
ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF UMHLANGANO WA MASEKO NGONI ON RURAL LIVELIHOODS OF SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES; A CASE STUDY OF NKOLIMBO VILLAGE IN NTCHEU DISTRICT, MALAWI.

***Benson Zidana, Freezer Jefutara**

¹Bachelor of Social Work-Pme.

²Vice Principal of Acedemics.

Dmi St. John the Baptist University of Malawi.

Article Received: 30 June 2026, Article Revised: 20 July 2026, Published on: 07 August 2026

***Corresponding Author: Benson Zidana**

Bachelor of Social Work-Pme, Dmi St. John the Baptist University of Malawi.

Doi: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.5574>

ABSTRACT

The study was aiming at assessing the impact Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni on rural livelihoods of surrounding communities at Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District. The research was qualitative in nature and used the explanatory research design, the research targeted Villagers both men, women and youths, Inkosi Nkolimbo, shop owners- selling different items.

The participants selected using purposive sampling technique. The total target population was 150 and sample size 30 participants selected using purposive sampling methods. The data were collected through interviews guide questions and analyzed using content analysis method. Cultural festivals can stimulate local economics via visitors spending, temporary jobs, and small scale businesses.

Despite visible business activity during Ushangano Maseko Ngoni in Ntcheu District lack of rigorous evidence on the festival's not economic contribution(beyond anecdote or short narrative of an interesting, amusing)the distribution of benefits or costs and ways to enhance inclusive socio-economic growth. Estimate the festivals economic contribution and proposed strategies to maximize inclusive local development at Nkolimbo Village in particular. Its recommendation is that there is need for Ntcheu District Planners together with tourism Department to develop plans for benefiting local villagers at Nkolimbo Village, those failed to implement should be dealt with accordingly to the laws of the land in order to reduce the

exploiting money and fraud cases and there is also a need for continuous improvement in monitoring and evaluation after looking into by-laws to improve Ntcheu District Council to measure progress and provide solutions to the problem immediately before out of hand the situation.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Heritage, Socio-economic development, Tourism, Community participation, Traditional leadership, Surrounding communities, Impact, Livelihoods, Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni , Cultural festival.

INTRODUCTION

People across the world conduct celebration depending on what particular ethic or cultural beliefs, this varies depending how the tribe values their culture, whether at funeral, weddings, celebrating the birth of child, initiations and celebrating cultural festivals as part of preserving culture of a particular tribe. In many rural settings across Africa, festivals bring together performances, ritual ,trade and tourism in ways that produce both tangible economic benefits(sales, casual labor, transport, accommodation)and less tangible social goods(networks, prestige, knowledge exchange, intergenerational teaching) according to Kuligowski(2024).

Despite their visibility influence the year-round livelihoods, who benefits, who is excluded and how benefits are distributed and sustained remain under-documented for many communities.This study explores those dynamics through a focused case:The Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni at Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District.This locally significant cultural gathering that brings together ngoni families across the country as well from other countries, performers and visitors for rituals ,music, dance and social exchange, according to Salvador (2022).

Beyond its cultural importance, festivals draws traders, transport operators, artisans and food vendors from the immediate area and further fields. This creating a seasonal market and a temporary projection in demand for goods and services. This research asks what are festivals impact on livelihoods of households living around Nkolimbo Village and how are those affects experienced across gender, age and socio-economic groups, according to Keagamaan(2022).

This research investigate how surrounding communities benefits from Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni festivals in terms of socio-economic livelihoods conditions and the gap in existing safeguarding policies that leave these communities not benefiting.

Understanding the strategies to employ in improving the livelihoods of the surrounding communities around Nkolimbo Village and contribute to the broader academic discourse on cultural festivals in Malawi.

This research aims at offering practical insights that can guide surrounding communities from different cultural festival celebration sites to benefit in socio-economic rather than used as celebration sites and advocacy effort aimed at fostering socio-economic conditions surrounding communities.

Background of the study

Globally, cultural are increasingly recognized as more than just celebrations of heritage. They are social institutions that shape identities, redistribute resources and generate livelihoods opportunities. At worldwide scale, research shows festivals can stimulate local socio-economics through direct spending (food, crafts, accommodation, transport and through multiplier in nearby businesses, according to Rowland (2022).

