of the communities surrounding the Majete Wildlife Reserve (map 1), a protected area in southern Malawi that covers 700km² of the Lower Shire Valley (Briers-Louw et al., 2019) at the southern end of the Great Rift Valley (Gordon, 2017). The Majete Wildlife Reserve was proclaimed a protected area in 1955. However, due to lack of resources the Malawian Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) was not able to manage the park adequately (Gordon, 2017). As a consequence, poaching was widespread throughout the reserve in the 1980's (Gordon, 2017). While in 1988 there were 200 elephants, by 1992 the elephant population was eradicated (Gordon, 2017), and large cats, that were once common, disappeared; lions were absent from 1984 onwards and in the early 1990's the last leopard tracks were reported (Briers-Louw et al., 2019). With poaching, illegal logging, overfishing and uncontrolled agriculture, local communities pushed the reserves natural resources to the limit (Gordon, 2017).

To turn the tide, African Parks, an NGO, which is currently managing and conserving over 12 million hectares in ten countries (African Parks, 2020), signed a 25-year agreement

²¹ Investment, business and insurance were left out in this figure, as they all accounted for less than 1%.

with the DNPW to manage the park in 2003. A road network was developed, law enforcement was trained and equipped to cope with poaching and a 140 km² sanctuary was built, in which 2.550 animals from 12 different species were reintroduced between 2003 and 2011 (Briers-Louw et al., 2019). The sanctuary fence was removed when the 142-kilometer perimeter fence was completed in 2011 (Briers-Louw et al., 2019).

The revitalization of Majete led to the return of animals, tourists and jobs (Gordon, 2017). However, the surrounding communities – an estimated 60,000 people – who used to live from this land and its resources, had to find alternative livelihoods^{22/23}. Despite investments in development, the villages around Majete were still poverty-struck and underserved by 2010. African Parks realized that, for people to value the reserve's natural resources, they must benefit from it in a real and meaningful way. In 2011, one of African Parks' early donors, Dioraphte Foundation, requested The Hunger Project to start working in the Majete communities through its 'epicenter strategy' with the aim to encircle the entire park with self-reliant communities within fifteen years²⁴. The Majete project area, in which the communities, African Parks and The Hunger Project work together on the conservation of nature, and ending hunger and poverty, is well suited to explore the situation regarding youth businesses in the poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus. Especially because more than 75% of the population in the Majete project area is younger than 25 years old (The Hunger Project, 2019e).

The Hunger Project Malawi entered the area because of the Wildlife Reserve and the poverty-struck situation of the local people. Looking at the Majete project area, the amount of jobs and other economic opportunities are unknown; the conditions youth face are not clear enough. Youth mentioned in the preliminary field visit in October 2019, that they *"channel their energy mostly to towards entrepreneurship"*, as just like in the rest of Malawi there are few job opportunities, and businesses are started out of necessity (OECD, 2018b). Nevertheless, as could be concluded based on previous literature, for youth to start a

²² Local communities surrounding the park are allowed, but rarely, to enter the Majete Wildlife Reserve through resource gates to thatch grass, reeds and indigenous bamboo (Gordon, 2017). Gordon (2017) interviewed 12 healers, who since the park is fenced cannot harvest medicinal plants in the reserve anymore. All healers indicated that they would like to harvest inside the reserve again, as almost all of them rely on their healing practice as their main source of income. Also, a survey indicated that 96% of the households would prefer that the resource gates would be opened more often, or for a longer period, as currently it is not long enough to harvest enough grass for their household needs (Gordon, 2017). Furthermore, 70% of the surveyed households requested the addition of firewood and medicinal plants harvesting to the current grass resource use program (Gordon, 2017).

²³ If not mentioned otherwise, for the rest of this paragraph the impact paper: Community Impact Around Majete Wildlife Reserve, made by The Hunger Project (2019d), is used.

²⁴ For more information about The Hunger Project and the epicenter strategy, please see [appendix 1](#) and [2](#).

business the infrastructure must be suitable to do so. The main infrastructure implemented in the Majete project area to promote entrepreneurship, and empower and financially include youth, are savings groups. That is why this existing infrastructure takes a central position in this research. Yet, VSLA is only an example of infrastructure that can contribute to reach desired business outcomes. By studying the available and needed forms of infrastructure in the Majete project area, more can be said about how rural youth residing in the immediate vicinity of protected areas can start-up a business.

Within the Majete project area, the research is specifically conducted in Majete 2 Chiphale Epicenter and Majete 3 Muonda Epicenter. These projects started in 2014. Majete 2 exist out of 29 villages, in which 8,148 people are living. 1,659 of these people are categorized as youth by The Hunger Project (aged 15-24). Majete 3 exists out of 21 villages, in which 9,133 people are living. Of which 1,859 are categorized as youth. Majete 2 and 3 were suitable research locations, as the projects are running for a couple of years already, and the epicenter officers (EPO's²⁵) know the communities²⁶ well and are widely accepted by the communities and its (traditional) leadership. Also, Majete 2 and 3 are already connected to the electricity grid, and Majete 4, 5 and 6 are not yet. As Majete 2 and 3 are already electrified, the influence of this infrastructure on entrepreneurial aspirations of youth can be studied. Furthermore, Majete 1 is not a suitable research location, as the VSLA methodology was not implemented there. Besides, Majete 1 has already reached self-reliance, which means The Hunger Project is not directly involved in the community anymore. In Map 1 the whole Majete project area is displayed, with the research area, Majete 2 and 3, on the left side of the map.



Map 1 the Majete project area (The Hunger Project, 2019d).

²⁵ The EPO's are field staff of The Hunger Project, working and living in the epicenter area.

²⁶ Each epicenter, in which groups of villages are working together on the conservation of nature, and ending hunger and poverty, are seen as one community in this research.

4. Methodology

The fieldwork was conducted from the beginning of February until the end of March 2020. To gather the needed data, a mixed methods approach is used. Primary data is collected via a variety of largely qualitative methods, to ensure the triangulation and therefore the reliability and validity of the data. Based on these participatory research methods, practices regarding youth starting-up businesses have been identified. Furthermore, existing evaluation data available at The Hunger Project is used to amplify some findings.

4.1. Study Area

Six villages in Majete 2 and 3 have been selected as study area. These villages are at different ranges from the epicenter building. In [appendix 8](#) the villages are displayed on a map of the research area ([Map 2](#)). Chiphale, Pearson and July are part of the Majete 2 catchment area, while Misomali, Chigwata and Muonda are part of the Majete 3 catchment area. Some respondents used other names for their villages, according to a young man (26 years old) this is created by the system of traditional leaders:

“The names people use for their village might differ. Here in Malawi, if there is a new village, a chief or village head can get compensation for the 'running' of the place. That is why there are so many villages, new names emerge, as people benefit from this. Even though they are just meters from each other.”

Nevertheless, when talking to the respondents, it became clear that their ‘village’ is, for example, part of Misomali village. For each of the selected villages the conditions and prospects were mapped, as differences between villages are there. Yet, only when something really jumps out from one village to another it is mentioned in this thesis, as on most topics the conditions and infrastructure for youth were the same for all the villages.

In each of the 6 villages, between 9 and 12 surveys have been conducted. Moreover, from each of the villages around 10 people joined the focus group discussions. Besides, multiple (shorter) interviews and informal conversation occurred. These research methods and techniques are explained in more detail in paragraph 4.3.

4.2. Operationalization of variables

Several concepts and key terms related to the conceptual model and all research questions of this study are made more concrete below.	
Concepts:	Operationalization:
Youth	As the dependence on self-employment in the Majete project area is high, youth is eager to use their entrepreneurial aspirations to better their lives. Although youngsters aged 15-24 are categorized as youth in the census data of The Hunger Project (2019e), after discussions with community members, employees of The Hunger Project and (other) extension workers, it was decided, with the concept of 'waithood' in mind, that youth in the Majete project area cannot be categorized with an international stamp. It, for example, happens that youth are still in school by the age of 24. The gatekeepers, together with the researcher, came to the conclusion that it is more important how people feel: <i>"When talking about youth [laughing], when thinking about my age [30] and my life. Yes, I am still youth. I definitely see myself as youth!"</i> (Women, Pearson Village). Following this information, this research considers youth as how people define it themselves. Nevertheless, a technical-line needed to be drawn at the age of 30, to keep an overview in who to select for the data collection. Moreover, to protect minors, only adults (18 years and older) have been asked to partake in focus group discussions and surveys.
Infrastructure:	Important physical and non-physical supporting structures that give prospects the opportunity to reach desired outcomes. In this research the desired outcome is youth being able to set up a business. Youth have been asked which infrastructure is needed, and again which infrastructure is present. By comparing these answers, conclusions could be made to what extent the right infrastructure is available and accessible for youth in the Majete project area.
Conditions:	The conditions are the (economic) opportunities for youth: what are the (livelihood) opportunities, determined by internal and external factors, in the Majete project area.

Desire for change:	The covet youngsters have to improve their living conditions, created by a combination of life aspirations and faced conditions. Youth were asked during the surveys and focus groups discussions what their desires are and how they developed these.
Aspirations:	Aspirations are the hope and ambitions, in line with the actions that are actually taken by youth to improve their living conditions. In the case of this research, youth is eager to use their entrepreneurial aspirations to better their lives. Youth were asked in the surveys and focus groups about these entrepreneurial aspirations, and whether or not they also have other aspirations to improve their living conditions (in the Majete project area).
Desired outcome:	In this research the desired outcome is youth being able to start-up a business. With starting-up a business is meant that youth acquired the right human capital, and are able to buy the material assets (become financially inclusive), needed to run the business they aspire to set up. Information about the desired business outcomes was acquired by asking youth how they feel about their likelihood to achieve their entrepreneurial aspirations under the conditions faced, with the available and accessible infrastructure.
Village Savings and Loans Associations:	VSLA is a form of infrastructure that gives rural people the opportunity to set up a business, and contributes to their empowerment. Youth have been asked which conditions make this infrastructure effective. And if this infrastructure is effective enough, looking at the conditions faced, to reach their desired business outcome.
Youth Empowerment:	In the case of this research the empowerment of youth is based on whether or not they are able to reach their desired business outcome; if they are able to acquire the right human capital and become financially inclusive, and therefore can start-up a business.

Table 1 operationalization of concepts.

4.3. Methods and techniques

Entering the field

The fieldwork-period was the second time the researcher visited the Majete project area. During a preliminary field visit in October 2019 the researcher already had the opportunity, as employee of The Hunger Project Netherlands, to conduct a first mapping. Also, the (field) staff introduced the researcher to the traditional- and epicenter leadership. The preliminary field visit was the starting point of the co-creation process²⁷, in which the Utrecht University (supervisor and researcher), The University of Malawi, The Polytechnic (co-supervisor), The Hunger Project Malawi (host organization) and The Hunger Project Netherlands (employer researcher) defined this research. Due to the preparations and close contact between the involved parties in the months that followed the preliminary visit, the data collection could start soon after arriving in the field in February 2020. The EPO's re-introduced the researcher to the community (leadership) and have, together with the epicenter leadership, been involved as the gatekeepers for this research during the fieldwork-period. Together with the gatekeepers the six villages have been selected in which a mixed methods academic research, that is explained in more detail below, has been conducted. This research enables the researcher to objectively analyze the effects, and contribute to the improvement of the intervention implemented in the Majete project area.

Observations

Observations have been undertaken after arriving in the field. Spots, near the epicenter buildings and close to Chapananga trading center²⁸, were selected to observe daily life of youth, and of other members of the community. Due to this, a better understanding of social relations in the area was acquired. It also gave the researcher some time to settle down. The researcher could get more familiar with the community, and the community could get used to the presence of the researcher in the area. Short conversations occurred, which contributed to this process. Furthermore, this time helped to better understand local norms and cultural habits. Of course, in reality it will take a long time to 'blend in' with a community. Yet, by taking some time before asking any questions, the researcher tried to build as much rapport as possible.

²⁷ The full co-creation plan can be found in [appendix 6](#).

²⁸ Chapananga trading center is a marketplace with multiple shops between Majete 2 and 3, in the catchment area of Majete 3. The exact name of the village is Kalimanjera. The place is somewhat bigger than most villages, and has a private health clinic and police post as well. The researcher resided in Kalimanjera during the fieldwork-period.

The observations were the starting point of the *field journal*. During the whole fieldwork-period notes for reflection, analysis and comparison about daily experiences, conversations and observations have systematically been written down. In the end the researcher digitalized the field journal. This digital field journal has been coded and analyzed, so that useful input and quotes could be used for this thesis.

Surveys: sampling

A *survey* was conducted in the first phase of the research, to explore the area, its conditions, and provide information about the economic opportunities, needed and available infrastructure and characteristics of youth in the Majete project area.

After the EPO's introduced the researcher to the community members, the respondents for the survey have been sampled via the EPO's and the epicenter leadership. Unfortunately, the available demographic data was not suitable to randomly select youth in the right age category. That is why quantitative input gathered via the survey is only used for descriptive statistics, as it was not possible to sample the respondents randomly enough to conduct inferential statistics.

The EPO's and the epicenter leadership know who lives in which village, and the researcher explained the operationalizing of the youth-concept, to ensure valid respondents were selected. Moreover, the researcher told the gatekeepers to select and invite, a broad perspective of the population, and not only people that are known for being successful youth entrepreneurs. Before the researcher conducted the surveys, the gatekeepers contacted the potential respondents via traditional leadership in the epicenter villages to find out whether or not these individuals were interested in participating in this research. Looking at the collected data, the EPO's and the traditional- and epicenter leadership succeeded in selecting a broad perspective of the population; both youth with and without businesses, that are married and already have children, as well as those that are still in school and live with their parents, have been selected and participated in the survey. In total 62 respondents participated, yet, only 56 of the surveys are valid and used for the descriptive statistics. Even with the use of gatekeepers, some participants still turned out to be too old.

Surveys: piloting

Before conducting the real survey, a pilot survey was conducted with five community members in Pearson village. With the feedback acquired from these test surveys, questions have been added or taken away, and any misinterpretations have been refined as well.

Survey: conducting

The survey ([appendix 3](#)) consist out of a mixture of quantitative and qualitative, and mostly closed, questions. Some questions are more open-ended and often a conversation started on some of the topics during, or after the survey. By using this open-way of conducting a survey, the researcher already collected valuable qualitative data when conducting the surveys. It allowed the participants to bring up their own ideas and thoughts. This was suitable to the situation; even though the research focusses on entrepreneurial aspirations, the fact remains that youth might have other aspirations. That is why an open and broad view by the researcher was required at all times, otherwise there would be the risk that youth would have shared unreliable or false information, as they might have mentioned things they think the researcher wants to hear. Yet, as a result, also some less structured data was collected with the survey. To keep a systematic overview, a document in Excel was made. Notes for reflection, made during and after the survey, have been coded and analyzed in this document. In this same document quotes, collected when conducting the surveys, have been written down. These notes and quotes have created important and reliable qualitative input for this research. The more structured, quantitative, questions have been analyzed with descriptive statistics in the same Excel document.

In the end, the survey helped to find more information about the conditions and the prospects in the Majete project area and their experience with the infrastructure. Also, it clarified who in the area is successful operating a business, for whom things are more problematic, and how these youngsters differ from each other. In the graphs and table below (demographic) information about the 56 respondents is presented.

Surveys: information respondents²⁹

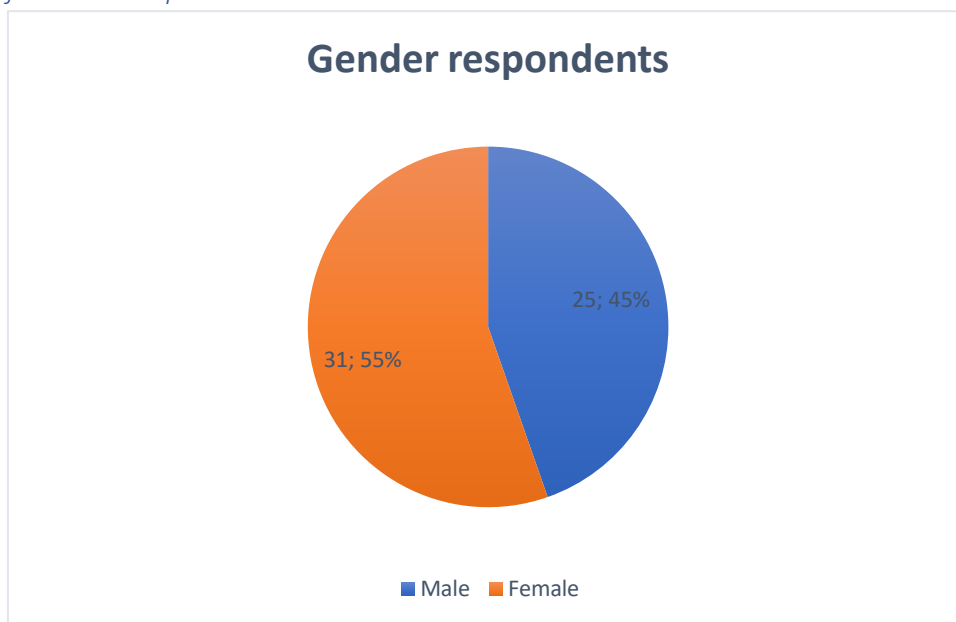


Figure 8 gender of the respondents.

Average age respondents:	
Males:	23,7 years
Females:	22,7 years
Those still living with their parents:	21,3 years
Overall average:	23,1 years

Table 2 average age of the respondents.

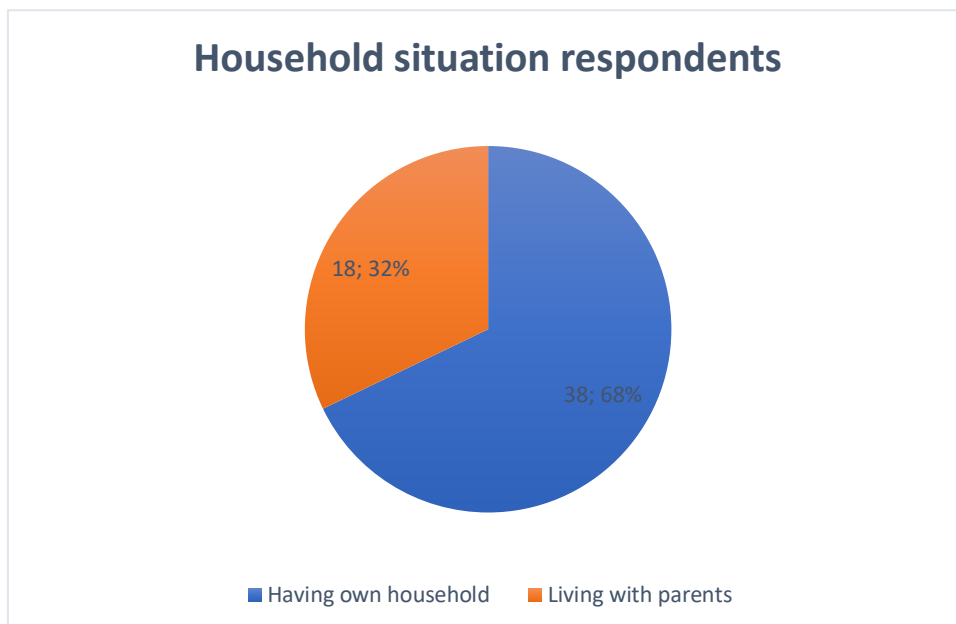


Figure 9 household situation of the respondents.

²⁹ All own work (2020), findings based on the data collected with the surveys in the Majete project area.

