

Gulewamkulu institutional and organizational factors influencing community development projects in the area of T.A. Chauma in Dedza District, Malawi



Anthony Gilbert Mtuta¹ 

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to analyze Gulewamkulu organizational and institutional factors and how they can influence community development projects in the area of TA (TA: Traditional Authority). Chauma, Dedza District, in Malawi. Gulewamkulu is a secret society in the Chewa ethnic group in Malawi. It is also found in Mozambique and Zambia. Gulewamkulu has been recognized as an indigenous cultural institution that promotes socio-cultural, economic, and political development by the international and local communities. Despite this recognition, Gulewamkulu has not yet been fully integrated into community development projects. The results of the study showcased that Gulewamkulu institutional factors such as principles (p -value of 0.000), rules (p -value of 0.041), power (p -value of 0.028), loyalty to leaders (p -value of 0.000), and disciples (p -value of 0.012) are significant and can influence the achievement of different community development projects. The study therefore recommends that Gulewamkulu be involved in community development projects in its areas. Community development agencies should develop policies that allow the participation of Gulewamkulu in different community development projects.

Keywords Gulewamkulu · Community development projects · Participation

Abbreviation

TA Traditional Authority

✉ Anthony Gilbert Mtuta
anthonymtuta@gmail.com

¹ Department of Anthropology, the Catholic University of Malawi, TA Chauma, Dedza, Malawi

Introduction

Different communities face various difficulties that need outside assistance to be overcome. Governmental and non-governmental organizations have been contacted to participate in the development of solutions to the problems communities are facing. When assisting indigenous people with their issues, these groups have never used an emic approach. The residents of T. A. Chauma are of the Chewa¹ ethnic group, who use Gulewamkulu² to solve issues that affect people's daily lives. Other stories have also mentioned Gulewamkulu's involvement in community development intervention programs. There is no clear explanation for whether Gulewamkulu institutional and organizational dynamics contribute to their success, despite the fact that various accounts acknowledge the influence of Gulewamkulu on various community development intervention programs. Therefore, the goal of the paper is to analyze Gulewamkulu's institutional and organizational dynamics and their influence in the study area.

Culture and development

In social contexts, the idea of culture is frequently employed to denote the way of life of individuals. It includes laws, moral standards, concepts, guidelines, knowledge, tangible elements, and socially acceptable behaviors. Values are a community's agreed-upon conceptions of what is morally right or wrong or what is aesthetically pleasing. The shared good of a society that has accumulated over time can be thought of as culture at its most fundamental level (Brennan 2022).

To ascertain its impact on new or existing development initiatives (resource management, environmental protection, etc.), it may be necessary to discuss the inclusion of culture in community and economic development models (Lewis 2014). Therefore, it is crucial that issues and potential solutions should be stated in a way that respects the local culture.

The National Cultural Strategy of Malawi (2005) acknowledges the participation of cultural institutions in various intervention programs for community development. According to the policy, Gulewamkulu in Malawi is one of the cultural institutions that aid in the achievement of the objectives of community development intervention programs for socio-economic development, political preservation, and environmental conservation (Boucher 2016; Ndau 2015; Fink 2015; Gondwe 2013 and Korpela 2011).

¹ Chewa: The ethnic group which is found in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. The Chewa originated from Luba area in Katanga District in DR Congo.

² Gulewamkulu: It literally means big dance. It is a most popular Chewa dance which is associated with the ancestral world. It is performed during the initiation rites, installation of the chief, the funeral rites and the memorial celebration of the dead.

What is Gulewamkulu?

The Chewa ethnic community has a clandestine indigenous organization called Gulewamkulu, which consists of both men and women and is charged with carrying out tasks on behalf of the entire group (Gondwe 2015). The Chewa people hold the belief that Gulewamkulu has a connection to their ancient spirits. Gulewamkulu, who wears a ceremonial outfit, symbolizes the spiritual realm and the spirits of ancestors (Bruegel 2001). The term Gulewamkulu, which serves as a collective noun for several categories of Nyau³ dancers, is used in a symbolic manner to suggest that it is superior to other dances performed by this Chewa ethnic group (Katan 2004). People often connect this institution with the ghosts of the deceased, who serve as a bridge between the spiritual and physical worlds.

