**BIOGAS ASSESSMENT PROJECT**

**Site ID: 59**

**Date: November 17, 2022**

**Interviewer**: Where did the digesters originate from?

**Interviewee**: I don’t remember because many years have passed. But I can only recall that it came here with one woman who came by a car. But, before that people were called for a community meeting where they were briefed about the biogas project. It was communicated there that five people in our area would benefit from the project, and would go for training. After the training, the five people were expected to be teaching other people regarding biogas. Of course, I myself did not attend the meeting I was just told. After some days, the installers came to my house and advised me to dig a hole and to find fresh cow manure, so that they could install the digester. So, we dug a big hole the height of me – it was very big, then we placed a bag in the hole. Then, we fed it with 50 buckets of water and 5 bags of fresh cow manure. And, I remember we mixed the feedstock using our bare hands. They promised us gloves, gumboots and other stuff, but we never got the items.They also told us that with the digester we would be cooking on it, and even charge our phones. The sad part about the digester was that around that time, there were some other community projects, for example, there was a road project and a social cash transfer program, but the community leaders decided not to involve us in the projects because we were involved in the biogas project. They said that we would get money after the biogas training or seminar, so we had to allow other people to benefit too. So, we lost many other opportunities for a year or two because of the biogas project. Moreover, the saddest part is that when the digester was commissioned it didn’t work, so we lost a lot of things on something that didn’t even work.

**Interviewer**: When was it built ?

**Interviewee**: It’s been 3 years, if not 5 years.

**Interviewer**: So, you are saying you dug the hole?

**Interviewee**: Yeah, I did.

**Interviewer**: How many were you?

**Interviewee**: I dug the hole with my first-born son. He supported me because he saw that I could not manage to dig it alone. The hole was a big one just like a dug well – It was deep that I could not manage to get out from. So my son seeing this thought of helping me.

**Interviewer**: You are saying you were asked to find 5 bags of cow manure and 50 buckets of water. Where did you get these things?

**Interviewee**: I didn't have cows, so I asked cow owners within the community to share me cow manure.

**Interviewer**: How many people sourced and prepared the feedstock?

**Interviewee**: I did this with my grandchildren. But, we didn’t do the job in a single day because it was impossible to gather that amount of cow manure and water in a day. And, I have to say that we abused the children, because once they got home from school we were immediately asking them source the feedstock, and they were doing this job day and night.

**Interviewer**: Oh, that was something.

**Interviewee**: Yeah, it was a lot of work. And, there was a lot of shouting to get the young children working – and, I promised them that once I completed the trainings, I would give them some money from the training allowance. But, the promise was never fulfilled as I didn’t go for training.

**Interviewer**: (laughs) oh

**Interviewee**: Yeah, I felt that was one way of motivating them.

**Interviewer**: I see. How many children are we talking about?

**Interviewee**: I have 5 or 6 grand children.

**Interviewer**: Okay. How many people from the installation company came to install or construct the digester?

**Interviewee**: There were two people, but someone escorted them from Kachere Village. But, I don’t know if the digesters worked in Kachere Village.

**Interviewer**: Okay. How were you selected as a beneficiary?

**Interviewee**: In every village, one person was chosen. So, in my village I was the only one who was chosen. And, the fact that I was chosen by the community and the Chiefs I thought that I was honored, so I couldn’t say no. So, they basically chose me because I was raising some orphans, so they thought it would help me to support the children. I think they thought that if I went to the training I would get money at the end of the training to support the orphans I was raising.

**Interviewer**: Sure. What was the selection process like?

**Interviewee**: The first time the project implementers came, they had a meeting with the chief, and they asked the chief to conduct a community meeting. So, at the community meeting the people together with the chief agreed that I was the right person to get the digester.

**Interviewer**: I have seen people chosen by the chiefs and the community to be given something, but refusing to accept the thing. Why did you accept the digester to be built here?

**Interviewee**: We didn’t know what was going to happen in the future, so we simply accepted it because the people and chief chose us. Had we known that things would pan out the way they did, we wouldn’t have accepted it at all. And, even some people started making fun of us for accepting it.

