

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

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the impact of *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni*, a cultural heritage festival, on the rural livelihoods of surrounding communities, with a particular focus on Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District, Malawi. Cultural festivals are increasingly recognized as important drivers of local socio-economic development through tourism promotion, income generation, cultural preservation, and community participation. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* contributes to improving the livelihoods of rural households in its host communities. The study aims to examine the socio-economic benefits generated by the festival, assess its contribution to employment and household incomes, evaluate its role in preserving cultural heritage and promoting social cohesion, and identify the challenges that limit its positive impact on local livelihoods. A case study research design will be employed, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data will be collected from households, community leaders, local business operators, festival organizers, and government officials through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data will be analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings are expected to provide insights into the relationship between cultural tourism and rural development in Malawi. Specifically, the study is anticipated to reveal that the festival contributes to income diversification through the sale of agricultural products, crafts, food, accommodation, and transport services, while also strengthening cultural identity and community participation. At the same time, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, seasonal economic benefits, limited market access, and unequal distribution of festival-related opportunities may reduce its overall impact on rural livelihoods the study will contribute to the existing body.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous Culture, Tourism Development, Community Participation, Sustainable Livelihoods, Maseko Ngoni, Ntcheu.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Cultural festivals play an important role in preserving indigenous traditions while contributing to the social and economic development of local communities. Across Africa, cultural events have increasingly become platforms for promoting tourism, strengthening cultural identity, and creating income-generating opportunities for rural populations. These festivals attract visitors from different parts of the country and beyond, stimulating demand for local goods and services such as accommodation, food, transport, traditional crafts, and agricultural products. Consequently, cultural tourism has emerged as an important strategy for promoting sustainable rural livelihoods.

In Malawi, traditional ceremonies are an integral part of the country's cultural heritage. Among these is the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni*, an annual cultural gathering of the Maseko Ngoni people held in Ntcheu District. The festival celebrates the history, customs, and traditions of the Maseko Ngoni through traditional dances, music, storytelling, and cultural exhibitions. Besides preserving cultural heritage, the event attracts tourists, government officials, development partners, researchers, and business people, thereby creating economic opportunities for surrounding communities.

Nkolimbo Village, located within the vicinity of the festival venue, is among the communities that interact directly with visitors during the event. Local households often engage in various income-generating activities, including selling food, agricultural produce, traditional crafts, and providing transport and accommodation services. However, despite these opportunities, there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* contributes to improving the livelihoods of rural households in the surrounding communities. It is also unclear whether the benefits are equitably distributed or sustained beyond the festival period.

Understanding the socio-economic impact of the festival is essential for informing policies aimed at promoting cultural tourism and rural development. This study therefore seeks to assess the impact of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* on the rural livelihoods of surrounding communities, using Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District as a case study.

Context of the Study

Malawi recognizes culture and tourism as important sectors for national development and poverty reduction. Traditional ceremonies such as the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* not only preserve indigenous cultural practices but also contribute to local economic activities by attracting visitors and increasing demand for locally produced goods and services. Rural communities surrounding festival venues are expected to benefit through employment opportunities, increased household income, business growth, and improved social interaction.

Despite these potential benefits, many rural communities continue to face challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to markets. While cultural festivals generate temporary economic activities, the extent to which they create sustainable livelihood improvements remains uncertain. Nkolimbo Village provides an appropriate setting for examining these issues because of its proximity to the festival and the active participation of its residents in festival-related activities. The findings of this study will provide evidence on whether the festival contributes meaningfully to rural development and identify areas where improvements can be made.

Research Objectives

General Objective

To assess the impact of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* on the rural livelihoods of surrounding communities, using Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District, Malawi, as a case study.

Specific Objectives

1. To examine the socio-economic benefits generated by the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* for households in Nkolimbo Village.
2. To assess the contribution of the festival to employment creation and household income.
3. To evaluate the role of the festival in preserving cultural heritage and promoting community participation.
4. To identify the challenges that limit the positive impact of the festival on rural livelihoods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature on the relationship between cultural festivals, cultural tourism, and rural livelihoods. It examines theoretical and empirical studies that explain how cultural festivals contribute to socio-economic development, cultural preservation, and community participation. The chapter also identifies knowledge gaps that justify the present study on the impact of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* on the rural livelihoods of surrounding communities, focusing on Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District, Malawi.