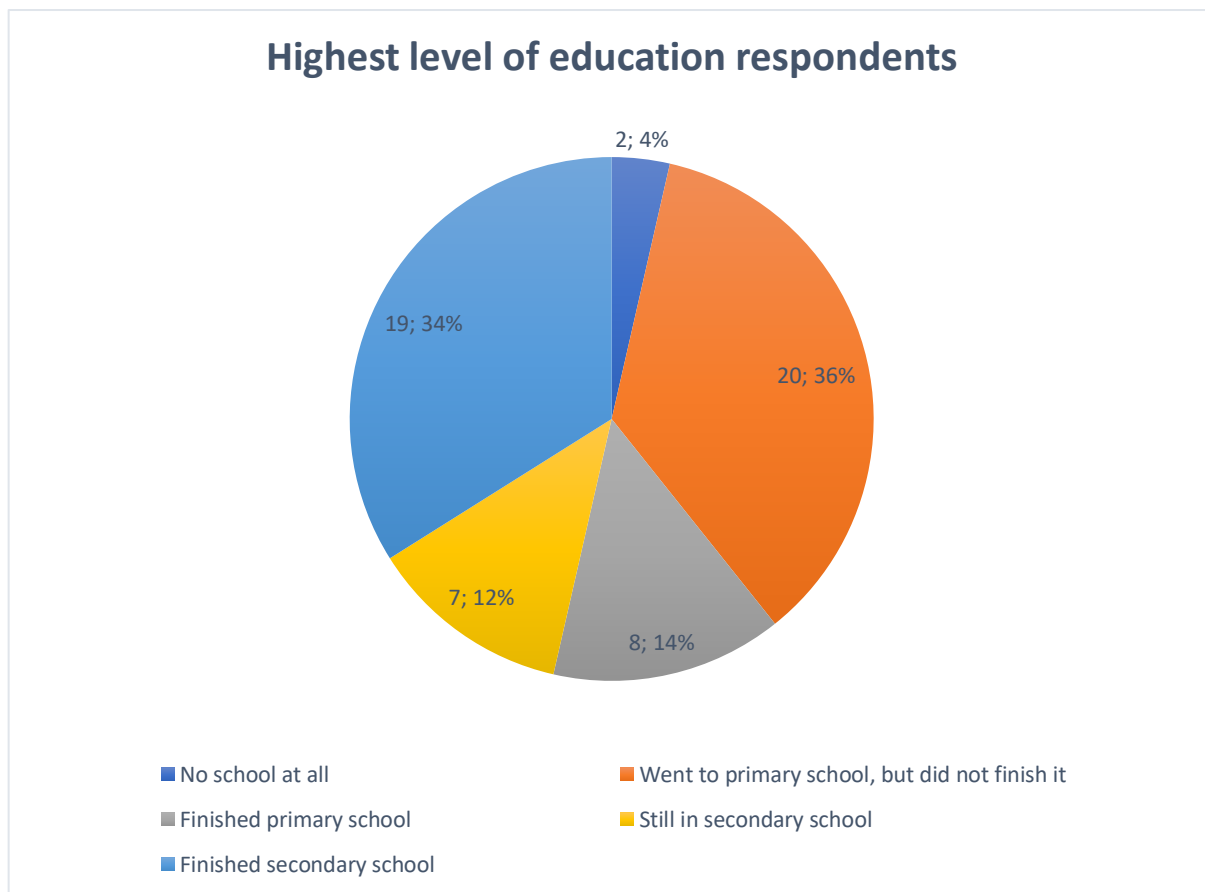


Figure 10 highest level of education of the respondents³⁰.

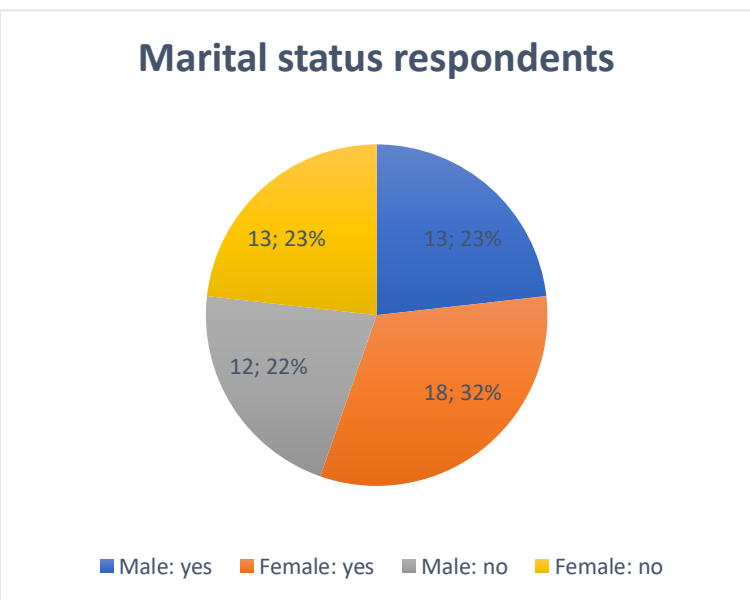


Figure 11 marital status of the respondents³¹.

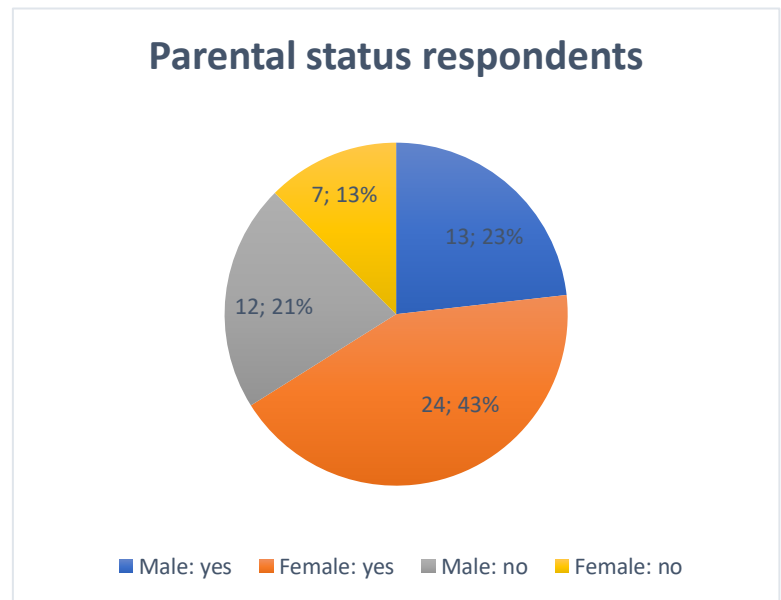


Figure 12 respondents that mention whether or not they have children³².

³⁰ 3 respondents that finished secondary school have been selected for tertiary education, but do not have the financial means to start at this moment. None of the respondents state that they have had tertiary education.

³¹ 55% of the respondents are married.

³² 66% of the respondents have children. It could be noticed that of the respondents relatively more women mention having children, compared to men. It was also observed that no men that mention not being married, mentioned that they already have children. While of the 13 women that mention that they are not married yet, 7 already have children.

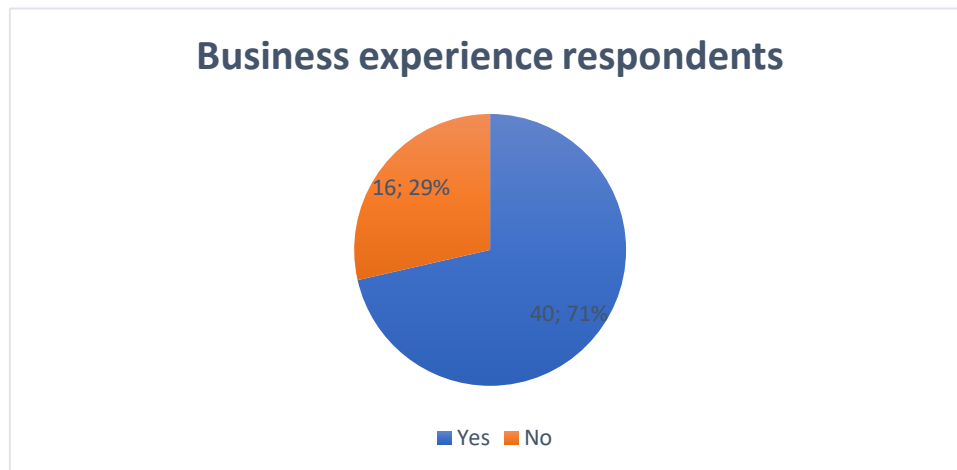


Figure 13 business experience of the respondents³³.

Focus group discussion

After the survey, three *focus group discussions* per epicenter have been conducted, to gain a broader view on the economic and business opportunities in the area and how young people respond to these opportunities (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011, p. 53). With the focus groups, the group opinion and group views on changing patterns over time has been gathered. Four mixed focus groups were conducted, together with one discussion with only young women, and another one with young men. By speaking with men and women separately, it was possible to compare how gender issues were differently raised. The same strategy as with the surveys has been used for selecting the participants: the participants have been selected via the same process with the gatekeepers and the traditional leadership.

During the focus group discussion, groups of youth discussed a wide variety of topics, all related to one of the sub-questions. To ensure reliability of the data collected during the focus groups, the same focus group guide has been used for all the focus group discussions ([appendix 4](#)). Notes for reflections have been made during the discussions, and quotes were written down. Afterwards these were digitalized, and this document has been analyzed and codes have been attached to the text.

To further ensure validation, member checking was done. After the data of the focus groups was processed, with two respondents, findings have been cross-checked. To make sure that what the group tried to explain, is the same as how it was understood by the researcher.

³³ Business experience: people that have a business at this moment or that had a business in the past.

Informal conversation

Moreover, many discussions and multiple conversations with extension workers and other employees, from the government, African Parks, The Hunger Project, and, among others, the Red Cross occurred. As well as consultations, or short interviews, with traditional- (village heads and (senior)-chiefs) and epicenter leadership. Furthermore, discussions of Youth Wildlife Clubs at various secondary schools were observed. Besides, the researcher went on multiple visits to the epicenter buildings, which created the opportunity to talk to animators³⁴ and other community members; short informal conversations occurred, which sometimes yielded good inputs. Also, due to the researcher living in the area, there was the opportunity to have daily interactions and conduct daily observations on the markets, the roads and the people. This made it possible to get a better understanding of what is happening in the Majete project area. The information gathered by these other data collection methods was systematically written down, digitalized, analyzed and later on coded, to ensure that these additional insights could be used for this research.

Secondary Data

Next to information provided by youth, other community members, village-heads and chiefs, extension workers, epicenter leadership and animators, *secondary data*, collected by The Hunger Project or external evaluators, is used for clarification of the empirical findings.

Analysis: positive deviance

Positive deviance is the observation that in most settings a few individuals follow uncommon, beneficial practices and consequently experience better outcomes than their neighbors and community members who share similar characteristics (Marsh et al., 2004). Often the deviant 'case' does not know that he or she is doing anything out of the ordinary and discovering a solution like this can transform lives if wider adaptation is possible (Pascale et al., 2010). In finding deviant cases with associated factors, it is more about getting to know 'who' and 'how', rather 'why' (Herington & van de Fliert, 2018).

The concept of positive deviance was used as analyzing tool. By using this positive lens when the empirical data was analyzed, unexpected good outcomes could be studied and enabling factors that could explain these good outcomes became clear. This makes it possible to design a strategy to improve the implemented program by The Hunger Project,

³⁴ Animators: people from the community trained by The Hunger Project via the train-the-trainer concept. These volunteers repeat the acquired knowledge in their own villages, to make sure the information is shared with as many people as possible.

to encourage other young people to adopt these particular behaviors as well (Marsh et al., 2004).

4.4. Reflection on positionality^{35/36}

I have been involved with The Hunger Project since 2017. I started working at the Dutch office as a volunteer, through a work experience placement. I have a background in Business and wanted to try if I desired a career in development cooperation. This is the case, and I have been employed by The Hunger Project since the beginning of 2018. Yet, I decided to enroll in the Master International Development Studies at Utrecht University, to academically reflect on my own practice as a development professional and to better understand the background, theories, and themes used in development cooperation.

Nevertheless, a critical distance between my role as researcher and employee was required, and I was aware of this at all times. The Hunger Project is an organization with a critical nature. I did not feel encumbered to criticize The Hunger Project, as I know they are open to constructive criticism. Moreover, the organization was already aware of the issue regarding youth inclusion, as it was observed during a field visit with multiple employees from around the world. Therefore, I was not worried about a conflict of interest, especially because this research is an outcome of a co-creation process between all parties involved, with all views considered³⁷. Besides, I believe my academic research can feed back into the practice of The Hunger Project.

Moreover, for me personally, it was important to make sure that no expectations were created in the communities. I made it clear at all times during this research that this trajectory was exploratory and tried to get a better view on the situation. Of course, suggestions could be made to The Hunger Project Malawi, but no promises have, and could be made.

4.5. Limitations and risks³⁸

Firstly, there was a cultural and language barrier between the community and the researcher. The researcher made sure that the questions were asked in a culturally appropriate way, and also ensured that the questions were understood correctly. To

³⁵ If not mentioned otherwise, for the sub-chapters 4.4. and 4.5. chapter 4 by Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) is used.

³⁶ As this paragraph is a reflection on the positionality of the researcher, it was deliberately chosen to write it in the first person.

³⁷ The full co-creation plan can be found in [appendix 6](#).

³⁸ The full ethical review can be found in [appendix 5](#).

overcome the situation in which respondents tell things, which they actually do not understand, the respondents and participants were shortly tested about their understanding of the research questions and topics before and after the surveys and focus groups. Also, the researcher ensured that respondents and participants understood that they were participating voluntarily, explained that their identity will not be linked with any of the answers they gave, and that they were allowed to withdraw from a conversation at any moment. Moreover, it was necessary to find a fitting way to obtain consent, as during the preliminary field visit in October 2019 was noticed that signing forms gained some suspicion – and broke down rapport. After the questions and topics were explained, the researcher orally asked for consent. Besides, it was ensured that all people involved had accurate expectations about the research and understood how the data, and with what purposes, the data would be used.

Furthermore, the researcher was, as expected, seen as an outsider, which made collecting data more difficult. To partly overcome this problem the researcher decided to live in the Majete project area, so that the people could get a bit familiar with the researcher's presence. To further increase the familiarity, the researcher took some time to settle down, so that before the asking of questions started, the community could create the feeling that they could trust the researcher.

Moreover, the language barrier between the researcher and communities was avoided through a translator. While there are people in the area that speak English, they are few, and a significant bias would have been created if the researcher had only used data from English speaking people. On the other hand, since a translator was used, there is the potential risk that things got lost in translation. Moreover, one could question if the respondents and participants all felt comfortable enough to share all the information that the researchers asked from them with the translator as well.

Time was also a challenge. The researcher was in the field for seven weeks, as due to COVID-19 it was no longer safe to stay in Malawi. Seven weeks still seems to be a lot, but looking at the amount of data that had to be collected, and that the researcher expected to stay for fourteen weeks, time was in fact very short. In the end, the researcher was able to ensure that enough grounded data was collected. Nevertheless, it would have been good to cross-check the collected data with more interviews. Especially so since the concepts used in

the conceptual model of this research are relatively normative. The elements to which weighting can be attached are limited. Due to this it was important as a researcher to maintain an objective view, and ensure that as many tangible outcomes of these concepts as possible were collected. While it was taken into consideration, it was decided not to ask someone else to conduct the interviews, as an outsider would have had to travel to and from the Majete project area, which would have unnecessarily exposed the communities to the coronavirus.

Moreover, it did make sense to change the age-category to a more culturally accepted category. Yet, this makes comparing data with older, or other, internal documents from The Hunger Project more difficult. Also, because of this 'new' age-category, other researchers should be careful when comparing findings from this paper with other literature.

Last but not least, as random sampling was not possible, there is a risk that the researcher did not speak with a representative part of the youngsters in the area. That is why only descriptive statistics is used, to make sure that no 'claims' are made, with inferential statistics, that are not possible to make based on the collected data, with the methods used.

5. Opportunities for youth in the Majete project area

When African Parks came to the Majete project area, and the park was fenced, local communities became economically displaced. They used to enjoy the benefits of the park and its resources, but due to the fencing this became more difficult than before. Access to farm plots in the park and the gathering of grasses, (fire)wood, traditional medicines and other resources became heavily restricted, or like an elderly man explained: *“We used to graze cattle in there [the park]. But now we have to go to other sides. The fence makes it more difficult to go in there [the park].”*

Although different kinds of community development activities were implemented by African Parks over the years, by 2010, communities around the Majete Wildlife Reserve were still poverty-struck. To strengthen the opportunities for local communities, a collaboration between African Parks and The Hunger Project was established in 2011. Since then, these organizations have initiated a wide variety of community development activities. This has created various economic opportunities in the context of access limitations imposed on the villages surrounding the park due to the fencing of the reserve. Yet, by the end of 2019, the inclusiveness of youth in these development activities could still be questioned. The necessity to study economic opportunities for young people in the area in greater detail, and to identify the necessary infrastructure to support youngsters with setting-up and running businesses, became clear.

5.1. Economic opportunities

The respondents in the surveys were asked what, in their view, the main opportunity in the Majete project area is to earn a livelihood. Figure 14 displays that self-employment, piece work and farming are seen as the main opportunities. Moreover, there is (almost) no formal employment in the Majete project area; only 2 out of the 56 participants mentioned that they are formally employed:

“Since we don’t have companies here [in the Majete project area] and African Parks does not employ in large numbers, the only chance here is self-employment” (focus group, Majete 2).

“... it is not that we don't want to be employed, it is just that companies wouldn't come here. It is difficult to reach this area” (Female, 26).

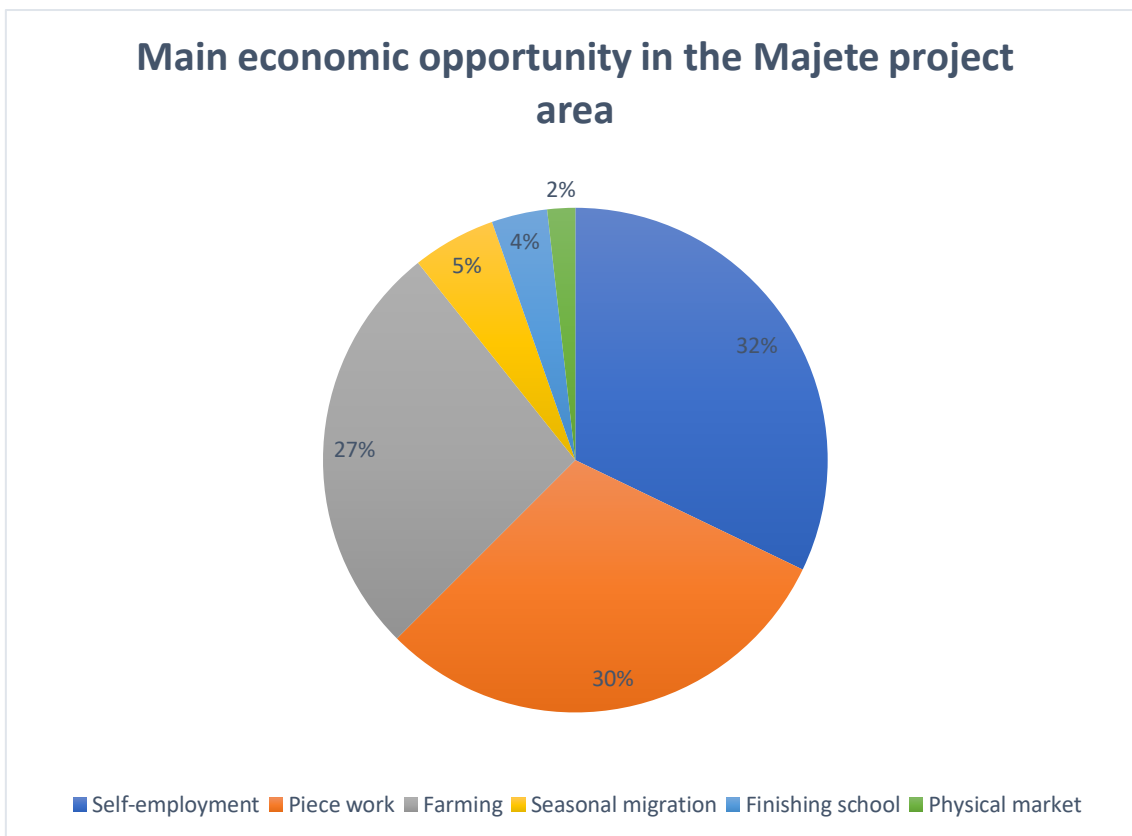


Figure 14 main economic opportunity for youth in the Majete project area (own work, 2020).

Yet, there are differences between Majete 2 and 3. In table 3 can be seen that, in Majete 2, self-employment is mentioned more often, while in Majete 3 piece work³⁹ is seen as more important. Based on the literature one could wonder if this difference has something to do with age; older people might have more abilities to run their own business (OECD, 2018a). Though, the average age among the participants is almost the same in the two epicenters. In Majete 2 the average age of the respondents is 23,04 and in Majete 3 this is 23,23.