According to one interpretation, the performer wearing the mask is thought to be the ghost of a deceased ancestor who appears as Gulewamkulu to carry out certain tasks deemed necessary for the benefit of the living community, thus hiding his or her identity in public.

Another interpretation claims that someone wearing a Gulewamkulu mask takes on a position of dominance over others. In particular, Gulewamkulu initiates women into positions of power which gives them great influence over decisions made during chief's inaugurations and the initiation rites of children into adulthood.

Origin of Gulewamkulu

The origin of Gulewamkulu is explained in a variety of ways. According to one story, Gulewamkulu was founded by women who experienced tensions and troubles but were unable to express them because of social pressures. They left the society, went into the bushes, covered themselves in leaves, and returned to convey what they were going through while keeping their identities secret. The only way the neighborhood could hear them was in this fashion.

Later, men embraced the dance, particularly those who married women in matrilineal societies. When their identities were concealed by the masks they wore, Gulewamkulu became a venue for these guys to air their concerns and exact retribution on abuses (Kamlongera 1992).

Another story claims that Gulewamkulu originated as a hunting strategy among the Akafula people, who inhabited Malawi prior to the arrival of the Chewa ethnic group. When hunting, individuals put on animal skins to conceal their identities by donning the hide of the prey they intended to kill. The prey was unable to recognize the adversary.

The third version makes it clear that Gulewamkulu first began as a straightforward dance for common fun but eventually became the greatest and most sacred dance of the society thanks to its adoption by individuals of rank and authority

³ Nyau: Another name for Gulewamkulu. It is associated to the attire that the mask dancers put on. They put on lugs or warn out attire that keeps on shaking when the mask dancer is moving or dancing.

(Kamlongera 1992), which was associated with performances at funerals, chiefs' inaugurations, and initiation rites.

Gulewamkulu's involvement in community development projects

The basis for the functions played by Gulewamkulu in the Chewa community is established by the ethnic myth of creation, which, among other things, encourages and promotes the presence of a harmonious interaction between supernatural beings, the cosmos (nature), and the living community. Gulewamkulu is seen by the locals as a metaphor for the ancestral spirits that communicate with the present-day inhabitants (Mtonga 2006). To ensure that nature and the environment are protected and that their interdependence is upheld, it acts as a conduit between God and the living and the dead. In this myth, Gulewamkulu serves as the supporters and upholders of the existing social systems, while God serves as the central figure for all conventional organizational structures. God is the final authority on everything that occurs in society.

Gulewamkulu represents the harmonious organizational structure of the ancestral spirits, who continuously instruct the living community on how to uphold the harmony and unity established by God while maintaining the relationship between God, nature, and the ancestral spirits. It makes sure that every member of the community strictly abides by the moral code of conduct that is taught to them during several initiation rites (Bruegel 2001). Gulewamkulu instructs the community to fight any outside or internal force or other weird organizational structures that endanger the harmony of the three world views that God has created (Schoffeleers 1999; Boucher 2012). It also qualifies for the fact that Gulewamkulu should participate in various socio-cultural, economic, political, and environmental endeavors where community development intervention actions are taking place in order to fulfill its obligations to the community. Gulewamkulu helps ensure that everyone in the community adheres to the principles of harmony and active participation so that community development interventions and activities are carried out in a way that does not conflict with God's principle of harmony between Himself, nature, ancestral spirits, and the living community. It guarantees that community development initiatives are launched with the overall good and wellbeing of the community and its people in mind.