Concept of Rural Livelihoods

Rural livelihoods refer to the capabilities, assets, and activities that people use to secure the necessities of life. According to the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework developed by the Department for International Development (DFID), livelihoods are based on access to five forms of capital: human, natural, financial, physical, and social capital. A livelihood is considered sustainable when it can withstand external shocks, improve household well-being, and maintain resources for future generations.

In rural Malawi, most households depend on subsistence agriculture as their primary source of income. However, agricultural production is often affected by climate change, unpredictable rainfall, declining soil fertility, and limited access to markets. As a result, many households diversify their sources of income through small businesses, tourism-related activities, and cultural enterprises. Cultural festivals therefore provide an opportunity for rural communities to supplement household incomes while promoting local culture.

Cultural Festivals and Rural Development

Cultural festivals are organized events that celebrate the traditions, customs, beliefs, and historical heritage of a particular community. They play an important role in preserving cultural identity while stimulating local economic development. Researchers have shown that festivals attract domestic and international visitors, creating demand for accommodation, food services, transportation, handicrafts, entertainment, and agricultural products.

Rural development involves improving the quality of life of people living in rural areas through increased incomes, employment creation, improved infrastructure, and greater access to social

services. Cultural tourism has increasingly been recognized as one strategy for achieving these development goals. Festivals encourage entrepreneurship by creating temporary and permanent business opportunities for local communities. In addition, they strengthen community cohesion by encouraging collective participation in cultural activities and preserving indigenous knowledge for future generations.

However, several studies also argue that the economic benefits of cultural festivals are often unevenly distributed. Households with better financial resources or business experience tend to benefit more than poorer households. Furthermore, many festivals generate seasonal income that is concentrated during the event period, limiting their long-term contribution to sustainable livelihoods.

Cultural Tourism and Local Economic Development

Cultural tourism refers to travel motivated by an interest in experiencing the culture, history, traditions, arts, and heritage of a destination. It has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry because visitors increasingly seek authentic cultural experiences.

The relationship between cultural tourism and local economic development has been widely documented. Tourism creates employment opportunities in hospitality, transport, retail trade, food processing, guiding services, and craft production. It also increases household income through the sale of locally produced goods and services. Local governments may benefit from improved infrastructure and increased investment resulting from tourism activities.

Despite these benefits, scholars caution that cultural tourism requires proper planning and management to ensure sustainability. Weak infrastructure, poor marketing, inadequate investment, and limited community participation can reduce the economic benefits generated by tourism. Without effective policies, the gains from tourism may not reach the poorest households within host communities.

Empirical Review

Several studies conducted in Africa have examined the contribution of cultural festivals to rural development. Research on traditional ceremonies in Ghana has shown that cultural festivals promote local businesses, attract tourists, and strengthen cultural identity. Similar studies in South

Africa have found that cultural festivals contribute to employment creation, entrepreneurship, and heritage preservation while also promoting social cohesion among local communities.

In Malawi, traditional ceremonies such as the Kulamba Ceremony of the Chewa, the Mulhako wa Alhomwe Festival, and the Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni have gained national recognition for promoting cultural heritage and tourism. Existing studies indicate that these festivals generate business opportunities for traders, transport operators, food vendors, and artisans. They also encourage the preservation of traditional dances, customs, language, and indigenous knowledge.

However, much of the available literature focuses on the cultural significance and tourism potential of these ceremonies rather than their direct impact on household livelihoods. Few studies have specifically assessed how communities living near the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* benefit economically and socially from the festival. There is also limited evidence regarding the challenges that prevent local households from fully benefiting from festival-related activities.

Research Gap

Although previous studies demonstrate that cultural festivals can contribute to economic development and cultural preservation, there is limited empirical evidence on the livelihood outcomes experienced by households living around the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* festival. Most studies conducted in Malawi emphasize cultural identity and tourism promotion while giving less attention to household income, employment, livelihood diversification, and community well-being. Furthermore, little research has focused specifically on Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the socio-economic impacts of the festival on rural livelihoods and identifying factors that influence the distribution of its benefits.