Next to the main opportunity, respondents were asked if they see other opportunities in the area (more than one answer possible). In figure 15 the other economic opportunities are displayed. Again, self-employment, farming and piece work are the most popular. In total 52 of the 56 respondents mentioned self-employment either as most important, or as other important opportunity in the Majete project area.

Epicenter	Self-employment	Farming	Piece work
Majete 2	44%	32%	12%
Majete 3	23%	23%	45%

Table 3 differences in most important economic opportunity between Majete 2 and 3 (own work, 2020).

³⁹ Such as working on someone’s field, fetching water, washing clothes or extinguishing fire in the park.

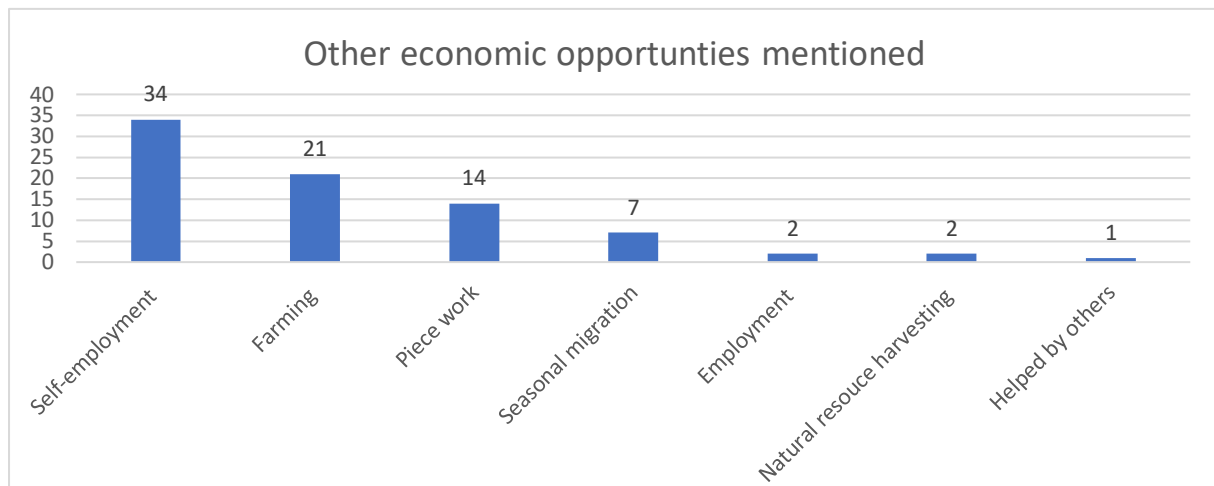


Figure 15 other economic opportunities mentioned by youth in the Majete project area⁴⁰ (own work, 2020).

Influence of the park, African Parks and The Hunger Project in the Majete project area

Although some events created by the Majete Wildlife Reserve, like could be expected based on literature, do influence the communities in the Majete project area in a negative way⁴¹, and people seem to have difficulties to speak freely about these disadvantages ([appendix 7](#)), the presence of African Parks is also associated with new economic opportunities and improved the living conditions. Like concluded in a focus group in Majete 2: “There are a lot of benefits for us, more than disadvantages.”, or as shown by this extract:

“At first, when I was young, we settled here [migrated from another area], because we wanted a lot from the park. We were getting timber, and herbs from the park, we killed animals and sold them elsewhere ... at first, we were worried. When African Parks fenced the park, how were we getting our daily bread? Without entering the park? But now our life is better, then when we relied on the park. Because of these organizations there are now boreholes ... [and] African Parks pays university fees ... [and] The Hunger Project is here to support with daily basic needs” (Male, 36).

African Parks pays for school fees at primary and secondary level for marginalized families and orphans, and the conservation organization built a couple of schools in the area.

Furthermore, communities around the park are being trained in beekeeping. Also, African Parks might pay the fees for public universities for young people from the Majete project

⁴⁰ Respondents mentioned economic opportunities that in their view are also important, next to the main economic opportunity mentioned in a previous question. More than one answer possible.

⁴¹ Among other things, the existence of limitation of access to natural resources in the park, higher pressure on land and human-wildlife conflicts due to the inadequate fencing ([appendix 7](#)).

area. Nevertheless, the knowledge about this is not widespread. African Parks and The Hunger Project could put more effort into spreading knowledge under which circumstances African Parks is willing to pay for university fees.

One of the things many people mentioned is that thanks to the fencing of the park, The Hunger Project came working in the Majete project area, and that this changed the trajectory of the area, like concluded in the focus groups in Majete 2:

“The closing of the park, it was a blow to our faces. Our fathers and uncles were going in, kill animals and bring food home. They were also selling. In the beginning we were scared, but to our surprise it went better ... all [positive] changes that happen here is due to the fencing of the park.”

The Hunger Project introduced⁴² vocational skill trainings, savings groups and provides farming input loans. Moreover, communities are trained in modern farming techniques and physical-infrastructure is improved (for example: boreholes, food banks, health clinics, electricity connection, and, among other things, nursery schools and improved pit-latrines have been built). Also, trainings about the importance of good nutrition, especially for young children and pregnant women are given by The Hunger Project. As well as trainings on health-related topic (like Malaria and HIV/Aids). Furthermore, a pass-on-goat scheme has been implemented, in which elderly people received two female goats and one male goat. After these goats gave birth, the elders keep the first-borns and pass-on the two female goats and the male goat to the next family in the scheme. This reduces the pressure on the park, and made the communities more food secure: *“Most people did not have any livestock. But The Hunger Project introduced the pass-on-goat scheme. This works. We don’t need to kill animals in the park for our proteins. Whenever we need meat, we can slaughter a goat.*

⁴² In [Appendix 1](#) and [2](#) the epicenter strategy, and implemented activities by The Hunger Project, are shown in more detail.

5.1.1. Self-employment

The respondents from the survey and the participants from the focus groups see self-employment as the most important opportunity in the Majete project area. Nevertheless, only 27% percent of the respondents is running a business at this moment (figure 16).

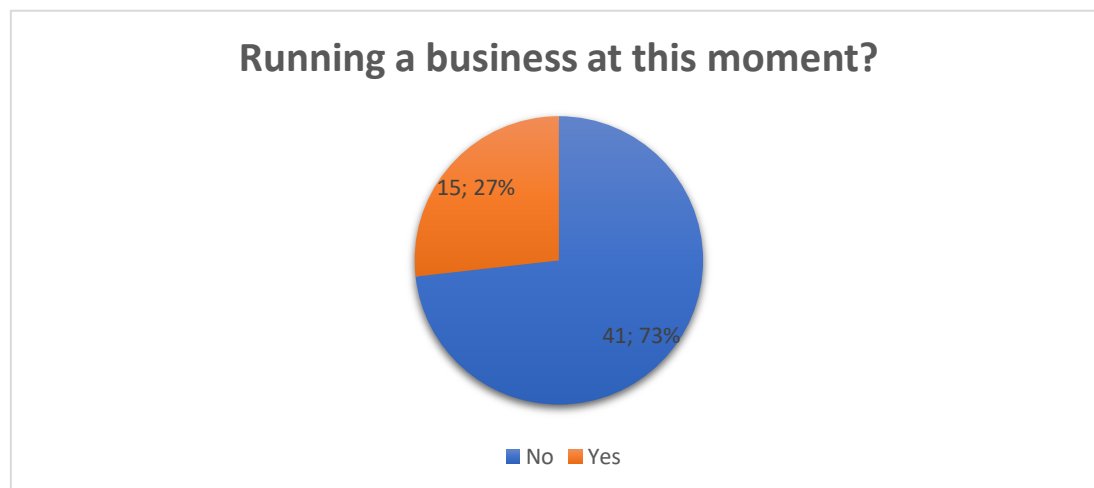


Figure 16 percentage of respondents that are running a business in the Majete project area (own work, 2020).

Most of the entrepreneurs have a trading business, this can either be a physical shop, or buying and selling goods at different marketplaces. Only 6 out of 15 entrepreneurs provide a service, or add value to the goods before re-selling them. The service that the respondents provide is either tailoring, or running a nursery school. 3 of the 4 respondent that do tailoring gained their skills via the vocational training provided by The Hunger Project. However, 2 of them do not own the machine. They borrowed it from someone else and have to share their income. They mention that the earnings are low: “2,000 Kwacha⁴³. Most people do not bring clothes now. As there is not a lot of money in the community. It is just before harvesting. I am just repairing old clothes. Not making new ones from fabric. So, 1,000 [Kwacha] for me, and 1,000 [Kwacha] for the owner, a month” (Male, 20). As shown by these extracts, in general the amount the entrepreneurs earn are low:

“I buy 15 kilograms of salt at Chapananga trading center for 3,000 Kwacha. I sell everything for 4,000 [Kwacha] here in July village. I make a profit of a 1,000 Kwacha. Sometimes it goes fast, sometimes it takes a long time to sell everything” (Female, 28).

⁴³ When conducting the fieldwork 1USD was 735 Malawian Kwacha (XE, 2020).

“The profit is just buying salt for the day, and then I just remain with my working capital. So, no real profit. Just some money to use the same day”
(Female, 30).

Nonetheless, the 15 entrepreneurs⁴⁴ on average earn almost 30,000 Kwacha a month. However, one should realize that 30,000 Kwacha is still only \$40, which means that on average these youth entrepreneurs do not even earn \$1.50 a day. Moreover, among the respondents there is only one person that earns more than 100,000 Kwacha a month; just over \$4 a day. This woman has a trading business and a shop together with her husband.

5.1.2. Piece works

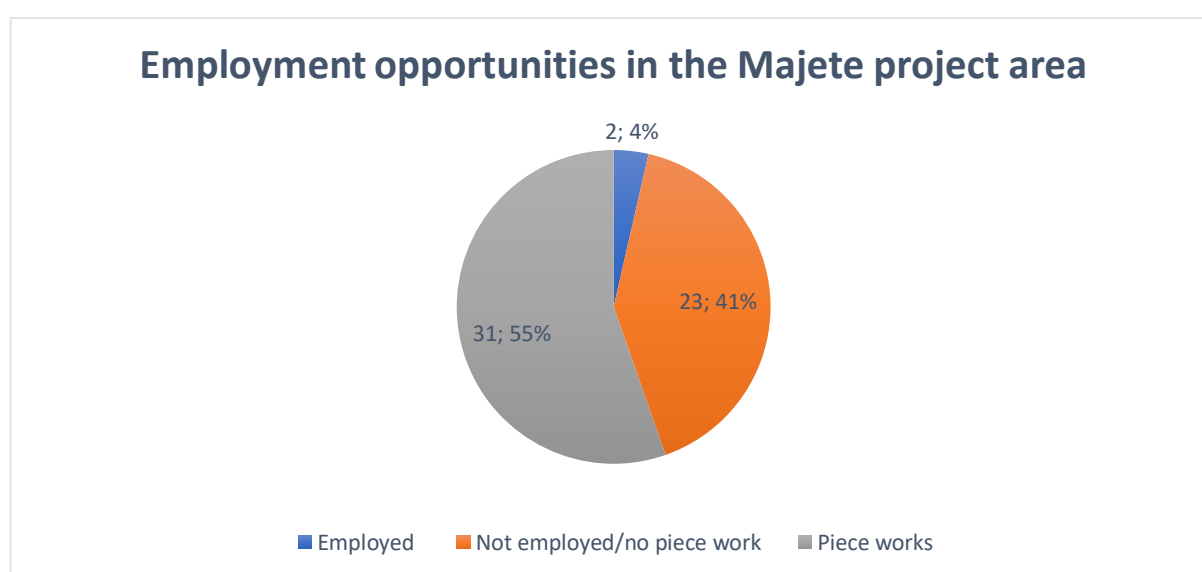


Figure 17 employment opportunities in the Majete project area (own work, 2020).

Although almost no one is formally employed, 31 community members mentioned that they earn some income by conducting piece work in the park or for other people: *“Piece work, that other people have small tasks we can do. And we get some money for this. This money we can use for either consumption, or for the purchase of seeds.”* However, the earnings are low: 100 Kwacha for washing the clothes of a neighbor, 200 Kwacha for fetching water or 500-1,000 Kwacha for working a day on someone’s field. Moreover, these ‘jobs’ are not available every day for everyone. In a month most people being dependent on piece work earn between 1,500 and 5,000 Kwacha. This money is just used to buy some cooking oil, salt or soap for the household. Still, for some, this feels like an opportunity: *“We are the poorest of the poor, it is difficult to get money. We can now improve our situation through piece*

⁴⁴ Of the 15 entrepreneurs, 9 are traders, 4 are working in tailoring, 1 owns a nurse school and 1 has a business in collecting natural resources and cooking and selling food.

works” (Male, 24). Moreover, others see it as an intermediate strategy to reach desired business outcomes: *“When youth are doing piece works, they save money and can start-up a business afterwards with the money”* (Male, 20). Nevertheless, as shown by this range of extracts, doing piece work offers few opportunities; the chance to break through the unsustainable cycle of dependence is low:

“Now we depend on piece works, but the sustainable way would be to do it [earn money] through business” (Female, 19).

“We have access to piece work ... But there is not enough [piece work for everyone]” (Female, 25).

“I did some piece works, I saved the money and started buying and selling fish. Nevertheless, it is difficult to develop the business. We have little money, that we use for different purposes, so that makes it difficult for the businesses to grow” (Male, 25).

Not many youth see piece work as a sustainable, well-working way of improving living conditions. And the dependence on other people remains high, while this is something people see as a goal; not being dependent on others: *“I am dreaming of just relying on my own. Having my own business, and not being dependent on others”* (Male, 24).

5.1.3. Farming

“People [in the Majete project area] rely on farming” (Male, 30). According to youth, farming does offer economic opportunities to improve living conditions in the Majete project area:

“... now I am only doing farming for consumption. But if there is a possibility to do farming as a business, this can for sure help to empower the youth” (Female, 21).

“... they only thing I can do, is to make sure that I do farming. One can do two ways of farming. Rain-fed and dry seasons [irrigation] farming. You can sell crops” (Female, 26).

“... if people put effort in farming, for example cotton, after selling the cotton they can now start small businesses” (Female, 19).

Cash crop farming

Yet, to do cash-crop farming the plot must be large enough, as growing maize, sorghum and millet for household consumption remains important:

“Farms can bring money into the area. Especially cotton and sesame, these are grown for cash. If one has a bigger plot of land and grows this [cotton, sesame or tobacco], one can start a business. With the earnings from the growing and selling [of] cash crops one can gain the capital to start-up something” (focus group, Majete 2).

Nonetheless, 35 of the 56 respondents have a plot of two acres or smaller, of these 35 youngsters, 17 sell crops. One farmer is just selling to buy some soap or other consumption purposes for the day, while on average these 17 farmers earn 19,000 Kwacha per season.

Besides, 15 respondents do not farm. 10 of these non-farming young people are still living with their parents. It is striking that the average age of these 15 non-farming youth is 21,2, 2 years lower than the overall-average.

Regarding the 6 farmers with a plot larger than 2 acres (utmost is 4 acres), they on average earn more than 43,000 Kwacha per season. Yet, it is good to mention that only 4 of these 6 farmers sell crops. These 6 farmers are on average 24 years old, with the youngest being 22, and the oldest 27.

Nevertheless, some farmers show that plots do not have to be big to successful grow cash crops. A 30-year-old female with a plot of 1,5 acres in rainy season and 1 acre in dry season grew tobacco last year, and sold this for 200,000 Kwacha. Another female, 24 years old, with a plot of 3 acres in rainy season, and no dry season plot, sold her cotton two years ago for 300,000 Kwacha. This last woman only owns 1 acre of land, but is renting 2 acres for in total 24,000 Kwacha a season. Which is a normal amount in this area; around 10,000 Kwacha per season per acre.

Dry season farming

Next to the growing of cash crops like Tobacco and Cotton, growing tomatoes or other vegetables with dry season or irrigation farming has influence on household income: *“There are many ways to earn income. Those close to the river they can grow veggies [vegetables], with this money one can start a business. We can go to Chapananga for selling [the*

vegetables]" (focus group, Majete 2). Looking at the 56 respondents, 12 of them mentioned using dry season farming. These farmers either use irrigation infrastructure, or their plots are in floodplains and they are able to use the moisture left in the soil after floods. 7 of these 12 farmers are from Chigwata, 4 from Muonda and 1 from Pearson village. Respondents in Misomali, Chipphale, July, and the majority of the respondents in Pearson and Muonda, mentioned not having dry season farming opportunities at this moment. On average the ones that do use dry season farming earn 50,000 Kwacha per season with their farming activities. Comparing this with people that do not have dry season farming plots or irrigation infrastructure, those farmers do not even earn 11,000 Kwacha on average per season.

Dry season farming offers economic opportunities for young people in het Majete project area, and respondents in a focus group in Majete 3 concluded that growing vegetables is more suitable for young people, than for older adults: *"Older adults or elderly plant maize, we [youth] are more involved in [growing] vegetables, as it costs more labor. It is labor intensive to grow these crops. But for this to do, we need access to input or capital, to make the investment."*

5.1.4. Natural Resources

In the past many individuals around the Majete Wildlife Reserve (partly) depended on the park for their livelihoods. Currently, this dependence (forcedly) has become less, yet, opportunities are still there to use natural resources, both inside, and outside the park's boundaries. Some youth mentioned that, although not often, they do enter the park to hunt ([appendix 7](#)). Also, African Parks allows the communities around the Majete Wildlife Reserve to enter the park once a year through the 'natural resource gates' to fetch grasses. Nevertheless, communities prefer that this would be possible more often, and that next to grasses, also traditional medicines and (fire)wood could be collected ([appendix 7](#)).

In the past, charcoal burning was used as livelihood-source in the Majete project area, as a result the area suffered severely under deforestation. That is why this 'natural infrastructure' offers less opportunities than in the past, except for July village:

"There is a lot of bush here, we have a lot of trees. Some people can think of doing a business in charcoal burning ... but looking at the nearest market, it is just not possible to do this as a business" (Male, 37).

“You can do charcoal burning [here in July], but there is no vehicle that can reach this area. It is difficult to sell. Nevertheless, ... I started my business, the shop over there, with profits from charcoal burning” (Female, 20).

Moreover, water does offer opportunities that can be useful for (young) people in the Majete project area, like for a 28-year-old woman that eats fish seven days a week. She goes to the river and catches the fish for her and her family herself. And, like mentioned earlier in this chapter, opportunities arise for youth by using irrigation farming.

5.1.5. Migration

Although mentioned by youth in October 2019 that migration is not an opportunity in the Majete project area, it became clear that this is not totally true. Not many people migrate permanent to and from the Majete project area. Nevertheless, seasonal migration is happening a lot; just for short periods, like discussed in one of the focus groups in Majete 3: *“Some of us go to Mozambique. To go there for work or business, and then come back. They stay there for short periods.”* And only during particular times of the year: *“We go from June to November, to Mozambique and other areas around Malawi. To find work”* (Male, 27). This seasonal migration, when it is not the agricultural season in the Majete project area, is really a way of living in this area: *“To go Mozambique for piece works. That is our lifestyle, going there, and taking some money back [to the Majete project area]”* (Male, 24).

Looking at the respondents of the survey, the majority that goes is men (figure 18 and figure 19). The most popular destination is Mozambique, as can be seen on the map ([appendix 8](#)), the area is bordering Mozambique.

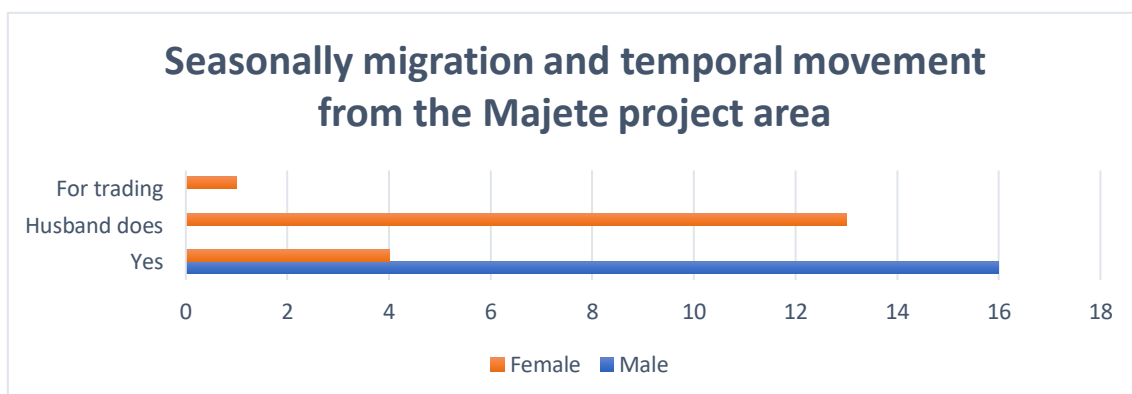


Figure 18 kind of seasonal migration and temporal movement from the Majete project area split out by gender (own work, 2020).

