



CLIMATE JUSTICE

Loss and Damage Action Research: Case Studies of Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was undertaken to support and empower Southern African leaders, activists, civil society organizations (CSOs) and policymakers, in the lead up to COP 27 and beyond, in the debate on the losses and damages caused by climate impacts. The definition of 'loss and damage' by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) looks at 'the actual and/or potential manifestation of impacts associated with climate change in lower income countries that negatively affect human and natural systems', including impacts from extreme events (e.g. heatwaves, flooding and drought) and slow-onset events (including sea-level rise and glacial retreat).¹

The study used an 'action research' approach by supporting the collective and inclusive documentation and sense-making of the lived experiences of loss and damage, and the co-production of a loss and damage narrative, through case studies and participatory workshops with Southern African survivors, communities, activists, civil society and decision-makers. Reflective collaboration supported the decolonization of the language and concepts used to talk about loss and damage and climate justice. This report describes this process and its outcomes. We hope it can support the influencing work of Southern African leaders and contribute to the development of loss and damage policy and practice that reflects and responds to the lived experiences of people whose lives are turned upside down by the climate crisis.

The research highlights the importance of non-economic losses such as trauma, mental distress,² physical health issues and the loss of a sense of belonging. These are often neglected by mainstream narratives, which tend to focus on economic losses.

Box 1: Six dimensions of 'loss and damage'

We are proposing that six dimensions of loss and damage from climate impacts emerged in this action research: psychological, cultural, social, economic, ecological and biophysical. Psychological distress – includes trauma and mental distress – is experienced due to the death or injury of family or community members, often in chaotic and frightening circumstances. Cultural identity can be disrupted due to loss and damage to cultural heritage. Social connections are broken due to the deaths of family and community members, displacement, and loss and damage to social structures such as schools. Economic loss is experienced as a result of loss and damage to belongings, homes, livestock, gardens, etc. Ecological loss is experienced when for example, topsoil is washed away or wells become polluted; and biophysical loss describes loss and damage to biodiversity, including the geographic distribution of species. Loss and damage comprise *economic* aspects, such as damage to property, belongings and livelihoods, as well as *non-economic* aspects, such as psychological distress, cultural and social disruption, and dislocation. The experience of non-economic loss and damage differs between individuals and groups: women, children, and men, and different societies and cultures will have unique experiences of this kind of loss and damage.

In addition to the destruction of economic assets such as property, food and belongings, the research brings into painful focus how interviewees impacted by climate change experience loss of dignity and respect, loss of peace of mind, and trauma and mental distress resulting from the death of community or family members. Deaths often occur in distressing and chaotic circumstances, and the bodies of loved ones washed away in floods may never be recovered and given a dignified burial. Following loss and damage, survivors live with anxiety, fear and a sense of dread that the events might reoccur. They report feeling insecure and afraid of the environment that used to sustain them. Interviewees also mentioned loss of heritage through the destruction of landscapes and important cultural sites such as graveyards, the disruption of social services, and the continuing personal and social impact of illness and deaths. This research shows that loss and damage is not a one-off event but persists over time and has cumulative impacts, as one loss often leads to several other losses.

These experiences of human suffering cannot be captured using universal or borrowed language. There is an urgent need to find culturally relevant ways to talk about and communicate the context and culturally specific trauma and mental distress people suffer because of climate change impacts. This would support survivors and decision-makers to develop and implement loss and damage policy and practice that reflects and responds to people's unique lived experiences.

In summary, the research findings show that loss and damage resulting from climate change entails destruction, disruption, trauma, mental distress and dislocation. These effects are exacerbated by the inadequacy of the conversation around the impacts of and responsibility for climate change, the lack of participation in the development of policy and practice by survivors, and the absence of comprehensive compensation that reflects the ways in which people's lives have been turned upside down by climate impacts.

Based on findings from both the action research and case study components of this project, we conclude that:

1. Not all climate impacts are quantifiable or even comparable across cultures. Loss and damage can include loss of cultural symbols, places people identify with or even ways of life. People's experience of loss is shaped by their values, cultural and socio-economic contexts, and daily practices. Knowledge of loss therefore needs to account for the inherently subjective and varying nature of values, contexts and experiences, and how this shapes the way people experience and bear losses.
2. Decolonization of the language and evidence base used to talk about loss and damage and climate justice more generally is essential, so that Southern African communities, leaders, CSOs, activists, negotiators and academics are equipped with an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of communities who are suffering loss and damage, and are able to communicate this and advocate for better climate policies.
3. A common and unified position and narrative on loss and damage may be desirable if Southern African leadership is to be heard and influential in shaping loss and damage policy and practice. This needs to be co-created in a bottom-up way, so that responses on how to address loss and damage can be tailored to the specific location and lived experiences of impacted communities.

4. Any narrative on loss and damage should be: inclusive, with perspectives from a wide range of different stakeholders; holistic, to capture the different types of loss and damage – psychological, cultural, social, economic, ecological and biophysical; focused, in that it clearly differentiates between economic and non-economic losses; and nuanced enough to capture people’s lived experiences, indigenous expressions of losses, and issues of note from different contexts, given the diversity of communities in Southern Africa.

5. More resources, including climate finance, are needed to help people recover and rebuild following climate impacts and to cope with the different dimensions of loss and damage. Governments in the Global North, who are disproportionately responsible for emissions and pollution, should be providing the majority of finance. At the same time, African governments should be accountable to their citizens and responsive to loss and damage suffered by communities.

