



Policy Coherence and Safeguarding Practices Implementation in Mega-Infrastructure Projects; The Case of SVTP in Malawi

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Introduction

Mega-infrastructure projects in sub-Saharan Africa present a complex interplay between development ambitions, ecological sustainability, and social equity.

The complexity is more nuanced when translating internationally recognized environmental and social safeguards into meaningful outcomes in climate and crisis-prone contexts like Malawi's Shire Valley Transformation Program (SVTP-1)

Objectives

- Assess the alignment and responsiveness of policy and institutional frameworks for environmental and social safeguarding.
- Analyse the mechanisms and challenges of formal and informal stakeholder coordination.
- Investigate the impact of local knowledge and participatory mechanisms on conflict resolution and benefit-sharing.

Theoretical Framework

Intergrative theoretical lens;

- Policy Coherence Theory
- Multi-Actor Governance Theory
- Complex Adaptive Governance Systems theory

Methodology

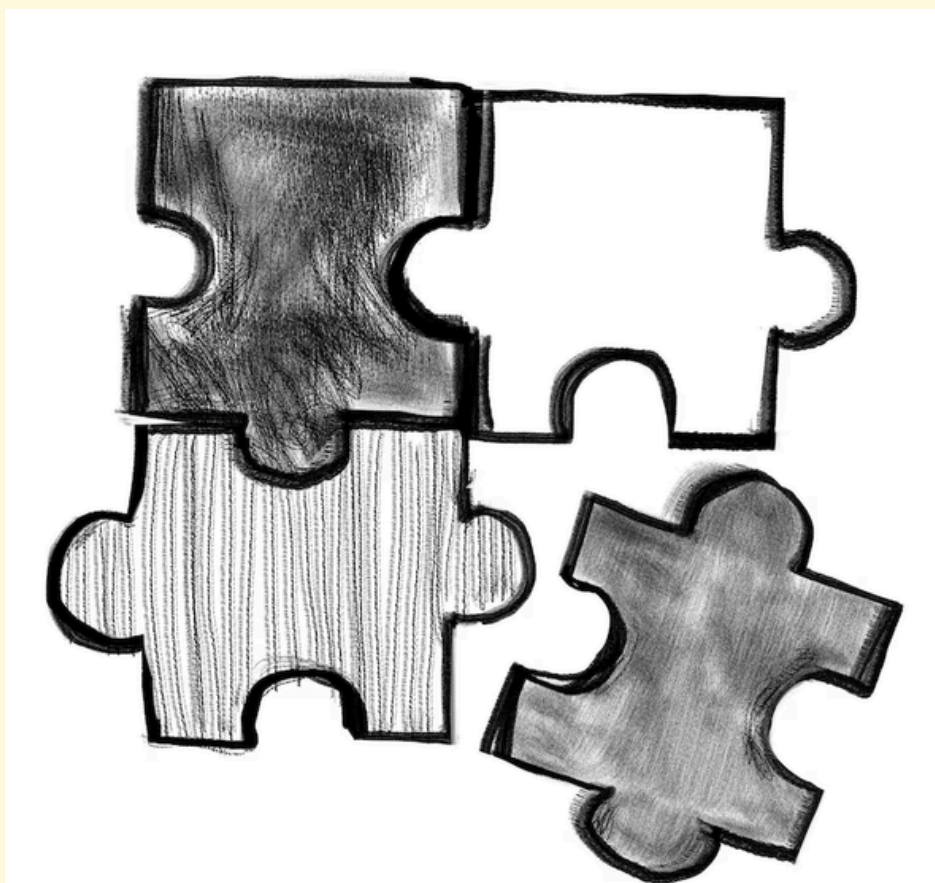
Convergent Mixed-Methods

- **Qualitative** (Policy and Document Review, semi-structured Interviews)
- **Quantitative** (Household survey)