Cultural festivals on surrounding communities not only single fixed figure but also can be illustrated with data like UNESCO Report which found that for every \$1 invested in festivals production, an estimated \$2.51 was injected into local economy. Other study indicates that cultural tourism accounts for approximately 40% of global tourism, demonstrating a significant economic contribution.

It creates short and long term employment (temporary event staff, guides, artisans, small traders and foster micro-enterprises development. It promote cultural industries and intangible cultural heritage which can be packaged for cultural tourism and create economy initiatives.

In 2024, ten major festivals created nearly 3000 jobs which are vital in regions with limited formal employment opportunities. Festivals can be inclusive spaces with UNESCO Report highlighting that 54% of management roles were held by women and 65% of the workforce was under 31 years old. Festivals can be a key instrumental for enhancing livelihoods and can stimulate development, especially when properly planned.

In Africa, cultural festivals play a particularly prominent role because of the continent's rich and diverse intangible heritage and because many rural and semi-urban economies rely heavily on informal event-driven incomes.

UNESCO Report on Southern Africa findings ten festivals studied generated \$11.7 million in economic activity in 2024. This boost local spending by up to 30% or surpass as source of

temporary jobs, 65% under 31years old and 54% of management roles were held by women. Hence, government support festivals like Senegal, Morocco for its sustainability.

Typical themes from Africa studies include festivals as drivers of domestic and intra-continental tourism which can bring visitors and cash to rural communities while also raising the profile of marginalized cultures. Linkages between festivals production (textiles, beadwork carvings) food vending and transport services often forming crucial but irregular livelihood streams, according to Dovey and others (2023).

In Malawi, cultural ceremonies and festivals remain central to communal life in many ethnic groups including The Ngoni locally organized events can generate income for households through sales of food, crafts (clubs, mthini, shields), accommodation and transport.

Data available, UNESCO indicates that tourism, to which festivals contribute accounts for 7% of Malawi's GDP and has the potential to diversify the economy away from Agriculture base. Culturally festivals strengthen social fabric and build community bonds.

It offers market exposure for local producers and performers. This reinforced ethnic identity and intergenerational transmission of customs (dance, language, dress) which has both cultural and social capital benefits.

It faces pressures from modernization, migration (youth outmigration and changing consumption patterns that affect how the festivals are organized and who benefits. In Ntcheu District, particularly at Nkolimbo Village specifically, studying the Umhlangano wa Ngoni provides an opportunity to examine how a locally significant cultural intersects with livelihoods in a predominantly rural setting where agriculture, petty trade and seasonal labour shape household survival. The festival's timing, visitors profile (local, from Ntcheu , national and diaspora) and management arrangements influence the kinds of opportunities it creates and for whom, according to Chakanza(2023).

One study conducted, touches on the relationship between cultural values and environmental sustainability including Ngoni and chewa tribes, according to Boucher (2022).

A case study of Umhlangano wa Ngoni at Nkolimbo Village can fill gaps by providing context-rich evidence on how cultural celebrations operates as livelihood strategies in Malawi rural economy. Livelihoods approach examines assets (human, social, natural, physical, financial, vulnerability and strategies. Some events/tourism economics analyzes direct, indirect and induced socio-economic effects.

Cultural sustainability assesses how commodities affects the authenticity and transmission of cultural practices. Equity lens looks at distribution outcomes across social groups (gender, age, wealth).

This provides empirical evidence for policymakers and development actors on whether and how cultural festivals can be influence for pro-poor local development. It informs local festivals management practices to enhance benefit sharing (e.g. vendors allocation, fee structure, capacity building for artisans) making fully benefiting Umhlangano festival surrounding communities, duty bearers may introduce a special fee allocation for developing Nkolimbo Village and surrounding to construct better water facilities for domestic use as well as hydroelectricity for electrifying houses, hospitals, building better schools, this makes known by the people around the area really benefiting from umhlangano festival levy.

This also contributes to academic debates on socio-economic role of intangible cultural heritage in rural livelihoods, according to Stoeltje (2023).

Main Objectives

To assess the impact of Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni on rural Livelihoods of surrounding communities.