1. BACKGROUND

Climate change has already had unprecedented impacts and consequences in most countries around the world, and loss and damage – the avoidable and unavoidable impacts of climate change that countries cannot adapt to – is now a key area of climate policy.³ Experiences of loss and damage by people in the Global South are complex. As politicians and diplomats wrangle over definitions and technicalities, the question of what to do about the toll taken by climate change is becoming ever more pressing. Poor, climate-vulnerable and marginalized communities – the people least responsible for climate change – are bearing the brunt of its impacts, in the form of extreme weather events like cyclones, floods and fires, and slow-onset processes such as drought, sea-level rise, salination and coastal erosion.

The economic cost of loss and damage is projected to be between US\$290bn and US\$580bn in developing countries alone by 2030.⁴ A study commissioned by Christian Aid in 2021 concluded that, under current climate policies, lower-income countries can expect to see climate change reducing their GDP by 19.6% by 2050, and by 63.9% by 2100.⁵ For years, lower-income countries have been calling for financial support for their efforts to address loss and damage.⁶ By the end of the 2021 UN climate change conference (COP 26), it was clear that the failure of high-income countries to systematically provide loss and damage finance can and will no longer be ignored. However, efforts by the UN climate regime to fully integrate loss and damage into the finance, transparency and stock-take elements of the Paris Agreement have been met with strong resistance from key high-income countries.⁷ Efforts to address loss and damage have been hampered by continuing evidence gaps in loss and damage research and the contentious nature of intergovernmental negotiations on the issue.⁸ After over 30 years of stalled progress on finance for loss and damage, at COP 27 in Egypt in November 2022 a loss and damage fund was finally agreed to be established. This was celebrated as a win for climate justice. However, at the time of writing this paper, the shape and scope of the fund is still to be determined.

1.1 EVOLUTION OF THE LOSS AND DAMAGE CONCEPT

The international policy debate on loss and damage began more than three decades ago, alongside the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in the early 1990s. This process started in 1991, when the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) ignited discussions with a proposal for the introduction of a mechanism to address climate change loss and damage, during the negotiations that led to the adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992.⁹ Different ways of addressing loss and damage were subsequently examined, including in the 2007 Bali Action Plan.¹⁰ However, it was not until the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP 16) in Cancun in 2010 that a work programme was established to consider approaches to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in vulnerable lower income countries. The UNFCCC responded to various groups from low-income nations and established the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM) at COP 19 in 2013 in Warsaw – which was a breakthrough.¹¹ The WIM aims ‘to address loss and damage associated with impacts of climate change, including extreme events and slow onset events, in lower income countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change’. An Executive Committee (ExCom) was established

to guide the implementation of functions of the WIM through an initial two-year work plan.¹²

A substantive follow-up step came in 2015 at COP 21 in Paris, with a dedicated provision on loss and damage included in Article 8 of the Paris Agreement. This ensured that loss and damage was given a formal platform within the UN climate change treaty regime. A number of high-income countries were, however, only willing to accept this on the condition that it would 'not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation', as was therefore expressly set out in paragraph 51 of decision 1/CP.21.¹³ This is not surprising, considering that the adoption of WIM in 2013 as part of the UNFCCC had puzzled observers because key state parties, such as the USA, had historically opposed the policy.¹⁴

Box 2: Defining Loss and Damage

Defining loss and damage has been fraught with disagreement. The UNFCCC defines loss and damage as 'the actual and/or potential manifestation of impacts associated with climate change in lower income countries that negatively affect human and natural systems', including impacts from extreme events (e.g. heatwaves, flooding and drought) and slow-onset events (including sea-level rise and glacial retreat). However, Broberg and Romera¹⁵ argue that neither the Paris Agreement nor the UN climate change treaty regime provides a formal definition of loss and damage, and both practitioners and academics apply diverging definitions. They contend that loss and damage is 'residual' to mitigation and adaptation.¹⁶ In other words, if we pool 'insufficient mitigation' with 'inadequate adaptation', we will be left with loss and damage. Constructing loss and damage in this way is referred to as the 'beyond adaptation approach'. One of the implications of the plurality of definitions is that it may lead to different priorities and policies. For instance, Broberg¹⁷ observed that at the first COP in 1995, insurance was categorized as an 'adaptation measure', whereas today insurance is also considered a measure under loss and damage. This gives rise to uncertainty about what policy responses fall under 'loss and damage' as opposed to 'adaptation'. At the same time, the lack of a single definition of loss and damage allows for the decolonization and localization of the term in line with people's lived experiences.

Loss and damage is strongly concentrated in poorer populations – poorer people have less protection and therefore experience greater loss and damage, which can accumulate over time.¹⁸ High-income countries have been slow to respond financially to support efforts to address loss and damage, with the first finance pledged in 2021 since the formation of UNFCCC in 1992. However, it became clear at the end of COP 26 that loss and damage needs attention, with the G77 (the largest negotiating bloc of developing countries) and China putting forward a proposal for a loss and damage facility.

A Loss and Damage Fund was eventually established at COP 27 in November 2022, although no clear direction was provided regarding who will contribute to its funding. This is where activists and CSOs can come in; they play a crucial role in amplifying the voices of the people affected by climate change, which is key in national policy spaces and international climate COPs. But for activists and CSOs to do this effectively and advocate for action on just climate finance, they need to have a shared understanding of loss and damage – one that reflects a true picture of the communities they are speaking for.