Key Findings

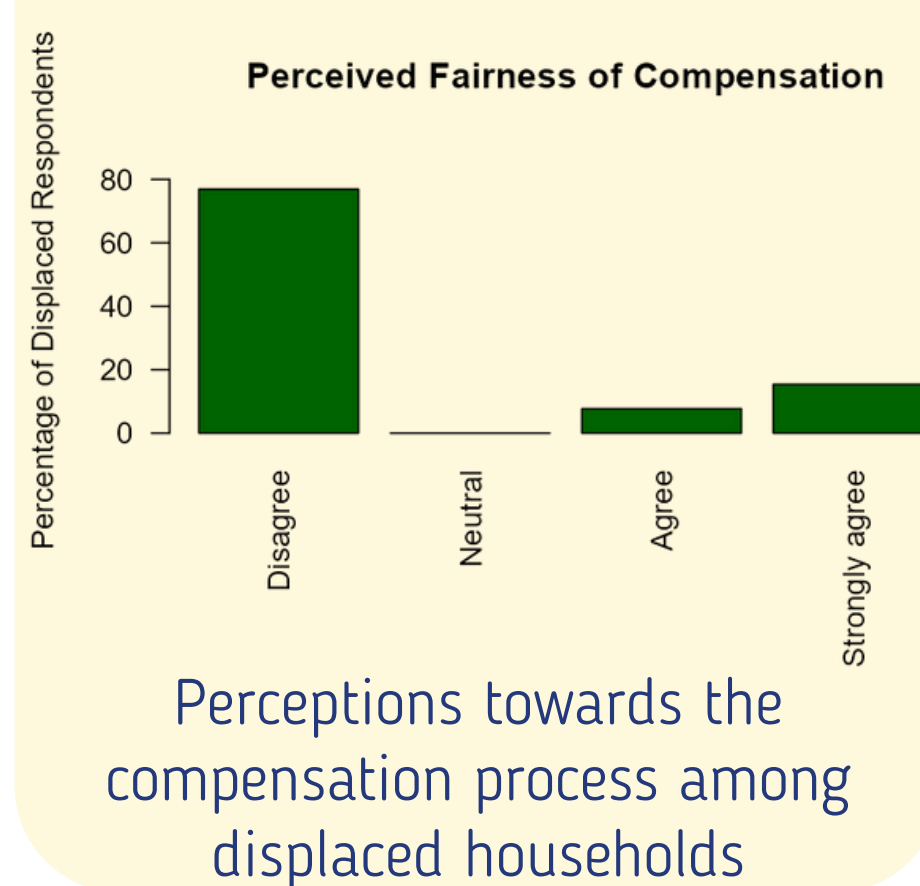
Institutional Fragmentation:

Despite strong alignment of frameworks, there were overlapping mandates, capacity constraints, and funding (financial) constraints



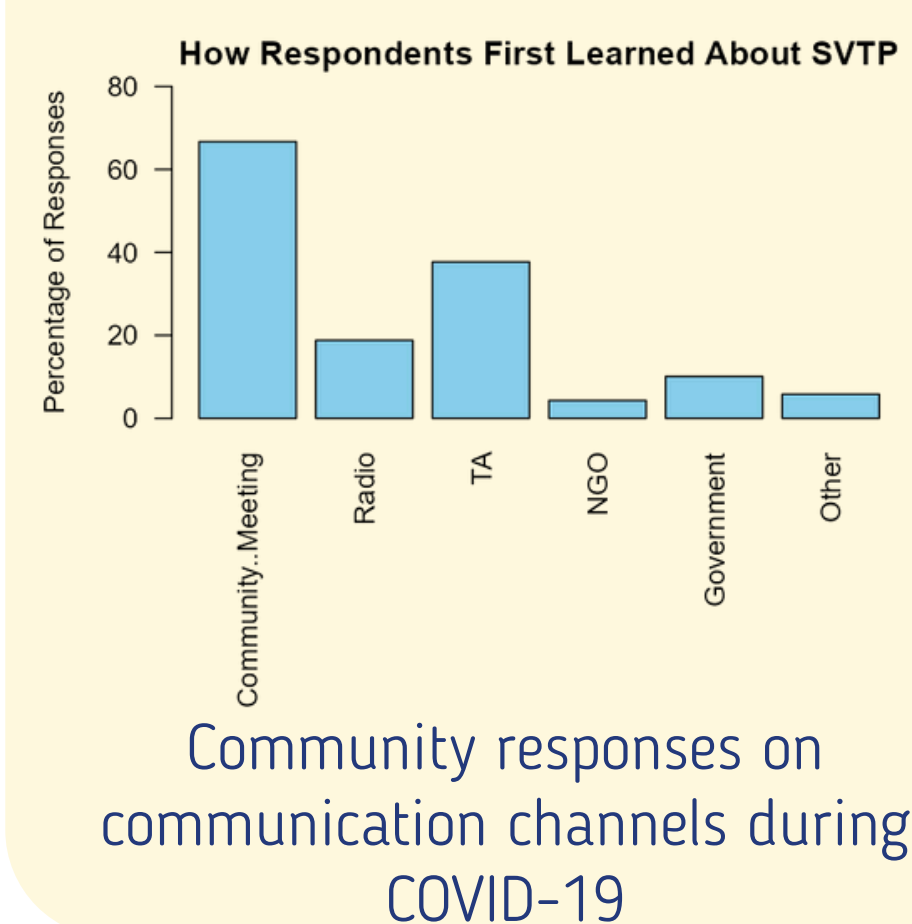
Stakeholder Coordination

Imbalances: While vertical linkages are improving, local horizontal coordination remains fragile and donor-dependent.