Specific Research Objectives

1. To examine the socio-economic benefits of Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni festival to households and local businesses.
2. To analyze the role of the festival in promoting tourism and creating opportunities for income generation in surrounding communities.
3. To investigate challenges faced by surrounding communities in benefiting from Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni festival.

Literature Review

Mokabe (2024) The socio-economic benefits “Quantifying the socio-economic benefits of music festivals: The case study of Phalaphala FM (South Africa) Royal Heritage festivals”. The study used both a demand-side survey of festival attendees and a supply-side survey of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the host area. It found that the festival generated income for the host community and local businesses; it emphasized that keeping the value chain local buying raw materials locally enhanced the benefits.

The study also noted challenges: not all goods/services were available locally, meaning leakage of benefits out of the host area. Relevance: This empirical case gives evidence of how both households through employment/ entrepreneurship and local businesses can gain during festival periods and highlights importance of local sourcing for maximizing benefits.

Anwuri (2022) Cultural Festival and Income Generation, a case study of Ikwere Local Government Area in Nigeria. Using primary survey data from residents of Ikwere Local Government Area (Nigeria), this study found a positive and significant relationship between cultural festivals and job creation and income generation through tourism-related activities. The research supports how festivals can stimulate local tourism and provide economic opportunities for households and small businesses.

Academy of Sciences and collaborative research teams(2020)Zhaoshu Island(Tree Island) was home to permanent community of about 200 residents across 70 households primarily comprising local fishermen and municipal staff, historically was barren sand cay vulnerable to severe wind and tide erosion, the Island has undergone intensive ecological transformation like afforestation, wildlife return by Chinese environmental authorities. It provides empirical evidence that cultural and ecological revitalization initiatives, including festivals and collective activities, had significantly improved the livelihoods of surrounding fishing communities by diversifying income, strengthening social cohesion, and attracting tourism.

Most of these changes were tied to ecological restoration, infrastructure development, and community-led events that blend cultural heritage with sustainable practices. Background on Zhaoshu Island, located Northern Qilian Islands, under Sansha City, Hainan Province, China. Population, Around 200 residents (mostly fishing families). Development, since 2014, infrastructure projects (desalination plant, housing, power supply, ring road) have transformed living standards.

Integrates the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and Cultural Livelihoods Enhancement theory adapted for a study on cultural festivals such as Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni. These aligned with global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8 & 11) that encourages decent work and economic growth as well as sustainable cities and communities respectively. Aligns with Malawi's National Development Plan, The Malawi 2063(MW2063) which emphasizes inclusive wealth creation and self-reliance.

Research Methodology

The research used explanatory research design to explore and have better understanding the impact of Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni on rural livelihoods of surrounding communities at Nkolimbo Village, according to Leavy (2022). This research used the qualitative method because wants to understand impact and comprehensive for first hand data of Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni on rural livelihoods of surrounding communities at Nkolimbo Village, according to Cambridge University (2023). This research used purposive technique, where by

the researcher intentionally select participants or units based on specific characteristics align with my study's objectives. Purposive sampling suitable because there is a targeting particular subgroups and opinions also known as judgmental sampling, involves the researcher used expertise to select respondents that are mainly useful to the purpose of research objectives, according to Plays (2018).

The target population for this study comprise of Villagers both men, women and youths. The total population was 150 the researcher had villagers as participants, according to Dr. Pandey(N/A). The sample size for that study was 30 participants due to data saturation, according to Chowdhry (2025).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

As qualitative data is gathered by use of open ended interview guide questions and I used thematic analysis technique by NVIVO to analyze data because was a systematic coding and categorizing approach to identify relationships, patterns and trends within text or visual data. This method able to conventional, directed and summative like start with pre-existing theories or concepts to guide analysis as well as focuses on specific words or cords frequency, providing understanding, explanation and interpretation of themes in textual data.

Response Rate

This study targeted 30 participants from Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu. All the targeted participants responded and presents 100% respondents rate. According to Baruch (2022) defines response rate as the percentage of eligible sample units that complete and returns a survey, accounting for various sampling and participants challenges.

Demographic Information

A demographic information refers to different qualitative assessment of characteristics of a population which are essential for comparing findings across studies, according to Short (2024). The discussed characters include age of participants, gender of the participants, role of the participants and educational level of the participants, discussion of these relevant variables provide an overview of the sampled participants in data collection.