Seasonally migration and temporal movement from the Majete project area

Does migrate temporally = 'yes', 'husband does', and 'for trading' combined

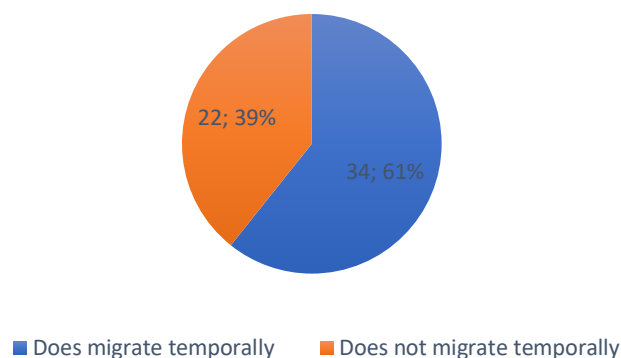


Figure 19 total seasonal migration and temporal movement from the Majete project area by respondents (own work, 2020).

Although many people use migration to earn some money, it is not a 'real' aspiration. People in the Majete project area see it as a temporal solution; it is not the end strategy: *"I want to go to Mozambique, to earn money there and have enough money to start a business"* (Male, 25). It is rather used as a strategy to gather capital and start-up a business: *"[I do] not [migrate] anymore, but I went in the past [to Mozambique]. Now it is not needed anymore, as I am now running the groceries business"* (Male, 22). Or like concluded in a focus group in Majete 3: *"... we go to Mozambique and then have money from piece work to rent [land in the Majete project area]."* Nevertheless, the earnings are not high: *"last year I went in July [to Mozambique]. I went there for cultivation ... I got 8,000 Kwacha for two weeks of work"* (Male, 20). And youth mentions that the chances to break through the circle of dependence are low: *"... once we are back here [in the Majete project area], we just go back to zero again. As there is no opportunity to make money"* (Male, 20). Moreover, in a focus group in Majete 3 was explained that it is not legal to cross borders like this: *"Some of the young ones ... go to Mozambique for piece work. They are crossing the border illegally. Sometimes they are caught and arrested there."* To put it differently, as shown by these extracts, youth in the Majete project area see migration as a survival strategy, not as lifelong development:

“By migration to Mozambique, you just develop people in Mozambique. Not yourself. They just use your labor. Going to Mozambique is not a good option” (Male, 26).

“If we can do a business [here in the Majete project area], we self-create the jobs in our community. That is more sustainable, the work in Mozambique is not” (Male, 20).

Nevertheless, a lot of goods, both consumption goods and physical assets are cheaper in Mozambique. When infrastructure and mobility are right, a lot of profit can be made: *“We can for example buy motorbikes in Mozambique and sell them in Chikwawa, or even in Blantyre, a lot of profit can be made”* (focus group, Majete 2).

5.1.6. Trading opportunities

Moreover, in all focus groups it has been mentioned that the Majete project area offers good trading opportunities; whether it is buying motorbikes in Mozambique and selling them in Blantyre, buying chickens, goats and cows in the villages and selling them at Chikwawa, or buying groceries in Blantyre, Chikwawa or at Chapananga trading center and re-selling the goods in village-shops, the trust that people can earn a livelihood with trading is there. Nevertheless, to enjoy the benefits of this opportunity, youth must be able to make the needed investments, both in mobility and in trading goods.

5.2. Desire of change for young people in the Majete project area

What youngsters really aspire is achieving their entrepreneurial aspirations. Some youth might have intermediate aspirations, and use piece works, farming, natural resource harvesting and migration as an opportunity to earn some ‘working capital’. Nevertheless, although youth have a desire for change, both for achieving their intermediate- and entrepreneurial aspirations, there are limitations; only few young people reach their desired business outcomes. Yet, as shown by these extracts, the wish to be an entrepreneur; the urge of being independent is there:

“I am dreaming of just relying on my own, having my own business, and not being dependent on others.” (Male, 24).

“I want to be independent. If I have a business, I can live my own life, and stop being dependent on my parents.” (Female, 22)

“Many youth are still dependent on others ... If there would be access to loans, we would have the opportunity to start-up a business. We can then take care of ourselves.” (Female, 26).

“We have a lot of youth, who just stay put. With self-employment they can do something ... But they now can’t do anything.” (Male, 25).

Vignet Resilience

On an early morning at Chapananga market, I am asking one of the motorbike-boys to help me out for the day. I need to go to Muonda village, near the epicenter building of Majete 3, for a full day of surveys. The motorbike-driver I am using today is a familiar guy, I have used his service before, and he is a friend of my neighbor. There are more than enough motorbike taxi’s, and many are waiting to have a ride; the supply is high compared with the demand. Yet, I like to use the service of the boys of which I know they are not under influence, the road by itself is already dangerous enough. The young men driving me to Muonda was able to invest in his motorbike with the money he brought back from one of his working trips to South-Africa. And this is a large investment; a secondhand bike is already 280,000 Kwacha.

As always, before we go, he has to top-up his fuel. He is only topping-up with 500 Kwacha a time. Even though he was able to make this major investment in his motorbike, just like many others in this area, he is running his businesses with few working capital. And as one can understand, if a crisis arises in a household, this low working capital is easily used for other purposes.

To put it differently, even if young people succeed in starting-up a business in the Majete project area, this unfortunately says little about their ability to deal with shocks. As a result of low profits and working capital, the resilience of people is not high: *“Only one is doing a real business here. At this moment at least. All the other business owners have consumed their working capital”* (focus group, Majete 2).

2019 was a tough year for the area, with first Cyclone Idai (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs, 2019) and later insufficient rainfall (Famine Early Warning Systems Network, 2019). This resulted in people stopping with their businesses in

December 2019 and January 2020, as they consumed their working capital⁴⁵. 22 of the 40⁴⁶ respondents with business experience had to stop their entrepreneurial activities, due problems in their household, and now insufficient working capital to run their business. Some examples are shown in the range of experiences and extracts below:

"... due to problems. I consumed the capital, and now I am broke and cannot do business anymore. My working capital was 2,000 Kwacha" (Female, 21).

"My mom and father were suffering ... [I] used the profit from my business, now [I have] no [working] capital anymore" (Female, 26).

"I faced some other challenges ... I was selling shoes in Blantyre. But now I stay put again" (Male, 24).

"My business stopped, as my child needed to go to the hospital in Chikwawa ... my money was spent on these health costs. Now I do not have [working] capital anymore" (Female, 28).

"... I was running this shop up to December [2019]. But then there was starving in our family ... I used all the money for food. I had a working capital of 10,500 [Kwacha]" (Male, 23).

Despite these challenges, youngsters aspire to have businesses. They have the trust that self-employment will reduce their dependence; help them to break with their waitness. Youth in the Majete project area want to have businesses in which people come to them; that they mostly can stay put – by selling or providing a service, without moving around the area too much. Of course, when running a business, people are still dependent on others for their income. If they do not sell anything, they will not have any income. Yet, youth seem to see this differently. When doing piece works you, on a daily basis, are dependent on someone asking you to help him or her out. For employment the same thing, if your 'service' is not required anymore, you will not have a job, and have no income. Youth in the Majete project area see piece-work and employment differently than self-employment; the demand 'purely' comes from the other side. When running a business, and for example: selling salt, tailoring

⁴⁵ Confronted with poor harvest, it was observed that households tend to consume the working capital of their businesses to buy food. Although it is positive that a famine is prevented, as youngsters have built some resources, it is not the way to sustainable development.

⁴⁶ Some more respondents with business experience do not run a business at this moment. Yet, those deliberately chose to quit their businesses, and were not forced to do so as the 22 respondents mentioned.

shirts or manufacturing chairs, the demand is different. The demand from others is focused on something that you as an entrepreneur can make or deliver; a service that not many others offer. While anyone could fetch water for someone in times of need, and there are plenty of (young) people to choose from; those dependent on piece works and employment are dependent on people that 'award' them with a job. In contrast, youth see self-employment as equal to independence.

Furthermore, although farming does offer opportunities in the Majete project area, land is scarce. Of the 41 participants that have a farm, 11 do not own (part) of the land they are farming on, as the availability of enough agricultural land remains a challenge in the area:

"There are youth who have to share their plot with their parents. Or actually, their parents share part of their plot with their children. Some people go to the village head and ask for a plot. It can be provided, but it is difficult. The pressure on land is high" (focus group, Majete 3).

Moreover, according to youth it is difficult to make good profit with farming, as the plots are small and self-sufficient farming remains important. The small plot size is partly created by population growth; the plots of the parents are divided among the children. Yet, in Majete 3 is mentioned that this process is aggravated by the fencing of the park:

"First, we could farm in the park, we had plots there and used to grow our crops. Then when the park was fenced this was not possible anymore. The fence increases the already existing problem of youth getting their own plot, it is difficult to get land [in this area]."

As an alternative land can be rented: *"The land is here, we can use it, either by renting or owning, but we can use it to run a farming business."* Nevertheless, in the same focus group in Majete 3 is mentioned that renting land is not sustainable: *"We can get land by renting, but this is not sustainable."* Receiving owned land from a village head provides more security for the future, yet: *"This [receiving land from a village head] is difficult however, there is not that much free [unoccupied] land available [in this area]."*

5.2.1. Opportunities, aspirations and attitudes

However, it is not only about opportunities and aspirations, but also about attitudes.

According to a young man (24 years old): *“I think many young people need to get a strong message ... They are being lazy. And it would be good to reach them with a message that working hard is important.”* Or like a group of women mentioned during a focus group: *“Life is not okay, just because most of the youth have nothing to do. Then you go and do immoral businesses, like drinking, smoking and stealing. Especially boys. They take goats and sell them somewhere else.”* Nevertheless, a 21-year-old female mentioned that these issues are also discussed in groups of young people together: *“I joined a kind of youth training; a type of training where we educate one and other on good mores, you know good behavior.”*

Though, facts remain; even if young people have a desire for change, the ‘right’ aspiration and the ‘perfect’ attitude, and the opportunities are there, it does not say that youth can enjoy the same benefits as older people; have the same economic opportunities in the Majete project area:

“In Malawi we say, youth are the leaders of tomorrow. This is said often in this area [the Majete project area]. Their chance will come. That is why many are not involved. They do not get the chance at this moment, as they are just the leaders of tomorrow. They have to wait for their time to come. But when will tomorrow come?” (Extension worker).

All in all, there is a gap between existing and needed infrastructure; for youth to enjoy the benefits of the economic opportunities in the area, the right infrastructure needs to be in place, and accessible to them. In the next two chapters the existing and needed infrastructure, and how this infrastructure could work for youth, is discussed in more detail.

6. Available infrastructure in the Majete project area

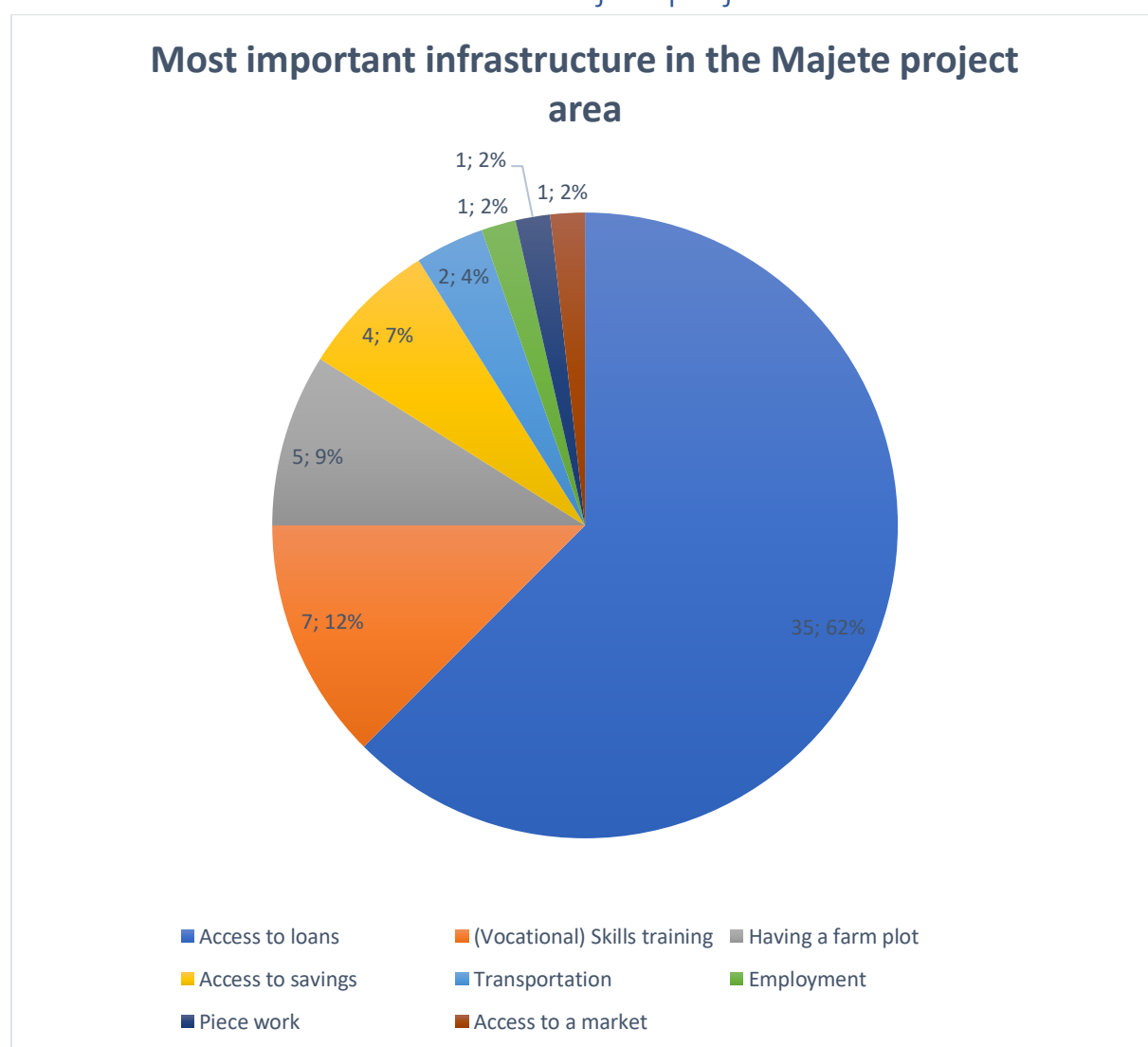


Figure 20 most important infrastructure in the Majete project area (own work, 2020).

In the survey, respondents have been asked what in their opinion, is the most important infrastructure needed to set up a business in the Majete project area, and whether this infrastructure is available and accessible to them. In figure 20 can be seen that access to loans is mentioned by a large majority of the 56 respondents as the most important infrastructure needed. Moreover, 12 people that did not mention access to loans as most important infrastructure, did mention the importance of it at a question about other needed infrastructure. Also, access to skills, a farm plot and savings are often mentioned as the most important infrastructure. Furthermore, access to skills is mentioned by 18 respondents as other important infrastructure. Besides, access to farm plots, savings, physical infrastructure (like roads and markets), farm input and equipment, and the pass-on-goat scheme are mentioned as other important infrastructure.

6.1. Infrastructure to generate and store money

Village Savings and Loans Associations

Although savings groups are largely available in the area, the involvement of youth remains low. Looking at the respondents of the survey, 41% mentioned that they are part of a savings group. Nevertheless, while more than 50% of the women respondents are part of a savings group, just over 20% of the men are. In the area the programming of VSLA is mainly focused on reaching and empowering women, which might explain the gender difference. This difference is also acknowledged by an extension worker, as well as that the majority of these groups are normally adults:

“In Majete 3 there are 44 VSLA-groups. Approximately 75% of the group members are women and only 10% are youth. Among youth the majority is also women. The involvement of youth is low due to limited access to funds ... Most cannot make the contribution ... Youth is still dependent. When parents have troubles, they cannot contribute, which explains the low involvement [of youth] ... For youth it is hard to make savings. Few have money themselves. They depend on their parents.”

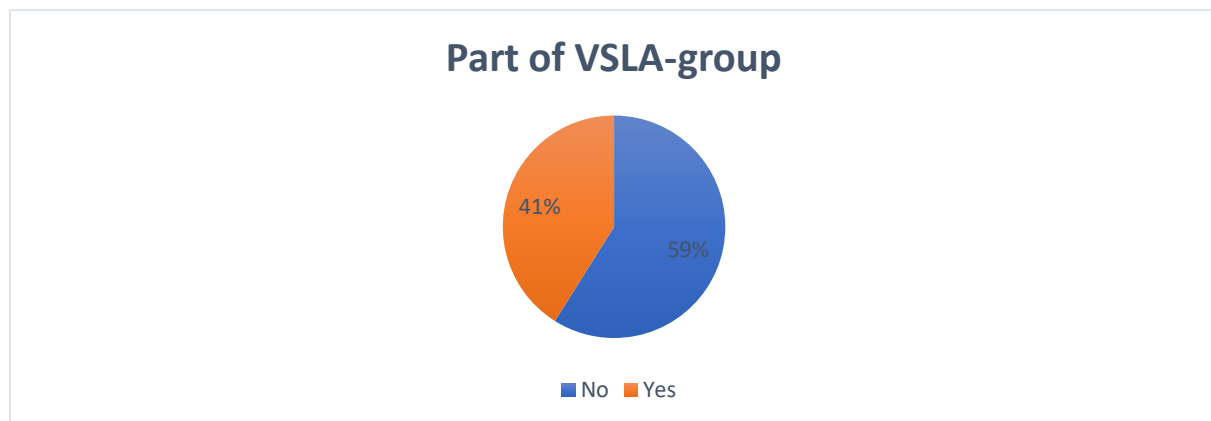


Figure 21 percentage of respondents' part of a VSLA-group (own work, 2020).

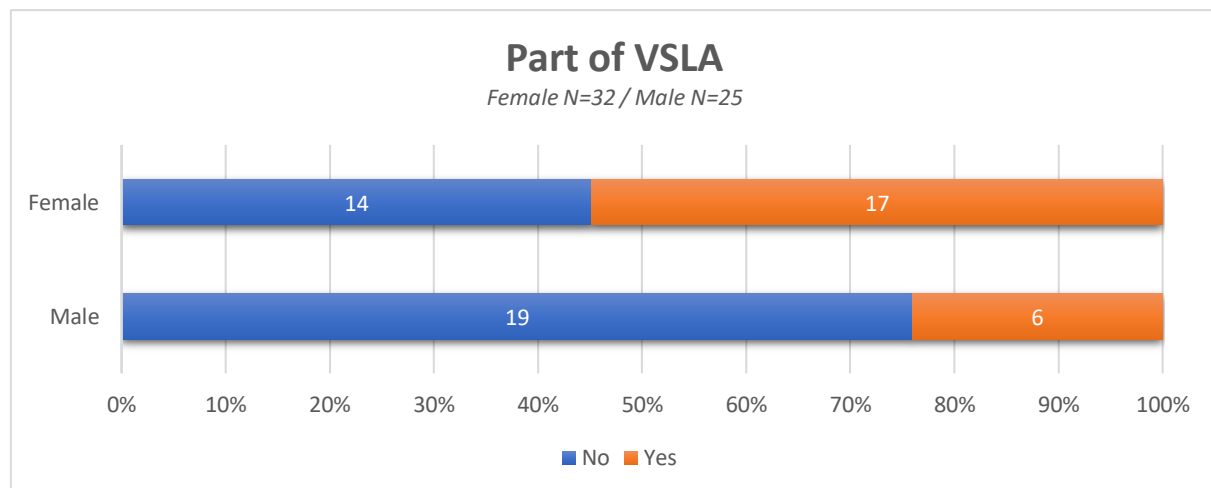


Figure 22 number respondents' part of a VSLA-group split out by gender (own work, 2020).

The issues that is raised by the extension worker, about the feasibility of youth joining VSLA-groups, is also concluded in a focus group in Majete 2:

“The money from VSLA is too low. And it is mostly from 30 years onwards. Young people fail to join the savings groups. To get money for their own, that is difficult for young people. Older ones have goats and harvest crops and get money. They can invest this money. They can join a savings group. Young people still depend on their parents and that is why they need outside money [external loans].”