Gulewamkulu performances spread knowledge, inspire participation, and raise awareness among community members for various developmental endeavors (Korpela 2011; Fink and Metzger 2015). Gulewamkulu songs provide messages that inspire and urge community members to protect the environment, modify their behavior, and show the spirit of hard work in the community (Boucher 2016; Msangambe 2011). Gulewamkulu instills a sense of identification and belonging in its members, causing them to take an active role in civic engagement and community development initiatives as well as to feel a sense of ownership over the community's fabric and way of life.

During the initiation rites, Gulewamkulu trains young members and imparts morals, discipline, and a variety of abilities. The instruction equips young people for

their involvement in activities which benefit the entire community and is judged vital.

Gulewamkulu brings people together and inspires them to stand in unity when addressing topics of shared concern. When Gulewamkulu dancers are called to perform at various community development interventions, the idea of togetherness, unity, and solidarity is demonstrated.

Contributions of Gulewamkulu in community development interventions

Gulewamkulu has taken on various roles in helping to carry out various community development projects. When it participates, two distinct perspectives emerge. According to the one perspective, Gulewamkulu operates as messengers of information regarding behavioral transformation (Zubieta 2016), environmental protection, socio-economic progress, and political change (Boucher 2016). It is used in places where students don't show an interest in going to school to persuade them to do so. Primary school enrollment has increased as a result of its contribution. Gulewamkulu performances also encourage members of society to get involved in infrastructure improvement, tree planting, and awareness-raising initiatives (Katan 2004). Consequently, this perspective urges change agents to include this institution in the process of creating, developing, and carrying out community development initiatives (Bruegel 2001; Boucher 2016; Ndau 2015).

The other opposing perspective portrays Gulewamkulu institution as supporting anti-modernity, anti-progress, and backward-looking community development initiatives. Gulewamkulu terrifies students, sometimes causing them to skip class. Gulewamkulu adherents choose to wear masks and dance rather than attending school (Cees and Mirjam 2013).

Methodology

Description of the study area

The study was carried out in the T.A. Chauma neighborhood in Malawi's Dedza District which is one of the nine districts in Malawi's central area, with Lilongwe to the west, Salima to the northeast, Ntcheu to the southeast, Lake Malawi to the east, and Mozambique to the southwest border of the district. According to Malawi Census Report (2018), a total of 623,780 people live in the district, of which 326,113 are women and 29,766 men.

Data collection methods

Both primary and secondary sources of qualitative data were used in the study. Three instruments were employed by the study to gather its data. In order to gather information from respondents and key informants, it first used a semi-structured

questionnaire and interview guide. Second, the study also made use of secondary data.

Data analysis methods

By paying attention to the major ideas, remarks, and concerns from the respondents, data from respondent interviews, key informants, and focus group discussions was analyzed using logistic regression, thematic analysis, and descriptive analytic methods. To ascertain the relationship between Gulewamkulu organizational and institutional factors influencing the effectiveness of social and environmental community development projects, regression analysis was used in the study. The logit model is as follows;

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \beta_7 X_7 + \beta_8 X_8 + \beta_9 X_9 + \beta_{10} X_{10} + \beta_{11}$$

Y = Dependent variables.

CDP Success.

α = Constant.

μ = Error.

β = Coefficient of disbursement.

$X_1 - X_{11}$ refer to Gulewamkulu organizational and institutional factors, i.e. structure, hierarchy, fraternity, power, principles, rules, royalty to leaders(chiefs), disciples, procedures, authority, secrecy. The study's association between its variables was established using the logit analysis technique.

Findings and discussion

According to the binary logit regression study findings shown in Table 1, Gulewamkulu has its own set of principles (p -value 0.000), which makes it more structured. Additionally, it has followers who follow rules (p -value 0.041) which have social influence, and power (p -value 0.028). Gulewamkulu is devoted to the society's leaders (p -value 0.000) and disciples (p -value 0.012). The objectives of the community development intervention programs are accomplished with the aid of these institutional and organizational factors.