**Interviewer**: Who was doing that, and why?

**Interviewee**: The people thought we had worked for nothing, so they were talking all sorts of things (laughs). The young people especially were making fun of me saying why an old woman like me was busy doing such a worthless job.

**Interviewer**: Tough! Did the project implementers attend the meeting?

**Interviewee**: No, it was just a community meeting.

**Interviewer**: Did you know about biogas before?

**Interviewee**: No, I didn’t. I was expecting to learn about biogas at the trainings, because we were told that we would go for training before installation of the digesters commenced. So, we were so surprised to see the installers asking us to source and prepare feedstock before the training. But, we didn’t say anything because we expected the training later.

**Interviewer**: Okay, what were your expectations?

**Interviewee**: We expected to go for biogas training and get training allowance at the end of the training. So, after the training I expected to use the training allowance to buy at least a goat or a chicken.

**Interviewer**: How did you expect the digester to help you?

**Interviewee**: The way the installers explained things, we were so convinced that we would use the digester for cooking. So, we expected to stop searching for firewood because here we source firewood in fields. We don’t buy firewood because we can’t afford it. Firewood needs people who have money. So, when we go the field to farm, we also source firewood there. The other thing is that we expected to be charging our phones using the digester – But nothing happened, zero!

**Interviewer**: Do you use charcoal?

**Interviewee**: I never used charcoal, because it needs a lot of money. So, it’s only rich people who use charcoal in this village.

**Interviewer**: What kind of training did you receive? I mean, you didn’t receive any training, right?

**Interviewee**: We didn’t go for training.

**Interviewer**: Then, how were you able to operate it?

**Interviewee**: The project implementers showed us how to operate it. Then, they told us that we should be using a matchstick to light up the fire, and all that. And, since we didn’t know anything about it, we expected to learn more about it, for example, its benefit and importance after commissioning it. But the sad thing is that it didn’t work at all.

**Interviewer**: How prepared to run or operate the digester did you feel you were?

**Interviewee**: I expected it to go for training after commissioning. So I felt like then I would have had skills and knowledge to operate it.

**Interviewer**: How did it work after the commission? I understand you didn’tuse it.

**Interviewee**: It didn’t work at all.

**Interviewer**: No even once?

**Interviewee**: I didn’t produce any flame. So we didn't even try to boil water for hand washing.

**Interviewer**: So after trying to start it up and seeing that it failed. What did the installers say?

**Interviewee**: After it was installed, they never came to see if it worked or not.

**Interviewer**: Did you try to start it up yourself? Were the installers there when you were trying to startit up?

**Interviewee**: The installers didn’t come to commission it. People from Kachere came to commission it. When they came, they taught us how to light up the gas, but when they tried to light up the flame, it didn’t work. So, we just abandoned it afterwards.

**Interviewer**: Who were these people from Kachere? Was it extension workers or government officials?

**Interviewee**: No, beneficiaries just like us from Kachere came. So, we don’t know if they were trained or not.

**Interviewer**: How many were they?

**Interviewee**: They were 2.

**Interviewer**: How people were expected to use the gas?

**Interviewee**: We were 6 people. Two were my children, the other 3 were orphans I was raising.

**Interviewer**: Okay, and you expected to use the gas for cooking only. What were the operation requirements?

**Interviewee**: They didn’t tell us about the requirements. They didn’t tell us which materials we would need to keep it running.

**Interviewer**: You mean they didn’t tell you about feeding?

**Interviewee**: They told us about feeding when we were trying to make the first charge. That’s when they told us about the 50 buckets (20 liters) of water and five bags (50 Kgs) of cow manure. But when we feed it with this, it didn’t work. So that’s when we just abandoned it.

**Interviewer**: Did you feed it after the first charge?

**Interviewee**: No, we didn’t feed it again. So, the bag deflated after some time. It was tough. We were only abused.

**Interviewer**: What were maintenance requirements?

**Interviewee**: They didn’t tell us anything about maintenance as well.

**Interviewer**: so, what are the challenges?

**Interviewee**: The challenge we faced was that people were listed as beneficiaries in various other NGO projects, but the chiefs said that our names should not be listed. He said because we would go for a biogas seminar, it was not proper for us to get other benefits as well. So, our friends were involved in other projects and we able to benefit money and other things as a result they were able to supporttheir family through the projects. As for us, we were only waiting to be called for a seminar or training on biogas.