Loans and share-outs from savings groups

Of the 56 participants of the survey, 23 are currently a member of one of the savings groups. 20 of them completed one or more savings cycles, and 15 had a loan during the last savings cycle. Nevertheless, next to 5 people of which the savings were too low to get a loan, 12 had a loan of 25,000 Kwacha or less. If the savings are too low, no loan can be taken. The minimum amount differs per group. Yet, a 20-year-old male had a share-out 25,000 Kwacha, and was not able to get a loan. Besides, people with low savings do not really have the opportunity to do something productive with their share-out. Like mentioned in the literature, share-outs are often in times when extra cash is needed (Karlan et al., 2017; Brannen, 2010). If the share-out is low, people end up consuming everything. Even people that have been part of savings groups for long period, like a 28-year-old woman who completed already 5 savings cycles faced this issue. This year she is no part of her group, as she does not have anything to contribute; she consumed everything she had.

Moreover, of the 20 people that had a share-out during last savings cycle, 11 were able to (partly) invest in a business, a house, in school equipment or to hire people to work in their garden. The 9 people who consumed the whole amount, on average had share-out of not even 20,000 Kwacha. With some of them as low as 2,000 to 6,000 Kwacha.

Loans

Of the 56 respondents of the survey, only 6 mentioned that they have access to loans separate from VSLA. Three of them can get loans from family, two have the opportunity to borrow money from ‘richer’ individuals in their village and one mentioned that an agency contacted him, yet, in the end he was never able to really borrow money from this agency.

Although there is some access to loans in these communities, these are just informal channels, that are not available at a large scale and with high interest rates: *“I once borrowed 10,000 Kwacha. I had to pay back 20,000 [Kwacha] ... I accessed the loan via an individual”* (Male, 23). One particular individual, 36 years old ‘loan shark’, shared information about his money lending business in an interview:

“We used to plant cotton and tomatoes ... Now I have money, I lend it to other people. I charge the people 50% percent interest. They have to pay the money back in 30 days. A lot of people used to come. But now I have less money [108,000 Kwacha left], so I have less to borrow out ... The demand is high, as there are only a few people here that do this kind of business”

Moreover, this loan shark also explained that he needs collateral if someone wants to borrow money from him:

“I am asking collateral ... like a goat, bicycle, radio or solar [panel]. If they fail to pay, I can claim that ... If it does not work out, I can go to the police. Then the police will tell the person that they should pay back.”

Although one could already question if people can be really helped with these kind of interest rates, and whether this is ethical at all or not. This loan shark system is also not working for youth, as they do not own (m)any assets: *“We [youth] do not manage to borrow ... as we do not have collateral”* (Female, 25). Furthermore, another person shared a story about how a loan shark demanded him to pay back the money before the pay-back date, this cost him his business: *“I stopped with the business, because I borrowed the money I was using from someone else ... already during the [pay-back] period the owner came to claim his money back. So now I don't have enough working capital to run the business”* (Male, 23).

Altogether, this loan shark system is not something to build on, the lenders are unreliable and ask exorbitant interest rates. Nevertheless, few alternatives are available; people are so badly in need for capital that they are willing to pay between 50-100% interest per month.

Savings mechanisms

Next to savings groups, people in the Majete project area also use other savings mechanisms. Of the 56 participants of the survey, 20 use other savings mechanisms (figure

23). These mechanisms are used to ‘store’ money, so that it can be used in times of need, or to invest in a business opportunity when the times come:

“My husband bought a welding machine, he can now fix broken motorbikes. We were able to buy this after cultivating cotton. It is a cash crop here. After the harvest we invested the money in cattle. After the electricity came, we made sure that our house was electrified. We sold the cows; they were just a savings mechanism. With the money we bought the welding machine”
(Female, 24).

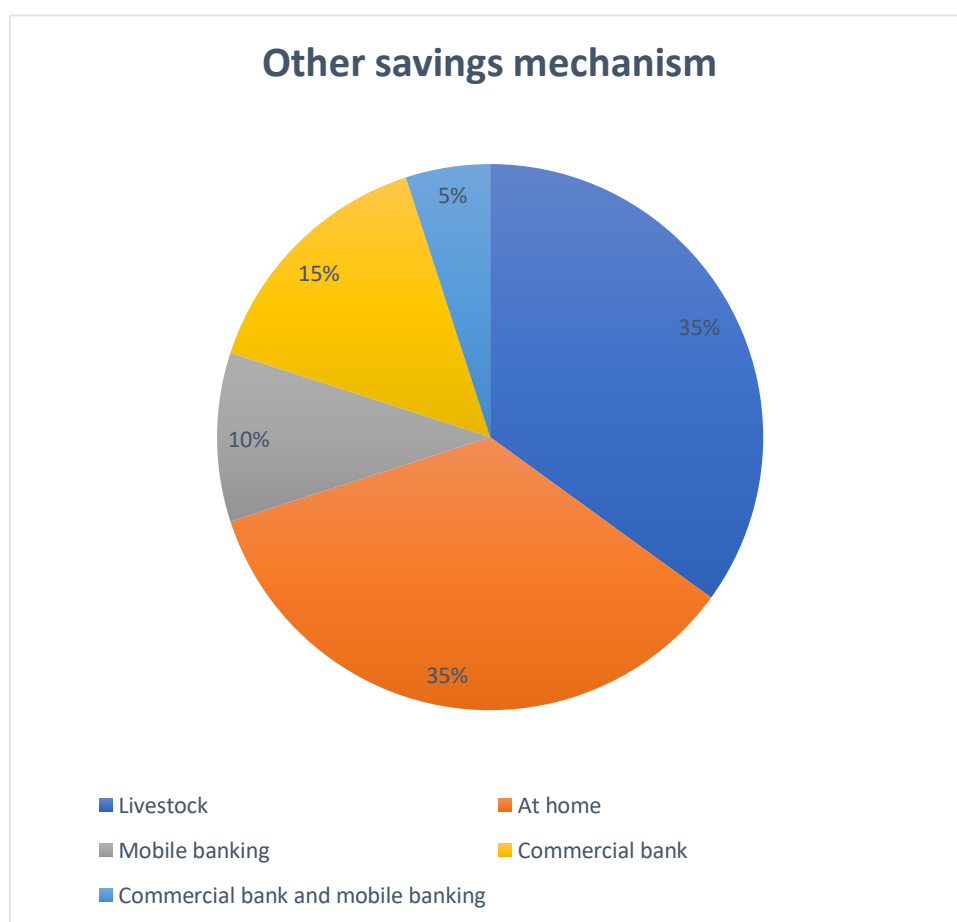


Figure 23 other saving mechanism used by respondents (own work, 2020).

Not many people use commercial banks. Though, in Misomali 30% of the respondents mentioned that they currently use a commercial bank. Looking at the geographical location of Misomali ([Map 2](#)), when comparing this with Pearson, July and Chiphale (all Majete 2), Misomali is closer to Chikwawa Boma; the nearest town, with the nearest commercial banks.

Most people save at home, or invest their savings in livestock. However, there is a risk involved when investing in livestock. During the lean-season, just before the harvest,

when many people in the area need to buy food, the prices of livestock drop. As in multiple households a crisis arises, many people try to sell their livestock, while less people have the means to buy them. As the supply increases, and the demand decreases, prices fall. Traders take advantage of this situation, and buy the goats, cows and chickens at low prices. Community members lose money. They bought livestock when the prices are high; after the harvest there is enough cash in the communities, and people start buying livestock. Yet, they also start selling around the same time; when the need in all households for food is high.

6.2. Physical infrastructure

Better physical infrastructure makes it easier for people to travel around the Majete project area; conducting business, reaching schools and accessing health services becomes possible for local communities, as shown by this extract from a focus group in Majete 2:

“Previously, when the bridge was not there yet, all our goods were dropped at the trading center. If we ordered something from Blantyre, the minivans or trucks only brought it to Chapananga. We again had to pay to get the goods here, at our own trading center. This was expensive. As the water most of the time was high. It was difficult to cross the river. Now ... It is the same price as to the trading center [Chapananga]. This bridge improved the situation here a lot.”

But also, other infrastructure, like electricity, improved the opportunities for (young) entrepreneurs in the area: *“Electricity is now available. This brings viable business opportunities. Firstly, we can now sell cold drinks. Also, people have opened barbershops. Thanks to the electricity.”* (focus group, Majete 2). The importance of good infrastructure, and how this influences an area like the Majete project area was well described by an NGO employee:

“If you compare this area with 10 years ago, a lot changed ... the (internet) connectivity of this area improved. And look at the trading center that is currently build in Chapananga. Of course, there are many shops now. But the infrastructure that is currently being built by the government will help to further improve the area. Those shops are big and good. It will attract many traders. Of course, the roads remain a challenge. But that might improve in

the future as well. Look what kind of difference the bridge [between Majete 2 and the Chapananga trading center] made. This area is improving well."

Clinic

When African Parks fenced the park and the collection of traditional medicines became impossible, the communities were promised clinics. When The Hunger Project came to the area clinics were built in or near the epicenter buildings. Yet, so far, the clinics in Majete 2 and 3 have not been staffed. The district health office (DHO), and the Minister of Health himself, promised that the clinic would be staffed, but so far, they were not able to keep this promise. Next to the fact that it is more difficult for the communities to access health services, also entrepreneurial ideas that have lived in the minds of many (young) entrepreneurs cannot be executed yet:

"... the DHO did not staff the clinic yet ... If the clinic would be open, many people would come here ... They need food, family might need refreshments when visiting. It offers opportunities ... Also, the doctors won't buy their food at Chikwawa ... We can earn something by making sure we meet their, and their patients, needs."

Rest house

In Majete 2, near the epicenter building, the community is currently constructing a rest house. This rest house will mainly be used by traders visiting the area, as Majete 2 and 3 are too far from the main gate of the park; tourists cannot enter the park from this side, and there are no plans to change this in the (near) future. Nevertheless, when the lodge is finished, new business opportunities for the community members will arise:

"We are currently constructing this rest house. It will help us to generate income for when The Hunger Project is gone. Next to the income that will be generated at community level, the guests need to buy groceries ... people need to buy toothpaste and soap. This can be bought from our shops. Maybe someone can open a restaurant, so people can order food from that place."

6.3. Skills and trainings

To create more opportunities, and reduce dependence on the park and farming, (young) people are trained by The Hunger Project in vocational skills. 27% of the respondents mentioned being vocationally trained. The opportunity to use skills gathered in vocational

training is often mentioned as important infrastructure for young people to start-up a business. 7 people mentioned that the availability of skills development is the most important infrastructure in the Majete project area to help young people to set up a business. Moreover, an additional 18 people mentioned that skills are necessary, but not the most important infrastructure in the Majete project area.



Figure 24 percentage of respondents vocational trained (own work, 2020).

Furthermore, the importance of vocational skills was mentioned by a village-head in an interview: *“The area is really in poverty. Those initiatives, like skills development, can help to sustain the lives of the youth. Some young women do tailoring, they can now sustain their family. They are not dependent anymore. And for young men, it would be also good to be involved in carpentry.”* Besides, as shown by this range of extracts, young people concluded about the importance of skills development in focus groups in Majete 2 and 3 as well:

“By giving vocational training, there are more opportunities in this area than just farming.”

“... people being incorporated in skills development; this improved their situation. Now they have something to do ... And can make a livelihood. Other youth just stays put.”

“First [before the fencing], it was eating and killing animals, fetching grass. Just short term. Not lifelong development. We believe these skills we are thought are [lifelong development].”

7. Needed infrastructure and making this infrastructure work for youth in the Majete project area

7.1. Infrastructure to generate and store money

Access to capital

Some people have access to loans via family, or richer individuals in the community.

Nevertheless, this informal system is only available to the lucky few. Moreover, collateral is needed, and the interest rates are high. Altogether, this is not a sustainable and well-functioning system for youth. The importance of access to loans is mentioned by 47 of the 56 respondents of the survey. In this range of extracts individuals express themselves about the importance of having access to loans:

“I want to have a viable [tailoring] business, with my own machine [but I need capital for this]” (Male, 20).

“Many youth are still dependent on others ... If there would be access to loans, we would have the opportunity to start-up a business. We can then take care of ourselves” (Female, 26).

“Even if it is possible for The Hunger Project to connect us to agencies that provide loans, with lower interest rates ... that would help us so much” (Male, 30).

Also, during the focus groups in Majete 2 and 3 was concluded that loans are needed to assist young people:

“... life will be better with a business, but without access to capital it is not possible to set up a business.”

“There is a gap. Things are here [infrastructure that can be used to run a viable business], but what is needed are loans.”

“... the only chance here is self-employment. But we are lacking capital. Life could be better if we would have access to loans.”

7.1.1. Making VSLA work for youth

VSLA can already help, but it mainly helps the better off. One could say, that it offers few opportunities for the ones with (almost) no savings. Although some young people are a

member of a savings group, only a few can ‘really’ make savings. And do something productive with the savings, like concluded in the one of the focus group in Majete 2:

“It is assisting those that are already doing business ... If you just stay [put], and you save just little, you will end up consuming the whole amount after share-out. But if you already have a business, a small business, you can really save and use the money to invest and expand your business. It helps those that are not staying put; those with successful businesses”

The effect of VSLA really depends on the saving capabilities of a person. Whether or not an individual in the end has an amount which can be used productively has little to do with aspirations; this is a problem of daily activities and income, and abilities to save. If one has enough capital VSLA works. Now, VSLA still demands initial capital that youth does not have.

Moreover, inequalities in the area are growing. The ones with capital inside the savings groups can accumulate their capital: *“I was able to start this trading business because I successfully cultivated ... I took the whole amount from the selling of cotton and invested it in the VSLA-group. I received interest over this. When I had a lot, after the share-out, I [also] decided to buy a motorbike.”* The power of capital accumulation is massive, as interest is charged. Often this is 20% a month. If an individual enters a savings group with 100,000 Kwacha at the beginning, and the whole amount is lent to others in the savings group for a full year, this ‘richer’ individual will in the end have almost 900,000 Kwacha.

7.1.2. Making loans work for youth

As initial capital is still required for VSLA to work for the less privileged youth, youngsters in the Majete project area are sure that access to loans is the silver bullet to break their waithood. Yet, some issues, like resilience, need to be addressed in parallel, otherwise people might be highly indebted; which is precisely one of the advantages of VSLA according to the literature, instead of people being indebted, capital is built up by saving (Hendricks & Chidiac, 2011).

Problem of resilience

As discussed in chapter 5, the resilience of young people in the area remains a challenge. One could question if capital would be available, people would not be dragged further into poverty, as when they face a crisis, the household might become highly indebted. Yet, when discussing this issue in the Majete project area, youth mentioned this will be the case:

“... we won’t use the capital for problems; just the profit for our problems. If we have a large business, we will also make more money. We have more money to solve our problems” (Male, 25).

“... we are not afraid of breaking the laws and agreements of loans ... If there are no laws, by-laws or regulations, maybe the money is not spent well. But we cannot use the money wrong, we are not allowed” (focus group, Majete 2).

Group loans

Although youngsters in the Majete project area do not expect problems with repaying their loans, and some might prefer personal loans over it, they still came up with the suggestion that it might be better to provide them with loans in groups: *“It would be good to have a revolving loan. In a group. Pay it back as a group. Like a savings group, but then with some outside cash”* (focus group, Majete 2). By creating this group responsibility: *“There is less risk than with loans to individuals, as we, as a group, will be responsible for the total amount”* (focus group, Majete 2). Moreover, in the focus group in Majete 2 is mentioned that they have these groups already in place, with people they trust.

7.2. Infrastructure for farming

Although the Majete project area relies heavily on farming, some of the infrastructure is not at an appropriate level, like concluded in focus groups in Majete 3: *“We would like to have more input for our gardens. Good methods of farming include irrigations, use of better [certified] seeds and fertilizer.”*

Farming input

Like shown in these extracts, youngsters mention that they do not have appropriate access to (improved) farming inputs:

“We have farms, if we use them properly and have the right materials this can help. We can have a good business with it. But we need ... the seeds, pesticides, sprayers and maybe even solar pumps” (focus group, Majete 3).

“NASFARM⁴⁷ could also provide farming input loans. So, groups can have this together, and then sell and make profit with the products” (Female, 30).

⁴⁷ NASFARM is an organization that operates in the area and encourages people to form groups to sell agricultural products, like Millet, Sorghum and Sunflower seeds, together.

The foodbank at the epicenter building does offer farm input loans. Yet, this is only for staple food, like Maize, Sorghum and Millet; the foodbank does not provide any input for cash crops. Nevertheless, there are companies that can help: *“I receive cotton seeds from a cotton company. There is no real contract. They provide me with seeds, and I pay a little interest over this”* (Male, 28). Nonetheless, either the knowledge about this is not widespread within the communities, or these organizations provide input at a low scale.

Tools

Moreover, *“Tools often make farming more easy ... We need tools at low prices. Or that we can lend them, maybe together in a group”* (focus group, Majete 3). The provision of tools at epicenters level, not as a hand-out, but via a rental-system might work. It is a model that is used before by The Hunger Project. In Benin one of the epicenters owns and maintains its own tractor, which can be used for a contribution (The Hunger Project, 2020a).

Irrigation

Moreover, youngsters in the Majete project area mention the importance of (solar) irrigation systems, which would make dry-season farming at a larger scale possible:

“Most youth is relying on farming, due to climate change, we need the right materials, like solar irrigation pumps, to better cope with the changing environment” (focus group, Majete 3).

“... they [youth] have the plots available. Nevertheless ... They do not have irrigations equipment. That makes it impossible for them to do dry season farming” (Female, 35).

Solar systems are comprehensive systems that are difficult to move around, which make them less suitable for the sharing- and rental-system, and *“... to have irrigation pumps here would be good ... [But] manual pumps, ... would already work”* (Male, 30). A possibility would be that the epicenter owns some treadle pumps, which community members can rent. This could also partly solve the issue of income generation at community level, mentioned in the latest external evaluation of the epicenter strategy (Alpenidze, Owusu Afriyie, & Dzilankhulani, 2019). Moreover, this strategy is already used in Chigwata in Majete 3. And, worthy of mention, looking at the respondents of the survey, Chigwata has the highest number of youth already involved in dry-season farming, compared with the other studied villages. The treadle pumps in Chigwata have been provided by another NGO:

“We here [in Chigwata] use treadle pumps for irrigation. We received one as a group of 38 people from Catholic Relief Service. The treasurer is keeping the pump. And we can all use it. We pay a small amount of 500 Kwacha a month. This is used for maintenance. To make sure that if anything breaks down, we can replace it. In our group everyone has his own farm ... But we do commonly use the pump (Female, 25).

Also, there is trust among youth that this system could be used at a larger scale:

“We think if there are enough of those pumps [treadle pumps], we could share them ... They could be owned at epicenter level, and rented for a contribution of 200 Kwacha per time. This will help to maintain the pumps, and the epicenter has the opportunity to earn some revenue” (focus group, Majete 3).

Pass-on-goat scheme

Moreover, the success of the pass-on-goat scheme was mentioned by young people.

Nevertheless, *“older adults received goats, ... This [scheme] was not directed at young people. But it helped people. It would be good to have some livestock-program for young people as well” (focus group, Majete 2).*

7.2.1. Making farming work for youth

Even though successful entrepreneurs in the area earn a lot with cultivating cotton, few youth recognize the importance of cash crop farming. One could say, it is surprisingly that farming is not seen as an end goal to achieve a desire for change by itself. Many youngsters agree that farming could be used to raise some capital, which can be invested in a ‘real’ business; people see farming as intermediate goal, and do not have the desire to run farming businesses in the long run:

“Farming offers opportunities ... But you need to farm differently. You have to think of other crops. Crops that sell well at the market. With this money, with the profit, you can start a business. Of course, you need to finance the seeds, and other input, but you can start something with the profit” (focus group, Majete 3).

This might be partly created by the fact that many youth do not see this ‘rural farming life’ as cool (FAO, 2014). The Hunger Project could intervene, and show the opportunities cash

crops farming can offer. In parallel, collaborations with, for example, cotton companies could be formalized, to ease the availability of farming input. Moreover, for youth to benefit from irrigation farming, infrastructure must be available. Solar irrigation systems are large, immobile, difficult to share and expensive. Thus, smaller and mobile systems (like treadle pumps), might offer more feasible, and shareable opportunities.