At a p -value of 0.000, or less than 0.05, statistical significance was observed for the predictor variable 'Gulewamkulu principles'. The variable had a favorable and significant impact on the likelihood that community development intervention programs would be successful. Every member of the organization is required to abide by the severe norms of Gulewamkulu. Those who break these laws face severe penalties. Gulewamkulu must ensure that each member of the organization participates and adheres to the guidelines established by its leaders when carrying out community-based tasks. Gulewamkulu provides instructions that encourage a work ethic, commitment, and fulfilling deadlines for the tasks assigned to it. The Gulewamkulu also follows through on completing tasks as directed by the plan. When putting these concepts into practice, intervention programs for community development are also necessary. The findings of the study are in line with a study by Englund (2002)

Table 1 Organizational and institutional factors influencing the success of social and environmental community development projects

	Delta-method				
	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
Gule_structure	.081483	.0934911	0.87	0.383	-.1017563 .2647223
Gule_hierarchy	.0261187	.0665504	0.39	0.695	-.1043177 .1565551
Gule_fraternity	-.0971751	.0721155	-1.35	0.178	-.2385189 .0441687
Gule_power	.109339	.0498478	2.19	0.028	.0116392 .2070388
Gule_Secrecy	.0453303	.0759581	0.60	0.551	-.1035449 .1942055
Gule_principles	.3273042	.0875233	3.74	0.000	.1557616 .4988468
Gule_rulesandprinciples	.1194325	.0583037	2.05	0.041	.0051594 .2337056
Gule_loyaltyleaders	.1974958	.0549162	3.60	0.000	.089862 .3051297
Gule_disciple	-.2539011	.1006177	-2.52	0.012	-.4511083 -.0566939
Gule_procedures	.0387645	.0735573	0.53	0.598	-.1054052 .1829341
Gule_authority	-.0195839	.0609064	-0.32	0.748	-.1389582 .0997904

on the influence of urbanization on local chiefs' power in the township of Chinsapo in Lilongwe City. Because of the Gulewamkulu norms and principles that were followed throughout the time when Gulewamkulu was actively involved in the implementation of community development activities, local chiefs in this area had influence over development and over immigrants' dwelling.

At a p -value of 0.041, which is less than the 0.05 level of statistical significance, the predictor variable 'Gulewamkulu rules' was determined to be statistically significant. The variable had a favorable and significant impact on the likelihood that community development efforts would succeed. The Gulewamkulu norms, which originated from the Chewa ethnic group, provide the group's members a sense of identity that was developed from the people's culture and beliefs, which would encourage everyone in this community to work together and listen to one another. Gulewamkulu's presence was a sign of care of the law, culture, and traditional beliefs that accepted the Chewa identity. The findings of this study concur with the study of Nda (2015), which demonstrated how the Nyau characteristics support the communal identity reflected in their cultural norms and beliefs. The Chewa ethnic group has come together as a result of cultural norms and values, and they are recognized as a people capable of working together for the benefit of the entire neighborhood.

With a p -value of 0.012, or less than 0.05, the predictor variable 'Gulewamkulu disciples' was shown to be statistically significant. It had a positive and significant impact on the likelihood of affecting the outcome of intervention programs for community development. The findings are in line with Kamlongera's study of 1992, which found that each Gulewamkulu actor's identity is a closely guarded secret and that they are thought to be the ghosts of deceased ancestors who temporarily inhabit the world of the living in the shape of Gulewamkulu. Everyone who wears one of these masks asserts power and control over others. As a result, those who wear these masks are elevated to a special position above all other humans (Kamichala 2007).

Gulewamkulu loyalty to leaders (chiefs) was discovered to be statistically significant at a p -value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, and is positively connected with affecting the success of community development intervention programs. Gulewamkulu is owned and ruled by Chewa chiefs. According to this study, Gulewamkulu is obedient to chiefs and always willing to follow their orders and directives to participate in any activity deemed important to the community (Katan 2004). This allegiance enhances the likelihood that every member of the society will take part in community development.