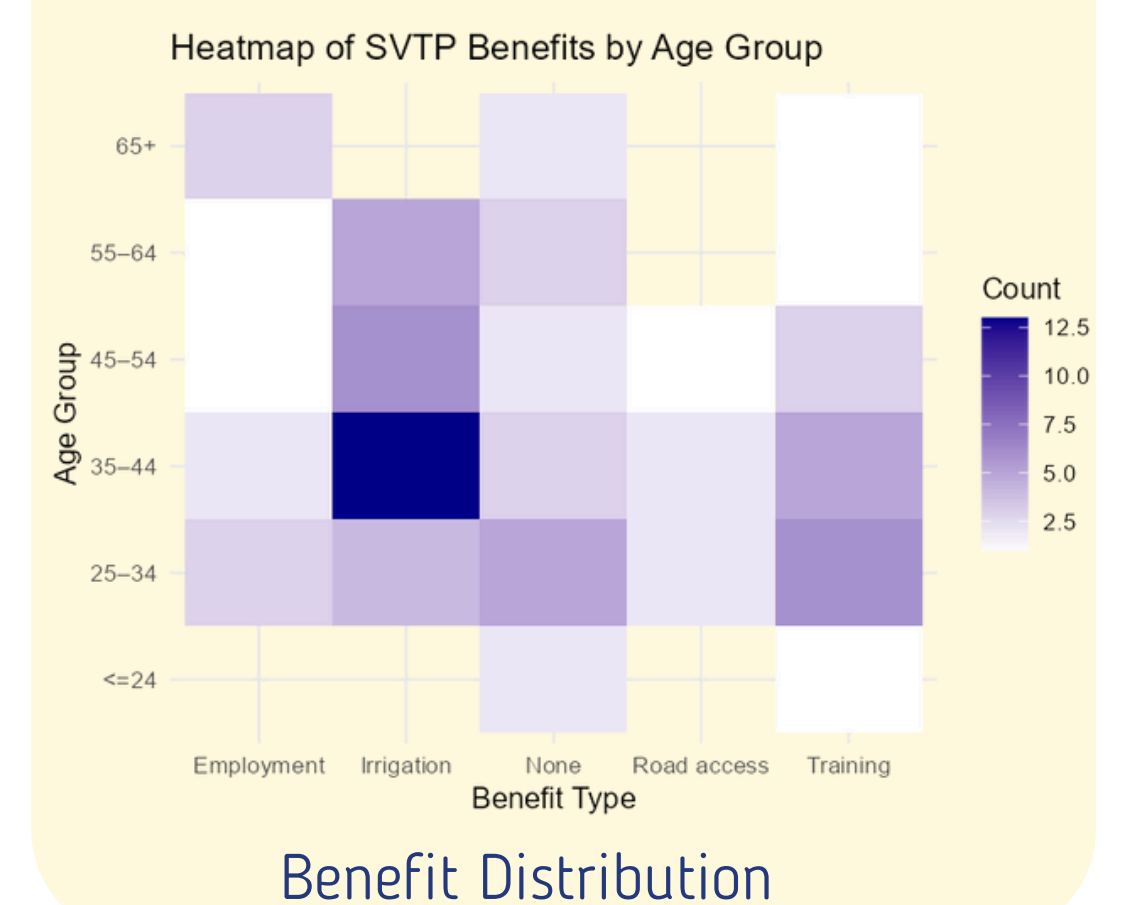
Emerging but Uneven

Adaptive Capacity: External shocks (cyclones, COVID-19) revealed both innovative local responses (digital outreach, "Gender Champions") and systemic weaknesses



Community Engagement

Gaps: High participation rates in consultations but underrepresentation of women in leadership, inadequate compensation, and asymmetries in benefits-sharing



Discussion

Safeguard implementation needs inclusive governance to compliment the formal policy. Centralized control and power imbalances lead to elite capture and weak accountability. Since current adaptive responses are often improvised, resilience requires strengthening accountability, promoting participatory learning, and recognizing informal governance.

Conclusion

Mega-project governance needs a new approach that goes beyond technical compliance. To ensure just and sustainable development, it must focus on fostering decentralized authority, cross-sectoral collaboration, and institutionalized learning. Empowering communities and balancing power are crucial to make sure infrastructure transformation truly benefits those most affected

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