7.3. Skills and trainings

Business skills training

“It is conflicting, but there is a lack of business skills in this area, while the dependence on self-employment is high” (focus group, Majete 3). However, trainings are available, but youth feels less welcome: *“... They [the Business Management training] can help us the most. Now this training is mainly available to older people”* (focus group, Majete 3). Yet, young people in the same focus group conclude that they can make the difference: *“We also need youth empowerment trainings, we might be able to put more pressure on making spots available to us [youth], when we are better empowered.”* Also, youth mentions the importance of mutual learning: *“We would like to have exchange visits for young people. Majete 3 to Majete 6. To see our friends doing their businesses there”* (focus group, Majete 3).

Vocational skills training

The trust in skills development is high, nevertheless, among those who had the opportunity to become vocational skilled, the demand for access to capital is high. People that did not benefited from the skills development so far, see it as the one and only solution; they see the vocational skills training as the silver bullet that will break their ‘waithood’. Nonetheless, according to youth in Majete 3, they do not have the same access to vocational trainings:

“Youth are taken away from the activities [vocational training]. Chiefs, or village heads, select the ones that can follow the training. And we young people are skipped ... We are not given the chance to enjoy the benefits of these vocational trainings.”

Also, an extension worker explained that some successful individuals leave the area, and take the acquired skills with them: *“Previously she was trained by The Hunger Project in Carpentry, now she went to Mozambique. To set up a shop there.”*

Often the most marginalized will be selected, and one could wonder whether these people are the most appropriate choice, as they might face difficulties in buying the needed

assets to run their business afterwards. When looking at the respondents that were trained, only few do really use their skill: *“When we get vocational training, we learn skills. Nevertheless, we miss the materials, the tools, that we need to use our skill after the training”* (focus group, Majete 3). Among the 15 participants that were vocationally trained, only 1 has the equipment to run the business. Yet, two more use their skills with borrowed equipment: *“I borrow the sewing machine. But now I can do my business. There is an agreement, everything I get from the machine, I am sharing with the owner of the machine 50-50.”* (Male, 20). Nevertheless, without equipment most vocationally trained cannot use their skill: *“Without access to loans, of those 10 people following the course, maybe only 4 will really start a business [with their skill]. The others ... They do not have the resources”* (focus group, Majete 2).

Furthermore, youth indicated the need for more vocational trainings. Both in quantity, and in diversity. According to an extension worker, this necessity is also acknowledged by the government: *“Near Chapananga trading center the government constructed a building to organize vocational trainings. Nevertheless, no activities yet.”*

7.3.1. Making vocational skills work for youth

Quantity of vocational trainings

Now two trainings are organized, tailoring and carpentry, both for 10 people per epicenter a year: *“Skills development helps. Yet, too few people are being considered”* (focus group, Majete 2). However, youth mentioned that they are afraid that even if the number of training-spots rises, chiefs and village heads will still select adults. So, only increasing the amount is no solution, also the distribution of the available spots needs to be revised. The empowerment trainings mentioned above, might be helpful for youth to strengthen their demands.

Moreover, the youngsters think it would be good to extend the training period to more than 3 months. Also, some youth mentioned that it is their dream to train others in the skill they learned: *“I am dreaming of that I have tools. That I can work on my own, and that I will be able to teach other youths in Carpentry”* (Male, 24). A more extensive training might be helpful to realize this dream, and when people can start training their peers, the quantity of the trainings can easily be increased.

Diversity of vocational trainings

The skills training is much appreciated, as it is seen a lifelong development. Yet, like mentioned in a focus group in Majete 3, more diversity is necessary:

“Just carpentry and tailoring are not enough. These two won’t solve the problem of land pressure by themselves. We think there must be more types, as otherwise we will have too much of the same businesses. Every year new people follow the course, overtime there will be too much people with the same skill for our market. Of course, we could sell to outside places, but then ... transportation [and physical infrastructure] must be better.”

In both Majete 2 and 3 more diversity is demanded. Youth mentioned that it would be good to train people in skills like:

- (Electoral) Engineering (electricity, home gadgets installation);
- Bakery;
- Phone repairing;
- Mechanic (motorbike, bicycle, car);
- Welding;
- Digital business (video production, computer use, printing);
- Construction (plumbing, bricking, painting)

Especially a training for mechanics is often mentioned: *“There are a lot of motorbikes here. But we do not have mechanics ... It would be valuable if a skill training was organized so that we are able to maintain the bikes, that would be a good business”* (focus group, Majete 2). As well as phone repairing: *“Cellphones break down, and many people have cellphones nowadays. But no one can repair them. If we could be thought in these skills, we can start a business in phone reparations”* (focus group, Majete 3).

Moreover, a training in plumbing might also solve another issue; during an external evaluation last year, it became clear that the WASH-conditions after self-reliance deteriorate (Alpenidze, Owusu Afriyie, & Dzilankhulani, 2019). In two epicenters studied in Malawi and Ghana, the access to clean drinking water decreased in the first three years after self-reliance. By linking the WASH-program with the entrepreneurial-program, and training

young people in the construction and maintenance of improved pit latrines and boreholes, the ability to maintain and construct improved WASH-facilities might be bigger.

Certification of the vocational trainings

Also, youth mentions that it would be good to show others that they followed an intense three-month vocational training: *“I think The Hunger Project just knows how to provide vocational training. But they do not provide any reference, or certificate. This can help us to show people that we have skills. We could use them at other places, like Blantyre. But now we cannot prove that we have these skills”* (Male, 26).

Access to materials

When traditional leaders select the ones that will be selected for the skills development, often is looked at how marginalized people in the community are. Yet, at this moment it is difficult for young people to get the capital for the needed investment; as they need external loans, which are not available. It might be wise to look at how people will act afterwards before making the selection. Either make sure people have the ability to access the materials, or choose people that have a better chance to finance the materials themselves, as youngsters that have to stay put after a training is a waste of their freshly gathered vocational skills. Another option would be to use materials owned by the epicenters temporary. It was observed that the carpentry tools and sewing machines owned by the epicenter, are only used during the three-month training period; the rest of the year the materials are just stored in the epicenter building. It would be an option to rent these materials, via the same principle as the treadle pumps, to the recent graduates. They could use the materials for a nine-month period, till the next training-round starts. The graduates could save money in savings groups, and potentially buy their own materials after this period.

7.4. Park infrastructure

In all villages there are still tensions between the park and the people ([appendix 7](#)). Although the fence is helping in reducing conflicts between humans and animals, it is not enough; as was mentioned during a focus group in July village: *“There is of course a fence, but many rivers come from the park, and at these places they [the animals] can go down, and pass the fence.”*

People from both Majete 2 and 3 complain about not being compensated for lost crops. (At night) animals come out of the fence and destroy crops: *“When wild animals come out, we are not compensated. If they damage our crops. Even if someone [a human] is killed. We are not compensated. This feels wrong”* (focus group, Majete 3). Communities are only allowed to chase the animals back to the fence, they cannot harm or kill the animals, as the punishment for this is high: *“Even if it happens outside the fence; even when we kill an animal outside the fence, we can be put in jail for 25 years”* (focus group, Majete 3). Due to the inadequate park infrastructure, productive time and opportunities are lost: *... it costs a lot of time to chase the baboons back to the fence, as they come every day, it is a waste of [our] time. We cannot use this time for productive purposes ...* (focus group, Majete 3).

7.4.1. Making park infrastructure work for youth

According to a traditional leader from July, the solution for tensions between humans and animals in this area is more collaboration with the park – and not less:

“The fence should be stronger. The lion came out. And a buffalo killed one man from Majete 1 ... Also, we chased a leopard back into the park ... These tensions between humans and animals are not good ... Maybe more rangers can come? ... They can come here, and shoot in the air. Warning shots in the air. Yet, a higher fence would probably also help.”

To prevent further tensions between parks and people and for African Parks to know how to improve park infrastructure, it is important that youth speak freely about the disadvantages created by the park ([appendix 7](#)). Frustrations about not being compensated for lost crops and measurements that can be taken to stop animals leaving the park, should be shared with African Parks.

8. Discussion and conclusion

In the first two paragraphs the sub-questions are answered, empirical findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and suggestions in line with general theoretical and practical implications are outlined. In conclusion, the main question is answered and a set of recommendations to supporting youth in starting-up their businesses in areas suffering from poverty around fortress conservation areas are given.

8.1. Sub-questions

What are the economic opportunities for youth in the Majete project area?

Just like Wilkie et al. (2006) conclude, few of the direct benefits of the Majete Wildlife Reserve end up in the communities, as not many people are being employed by the park, piece works is rarely available and Majete 2 and 3 are too far away from the main gate to benefit from tourism. Moreover, the fact that communities seem not to speak freely about disadvantages created by the park, could lead to tensions in the future. Frustrations about not being compensated for lost crops and measurements that can be taken to stop animals leaving the park, should be brought back to the table by the communities, as it is impossible to act for African Parks if they are not aware of the lost opportunities and dissatisfaction in the communities. Nonetheless, most youth seems to acknowledge that due to the fencing 'life-long' development activities came to the area. Various (economic) opportunities in the context of access limitations imposed on the villages surrounding the park have been created by African Parks and The Hunger Project.

Around the world young people actively dream about a 'better' life (Carling, & Talleraas, 2016). As the dependence on self-employment in Malawi, and the Global South in general, is high, youth in the Majete project area have a desire to improve their living conditions via entrepreneurial aspirations. According to them, self-employment is their main opportunity to make a livelihood. Youngsters know what they want to achieve; they have a clear vision – and dare to dream big. They might have intermediate aspirations, and try and use piece works, farming, natural resource harvesting and migration as an opportunity to earn some working capital. Yet, empirical findings show that the effect of these intermediate strategies can be seriously questioned at this moment, as for now these opportunities do not widely put young people in the position to set up a business.

Despite of this, youth have the desire to be an entrepreneur. Mainly because they express the feeling that with self-employment, they are not dependent on others anymore. So, instead of talking about entrepreneurial aspirations, it might be better to talk about an aspiration of independence; an aspiration to break with waithood (Carling, & Talleraas, 2016). Though, just like Brockington and Wilkie (2015) mention, the distribution of opportunities within affected groups surrounding protected areas can be questioned. While these development activities are available in the Majete project area, youth are seen as the leaders of tomorrow. As a result, breaking with waithood might be difficult, as youngsters have to wait for their time to come; in the Majete project area, the infrastructure to benefit from these available opportunities, are not widely accessible to youth.

What is the existing infrastructure, such as savings groups, to enable youth to set up a business in the Majete project area?

The main infrastructure, that is actively implemented, to assist youth in becoming entrepreneurs, are Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) and (vocational) trainings. Moreover, for some youngsters, loans are available via informal channels. And young people do use other (informal) saving mechanisms. Mainly livestock or saving at home is used to store capital that can be used at a later moment to invest in assets needed to start-up a business. Also, youth with access to the right farming infrastructure could use the profits from farming to start-up a business. Furthermore, due to the improvement of physical infrastructure, like electricity connection, a rest house and a bridge, new opportunities, that enable youth to set up a business, arise.

What infrastructure is needed to enable youth to set up a business in the Majete project area?

47 of the 56 respondents mentioned the need for access to loans, with external capital, less collateral requirements and lower interest rates. Although in the area for some loans are available, this is currently only accessible to some privileged youth via family members, or via loan sharks. Yet, loans sharks offer unreliable loans, ask exorbitant interest rates and demand collateral that most youth does not have.

Moreover, to have more success with farming, youngsters understand that they need to start farming differently. Nevertheless, therefore input is needed that is currently not widely available. Besides, although youth value the opportunities created by (vocational) trainings, they convey the need to adjust the program radically.

Furthermore, the park infrastructure needs to be improved. To make sure less opportunities are lost due to the human-wildlife conflicts, either the fence needs to be upgraded or more rangers should be employed. Also, the government should take responsibility to improve the conditions of other physical infrastructure. If the clinic would be staffed, the vocational training center would be open and the road network would be improved, more business opportunities arise, skills training will be available more widely, and mobility will be enhanced. This would create more and new opportunities for young people, and this infrastructure will enable them in accomplishing their desired business outcomes.

How can this infrastructure be leading to a successful business in the Majete project area?

Infrastructure to generate and store money

The VSLA-program that is currently implemented is not as sufficient and promising for youth as one would believe based on what is written in the literature (Karlan et al., 2017; Brannen, 2010). Just like mentioned by Flynn and Sumberg (2017), youngsters are still dependent on others. Most youth in the Majete project area can only contribute small amounts to savings groups and few people have the 'luck' to be financially supported by others. This differs from what is mentioned by Flynn and Sumberg (2017) and Zou et al. (2015), who conclude that youth receive and share the money for and from savings groups with partners, family members and social networks.

Even though VSLA has the opportunity to contribute to economic empowerment, financial inclusion and increasing resilience (Flynn, & Sumberg, 2017; Karlan et al., 2017; Brannen, 2010), this seems not to work for the poorest-of-the-poor. For youth around the Majete Wildlife Reserve, VSLA does not massively reduce poverty, increases nutrition and makes sure that children stay in school, as VSLA still demands initial capital that most youth does not have. Youngsters, if possible at all, mostly end-up saving small amounts. Just like mentioned by Brannen (2010), as share-outs are often in times when extra cash is needed in households, these less privileged in the Majete project area end up consuming the whole share-out. Nonetheless, for those individuals that already run successful businesses; for those youngsters that are not staying put, VSLA is working promising. They have the opportunity to save serious amounts, and accumulate their capital thanks to the interest that is charged in the savings group. Yet, as a result, inequalities in the area are growing.

While in the literature is written that VSLA do not receive grants or external loans (Karlan et al., 2017), this could be the solution for better financial inclusion for the less privileged youth. According to youngsters in the Majete project area, there is trust among members of the savings groups and these existing structures could be used, but expanded with external capital. More youth would be able to borrow serious amounts, while the security and the group-responsibility of savings groups remains. Nonetheless, youngsters mention that using existing groups is not the only solution; according to them it is important that loans become available anyways, be it at individual, or at group level. Just like other rural youth in Malawi (Scale2Save, 2019; OECD, 2018a; 2018b), youngsters in the Majete project area see the lack of access to loans as the issue that blocks them from reaching their desired business outcome; to break with their waithood.

However, it should be considered that when youth starts borrowing external capital, they become more exposed to the risks of financialization (Mawdsley, 2018) and that one of the advantages of VSLA, enhancing the financial base by stimulating a savings culture rather than indebting people (Hendricks & Chidiac, 2011), is lost. That is why resilience need to be strengthened in parallel, to make sure that youngsters do not end up consuming loans, in the same way as some youth in the Majete project area ended up consuming their working capital.

All in all, there are almost no formal opportunities to have savings, let alone getting loans. Where Majete 1 already has a Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO), this infrastructure is not yet in place in Majete 2 and 3. In 2018 The Hunger Project decided to further shift the focus on VSLA and formally separate The Hunger Project-founded epicenter banks (Tadala SACCO) from The Hunger Project Malawi. The reasoning was that it is more sustainable to have other Microfinance Institutions provide financial services in epicenter catchment areas (The Hunger Project, 2020b). It has now become clear that The Hunger Project Malawi needs a specialized program expert to realize such a change of plan. The to-be-appointed expert will be responsible for VSLA, entrepreneurship and Microfinance Institutions mobilization, as to further increase community members' access to financial services (The Hunger Project, 2020b).

Vocational skills

Next to the importance of capital, youngsters mentioned the influence vocational skills can have on their lives. They value the infrastructure already in place, but express the need to expand these trainings, both in quantity and diversity to ensure that they will be able to set up businesses. Yet, only increasing the quantity and diversity is no solution, also the distribution of the available spots needs to be revised.

Moreover, youngsters that did not had the privilege to be vocationally trained, identify vocational trainings as a silver bullet that will help them to start-up a business, while the ones that have been trained explain that it is not that simple. A majority still stays put, as they do not have the needed materials (e.g. carpentry tools or a sewing machine) to really start a business with their skills. To improve the current situation, the vocational trainings and access to materials need to be addressed in parallel.

Infrastructure for farming

As mentioned by the FAO (2014), many youth lack access to credit and have difficulties to earn a livelihood, which is further enforced by the high pressure on land, that makes it difficult for them to start a farm. Based on the empirical findings, it can be concluded that, although agricultural plots do not have to be that big to farm successfully, land scarcity is also something youth in the Majete project area face. Even though agricultural plots can be rented, it would be more sustainable to own the plots, as renting makes it more difficult to move to independent adulthood.

If farming is done right, it offers good opportunities for youngsters. However, the infrastructure must be right, which is not the case at this moment. To make farming work for youth, youngsters need to start farming differently, and therefore they need access to cash crop input and (irrigation) tools that make dry season and cash crop farming possible. As well as the same access as older adults to livestock-programs.

To what extent does the VSLA-program within the epicenter strategy, and the epicenter strategy of The Hunger Project Malawi in general, contribute to youth empowerment?⁴⁸

In general, the distribution of the created opportunities could be improved by The Hunger Project. If available infrastructure would be accessible more proportional among the population, the program will contribute better to youth empowerment than currently.

⁴⁸ Due to the interconnectedness of this sub-question, as it includes suggestions in line with the outlining of general theoretical and practical implications, it is answered in more detail in the next two paragraphs.

Moreover, as initial capital is still needed, the implemented VSLA-program is not working sufficiently enough to empower youth at this moment. Besides, as already acknowledged by The Hunger Project in a response on the most recent external evaluation (The Hunger Project, 2020d), there is need to track and expand youth engagement as a critical area of growth within the epicenter strategy.

8.2. Reflection and future studies

This paragraph will elaborate on the research process and potential topics for future studies. Just like Brockington and Wilkie (2015) mention, data about the distribution of benefits in the immediate vicinity of protected areas is spatially aggregated. Unfortunately, this is also the case with this research. Even in the local context villages and epicenters in the Majete project area differ from each other, let alone differences with other communities surrounding parks in Malawi, or other regions on the African continent and parts of the world. For example, Majete 2 and 3 are too far from the main gate of the Majete Wildlife Reserve for the communities to benefit from tourism opportunities. The smaller chance of being employed is one thing, but when communities live closer to the main gate; when communities live nearby tourist, new economic and business opportunities arise. The fact that the communities of Majete 2 and 3 live so remote, makes it difficult, maybe even impossible, to compare the findings of this research with communities living closer to the main gate (of other protected areas). That is why it might be useful to replicate this study in the same or another area, but then select program sites that are situated in the immediate vicinity of a tourism gate. Besides, more characteristics could be thought of, in which the Majete project area differs from other areas surrounding protected areas. For example, different levels of protection might influence limitations, and therefore opportunities, imposed on communities in the immediate vicinity of parks (IUCN, 2019). And, as the expansion of these protected areas is going to happen either way, since it is carried out to support a global desirable goal (Kabra, 2018, p. 122), and 1.1 billion people in the world partly depend on protected areas for their livelihoods (Bhola et al., 2016), the economic opportunities for youth nearby parks, with different characteristics and protection levels, should be studied more extensively. Especially because “timely interventions directed at young people are likely to yield a greater return for sustainable development than attempts to fix their problems later in life” (OECD, 2018a) and a growing number of conservation

organizations argue that securing local livelihoods is crucial for the long-term success of protected areas (Brockington, & Wilkie, 2015).

Another thing that would be worth to dug deeper into is the possibility of incorporating the communities in value chains of cash crops. For example: cotton or sesame, as “investing in youth entrepreneurship and local value chain development will ultimately increase employment opportunities and earnings, improve working conditions and livelihoods, reduce poverty and boost economic growth in rural areas” (OECD, 2018a). During this research the importance of cash crop farming became clear; often successful youth positively deviate from their peers as a result of successful cotton farming. Yet, these collaborations are not formalized between organizations involved; just a few individuals work together with cotton companies. It would be useful to conduct a feasibility study, to find whether or not these communities could be incorporated more formally on a larger scale in the value/supply chain of particular cash crops. Currently, The Hunger Project Benin is already trying to incorporate different cash crops businesses in local, regional and international value chains. It would be good to explore these opportunities in the Majete project area, and in other areas in the immediate vicinity of parks, as well.

Furthermore, the model, made by Carling and Talleraas (2016), that has been adjusted from the migration literature to the youth business literature to explore and explain how particular conditions and infrastructure influence young people’s aspired business outcomes, in relation with the poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus, could also be adjusted in relation to other aspirations and desired outcomes, that young people might have to break with their waitthood.