1.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS

There is a need for a contextualized understanding of loss and damage that is embedded in the everyday experiences of people impacted by climate change. The literature review indicates that while there has been an increase in evidence focused on loss and damage, there are still major knowledge gaps in relation to the following:

1. Much of the available knowledge around loss and damage is theoretical; it is focused on conceptualizations of loss and damage from a variety of perspectives and links to policy frameworks, with significantly less empirical evidence.
2. There is limited research originating from and led by the Global South, which has a critical role in framing the experience of loss and damage, informing what support should be given, and developing relevant delivery and financing mechanisms for loss and damage.
3. The complex and context-dependent nature of loss and damage presents a challenge to top-down, one-size-fits-all thinking.
4. The mainstream economic discourse is focused on the economic and physical impacts of climate change on property and infrastructure, rather than the non-economic aspects of loss and damage.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study used an ‘action research’ approach: firstly, a literature review and participatory stakeholder workshop was held to learn from Southern African academics, activists and leaders about loss and damage in the Southern African context. Secondly, personal case studies were gathered in three countries (Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe) to document people’s lived experiences of loss and damage caused by climate change. Thirdly, the stakeholder workshop was reconvened to co-produce a loss and damage narrative based on the findings of the case studies and the experiences of Southern African academics, activists and leaders.

2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to develop a contextualized and shared understanding of the term loss and damage – informed by people’s lived experiences in Southern Africa – by employing a decolonizing and participatory action research approach. This used qualitative methods to bring together voices of Southern African actors and those experiencing loss and damage from climate change, in order to:

1. Support the leadership and empowerment of Southern African non-governmental organizations (NGOs), activists, negotiators and decision-makers on loss and damage.
2. Contribute to COP 27 being an African COP that reflects and is influenced by the leadership of African CSOs, activists and decision-makers.
3. Co-create with Southern African NGOs, activists, negotiators and decision-makers a narrative that defines, contextualizes, demonstrates, illustrates and evidences the macro and human impacts of loss and damage in the Southern African context.
4. Help overcome the barriers and limitations to African civil society activism, campaigning and communication on loss and damage.
5. Complement other loss and damage work being done by Oxfam and its partners.
6. Develop learning on how to decolonize action for climate justice.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted to identify narratives on loss and damage, and to explore how the term has evolved and been communicated internationally and by African players. The literature reviewed included journal articles, intergovernmental reports, books, policy documents and occasional papers around the evolution of the loss and damage concept, climate change impacts, loss and damage internationally and in Africa, as well as previous efforts to develop an African narrative of loss and damage. The literature review focused on Africa, and Southern Africa in particular.

2.3 STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS

Three online workshops were convened. These aimed to learn from and support the leadership of Southern African activists, CSOs and policymakers on loss and damage,

and to work towards a contextualized way of describing loss and damage for and in the Southern African context. Online workshops participants were drawn from the three countries in which the case studies were conducted: Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. They included representatives from civil society as well as government officials, climate negotiators and academics.

The objectives of the workshops were as follows:

Online workshop 1: To explore how the term 'loss and damage' is understood by different stakeholders, and to solicit recommendations and action points on understanding loss and damage from a multisectoral perspective. A total of 32 people participated in the first workshop, held on 19 August 2022.

Online workshop 2: To understand loss and damage in relation to the lived experiences shared through the three case studies in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. A total of 21 people participated in the second workshop, held on 21 October 2022.

Online workshop 3: To conclude the series of workshops on loss and damage by reaching a consensus on the most appropriate loss and damage narrative for Southern Africa, based on the stakeholder workshops and the lived experiences shared through the case studies. A total of 17 people participated in the final workshop, held on 3 November 2022.

2.4 THREE COUNTRY-BASED CASE STUDIES

Case studies were gathered in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, which sought to capture, document and provide grounded evidence on the ways loss and damage is experienced by survivors of extreme weather events linked to climate change. The case study locations were selected on the basis of their vulnerability to climate change impacts. Importantly, the case studies aimed to inform the online workshop discussions and support the creation of a loss and damage narrative for the Southern Africa region, in turn supporting the empowerment of Southern African leadership on loss and damage.

The case studies in Malawi and Zimbabwe focused on the lived experiences of loss and damage caused by Cyclone Idai, while the Mozambique case study focused on the lived experiences of loss and damage caused by extreme droughts. The literature¹⁹ attributes these extreme weather events to climate change. In Malawi, the case study was conducted in Mbweza, Joliji and Chilindiine villages in Chikwawa District. In Zimbabwe, the case study was conducted in Ndiadzo village, Chipinge District, Manicaland province. In Mozambique, the case study was conducted in Panjane community in Magude District, Maputo province.

Three individuals were interviewed in Malawi and Zimbabwe, and four in Mozambique, and their stories recorded on video. Interviewees had a range of different characteristics in terms of gender, age and disability. All participants consented to be interviewed and to have their interview recorded and shared on different media platforms. Each of the individuals interviewed had a unique experience of loss and damage; this included loss of life, loss of livelihoods and damage to infrastructure.

2.5 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study include:

- The small number of interviews in each case study (three or four per country), resulting in a limited basis for generalization of findings to the wider population.
- Participation in the online workshops was by invitation. Not all the key sector representatives (government, CSOs, NGOs and academia) were able to participate.

3. MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main findings from the study.

3.1 FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The main findings from the literature review are as follows:

1. While loss and damage are now effectively considered the third pillar of climate action (after mitigation and adaptation), defining the term has been fraught with disagreement, with both practitioners and academics applying diverging definitions.²⁰
2. Countries hold different views on how experiences of loss and damage should be addressed,²¹ with some countries positing that funding and implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures is the best way to address loss and damage. Others, especially in the Global South, are calling for the establishment of a special fund dedicated to loss and damage.
3. African governments have managed to present a relatively united front in pushing for and communicating an African-centred loss and damage narrative at international fora. However, their position on the issue has often been weakened by factors such as: the lack of resources and skills in most African countries to quantify loss and damage and to evidence the need for resource mobilization for loss and damage; the different understandings and interpretations of the term 'loss and damage' among different African stakeholders; and difficulties in differentiating between general climate finance and loss and damage finance.²²

3.2 FINDINGS FROM THE STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS

Online workshops were conducted with key stakeholders, which included government representatives, climate negotiators, civil society organizations (CSOs), activists, researchers and academics. The main findings from these discussions are presented below.