**Interviewer**: so you missed the other opportunities because you were involved in biogas project.

**Interviewee**: Yes, of course. We were not involved in another project because we got the digesters.

**Interviewer**: Which projects are you talking about in particular?

**Interviewee**: There were a lot of projects that we were not involved in because of biogas. The first one was that we would not get involved in the construction of a community road program by MASAF (Malawi Social Action Fund). Also, people were given goats by NGOs, but our names were again not listed because we were installed digesters that didn’t even work.

**Interviewer**: When it didn’t work, what did you do?

**Interviewee**: I left it in the ground for two or three years. Then, I decided to take it out to prevent the plastic digester bag from decomposing in the ground. At first, I tried it to take it out to myself but I failed, as I’m a woman. Then, I hired five boys to take it out. So, they cut it a bit, take out the contents, and removed it.

**Interviewer**: Did you pay them?

**Interviewee**: Of course, we did. I paid each one K2000 for the work. I even involve myself in some piecework to pay the boys. So, in total I paid K10000 to take the digester bag out of the hole. But, I took it out to help me with my roof that was leaking.

**Interviewer**: How would you describe the current state of your digester today? If the installers call you today to find out about the digester, what would you say to them?

**Interviewee**: I would ask them that did you give us the digester to guard over it. Why didn’t you follow up on us? Because, one would expect the installers to follow up the equipment, but they didn’t. And, that is what normally what happens when organizations come here. When people bring something to the community, they follow up to see progress and performance. But, these ones didn’t. So, if they decided to bring us to court for damaging their equipment, we would accept the charges. And, our defense would be that they did not follow up and they didn’t training us on anything. In regards of training, they told us to keep old clothes for the training. They said to learn about feedstock making we would need rags. So, we kept rags in the house waiting for the training.

**Interviewer**: Oh, that was tough.

**Interviewee**: Yes, we suffered. Imagine, handling fresh manure with bare hands.Imaging kids handle fresh manure. We suffered a lot, mister.

**Interviewer**: Why do you think the installers didn’t come to follow-up?

**Interviewee**: I don’t know why they didn’t come again. I just don’t know why they failed to come again and follow up.

**Interviewer**: Okay. Now that it is not working, are you still using firewood for cooking?

**Interviewee**: Yeah, we still do that. We get small pieces of firewood from the fields that we use for cooking our nsima.

**Interviewer**: We are going towards the end of interview. How much did reactor cost?

**Interviewee**: They didn’t tell us how much money the reactor cost. And, they didn’t say anything about money.

**Interviewer**: Did you contribute anything?

**Interviewee**: It’s only that I abused the littles ones because of the digester. When they came from school, I was ordering them to go source cow manure and water as I thought it would benefit them. I even suffered myself, because when I came from the field I was going directly to people’s houses to source manure. Today, when I think about biogas, I feel sad that I caused pain to little children for nothing.

**Interviewer**: What is your opinion of biogas?

**Interviewee**: I have nothing to say about biogas other saying that it caused us to suffer. I’m only happy that you came, so that makes us think that you think about us. So, we are just hoping that something good will happen in the future. Thus, we would be grateful if next time; you would give us goats in place of biogas.

**Interviewer**: Final question, if you could have designed your own waste or energy intervention, what could you have chosen instead?

**Interviewee**: I would choose an intervention of giving the community livestock such as goat, so that from there we can get manure, and support our families. Or, if there is a better intervention you think would help us, we are willing to accept it.

**Interviewer**: You have to mention it yourself; so that people would not come up with an intervention, you may not like it, or something that may cause suffering as biogas did.

**Interviewee**: Then, I would just settle for an intervention that would give goats or any other livestock to the community.

**Interviewer**: Sure. Thanks for the interview. Do you have any last words?

**Interviewee**: Thanks for coming and for thinking about us. In closing, I would simply say we need an intervention that can improve the lives of people in this community.

**Interviewer**: Sure. Thanks.