Notwithstanding, in this research the effect of infrastructure on reaching desired business outcomes took a central position. Youth see parts of the implemented program, with proposed adjustments, as a silver-bullet to break with their waitthood. Yet, looking at the resilience of youth entrepreneurs⁴⁹, it could be questioned till what extent the local economy is already strong enough to create self-employment opportunities for such a large part of the population. To put it differently, it would have been better to be more skeptical in this research about the complicated process of rural economy building, and whether or

⁴⁹ After a though year with a cyclone and droughts, many of the young people consumed their working capital in December 2019 and January 2020.

not the resilience and cash circulation is strong enough to increase the intensity of the implemented program.

Moreover, there is nothing wrong with investing in livestock, but there seems to be a risk to invest in livestock with ‘resilience money’⁵⁰. Household crises often occur simultaneous during the lean season. Sequential, many families start selling, prices drop, and families are making losses when selling livestock. If formal saving institutions would be available, community members would have more options to store their money for a rainy day. It is advised to study the effect these fluctuations have on the capital available in households, by comparing a site with, and a site without a formal savings institution.

Besides, even though the effect of VSLA-groups has been proven for other marginalized groups in previous literature, and these groups expose members less to the consequences of financialization than more classical micro-finance schemes, the effect these groups have on youth can be seriously questioned, due to the inability of youngsters to bring in the initial capital needed. Although it seems not fully in line with the strategy of The Hunger Project, the effect of direct cash transfers or the supply of tools (e.g. carpentry tools or a sewing machine) after youth graduates from the vocational training could be studied. It would be advisable to start-up a pilot to compare two sites, one in which youngsters do receive this infrastructure, and one in which the current strategy is used (in which youth is expected to save for, and buy the materials themselves). After a year these two groups could be compared again, to see if any large differences occurred. Another option would be to amplify some of the existing savings groups, and just like the youth suggested in the Majete project area, use these existing structures, but add a component in which external cash is available to the members of these groups, so that they have the opportunity to borrow higher amounts. Again, by comparing different groups, interesting insights could be added to previous literature about savings groups and the empowerment of youth in relation with the poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus.

Last but not least, it is too early to know the full impact of COVID-19 throughout the Global South, and in Malawi. The immediate health impact is still evolving. How COVID-19 interacts with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and malnutrition is unclear at this moment.

⁵⁰ Resilience money: money that is needed when a crisis arises in a household.

Nevertheless, the indirect consequences beyond health already bring a heavy toll. These include food insecurity, lack of medical supplies, loss of income and livelihood, difficulties in applying sanitary and physical distancing measures, a looming debt crisis, as well as related political and security risks (The Hunger Project, 2020c). These consequences will have influence on the regional development, and may also affect youth wishing to start-up businesses. Although markets are still open, individuals are able to run their businesses and farmers are harvesting their crops, it may happen that these activities have to stop in the near future. If this happens, operational consequences for savings groups will occur, as (young) people will not have the opportunity to make their contributions. Also, savings groups might have a solidarity fund (Karlan et al., 2017; Brannen, 2010), from which members can get a cash grant or an interest-free loan to overcome a crisis, yet, as all members have to cope with consequences of COVID-19, a fund like this might not be sufficient enough. Whether the resilience in communities is high enough to cope with this crisis, only time will tell. What further influences this process, is that it might be more difficult for (local) NGOs to implement the social infrastructure on which the Global South currently depends. A turn in paradigm may be needed; a change in aid-regime, as states might need to take more responsibility, because of the inability of NGOs in the current COVID-19 world to operate in the way they are used to do in our globalized world since the beginning of neoliberal times.

8.3. Concluding remarks

This thesis aimed to explore possibilities and conditions for youth to succeed in establishing businesses in the immediate vicinity of protected areas. Using the Majete project area in Chikwawa district, Malawi, as a case study by answering the question: ***how can young people start-up a business in the Majete project area in Chikwawa district in Malawi?***

This research showed the urgency for youth of access to loans without a need for initial capital, and the adjustments needed to be made to make VSLA, farming and (vocational) trainings work for youth. Theoretically, this contributes to literature about youth businesses, empowerment and financial inclusion, in relation with the poverty reduction-biodiversity conservation nexus. Moreover, although previous literature focusses on the dependence of youth on other individuals to be able to join savings groups and start-up businesses and the consequences this outsider-influence has for the design, implementation

and evaluation of saving groups, empirical findings in this study show that due to the inability of parents, other family members or social networks to assist youth with their contributions to savings groups, it is impossible for youngsters to raise the initial capital needed to join savings groups.

Due to the current conditions, young people have difficulties to start-up businesses and break with their waithood. This is partly created by the unavailability of infrastructure, yet, also by limited access to infrastructure. Indeed, loans, more and different kinds of vocational trainings, and using the security and the group-responsibility of savings groups, but expanded them with 'external' money (from microfinance-institutions), will enable youth to set up businesses. Nevertheless, as youth in the Majete project area are seen as the leaders of tomorrow, they have difficulties to access the same infrastructure and enjoy the same opportunities as older adults and elderly. It is not only about increasing availability and improving the quality of infrastructure, also the distribution of available infrastructure needs to be revised. It could be concluded that overall youth can be involved better in the implemented programs by The Hunger Project, and NGOs in general. It would be good to make sure that opportunities are proportional divided among the population. That youngsters have their own group of animators, the pass-on-goat scheme is also available to young people and that vocational skills are not only available, but also more accessible for youth. Moreover, to enlarge the opportunity that youth are able to set up a business, it is advised that The Hunger Project starts renting the infrastructure that is stored in the epicenter building between trainings to the recent graduates. This will not only increase epicenter income, it will also put youngsters in the position to earn an income with their skill and save for their own sewing machine or carpentry tools. Furthermore, the effect dry season farming has on the household income of the respondents became clear. To make farming a useful intermediate strategy to reach the desired business outcome, treadle pumps should be purchased and owned at epicenter level, and rented to youth, this will enhance the positive benefits farming has.

Yet, it is not only an issue about availability, accessibility and inequality, but also about knowledge. In the area are enough young people that did succeed in setting up a business. These successful youngsters originally did not differ much from their peers; they come from the same villages, with the same conditions. Only a small minority has the luck of

being supported by their parents, so it could be concluded that on general the youngsters have comparable starting points, and have the same opportunity to become successful entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, some youngsters are more successful than others. When looking at young people that positively deviate from their less successful peers, the effect cash crop farming - as their stepping-stone - jumps out. Yet, the knowledge about the effect cash crop farming can have seems to be not as widespread as possible. It became clear that people do not need to own a large plot of land, as plots can be rented. And no large investments are needed, as cotton companies are willing to provide input. It would be good if The Hunger Project Malawi would sensitize youth more on these cash crops opportunities, and look together with the communities in each village, which cash crops would be suitable to grow in the local conditions, as this as well would be a good intermediate strategy to reach desired business outcomes.

By making sure farming, (vocational) trainings, and VSLA work for youth, and by arranging that microfinance-institutions start operating in the area, youngsters will be able to set up businesses at a larger scale in the immediate vicinity of protected areas. They will be able to achieve their aspiration of independence, reach their aspired business outcomes and break with their waithood, which will decrease the pressure youth put on parks, and this collaboration between parks and people, in turn will contribute to the achievement of the interconnected global goals: SDG 1, SDG 2 and SDG 15.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The Hunger Project

The vision of The Hunger Project is: *“a world where every women, man and child leads a healthy, fulfilling life of self-reliance and dignity”* and its mission is: *“to end hunger and poverty by pioneering sustainable, grassroots, women-centered strategies and advocating for their widespread adoption in countries throughout the world”* (The Hunger Project, 2019a). According to The Hunger Project, hunger can be ended within our generation; the organization sees hunger as the biggest solvable problem in the world (The Hunger Project, 2019b). Vision, Commitment and Action (VCA) Workshops are central in the strategy of The Hunger Project. VCA workshops are given throughout the whole project, and serve as the foundation of The Hunger Project’s work; inspiring individuals to move from “I can’t” to “I can” to “We can” (The Hunger Project, 2019c).

The Hunger Project Program countries in Africa cooperate with The Hunger Project Netherlands (Rijneveld et al., 2015). The Hunger Project Netherlands is raising funds, while the program countries take care of the design, management and monitoring of the programs. In Africa The Hunger Project works in nine countries with local staff and rural farming communities with the epicenter strategy (for more information see [Appendix 2](#)). In the epicenter strategy, designed by African experts and volunteers, communities in clusters of villages⁵¹ work on a broad range of development-related activities (figure 25).

Communities organize themselves with support from The Hunger Project from a centrally located building; the epicenter, which contains e.g. a health clinic, food bank, meeting-hall and savings-bank. The objective is to assist the inhabitants of these villages to work towards self-reliance (Rijneveld et al., 2015). Self-reliance in this case means that community members are confident and have the capacity and skills to act as agents of their own development (Rijneveld et al., 2015).



Figure 25 holistic approach The Hunger Project (The Hunger Project, 2019c).

⁵¹ 10 to 15 villages within walking distance from each other (range from epicenter building up to 10 kilometer), with approximately 5.000 to 15.000 inhabitants.

Appendix 2: The epicenter strategy

The epicenter strategy has four phases (figure 26 and figure 28), which are implemented over a period of approximately eight years (Compernelle, & Dzilankhulani, 2018). There are three important pillars within the program: 1) begin with women, 2) mobilize everyone and 3) engage with local government (The Hunger Project, 2019c). In the end, the project wants to achieve self-reliance, with sustainable, vibrant, healthy rural communities free from hunger and poverty (figure 27) (The Hunger Project, 2011).

Year	Phase I		Phase II	Phase III			Phase IV	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EPICENTER'S JOURNEY TO SELF-RELIANCE	MOBILIZATION		CONSTRUCTION	PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION			TRANSITION TO SELF-RELIANCE	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VCA workshops • Animators • Community-initiated projects • Leadership • Microfinance 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributed land, materials, labor • L-shaped building • Demonstration farm • SACCO/Bank recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and nutrition security • Health • Education • Sanitation • Adult literacy 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epicenter income generation • Epicenter committee leadership of continuing development 	

Figure 26 four phases epicenter strategy (The Hunger Project, 2018).

An epicenter that has reached sustainable self-reliance exhibits:

- Effective, gender-balanced and fully trained epicenter leadership, with democratic processes and transparency;
- A strong Women's Empowerment Program;
- Access to basic services, including healthcare, education, clean water, agricultural tools, and microfinance savings and credit opportunities; and
- Epicenter income, with revenues that cover all expenses and a self-reliant microfinance institution.

Figure 27 self-reliance exhibits (Compernelle, & Dzilankhulani, 2018).

Phase 1: partners are mobilized to participate in VCA workshops, in which the community builds a vision for their own future. Committed individuals are elected to the Epicenter Committee, as well as several thematic sub-committees (figure 25). In each village, animators (volunteers) are recruited for each of the themes. They receive training (from government extension-workers or local The Hunger Project staff) to ensure they can strengthen their fellow community members by passing on this knowledge.

Phase 2: commences after approximately two years, when the epicenter can be built. The community contributes to the center with time and resources (e.g. supply the bricks) and

one of the community leaders provides the land. The Hunger Project funds the construction and other materials for building.

Phase 3: the program implementation phase begins. This phase is estimated to take three years and includes the implementation of all program aspects (figure 25). Also, the Epicenter Committees are trained in governance and accountability and encouraged to partner with other civil society groups.

Phase 4: focuses on the transition to self-reliance, which takes two years. The Hunger Project supports the community in their engagement with third parties (e.g. other NGOs, government) and with the setup of the new governance structure (organizational development technical advice). After these two years, the epicenter should have reached self-reliance and continue the community-led development process without The Hunger Project, as an own community-based organization (CBO).

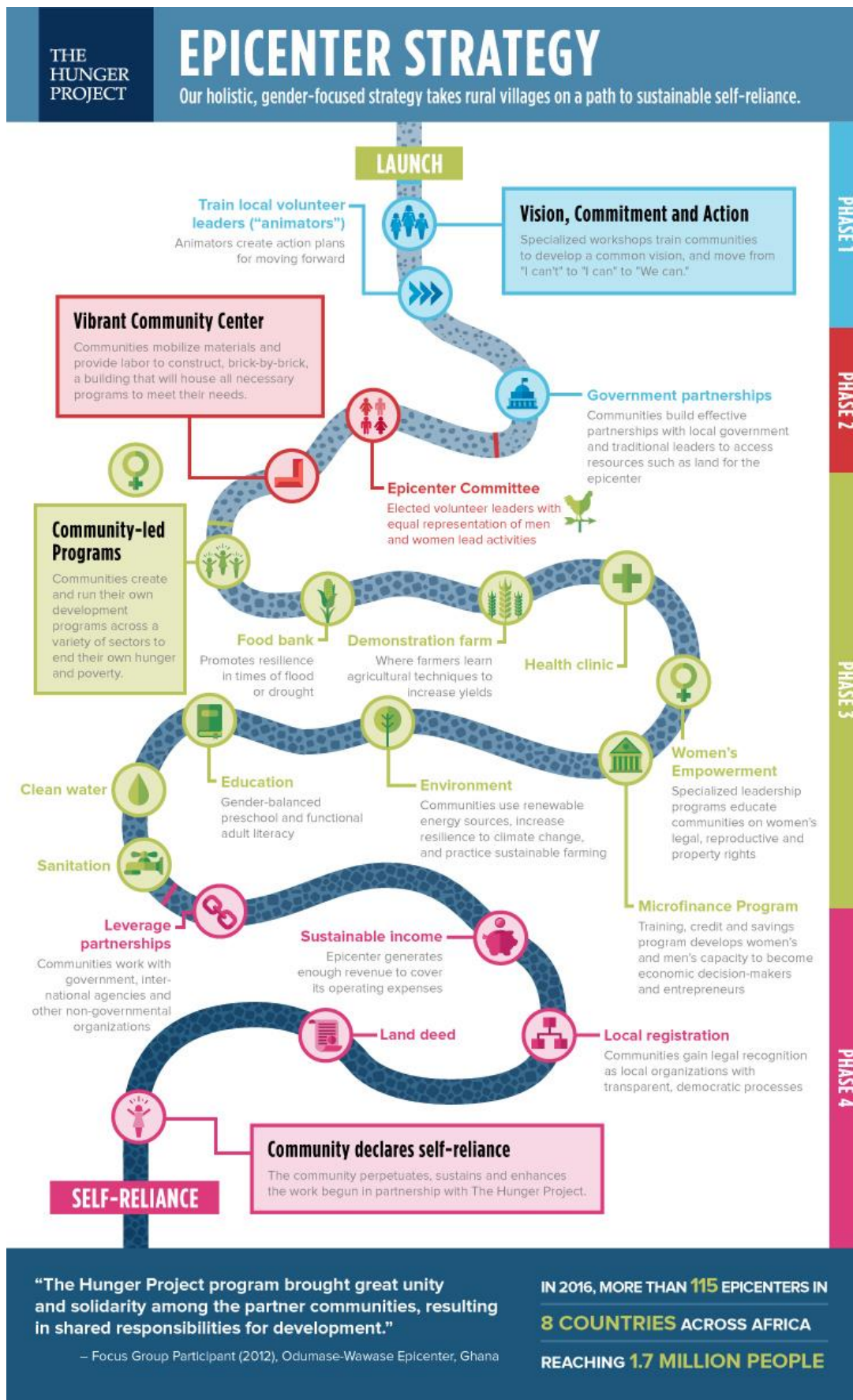


Figure 28 the epicenter strategy (The Hunger Project, 2016).

Appendix 3: Survey

Before we start, it is important that you are between 18 and 30 years old.

Date of the survey:

Dearest respondent,

First, let me start by introducing myself. I am Tom van den Biggelaar, a master student from Utrecht University in The Netherlands and an employee of The Hunger Project Netherlands. Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this survey. It will take approximately 45 minutes to complete all the questions. This survey is part of a research we are conducting in the Majete project area between February and May 2020 (*had to leave in March due to Covid-19*), to answer the question: **How can young people start-up a business in the Majete project area in Chikwawa district in Malawi?**

The purpose of this study is simply to gain a better understanding about youth and their economic opportunities in the Majete project area. It is good to mention that this research is exploratory and tries to get a better view on the situation, but its outcomes will not directly change program implementation.

This survey is about economic opportunities in the Majete project area, and about how youth can set up a business in this area and what infrastructure is needed for this. We define infrastructure as important physical and non-physical supporting structures that give prospects the opportunity to reach desired outcomes. In this research the desired outcome is youth being able to set up a business.

Be assured that all answers you provide will be kept in the strictest confidentiality. Moreover, everything you tell will only be used for this research project, and individual answers will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Also, your name will not be used, to make sure that no one can identify you with any answers. In the end, the information gathered in this 3-month period will be summarized and shared with you, and the rest of the community. If it is okay, I would like to ask you the questions in this survey.

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	English	Yes / No
2	Gender	M / F
3	Age	
4	Village	
5	Highest level of education	
6	Years of schooling	
7	Married	Yes / No
8	Children	Yes / No
8.1	If answered yes on question 8: please indicate how many children you have. Otherwise, please proceed to question 9.	
8.2	Do you have children that go to the nursery school or primary school?	Yes / No / Too young
8.3	Did your children had any vaccinations?	Yes / No

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

9	What is in your view the main opportunity for youth to make a livelihood in the Majete project area? (how do young people earn money in this area)	Self-employment (business) Employment Migration Farming Natural resource harvesting Other:
9.1	Could you name other economic opportunities in the Majete project area for youth to make a livelihood?	Self-employment (business) Employment Migration Farming Natural resource harvesting Other:
9.2	Could you briefly explain how in your view the opportunities for youth in the area could be improved?	

BUSINESS EXPERIENCE

10	Have you ever tried to set up a business?	Yes / No
10.1	If answered <i>yes</i> on question 10: did you succeed in setting up a business? Otherwise, proceed to question 11.	Yes / No

CURRENT INCOME FROM BUSINESS OR EMPLOYMENT

11	Do you currently have your own non-farm business? Or multiple businesses?	Yes / No If answered <i>yes</i> on question 10.1, and <i>no</i> on question 11: <i>What happened, why not anymore?</i>
11.1	If answered <i>yes</i> on question 11: please specify what kind of business(es) you have. If answered <i>no</i> , please proceed to question 12.	<input type="radio"/> Trader (sales/vendor/retailer) <input type="radio"/> Cooking and selling food <input type="radio"/> Carpentry (light manufacturing) <input type="radio"/> Tailoring (light manufacturing)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (Tin) Smith (light manufacturing) ○ Bricking/construction (light manufacturing) ○ Hairdresser (service) ○ (Bicycle) repair shop (service) ○ Print/computer shop (service) ○ Maize mill (service) ○ Tourist industry (service) ○ Transport industry (service) ○ Beekeeper ○ Natural resource harvesting ○ Other:
11.2	Please indicate whether or not you own the assets needed for your business?	Yes / No / No need
11.3	How did you finance this business(es)?	Loan Savings Family / relatives Other:
11.4	Are you willing to share how much Kwacha you earn with this business(es) on average per month?	Kwacha:
12	Are you employed by or doing piece work for someone? (do you have a job)	Piece work / Employed / No
12.1	If answered yes on question 12, please indicate what kind of work you do. Otherwise, please proceed to question 13.	
12.2	Are you willing to share how much Kwacha you earn with your job on average per month?	
13	Do you have your own a farm?	Yes / No
13.1	If answered yes on question 13: please indicate how many acres of land you farm? Otherwise, please proceed to question 14.	Rainy Season: Dry Season:

13.2	Please indicate what kind of crops you grow	Maize / Millet / Groundnuts / Sorghum / Papaya / Cucumber / Pumpkin / Tomato / Onion / Chili / French beans / Rice / Sugar Cane / Cotton / Other:
13.3	If so, please indicate what kind of crops you sell	Maize / Millet / Groundnuts / Sorghum / Papaya / Cucumber / Pumpkin / Tomato / Onion / Chili / French beans / Rice / Sugar Cane / Cotton / Other:
13.4	If answered yes on question 13.3, are you willing to share how much Kwacha you earn with your farm business on average per season? Otherwise, please proceed with question 13.5	Kwacha:
13.5	Please indicate whether or not you own the land you farm on?	Yes / No
13.6	Please indicate how you finance this business? More than one answer possible.	Cash loan Farm input loan Savings Seed savings from last year Family / relatives Friends Other:
13.7	Are you part of a farming cooperative?	Yes / No
13.8	Are you engaged in contract farming?	Yes / No
14	Do you (seasonally) migrate to earn some money? (migrate for work)	Yes / No
14.1	If answered yes on question 14, please indicate a bit more specific why and to where you migrate (seasonally). Otherwise, please proceed to question 15	
15	Do you have any other ways in which you earn income? If so, please explain.	Yes / No Explanation:

SUPPORT FROM OTHERS

16	Do you have any family or relatives that support you?	Yes / No
16.1	If answered <i>yes</i> on question 16, do they live in this area, or have they migrated? Otherwise, please proceed to question 17.	Migrated / in the Majete project area
16.2	Please indicate whether these relatives support you with:	<p>Business ideas: Yes / No</p> <p>Money for consumption goods (e.g. food, phone credit): Yes / No</p> <p>Money for farm business investments (e.g. farm input): Yes / No</p> <p>Money for non-farm business investments (e.g. credit): Yes / No</p> <p>Other support:</p>

INFRASTRUCTURE, think both about infrastructure that is already available, but also about things that in your opinion should be available (are needed). Infrastructure are physical and non-physical structures that contribute to youth being able to start-up a business. What is needed to set up at business?