1. Participants' understanding of loss and damage

The terms 'loss' and 'damage' were not considered separate concepts but rather were conflated by stakeholders. There was no single definition or understanding of the term 'loss and damage', although all the stakeholders understood loss and damage in relation to climate change and its impacts, and saw it as referring to destruction and/or damage. Participants agreed that the term should be defined in such a way that it captures all the dimensions of loss and damage (psychological, cultural, social, economic, ecological and biophysical) in a holistic manner. For example, the definition should recognize that there is loss and damage because it is difficult to recover from

experience the deaths of family and community members. Participants noted that the narrative should pay attention to the non-economic losses and damages that are not easily quantified, such as culture and heritage.

However, there were diverging views. Some participants argued that there might not be a need for a Southern African or Africa-wide narrative, but rather a range of different indigenous narratives, reflecting the diversity of African cultures. The continent of Africa is diverse and broad in culture and livelihoods; even within one country, different communities have different cultural identities. Hence, they argued, there is need for contextualization based on evidence gathered through more extensive research.

Stakeholders did agree that definitions of loss and damage are important in shaping campaigning and advocacy by Africans. One suggestion was to borrow ideas from other disciplines and existing frameworks (e.g. use of the UNESCO 2003 Convention's definitions of tangible and intangible heritage). Stakeholders also suggested looking at economic and non-economic losses, and interrogating how non-economic losses should be quantified.

3. Challenges in understanding loss and damage

Stakeholders highlighted that in affected communities the term loss and damage is not easily understood or has no meaning, even in official languages, because of the diversity of languages and high illiteracy rates. Community members can describe what they have lost, but are not conversant with international terms. In summary, challenges in understanding the term include:

- The complexities of the language and concepts.
- The concept of loss and damage being relatively new.
- The difficulty of separating 'loss' and 'damage'.

4. Challenges for stakeholders working on loss and damage

Participants noted that most state and non-state actors working in the loss and damage field do not call their work 'loss and damage'; hence their understanding is implied, but not necessarily informed. The general sentiments expressed were that stakeholders do not have enough (financial) support for their work for a variety of reasons, including the lack of mutual understanding of the term 'loss and damage'.

Stakeholders also highlighted that CSOs and NGOs are often not included in negotiations on loss and damage, so their contributions are limited, and African governments are not taking civil activism and participation seriously, as negotiations at international fora are generally done by government officials. They felt that progress is hindered by the silo approach in which CSOs, NGOs and governments are working independently, without interacting.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.3.1 Recommendations based on the literature review

The literature review highlighted the need for:

- African leaders and negotiators to be equipped with current, locally informed and relevant information and examples on loss and damage, to enable them to communicate effectively with decision-makers and partners.

- African leaders and negotiators to ensure that the issue is a stand-alone agenda item at COP 27, in line with calls by CSOs and academics in the Global South for loss and damage to be established as a permanent, stand-alone agenda item under the UNFCCC subsidiary bodies.
- African countries to solidify their partnerships and continue to work together to place the stories of African communities and people most impacted by loss and damage at the front and centre of international climate negotiations and discussions.
- African governments to unite and speak with one voice to have greater impact during negotiations at the global fora.

3.3.2 Recommendations based on the stakeholder workshops

The following general recommendations to support work on loss and damage in Southern Africa were suggested during the online workshops:

- All stakeholders should pay attention to non-economic loss and damage, including loss of life; loss of culture, heritage, sense of community, and relationship to land; loss of hope for the future, loss of sense of peace and dignity, linked to trauma and mental distress. A loss and damage narrative should be created that includes these aspects of loss and damage, based on people's lived experiences.
- The language used by survivors when describing their lived experiences of loss and damage needs to be acknowledged, understood and responded to in the development of a loss and damage narrative and in policy decisions on loss and damage. Survivors should be part of intergovernmental negotiations, so that their voices and inputs are clearly heard and captured.
- Finance to address loss and damage should go towards both economic and non-economic loss and damage, including provision to address trauma and mental suffering, as well as cultural and social restitution and renewal.
- A research agenda needs to be developed and implemented to understand and address non-economic loss and damage, how it persists over time, and its cumulative impacts on people, their livelihoods, and their coping and adaptive capacities. This research should focus on enabling the people most affected by loss and damage to describe their experiences and identify their own solutions for funding from loss and damage finance. Research and literature on loss and damage from a Southern African perspective can help shape frameworks, definitions, and policies and enable Southern African negotiators to influence the design and administration of a loss and damage fund.
- CSOs/NGOs, activists and survivors need more knowledge on loss and damage and to be more engaged in advocacy and activism for loss and damage; for instance, using digital platforms to exchange ideas. And more engagement is needed between government, activists, CSO/NGOs, survivors, and the private sector in the formulation and implementation of loss and damage policy and practice.
- Communities should be supported to build resilience to avoid accumulating losses. This should be done at all levels, with contingency plans in place.
- Compensation policies are important and should be explored further. Such policies are needed to structure compensation for those who have experienced loss and damage; these should also cover non-economic assets such as cultural heritage.

3.4 FINDINGS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

The main findings from the case studies are as follows.

3.4.1 Malawi case study

The case study was conducted in Joliji and Chilindiine villages in Chikwawa District in southern Malawi. The three interviewees (one woman and two men) highlighted the following issues when asked about their experiences of loss and damage due to extreme weather events, including cyclones and tropical storms.