Age of Respondents

This section includes ranges of ages of participants from Inkosi Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu only since they were the ones administered with interview guide questions. It is essential because a

Specific age demographic may share certain cultural experiences, values, attitudes and determines quality of information given from respondents with different perceptive.

26.66% of the participants were aged between 35-44 years, 23.33% of the participants were aged between 25-34 years, and 20.00% of the participants were aged between 45-54 years, 16.66% of the participants were aged between 18-24 years and 13.33% of collected from participants aged 55 years and above representing 100% in total.

Gender of Respondents

The Word gender refers to a person's self-representation as male or female. Enables the researcher to understand sources of any inequalities and have an insight into patterns among different gender impacts the categories. It also helps to determine how gender impact the choices of an individual. This thereby having an impact on the survey, for example this study was about assessing the impact of Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni on rural livelihoods of surrounding communities, based on Ngoni culture, women are custodian of it, to an extent Inkosi's are chosen by them, they regarded knows the behavior of men in the locality, this include their livelihoods know better. Therefore it was important as it enabled the researcher collected certain information as the study was carried out for gender responses.

The majority of respondents were females with representation of 66.66% of 20 female respondents and 33.33% of 10 male respondents.

Level of Education of Respondents.

Another essential variable to the study was education levels of participants. This was considered to be one of that demonstrate different level of education of participants

30.00%, followed by those who reached primary level 26.66%, then followed by those reached tertiary level representing 23.33% and 20.00% of the participants did not attend any formal education From the objective of Socio-Economic benefits to households and local businesses the researcher found that; **most participants stipulated that household's income** from Local farmers and vendors benefit by selling food and produce to attendees. Artisans earn income through sales of traditional crafts and textiles, according to Ganizo(2024). However, some **business growth like** hospitality services such as guesthouses and restaurants experience increased demand during the festival period said during the Umhlangano wa Maseko festival, visitors purchase traditional crafts and textiles, providing artisans with a platform to showcase their skills and earn income. While others people they do not know what to do during or after the festival.

From the objective role in promoting tourism and income generation the researcher found that most participants in agreement that; tourism attraction, the festival draws international visitors from Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia, strengthening Malawi's cultural tourism (Ndzila, 2025). In contrast that also Cultural preservation, Traditional dances like mgubo dance and rituals at Gomani Chikuse's grave provide unique experiences for tourists according to Nation Online (2023).

Other participants understand that income opportunities, at the event creates jobs for performers, artisans, and service providers, while boosting creative industries and said that the Festival of the Ngoni people evidences how tradition and culture can generate value, promoting tourism cultural, capacitation of young artists, and strengthening communities" (Ndzila, 2025, p. 2).

From objective, Challenges Faced by Surrounding Communities the researcher found that; most participants revealed in stipulated the festival faces Infrastructure limitations, Poor road networks and limited accommodation deter tourists, according to Ganizo (2024).

Other participants agreed that harmful practices, traditional initiation rites have historically exposed most children to risks such as child marriage and school dropouts, according to World Vision International (2025). On other hand, most participants were agreed that cultural erosion, influence of western culture by emmulation and intermarriages has weakened Ngoni traditions, reducing community benefits, according to Nation Online (2017).

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote year-round socio-economic activities, stakeholders should develop complementary cultural events and tourism products throughout the year.
- Malawi Police Service should improve security and safety measures, adequate policing and community-based security initiatives will improve the festival's reputation and encourages repeat visits of tourists or visitors.
- Malawi Government must establish monitoring and evaluation mechanism, identify gaps and inform future planning decisions.
- Ministry for Tourism should strengthen tourism promotion and marketing, partnerships with tourism authorities and media platforms can increase awareness of Umhlangano Festival attracts more visitors and extend tourism activities throughout the year.
- Malawi Government or NGOs should improve access to capital, access to capital will enable community members to expand their businesses and prepare adequately for the Umhlangano Festival.

- Malawi Government or NGOs should provide skills, training and capacity building, this will improve service delivery, business performance and the ability of households to maximize income-generating opportunities during the Umhlangano Festival.
- Malawi Government or NGOs should formulate policies that enhance community participation in planning, establishing community committees or stakeholder forums will ensure inclusiveness, transparency and equitable distribution of benefits to many.
- Both Malawi Government and NGOs should improve infrastructure development, this will enhance accessibility, attracts more tourists and support local businesses during and beyond the Umhlangano Festival period.