The study also showed that Gulewamkulu members who participate in community development intervention programs also adhere to the leadership's directives as given by chiefs. This shows that they heed commands and conduct themselves with respect to the chief's directives. The research's findings are consistent with those of Boucher (2016), Nda (2015), Forsund (2008), and Englund (2002), who demonstrated that Gulewamkulu's participation in community development intervention programs would help those programs achieve their intended aims. The findings are also incongruent with researches from Mhango (2012), Cees and Mirjam (2013), and Phiri (1991), which found that Gulewamkulu had important responsibilities in the societies in which they lived, including opposing, protesting, and upsetting outside influences and external community development intervention programs.

According to these studies, Gulewamkulu has independent authority and does not actively seek influence (Mervin 1980). Because Gulewamkulu is loyal to leaders and chiefs, community development agents may face difficulties or an opportunity (Gondwe 2013).

Gulewamkulu power was found to be positively connected with the success of community development intervention programs at a p -value of 0.028, which is less than 0.05 and statistically significant. Members of the community hold the belief that Gulewamkulu actors adopt the persona of ancestor spirits with dominion over the populace. They are obligated to follow any instructions given by Gulewamkulu actors when they are dressed in traditional Gulewamkulu garb because they think that such orders are given by ancestors (Longwe 2008).

By allowing Gulewamkulu to take part in community development intervention programs, members of the community are persuaded to engage in active participation with the understanding that the ancestors are encouraging the community members to participate in the implementation of the program.

The study's findings are in line with Forsund's research observation, in which Gulewamkulu was asked to assist in sensitizing and convincing boys and girls to attend school. Its participation in the intervention led to an increase in student enrollment (Forsund 2008).

Every person who wears a Gulewamkulu mask assumes control over other people, according to Kamlongera (1992). Therefore, these masks elevate anyone wearing them to a special position above all other humans.

Conclusion and recommendations

Every member is required to abide by the severe norms of Gulewamkulu. Those who break these laws face severe penalties. In order to instill the spirit of hard work, dedication, and commitment to the duties assigned to it, Gulewamkulu makes sure that every member participates and follows the instructions defined by the leaders of this institution (Ott 2000). Gulewamkulu must abide by these norms and principles in order to positively contribute to the achievement of the intended aims of community development intervention programs.

Gulewamkulu has power, which is thought to be derived from ancestral spirits. Members can submit to it because of its authority. It exploits this power to influence them to participate in various social development initiatives.

Gulewamkulu has power over people as well. It ensures that each member has the information and skills necessary to make a good contribution to the general well-being of society.

The findings have identified Gulewamkulu institutional and organizational factors that may affect the success of community development interventions. When the community is carrying out various community development intervention activities, Gulewamkulu has to be given specific responsibilities.

In order to allow Gulewamkulu to participate in community development intervention programs, the Chewa society needs to find a solution. Gulewamkulu institution can carry out some duties, particularly those that have to do with social

discipline and environmental protection. In regions where Gulewamkulu exists, Boucher (2016) suggested that Gulewamkulu organizations and institutions have a major impact on the outcomes of social and environmental community development initiatives. This might also apply to how Gulewamkulu is now faring.

To make diverse policies realistic in how they direct various community development program initiatives, policy makers must take cultural and institutional processes into account.

In order to determine which potential may be tapped and used to enhance people's livelihoods by utilizing existing structures that currently exist in their communities, it is necessary to support additional research in local and cultural organizations.

Change agents must work with these organizations to advance their goals of raising people's standards of living in various communities.

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Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate The research was approved by the Catholic University of Malawi Research Ethics. It issued the letter which was sent to the traditional authority leader of the community where the research was conducted.

Consent for publication The Catholic University of Malawi Directorate of Research and Publication indorsed the article to be published. The consent is optional. The author can publish after the study.

Competing interests Not applicable.

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Comments

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