- Interviewees have experienced flooding, droughts and strong winds, but for them the most significant of these extreme events is flooding.
- Interviewees reported that children and women experience loss and damage the most. Children are traumatized, especially if they have lost a family member due to an extreme weather event. Women worry about their children, while bearing the burden of lack of food and household items. Women also said they were embarrassed to be seen in public without a change of clothes after their belongings were washed away by the floods.

'The boy stayed for two weeks without going to school. He only started when the teacher promised to give him an exercise book and a pen. Later, when we received money from well-wishers, I bought him clothes and we also bought some food. I have been encouraging him to go to school; it was difficult at the beginning, but eventually he got to understand. The girl is affected more, because when it happened she was on her period, so she had difficulties taking care of herself. But we tried to help her.'

Joyce Luka

- At the community level, they have experienced economic loss and damage to crop fields, livestock, roads, houses, graveyards and drinking water sources.
- At the household level, they described loss and damage to food, both in the field and in storage; to livestock; and to household items, including clothes and utensils.
- Interviewees reported that most people in their villages have not recovered from the shock and trauma of extreme weather events. They spoke of being very uncertain about the future and afraid that these events will be repeated.

'My life is at risk right now. Everything that I had – such as goats, chickens and guinea fowl – was washed away by the floods, and I have nothing to rely on. In addition to that, my life is at risk because we are approaching the rainy season and I am still to find my own accommodation. I also don't see myself being able to build a new house any time soon.'

Joyce Luka

- The destruction of graveyards is felt as a deeply disturbing loss. Villagers are unable to identify their relatives' resting places or to rebuild or repair tombstones.

'Because people do not know which grave belongs to their relatives, they end up preparing other people's graves, for instance during tombstone unveiling. For example, I had a child whom we buried at the grave. I had plans to unveil the tombstone, but I failed because I can no longer identify the grave. I tried to go to the church to explain it, and my relatives said they would help me look into the matter and would bring feedback, but up to now I haven't heard anything.'

Isaac Makina

- Most of the support the interviewees had received was of a one-off nature and was not enough to help them recover.
- Interviewees said they would like more support to help them rebuild their houses using stronger materials to withstand flooding.



A temporary shelter constructed by Isaac Makina after his house collapsed due to Cyclone Ana in Joliji village, Chikwawa District, Malawi. Photo credit: Thoko Chikondi/Oxfam

3.4.2 Zimbabwe case study

Three individuals – two women and one man – were interviewed in Chipinge District at Kopa Growth Point, which was the epicentre of Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe. Participants highlighted the following experiences of losses and damages in relation to climate change impacts, particularly flooding.

- Villagers experienced their family members as well as fields and property being washed away by the floods. They talked about how they did not have the opportunity to pay their last respects or bury their loved ones. As a result, they still suffer trauma and mental distress, which they described as a void or an emptiness.

'We lost several relatives, including my brother's wife and child. My brother was saved by holding on to a rope. He is now in bad shape and no longer mentally stable. A local NGO collected him last week and took him to a rehabilitation centre in the city for counselling.'

Innocencia Njoringo

- There was a reduction in crop yields after the cyclone, and interviewees felt that the rains may have brought acidic rains that affected soil fertility. The flooding deposited sand, stones and large boulders in their fields, which also affected soil fertility and the land's suitability for growing crops.
- Any hint of cyclonic conditions now has a psychological impact on community members in Chipinge and the neighbouring district of Chimanimani. Weather conditions such as strong winds, thunder and thick cloud cover trigger flash-backs and memories of the destruction caused by Cyclone Idai, and the communities live in a perennial state of fear. Interviewees highlighted the need for counselling to help community members suffering from post-traumatic stress.

'I was greatly affected by the loss of family and belongings and went into a depression that resulted in my blood pressure getting too high, which caused a stroke. My left side was affected, and because of that I can no longer work for my family as I used to do before. I am now permanently disabled due to the impact of Cyclone Idai.'

Gift Zikuyumo

- Children who were orphaned because of the floods also face a range of problems, according to interviewees, particularly the constant question of what happened to their parents. Local cultures do not encourage talking to children about death. These children continue to ask questions, and in some cases were only told what happened by their friends at school, which has led to further social and mental distress.
- The cyclone caused widespread damage to physical infrastructure, including the destruction of schools, clinics, roads, bridges, houses, communication infrastructure (e.g. telephone lines, base stations), electricity transmission lines and shops.



*Boulders strewn across farmland following flooding caused by Cyclone Idai, which destroyed people's land and agricultural activities, Kopa Growth Point, Chipinge District, Zimbabwe.
Photo credit: Lesley Macheka/Oxfam.*

3.4.3 Mozambique case study

The study was carried out in Panjane community, Magude District in Maputo province. This is an arid and semi-arid region characterized by intense and persistent droughts, and the situation has worsened since 2007. Four people (two women and two men) who have lived in the district for more than 20 years were interviewed to gain in-depth insights into the dynamics of drought events and the associated losses and damages.

- Interviewees talked about how drought and excessive hot weather has resulted in the low productivity of agricultural crops and the loss of arable land. As a result, community members face food shortages and experience deep hunger. The community now depends on help from the government and other entities to access food, but this is insufficient to feed families.
- Large numbers of cattle have died due to the persistent drought, water shortages and limited pasture for grazing. Livestock is a symbol of wealth and a major income-generating asset in the community.

'The excessive heat in these years results in greater losses of crops (maize) stored in granaries. Before, we could store maize for a period of over a year in the granary but now the maize does not last even six months. This leaves us in a situation where we run out of food and seed.'