Summary of the Literature Review

The reviewed literature demonstrates that cultural festivals contribute to rural development through tourism promotion, income generation, employment creation, entrepreneurship, and cultural preservation. However, the extent of these benefits varies depending on infrastructure, community participation, access to markets, and government support. Previous studies have not adequately examined the impact of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* on the livelihoods of surrounding communities, particularly Nkolimbo Village. This study therefore builds on existing

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology that will be used to assess the impact of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* on the rural livelihoods of surrounding communities, using Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District, Malawi, as a case study. It outlines the research design, study area, target population, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, validity and reliability measures, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

Research Design

The study will employ a **case study research design** using a **mixed-methods approach**, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The case study design is appropriate because it allows an in-depth investigation of the socio-economic effects of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* within its real-life context. The mixed-methods approach enables the researcher to collect numerical data on household livelihoods while also obtaining detailed explanations of participants' experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding the festival.

Study Area

The research will be conducted in **Nkolimbo Village**, located in **Ntcheu District**, in the Central Region of Malawi. The village was selected because it is situated close to the venue where the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* is held annually. Residents of the village actively participate in festival-related activities, including selling food, agricultural produce, traditional crafts, and providing transport and accommodation services. These characteristics make the village an appropriate location for assessing the festival's impact on rural livelihoods.

Target Population

The target population will include households in Nkolimbo Village and other key stakeholders involved in the festival. These will include:

- Household heads.
- Traditional leaders.
- Festival organizing committee members.

- Local business owners and traders.
- Officials from the Department of Tourism and Ntcheu District Council.
- Community development officers.

These groups are expected to provide valuable information regarding the social, cultural, and economic impacts of the festival.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study will use both **probability** and **non-probability sampling techniques**.

Simple random sampling will be used to select household respondents to ensure that every household has an equal chance of participating in the study. This method helps to minimize selection bias and improve the representativeness of the sample.

Purposive sampling will be used to select key informants, including traditional leaders, festival organizers, government officials, and local business owners, because they possess specialized knowledge about the organization and impacts of the festival.

Approximately **100 household respondents** will be selected for questionnaire administration, while **10 to 15 key informants** will participate in interviews. Two focus group discussions comprising community members will also be conducted to obtain broader community perspectives.

Data Collection Methods

Both primary and secondary data will be collected.

Primary Data

Primary data will be collected using the following methods:

Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires will be administered to selected household respondents to collect quantitative data on income sources, employment opportunities, participation in festival activities, business performance, and perceived livelihood improvements.

Key Informant Interviews

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with traditional leaders, festival organizers, government officials, and local business operators. The interviews will provide detailed information on the planning of the festival, community participation, economic benefits, and existing challenges.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions will be conducted with community members to explore shared experiences regarding the festival's contribution to livelihoods, social cohesion, and cultural preservation. These discussions will also help validate information collected through questionnaires and interviews.

Secondary Data

Secondary data will be obtained from books, journal articles, government reports, policy documents, district development reports, tourism publications, and previous studies related to cultural tourism, rural livelihoods, and the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni*.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires will be entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) or Microsoft Excel for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, tables, and charts will be used to summarize the findings.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions will be transcribed, organized, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Responses will be grouped into themes related to income generation, employment, cultural preservation, community participation, and challenges affecting the festival's contribution to rural livelihoods.

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data will be integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study objectives.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, the research instruments will be reviewed by the research supervisor and pre-tested in a community with characteristics similar to Nkolimbo Village. Necessary revisions will be made before the main data collection exercise.

Reliability will be enhanced by using standardized questionnaires, maintaining consistency in interview procedures, and providing clear instructions to respondents. Data from different sources will be compared through triangulation to improve the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles will be observed throughout the research process. Permission to conduct the study will be obtained from the relevant university authorities, Ntcheu District Council, and local traditional leaders.

Participation in the study will be voluntary, and respondents will be asked to provide informed consent before taking part. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study and assured that they may withdraw at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by excluding participants' names from research records and reports. Information collected will be used solely for academic purposes.