CONCLUSION

From the study results showed that the festival plays a significant role in enhancing socio-economic development within surrounding communities. Firstly, the Umhlangano Festival contributes positively to households and local businesses through increased sales, temporary employment opportunities and unimproved access to market for local products and services, food vendors, small-scale business owners, transport operators, accommodation provider experience arise in income during the Umlangano Festival period, which supports households and stimulates local economic activity endeavors.

Secondly, The Umhlangano Festival services as important platform for promoting cultural tourism. Festival attracts both domestic and international visitors, thereby increasing the visibility of Nkolimbo Village as a cultural tourism destination. The coming of visitors creates business opportunities, encourages entrepreneurship as well as strengthens cultural preservation. As a result, Umhlangano Festival contributes to income generation and supports the growth of formal and informal economic activities in the surrounding communities at Nkolimbo Village.

Thirdly, despite these benefits, the study also established that several challenges limits actives fully participation and benefit of local communities. Some of these include limited access to capital, poor infrastructure, and inadequate community involvement in decision-making and planning, lack of skills and training security concerns and seasonal in nature of Umhlangano Festival. Such barrier reduce the long-term and sustainable impact of the Umhlangano festival on socio-economic development.

Despite celebrating as cultural heritage, The Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni festival holds immense potential to transform surrounding communities by merging cultural heritage with economic empowerment. Respondents (25) agree that maximizing its impact requires

strategic planning, investment in local capacity, and integration of cultural tourism with livelihood development. If these strategies are pursued, the festival can evolve into a sustainable engine of prosperity, identity, and unity for the Ngoni people and their neighbors.

REFERENCES

1. Academy of Sciences and Collaborative Research Teams (2020) *Atlas of Common Plants in the Xisha Island*, China Environmental Publishing.
2. Alho J. & B. Spencer (2025) *“Statistical Demography and Forecasting (Springer’s Series Statistics),”* N/A.
3. Anwuri, P.N. (2022) *Cultural Festival and Income Generation*, GPH-International Journal of Business Management.
4. Researchgate Article (2025) *Literary Festivals as Cultural Destinations*, Ubud Writers.
5. Birmingham, P. (2025) *“Using Research Instruments: A Guide for Researchers”*, Taylor & Francis Press.
6. Boucher, C. (Chisale) G.J. Morgan (2022) *When Animals Sing and Spirits Dance: Gule Wamkulu, the Great Dance of the Chewa People of Malawi*, Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art.
7. Cambridge University of New York (2023) *“The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics”*, Cambridge University Press.
8. Chakanza J.C. (2023) *Religion and Culture in a Changing Malawi*, Luviri Press.
9. Chilima, S. K. (2023, September 2). *Unity is vital for development*. Malawi Government Press.
10. Chimwendo Banda, R. (2023, September 2). *Umhlango wa Maseko Ngoni 2023: Peace, stability, unity are prerequisite for development*. Malawi Voice Press.
11. Chowdhury, A.K. (2025) *“Sample Size for Clinical Trials”*, Oxford Press.
12. Clarke, A. & A. Jepson (2025) *Managing and Developing Countries, Festivals and Events*, McMillan Press.
13. Clarke, A. (2016) *Managing and Developing Communities, Festivals and Events*, Palgrave McMillan (now Springer Nature).
14. Creswell, J.W. (2025) (Sixth Edition) *“Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches”*, SAGE Publications.
15. Doe, F. & A. Preko (2021) *“Festival Tourism and Socio-economic Development: Case of Kwahu Traditional Areas of Ghana”*, Emerald Publishing.

16. Dovey L. and Others (2023) *“African Cinema: Manifesto and Practice for Cultural Decolonization”*
17. Dr. M. Pandey *“Research Methodology: Tools and Techniques”*, N/A.
18. et al...S. (2025) Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, DFID.
19. *“Festivals and Values”*, (2023) Springer Link.
20. Gold J. & M. Gold (2020) *Festival Cities: Culture, Planning and Urban Life*, Rout ledge Press.
21. *“Handbook of Data Analysis”* (2004), SAGE Publications.