Carlos Chongo

'Extreme hunger leads to school absenteeism among our children. We are a bit lucky because in the primary schools in the region they have introduced the School Lunch Programme, and this encourages our children to go to school because they get something to eat when they are at school.'

Otilia Mazive

- Before the construction of a reservoir, persistent drought caused the rivers to dry up quickly and community members had to walk over 10km to get drinking water. In 2018, the community benefited from the construction of a reservoir with a capacity of 20,000 litres. Community members have created a farm beside the reservoir, where they produce vegetables, maize and other crops, helping to alleviate severe hunger.

'The water reservoir has solved the suffering of having to walk 13km to look for water in years of intense drought. It has ensured access to drinking water for human consumption and livestock watering. Now we never lack water for several uses.'

Carlos Chongo



Unproductive field with weakened maize crops due to lack of rain and excessive hot weather in Panjane community, Magude District, Maputo province, Mozambique. Photo credit: Rosta Munjovo/Oxfam.

4. THEMES EMERGING FROM THE CASE STUDIES

Key themes emerging from the case studies revolve around grief, trauma and mental suffering. These take a unique form particular to the person, their context, the loss and damage they have experienced, and the support they have access to or have been given.

People experience **grief and trauma** when they lose family members in very frightening events such as floods. Grief is exacerbated when surviving family members are unable to find the bodies of their loved ones, which were washed away, making a decent burial impossible. The absence of graves means survivors are not able to mourn or to conduct the important death and burial rituals that would help them express and find ways to live with their grief.

Death is thus an important and common aspect of the social and cultural dimensions of loss and damage. In African societies, death doesn't end when a person physically stops breathing; it is a process. For survivors, this inability to carry out rituals means there is no closure, so the trauma persists. People say that they 'die inside' due to lack of recovery of their relatives' bodies. Trauma is also relived when graves are opened, as was described by one of the interviewees in Chipinge in Zimbabwe. Children are 'spared' from being told about death; for example, the word 'died' is substituted with phrases such as 'gone to heaven'. The taboo around talking to children about the death of loved ones means they bottle up their trauma, which may lead to both children and their carers experiencing ongoing mental suffering.

Survivors also continued to experience ongoing **mental distress** linked to past extreme weather events or ongoing events such as persistent drought, hunger and food insecurity. Traumatic memories can be triggered, for example, by foreboding weather conditions. Survivors now fear the environment they previously relied on to sustain them. The interviewees' experiences reflect what has become known as *solastalgia* – the distress caused by environmental damage, when a person's endemic sense of place is violated. Interviewees also shared that, as with death, it can be difficult to speak about trauma and mental suffering, especially to children. These subjects may not be openly discussed in families and communities, and the language for talking about these experiences may not be available to all community members. Some people have become permanently physically disabled because of extreme weather, causing unemployment and mental suffering.

Another common theme arising in the interviews was the **loss of physical assets** such as houses, food, belongings, land and livestock. Livelihoods have been fractured as people are not able to farm and produce food, and in some cases have had to depend on external agencies for food.

Together, the case studies illustrate that loss and damage is not a one-off event. Rather, loss and damage persists over time, is cumulative in nature, and affects all aspects of survivors' lives.

Figure 2 presents the main themes that workshop participants felt emerged from the case studies, including grief, trauma, mental suffering and social disruption.

5. TOWARDS A NARRATIVE OF LOSS AND DAMAGE FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

This section presents a discussion of the consolidated findings from the literature review, workshops and case studies, and provides a framework with key components for a loss and damage narrative for Southern Africa. These components are closely linked to each other, as one experience of loss or damage is likely to lead to another series of losses and damages. For example, loss and damage caused to crop fields leads to loss of food; this leads to loss of peace of mind, and may eventually cause trauma or mental distress, further undermining the individual’s livelihood and food security. The case studies highlighted that communities experience prolonged impacts of extreme weather events, some of which are irreversible.

Research participants agreed that a common loss and damage narrative is needed if Southern Africa is to be heard and influential in climate negotiations. ‘Loss’ and ‘damage’ are both contested terms, and the concept of loss and damage has assumed different meanings based on people’s experiences of the realities of climate change impacts, in their capacity as negotiators, researchers, or members of CSOs or affected communities. In the scientific discourse, the meaning of loss and damage might be abstract, but this study has shown that people’s experiences are real, lived and relived through traumatic memories.

Table 1 shows the six dimensions of loss and damage identified from the literature review, and provides illustrations from the case study findings in relation to each dimension.

Table 1. Six dimensions of loss and damage with examples from the case studies

Dimension of loss and damage identified in this research	Findings/examples from the case studies
<i>Psychological</i>	Loss and damage resulting in trauma and mental suffering and distress. In some cases, this can lead to physical health problems such as stroke (as in the case of one of the interviewees in Zimbabwe), resulting in another damage (disability), thereby threatening wellbeing and even survival. Most case study participants from Zimbabwe and Malawi reported living in constant fear that flooding might happen again, which affects their mental health and wellbeing.
<i>Cultural</i>	Loss and damage to cultural heritage, relating to disrupted cultural identity. This includes loss of cultural artefacts and places, and a loss of sense of belonging due, for example, to displacement. In the case of Cyclone Idai, heritage and cultural sites were washed away. Where graves ¹⁶ were destroyed, relatives experienced acute distress as they could not perform cultural rituals.
<i>Social</i>	Loss and damage resulting from broken social connections due to the death and displacement of family and community members, and loss and damage to social structures, e.g. schools. During climate extreme events such as floods, people are often separated from each other and disconnected from social networks, exacerbating other loss and damage. The death of relatives was reported in both the Malawi and Zimbabwe case studies.