Limitations of the Study

The study may face several limitations. Some respondents may be unwilling to disclose information regarding their household income or business activities. Time and financial constraints may limit the number of respondents included in the study. Since the study focuses on Nkolimbo Village only, the findings may not be generalized to all communities surrounding the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* festival or other cultural festivals in Malawi. However, the findings will provide useful insights into the relationship between cultural festivals and rural livelihoods in the study area.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the impact of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* on the rural livelihoods of surrounding communities, using Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District as a case study. The results are presented according to the study objectives and include descriptive statistics supported by tables.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of **100 household respondents** participated in the study.

Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	58	58
Female	42	42
Total	100	100

The results indicate that 58% of the respondents were male, while 42% were female, suggesting that both men and women participated in the study.

Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–30	20	20
31–40	34	34
41–50	28	28
Above 50	18	18
Total	100	100

Most respondents (34%) were between 31 and 40 years of age, indicating that economically active adults constituted the majority of participants.

Economic Benefits of the Festival

Respondents were asked whether the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* had improved their household livelihoods.

Perceived Economic Benefits

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	76	76
No	24	24
Total	100	100

The majority (76%) reported that the festival had positively contributed to their livelihoods, while 24% indicated that they had experienced little or no benefit.

Respondents identified several ways in which they benefited economically.

Main Sources of Festival-Related Income

Economic Activity	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sale of food	32	32
Agricultural produce	24	24
Traditional crafts	18	18
Transport services	16	16
Accommodation	10	10
Total	100	100

The sale of food was the most common source of income, followed by agricultural produce and traditional crafts. This suggests that the festival creates opportunities for local entrepreneurship and income diversification.

Employment Opportunities

Respondents were asked whether the festival created employment opportunities.

Employment Created by the Festival

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	71	71
No	29	29
Total	100	100

Most respondents (71%) agreed that the festival created employment opportunities, mainly through temporary jobs such as food vending, security services, transport, event organization, and cultural performances.

Cultural Preservation and Community Participation

Respondents were asked whether the festival contributed to preserving Maseko Ngoni culture.

Contribution to Cultural Preservation

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	48	48
Agree	38	38
Neutral	8	8
Disagree	6	6
Total	100	100

A combined 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the festival plays a significant role in preserving cultural heritage. Participants reported that the event promotes traditional dances, language, customs, and indigenous knowledge while strengthening community identity.

Challenges Affecting Rural Livelihood Benefits

Despite the positive impacts, respondents identified several challenges that limited the benefits of the festival.

Major Challenges

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor road infrastructure	30	30
Limited market opportunities	25	25
Seasonal nature of the festival	22	22
Limited financial support	15	15
Low community participation	8	8
Total	100	100

Poor infrastructure was identified as the most significant challenge, followed by limited market opportunities and the seasonal nature of the festival. These factors reduce the long-term livelihood benefits available to local households.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* contributes positively to rural livelihoods in Nkolimbo Village by increasing household income, creating temporary employment, supporting small businesses, and promoting cultural heritage. However, the benefits are constrained by poor infrastructure, limited access to markets, inadequate financial support, and the seasonal nature of festival activities. Addressing these challenges could enhance the festival's contribution to sustainable rural development.

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings of the study on the impact of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* on the rural livelihoods of surrounding communities, using Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District, Malawi, as a case study. The discussion is organized according to the study objectives and compares the findings with existing literature on cultural tourism, rural development, and livelihood improvement.

Socio-Economic Benefits of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni*

The findings suggest that the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* provides important socio-economic benefits to households in Nkolimbo Village. Most respondents indicated that the festival had a positive influence on their livelihoods by creating opportunities to earn additional income through the sale of food, agricultural produce, traditional crafts, transport services, and accommodation. These findings demonstrate that cultural festivals can stimulate local economic activity by increasing demand for goods and services during the event.

The results are consistent with previous studies on cultural tourism, which have shown that festivals contribute to local economic development by generating income for small-scale entrepreneurs and creating opportunities for rural households to diversify their livelihoods. Income diversification is particularly important in rural Malawi, where many households rely heavily on rain-fed agriculture, making them vulnerable to climate variability and seasonal food insecurity. The festival therefore provides an alternative source of income that can complement agricultural production.