17	What is in your opinion the most important supporting structure needed to set up a business for young people in the Majete project area?	<p>Access to loans</p> <p>Access to savings</p> <p>Skills</p> <p>Farm plot</p> <p>Physical assets</p> <p>Social network</p> <p>Other:</p>
17.1	Is this infrastructure available?	Yes / No
17.2	Do you have access to this infrastructure?	Yes / No

18	What are in your opinion other important supporting structure needed to set up a business for young people in the Majete project area? Encircle whether or not available and accessible	Access to loans	<i>available / accessible</i>
		Access to savings	<i>available / accessible</i>
		Skills	<i>available / accessible</i>
		Farm plot	<i>available / accessible</i>
		Physical assets	<i>available / accessible</i>
		Social network	<i>available / accessible</i>
		Other:	

SAVING AND LOAN MECHANISMS

19	Are you part of a VSLA-group?	Yes / No
19.1.1	If answered <i>yes is</i> on question 19: for how long have you been a member of a VSLA-group? Otherwise, please proceed to question 20.	
19.1.2	How many cycles of VSLA have you completed?	
19.1.3	<i>If you already completed at least one cycle:</i> what was the amount of last payout? Otherwise, proceed to question 19.2.	
19.1.4	For what purpose did you use your last payout? Please specify whether or not this was a productive/business investment, or for consumption purposes (e.g. school fees, food). Also, if more than one purpose, please explain.	Business investment: Consumption: Other:
19.1.5	Who made the decision about the purpose of the payout?	Me Partner Together with partner Family Friends Other:
19.1.6	Please indicate if, and for what purpose you used your last VSLA loan? Please specify whether or not this was a productive/business investment, or for consumption purposes (e.g. school fees, food). Also, if more than one purpose, please specify.	No loan yet, savings to low Business investment: Consumption: Other:

19.1.7	If you had a VSLA loan, please indicate the amount borrowed with your last loan. Otherwise, proceed to question 19.2	Kwacha:
19.1.8	Please indicate who made the decision for the purpose of the spending of this loan.	Me Partner Together with partner Family Friends Other:
19.2	Did you have savings before becoming a member of your VSLA-group?	Yes / No
19.3	Please indicate whether or not you are dependent for your contribution to the savings group on other people than yourself (depend on friends, family, parents, partners).	Yes / No
19.4	Please indicate whether or not you share (part of) your share-out with other people than yourself (sharing friends, family, parents, partners).	Yes / No
20	Do you use other saving mechanisms?	Yes / No
20.1	If answered yes on question 20: please indicate which other savings mechanisms you are using. Otherwise, proceed with question 21.	Other microfinance scheme Commercial Bank SACCO (village bank) Mobile banking At home Other:
21	Do you have access to loans? Other than VSLA!	Yes / No
21.1	If answered yes on question 21: please indicate how you have access to loans (more than one answer possible). Otherwise, please proceed with question 22.	Other microfinance scheme Commercial Bank SACCO (village bank) Relatives Other:
21.2	Please indicate for what purpose you used your last loan? Please specify whether or not this was	Business investment: Consumption:

	a productive/business investment, or for consumption purposes (e.g. school fees, food). Also, if more than one purpose, please specify.	Other:
21.3	Please indicate the amount borrowed with your last loan, and how you accessed this loan.	Kwacha: Accessed via:
21.4	Please indicate who made the decision for the purpose of the spending of this loan.	Me Partner Together with partner Family Friends Other:

TRAININGS

22	Have you followed a vocational training (from The Hunger Project)?	Yes / No
23	Have you followed any other trainings? If so, please indicate what kind of trainings you have been following (offered by The Hunger Project or other organizations)	Yes / No Specify: Farm input Literacy Financial literacy Business management WEP VCA WASH Health Other:

HOUSEHOLD

24	Do you have your own household, or do you stay with your parents, relatives or friends?	Own household Parents Relatives
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		Friends
		Other:
24.1	To whom does your house belong?	<input type="radio"/> Mine (I am the owner / together with my partner) <input type="radio"/> Rented <input type="radio"/> Shared <input type="radio"/> Parents <input type="radio"/> Other:
24.2	Does your house have (solar) electricity?	Yes / No / Solar / Battery
24.3	From what kind of material is the roof of your house made?	Grass/leaves Iron sheets Plastic sheets Other:
24.4	From what kind of material are the walls of your house made?	Earth/soil Cement (bricks) Burnt bricks Other:
24.5	From what kind of material is the floor of your house made?	Earth/soil Cement Tiles Other:
24.6	What is the source / are the sources of water for your household?	Piped Borehole/covered well Open well, river, lake Other:
24.6.1	How far is this source from your house?	
24.7	What type of sanitation is used by your household?	Bush Traditional pit latrine Improved pit latrine Flush Other:
24.8	Is your kitchen in a separate building?	Yes / No
25	How many meals do you have on an average day?	1 - 2 - 3 – more than 3
25.1	Number of days you consumed meat last week?	

25.2	Number of days you consumed fish last week?	
26	Is your household able to make the required community contributions? To, for example, the water comity for the maintenance of boreholes?	Yes / No / No idea what this is
27	Do you own any livestock?	Yes / No

LIFE ASPIRATIONS

28	What are you working towards in the near future?
29	What are your life aspirations in the long run?
30	Anything to add?

Appendix 4: Focus group discussion guide

I would like to thank you all for coming today. First, let me start by introducing myself. I am Tom van den Biggelaar, a master student from Utrecht University in The Netherlands and an employee of The Hunger Project Netherlands. This focus group discussion is part of a research we are conducting in the Majete project area between February and May 2020 (*had to leave in March due to Covid-19*), to answer the question: **How can young people start-up a business in the Majete project area in Chikwawa district in Malawi?**

The purpose of this study is simply to gain a better understanding about youth and their economic opportunities in the Majete project area. It is good to mention that this research is exploratory and tries to get a better view on the situation, but its outcomes will not directly change program implementation by The Hunger Project.

This focus group discussion is about economic opportunities in the Majete project area, and about how youth can set up a business in this area and what infrastructure is needed for this. We define infrastructure as important physical and non-physical supporting structures that give prospects the opportunity to reach desired outcomes. In this research the desired outcome is youth being able to set up a business. Although this study focusses on entrepreneurial aspirations, if you have any other aspirations, please feel free to share.

Let me tell you a little about how we will conduct the group discussion today. Your participation in this group discussion is on a voluntary basis, therefore, if you wish not to partake in this discussion, you are free to leave. However, I appreciate all of your views and opinions and we hope you are willing to share these. I would like to emphasize upfront that there are no right or wrong answers, so feel comfortable to share anything that is on your mind. I hope to hear different opinions, feel free to respond on each other, also if you disagree, but please respect each other's views. We (My translator and I) will not be giving turns, just join in the discussion whenever you want. But, we will appreciate it if only one person talks at a time. Be assured that all answers you provide will be kept in the strictest confidentiality. Moreover, everything you tell will only be used for this research project, and individual answers will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Also, your name will not be used, to make sure that no one can identify you with any answers. In the end, the information gathered in this 3-month period will be summarized and shared with you, and the rest of the community.

During the discussion I will ask the questions, and my colleague will translate them to Chichewa and translate the discussion back to me, so that I can take notes. The discussion will probably take around an hour to finish. Are there any questions so far?

Opening question

- Shall we start with a small introduction round?

Probes: name, age, village, whether or not you have a business and if you are a member of a VSLA-group.

Introductory question

- When thinking about this area, Majete 3 (Muonda) / Majete 2 (Chiphale), what are the things about daily life that come to your mind?

Probes: farming, chances, economic opportunities, schools, chiefs, dirt roads, maize/sorghum/millet, NGO's, vision – commitment – action, hunger, poverty, Majete Wildlife Reserve, natural resources

Transition question

During a discussion in October 2019 young people shared their views about economic opportunities and chances for youth in this area, and the difficulties related to this.

- What opportunities do you see for young people in this area, under the conditions faced?

Probes: which conditions influence opportunities, entrepreneurial opportunities, migrations opportunities, self-employment, employment and differences among gender, material status, having or not having children, educational level, vocational skills, VSLA-membership.

Key questions

We just discussed a bit which conditions influence the economic opportunities for young people in this area, I would now like to talk about the aspirations you all have.

- Could you share me something about the life aspirations you have?

Probes: migration aspirations, entrepreneurial aspirations, employment aspirations, study aspirations

Looking at the aspirations we just discussed.

- What kind of physical and non-physical supporting structures are available in this area to support young people to achieve these aspirations? And why does this 'infrastructure' help?
- And, what kind of physical and non-physical supporting structures are needed in this area to support young people to achieve these aspirations? And why does this 'infrastructure' help?

Probes: access to capital, VSLA, social networks, (vocational) training opportunities, (financial) assets, owning a farm, roads, bridges, access to healthcare, things that The Hunger Project could do better

- How, in your view, do young people that succeed in setting up a business differ from other youth that does not succeed?

Probes: gender, age, material status, family, educational level, (vocational) training, VSLA-membership, having or not having children, 'waithood'

Closing question:

- If you have all the freedom to choose anything you want to do, what would you like to accomplish?

Probes: in this area or outside, migration, self-employment, employment, study

Appendix 5: Ethical review

Participants and respondents have been approached, and treated with respect. The researcher explained that participation was voluntary, and that no one was obligated to take part in this research. If people were not interested, this was respected as well. The researcher ensured that people did not feel obligated, because it was asked by the EPO's, by someone else from the community or because the researcher is also working for The Hunger Project. The researcher did anything within his power to ensure that participants and respondents were not forced by anyone or anything to partake in a focus group discussion, survey, or any other instrument used for, or moment of, data collection. Moreover, to protect minors, only adults (people 18 years and older) were asked to partake in focus group discussions and surveys.

Also, everyone that participated in this research was openly informed about their rights. *Consent* was asked in a way that was suitable to the situation. Besides, participants were informed that they could stop with a survey or focus group discussion at any moment, and that they always maintain the right to recall, change or add anything to what they have shared. Moreover, participants were informed how the data was handled, by whom, and how it is stored.

Furthermore, the researcher ensured as *few harm as possible* was done to the respondents and participants. For example, by making sure that no one can be identified with any of the data. Also, all storage devices are protected. Even the USB-sticks are protected with passwords. All to make sure that, even if data is 'lost', the data is not accessible, and participants stay anonymous. Nevertheless, one could say that the causing of no harm is at risk by the nature of this research. Entrepreneurs may have shared insights that potentially help others in starting-up a business, but at the same time this could potentially cause harm their own business. This was difficult to overcome, but the researcher ensured that all participants were aware of this possible effect. Moreover, as participations was voluntarily, participants might have lost productive time, which could have indirectly harmed them, as they otherwise might have earned something during these productive hours.

Data containing any information that might make identification of one or more participants possible is only available to researcher. *The sharing of raw data* can potentially

harm participants, and this was, and will be, prevented at all times. Moreover, data files made anonymous have only been shared within the research team. Nevertheless, research findings will be shared within and outside the community, as it is not possible to only receive as a researcher, but one should also send and share. While the community will receive a broad summary, this thesis will be available to outsiders via the database of Utrecht University. In this openly available thesis, no data, or any quotes, will be traceable back to a particular individual.

A potential *conflict of interest* is extensively discussed in paragraph 4.4. Due to the critical nature of the host organization, their willingness to change and the co-creation process, the researcher was not afraid of any form of conflict of interest, as there was no impediment to be, and write, critical.

Appendix 6: Co-creation

The whole research is an outcome of co-creation from the beginning on. It started in October 2019 during a field visit to the epicenters surrounding the Majete Wildlife Reserve. During focus group discussions the inclusiveness of youth came up, and whether the project is 'youth-friendly' enough. Youth mentioned that although they value the vocational training opportunities offered by The Hunger Project, they are disappointed in the lack of opportunities to start a business afterwards. This was the starting point of many discussion later that week, in which staff from The Hunger Project Malawi, the United States, and the Netherlands thought together about the issues raised during the focus group discussions, and concluded that it would be good to study the situation more extensively.

In the months that followed the collaboration between Utrecht University (supervisor and researcher), The University of Malawi, The Polytechnic (co-supervisor), The Hunger Project Malawi (host organization) and The Hunger Project Netherlands (employer researcher) was established. During multiple discussions, skype sessions and telephone conversations the research topic was defined. Moreover, already during the field visit in October, the Majete Community Extension Manager from African Parks was informed about the possibility a research would be conducted in the area. The Hunger Project Malawi and African Parks are partners, so early involvement and notification about these kinds of studies is of crucial importance to keep the good relationship. Later on, the Impact Reporting Manager from African Parks, which is operating from the Dutch office, was also informed. African Parks will not be directly involved in the research, but is supportive: *"To read up on your findings would be incredibly interesting for us to draw lessons for future interventions to be rolled out."* Nevertheless, the extension worker who is responsible for the catchment area of Majete 2 and 3, who is also a personal friend to the EPO's of Majete 2 and 3, was able to be of help, and arranged and mobilized youth that were interesting prospects for this research.

The EPO's were the main gatekeepers of this research. There is one EPO in each epicenter of The Hunger Project in Malawi. The EPO's are arranging everything on the ground, they live close to the epicenters and often are schooled as extension workers. The EPO's were of major importance, as they are the ones who on daily basis have contact with the traditional- and epicenter leadership, local government and other development

organizations. Moreover, the EPO's have the latest insights on development activities conducted in the area, and how youth is involved in these activities. Furthermore, the EPO's speak both English and Chichewa, and were able to assist in arranging transport. Besides, they knew people that were available to assist the researcher with translation.

After arriving in the field and meeting with the co-supervisor, some adjustments in the way data would be collected have been made. To overcome gender issues, next to mixed focus group discussions, also separate discussions with men and women were conducted. Moreover, to enlarge validation, member checking was conducted with respondents of the focus group discussion.

All these parties played a major role in the creation of knowledge during this research. Nevertheless, the most important stakeholders were the youth in the communities. These young people are the ones who experience the conditions in the area. Although the EPO's also live either within or near the epicenter catchment area, the youngster from the communities are the ones who live the life that takes the central position in this research, this makes their contributions of crucial importance.

Appendix 7: Negative impacts of the park on the communities in the Majete project area

When talking with the communities, it took a while before they felt comfortable enough to share their insights about the ‘disadvantages of the park’. There seems to be less space for talking about these disadvantages; the communities have been sensitized on the benefits of conservation. Their views have been influenced by the community work of African Parks, which one could say is good, as communities are more aware of the benefits of conservation. Nevertheless, while creating a safe-space to share all insights; talking with the communities a bit longer, they did mention issues. This creates a risk. If communities do not feel that they can share these setbacks as well, they might act, without anyone knowing about their anger. Like this quote from a young man in Majete 2 shows:

"There is a treat here, if there is no way of earning money, sooner or later young people will decide to go into the park again. They will have to poach again ... If there is a chance of doing a business. People will have something to do. They do not stay put and won't have to enter the park."

The communities used to extract natural resources from the park. Which is now not, or almost not, possible anymore. Community members, both young and old, are frustrated by this, like shown by this range of extracts from one of the focus groups in Majete 3:

"As you can see, our roofs are fetched with grass. But last year they [African Parks] decreased the number of people per village group head that are allowed to enter the park to fetch grass. Now in total only 40 people can fetch grass. Once per year! This is not enough. Also, we are only allowed to stay in the park for 4 hours, this is not enough time. We need this grass for our roofing."

"Also, we can't take other things from the park. Only grasses. No other things can be fetched. Before the fence we could collect local medicine. Now this is not allowed. They promised us a hospital in return. This [the hospital] is not open yet. If the hospital will not open, we are thinking about entering [the park] anyways to collect our traditional medicines again."

Moreover, according to youth it is difficult to make a good profit with farming, as the plots are small. The small plot size is partly created by population growth; the plots of the parents are divided among the children. Yet, in the villages of Majete 3 is mentioned that this process is enforced by the fencing of the park:

“First we could farm in the park, we had plots there and used to grow our crops. Then when the park was fenced this was not possible anymore. The fence increases the already existing problem of youth getting their own plot, it is difficult to get land [in this area].”

Furthermore, people from both Majete 2 and 3 complain about not being compensated for lost crops. (At night) animals come out of the fence and destroy crops: *“When wild animals come out, we are not compensated. If they damage our crops. Even if someone [a human] is killed. We are not compensated. This feels wrong.”* It is difficult to do something about this, as communities are only allowed to chase the animals back to the fence, they cannot harm or kill the animals, as the punishment for this is high: *“Even if it happens outside the fence; even when we kill an animal outside the fence, we can be put in jail for 25 years.”*

Moreover, youth from Majete 2 and 3 complain that they do have the disadvantages from the park, but do not enjoying the benefits: *“We are not benefiting from the park. Sometimes they employ people, but they do not consider us around the park for work. Only if there is fire in the park, we can go in and do piece work for them.”* Also, Majete 2 and 3 are too far from the main gate of the park; tourists cannot enter the park from this side, and there are no plans to change this in the (near) future. To put it differently, the communities in Majete 2 and 3 cannot focus on tourism at all, the area is just too remote for that.

Human-wildlife conflict

In all villages there are still tensions between the park and people. Nevertheless, in July, which is the closest to the fence of all the villages studied, the pressure is especially high:

“One of us met a lion once on the path from here to Majete 1. Also, leopards jump the fence [often]. Just like the baboons. Who destroy our crops. A lot of them jump the fence daily. They get out and eat our crops. But we cannot hurt them. We have to chase them back into the park. But it costs a lot of time to chase the baboons back to the fence, as they come every day, it is a waste of

[our] time. We cannot use this time for productive purposes. But for killing baboons you go to jail. So, we have to do it. Otherwise they destroy more crops. They [African Parks] only tell us to chase them, and we are not compensated for our lost crops."

The fence is helping, but not enough; as was mentioned during a focus group in July village: "There is of course a fence, but many rivers come from the park, and at these places they [the animals] can go down, and pass the fence." According to a traditional leader from July, the solution for tensions between humans and animals in his area is more collaboration with the park – and not less:

"The fence should be stronger. The lion came out. And a buffalo killed one man from Majete 1 ... Also, we chased a leopard back into the park ... These tensions between humans and animals are not good ... Maybe more rangers can come? ... They can come here, and shoot in the air. Warning shots in the air. Yet, a higher fence would probably also help."

First, youth from July mentioned that they do not enter the park anymore, as they now have proteins outside the park. Yet, later in the focus group they changed this point of view: "Sometimes we go. But there is a law, if we go in, we can be jailed. But sometimes we feel it is needed. There are few things to do here. And the availability of capital would help us, we would be less dependent on the park." Nevertheless, they also mentioned that they not solely go in to hunt: "Sometimes we also go in and just see and check the animals. Not for poaching, but we just go and see the animals." This is something that was not only mentioned in July, also in other epicenter villages the communities are interested to have more casual interaction with the park and the animals. African Parks sensitizes communities a lot on conservation, yet, only few young people have had the opportunity to experience the park and the animals on firsthand: "We need to visit the animals. Where are we doing this for? Majete does organize visits, but we lack the money for the fuel costs."

Appendix 8: Research area



Map 2 research area (own work, 2020).