<i>Economic</i>	Loss and damage affecting resources, goods and services, critical infrastructure, property and supply chains. In Mozambique, severe drought and water shortage resulted in the loss of crops, and led to the death or weight-loss of livestock. As agriculture and livestock husbandry are the major economic activities, this reduced income generation. The excessive heat also resulted in increased post-harvest losses due to pests in the granary, which ultimately reduced food availability and seeds for the next harvest.
<i>Ecological</i>	Loss and damage to nature caused by climate extremes such as flooding, droughts or freezing temperatures. In Malawi, floods washed away soil, which affected crops and subsequent harvests. In Zimbabwe, 'raining' stones and boulders that covered people's fields led to loss of arable land.
<i>Biophysical</i>	Climate extremes can affect biodiversity directly by influencing biophysical variables that drive species' geographic distribution. In the case of Mozambique, heatwaves resulted in soil dryness and high evapotranspiration. This can lead to reduced biotic activities and increased soil carbon stock reduction on exposed soil, reducing fertility and productivity. ²³

Figure 3 depicts the key components identified by the study for inclusion in framing the loss and damage narrative for Southern Africa. In summary, this narrative needs to be:

- In a language, style and format that is accessible to and easily understood by affected communities and survivors.
- Inclusive, focused and tailored to the given context, e.g. geographic area, with concrete and specific examples.
- Inclusive of the views and voices of all key stakeholders and survivors.
- Holistic, to capture all the different dimensions and experiences of loss and damage.
- Broad enough to capture the nuances emerging from various stakeholders, affected communities and survivors.

Figure 3: Framing the Loss and Damage Narrative

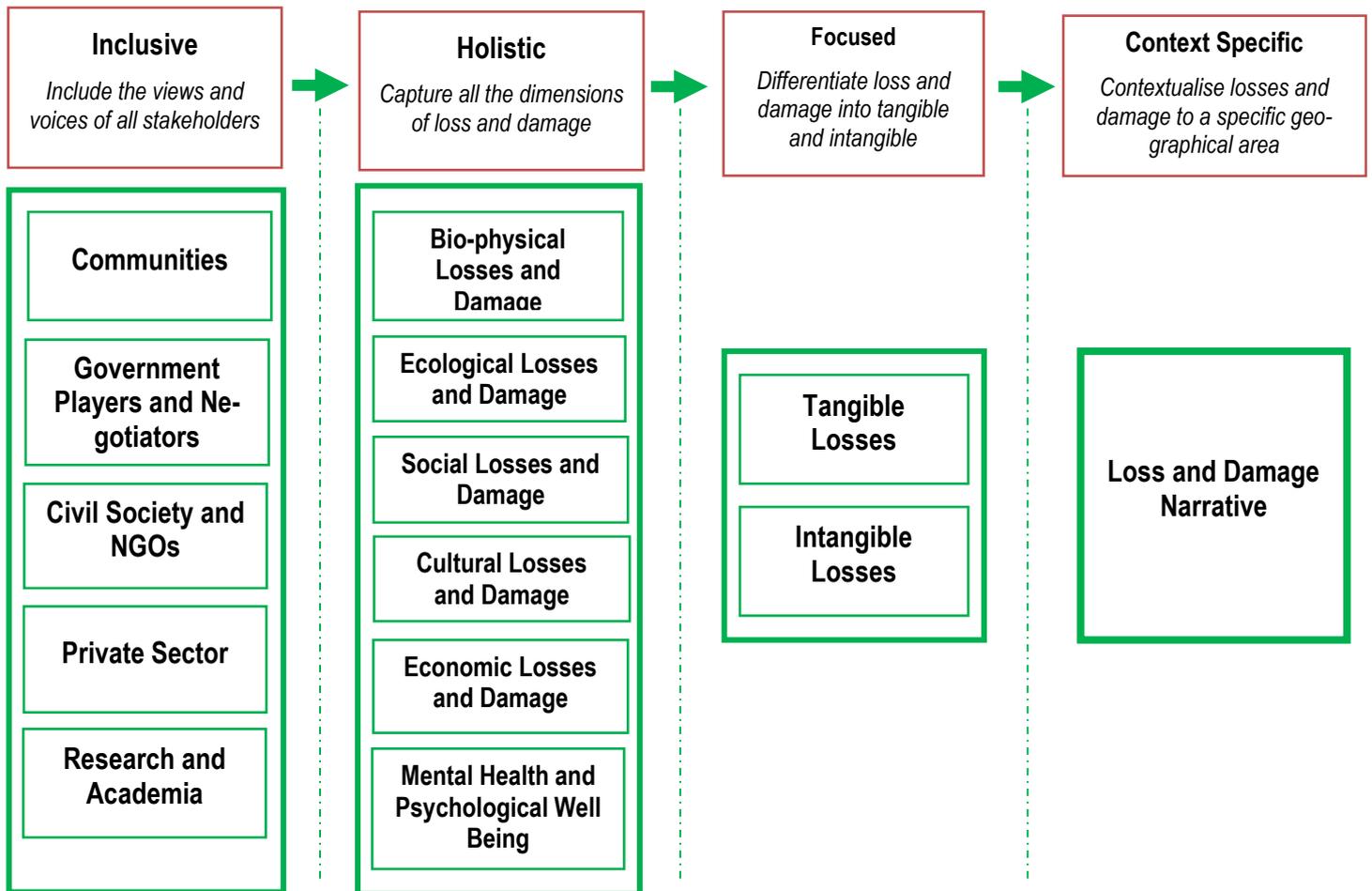


Figure 3. Components for framing the Southern African loss and damage narrative. Source: authors' creation.