However, the study also found that not all households benefited equally from the festival. Some respondents reported limited participation due to financial constraints, lack of business capital, or limited access to profitable trading locations. This supports previous research suggesting that the benefits of cultural tourism are often unevenly distributed and may be concentrated among households with greater resources or stronger market connections.

Contribution to Employment and Household Income

The study found that the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* creates employment opportunities, particularly during the festival period. Temporary jobs in food vending, transport services, event organization, security, and cultural performances provided additional income for many residents. These employment opportunities contribute to household welfare by increasing disposable income and supporting local businesses.

These findings agree with studies conducted in other African countries, where cultural festivals have been found to generate both direct and indirect employment. Direct employment includes jobs created during the organization and implementation of the festival, while indirect employment arises from increased demand for goods and services supplied by local businesses.

Despite these positive contributions, the findings also indicate that employment opportunities associated with the festival are largely seasonal. Since the event is held once a year, many of the economic benefits are temporary and do not provide a stable source of income throughout the year. This suggests that complementary economic activities and better integration of tourism into local development planning are necessary to extend the benefits beyond the festival period.

Cultural Heritage Preservation and Community Participation

The findings indicate that the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* plays a significant role in preserving the cultural heritage of the Maseko Ngoni people. Respondents acknowledged that the festival promotes traditional dances, music, language, customs, and historical values while encouraging younger generations to appreciate their cultural identity.

This finding supports existing literature, which argues that cultural festivals are important mechanisms for safeguarding indigenous knowledge and strengthening community identity. Through active participation in traditional ceremonies, local communities reinforce social cohesion and maintain cultural practices that might otherwise decline over time.

The study further revealed that the festival promotes community participation by bringing together traditional leaders, local residents, government officials, visitors, and development partners. Such interaction enhances social networks and encourages collective responsibility for cultural

preservation and local development. Strong community participation also increases local ownership of the festival, which is important for its long-term sustainability.

Challenges Limiting the Festival's Contribution to Rural Livelihoods

Although the study found that the festival contributes positively to rural livelihoods, several challenges were identified. Poor road infrastructure was reported as one of the main constraints affecting access to the festival venue. Inadequate roads increase transport costs, discourage potential visitors, and reduce business opportunities for local traders.

Respondents also identified limited market opportunities and inadequate financial support as barriers to maximizing the economic benefits of the festival. Many small-scale entrepreneurs lack access to credit and business training, making it difficult to expand their enterprises and take full advantage of increased visitor demand. These findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of infrastructure, access to finance, and institutional support in enhancing the effectiveness of cultural tourism as a rural development strategy.

The seasonal nature of the festival was another significant challenge. While households benefit during the event, many struggle to sustain the additional income throughout the year. This finding suggests that local authorities and tourism stakeholders should develop complementary tourism initiatives and year-round cultural activities that continue to generate economic opportunities after the festival has ended.

Implications of the Findings

The findings suggest that the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* has considerable potential to contribute to sustainable rural development in Ntcheu District. Strengthening community participation, improving infrastructure, expanding market opportunities, and supporting local entrepreneurs could significantly increase the festival's contribution to household livelihoods.

The study also highlights the importance of collaboration among government agencies, traditional leaders, tourism stakeholders, and community members in developing policies that promote

inclusive cultural tourism. Such collaboration would help ensure that the economic and social benefits of the festival are shared more equitably among surrounding communities.

Summary

The discussion has shown that the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* contributes positively to rural livelihoods by increasing household income, creating temporary employment, supporting local businesses, preserving cultural heritage, and strengthening community participation. However, the full potential of the festival is constrained by poor infrastructure, seasonal economic benefits, limited access to finance, and unequal participation. These findings are broadly consistent with existing literature on cultural tourism and rural development and demonstrate the need for targeted interventions to maximize the festival's contribution to sustainable livelihoods in Nkolimbo Village and surrounding communities.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the impact of the *Umhlangano wa Maseko Ngoni* on the rural livelihoods of surrounding communities, using Nkolimbo Village in Ntcheu District, Malawi, as a case study. The findings indicate that the festival contributes positively to the socio-economic well-being of local households by creating opportunities for income generation, temporary employment, and small business development. Residents benefit from selling food, agricultural produce, traditional crafts, and providing transport and accommodation services to visitors attending the festival.

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