6. THE NEED TO DECOLONIZE THE LOSS AND DAMAGE NARRATIVE

In most cases, climate change narratives are centred on the Global North and are out of touch with the realities and lived experiences of people in the Global South and/or minorities in the Global North.²⁴ There is a pressing need to decolonize the discourse by examining the dominant understanding of climate change and acknowledging the indigenous or traditional knowledge of those suffering from severe climate harms.²⁵ Decolonization is important, as it pays attention to sociolinguistics²⁶ and helps to ensure that established notions of loss and damage are informed by and resonate with people in the communities most affected by loss and damage. Hence, it is essential to co-create the narrative with survivors, CSOs, activists, academics and negotiators to contextualize and illustrate loss and damage through the lived experiences of those affected.

In this study, one of the main principles of the climate justice concept, procedural justice, was used with the aim to help decolonize the loss and damage narrative. This means promoting equity and the informed, full participation of survivors, civil society, activists, academia and negotiators in the processes of deliberation and decision-making on loss and damage in national and international fora. By taking a participatory, action research approach, which included a literature review, online workshops with stakeholders and country-based case studies (see the Methodology section), the study aimed to deconstruct the linear discourse and global narratives on loss and damage. Different stakeholders were able to share their views based on their lived experiences and everyday realities, practices and encounters. This co-generation of knowledge on loss and damage, with particular attention to the lived experiences of loss and damage in affected communities, helped the study to contextualize and better understand the term 'loss and damage'.

The following key recommendations to decolonize the narrative on loss and damage arose from the online workshops with stakeholders:

- Amplify the voices of survivors, frontline and marginalised communities that are most affected by climate change, and involve them in climate planning and policymaking.
- Equip Southern African leaders, negotiators and journalists with current, locally informed and relevant information and examples on loss and damage to enable them to communicate effectively with decision-makers and partners to promote the 'African narrative' at international climate fora, until tangible solutions are reached.
- Break knowledge hierarchies and co-produce mutually beneficial knowledge using action research to help give a contextualized/localized narrative.
- Acknowledge and appreciate the diversity between different cultural groups, and understand that experiences of loss and damage can differ based on context and characteristics such as gender and age. Situating climate challenges within specific geographic contexts is an important step towards decolonizing the narrative of loss and damage.
- Conduct climate or loss and damage campaigns that are informed and connected to communities at the frontline of climate change impacts.

- Decolonize climate change education by giving equal representation to multiple forms of knowledge in the climate change narrative. For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2014)²⁷ concluded that, given its holistic nature, indigenous knowledge provides an in-depth understanding of climate risk that enhances the climate adaptation process by informing policy and practice.

7. CONCLUSION

Despite the many different perspectives and experiences that arose from the workshops, there was consensus that a shared loss and damage narrative is needed if Southern Africa is to be heard and influential in negotiations on loss and damage financing. This narrative should be constructed in a language that communities can easily understand and relate to. It should be able to capture nuances emerging from different individuals, communities and stakeholders. If possible, indigenous knowledge systems should be integrated into the narrative on loss and damage. Different stakeholders (government, academics and activists) should be explicit in their use of and engagement with the term loss and damage, by ensuring it is grounded in lived experiences and illustrated with relevant, context-specific examples.

However, there are challenges associated with the construction of a shared narrative for Southern Africa. The term 'loss and damage' is contested even in scientific discourse; hence reaching an agreement in practice is not easy. The term cannot be easily translated into local meanings and languages. Southern African societies are diverse, so in order to capture this diversity the term must be both broad and inclusive. It must involve *non-economic as well as economic aspects* of loss and damage. It must also factor in aspects of compensation and liability that matter to communities.

Loss and damage should also be viewed from the perspective of decolonization. This means moving away from the abstract to the specific, rooted in the lived experiences of people affected by climate change. It means capturing realities and experiences, learning, and unlearning, as happened through the workshops and case studies. Decolonization also means paying attention to the language used in describing loss and damage – for instance, understanding loss and damage through the way trauma is described by the people who have experienced it in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique. The experience of loss and damage cannot be captured using universal or borrowed language.

In summary, the research findings show how loss and damage entails persistent **destruction, disruption, trauma, mental distress** and **dislocation**, to the extent that people are not able to cope or to recover what has been lost.

Regarding trauma and mental suffering, more research is required to understand and communicate people's lived experiences in ways that honour their own sense-making and language, and inform appropriate and effective policy responses.

More resources are needed to help people cope with loss and damage. African governments should be accountable to their citizens and responsive to the loss and damage suffered by communities. Governments in the Global North and the Global South need to invest in interventions that break the cycle of losses and damages, which are cumulative.

The study concludes that:

1. While the definition of loss and damage is contested, there is a need to be able to characterize the losses and damages experienced within a Southern African context as distinct from those of other regions in the world.
2. Not all impacts are quantifiable or even comparable across cultures. Loss and damage can include cultural symbols, places people identify with, or even ways of life. Values and losses are shaped by social contexts and by people's experiences and daily practice. Knowledge of loss therefore requires accounting for the

inherently subjective nature of values, and how these values vary across human experiences.

3. A Southern African loss and damage narrative should be: inclusive, i.e. it should include perspectives from different stakeholders; holistic, to capture the different dimensions of loss and damage – psychological, social, cultural, economic, ecological and biophysical; focused, to clearly differentiate between economic and non-economic loss; and nuanced enough to capture lived experiences of affected communities, indigenous expression of loss and damage, and important issues of note from different contexts, given the diversity of Southern African communities.

Figure 4 shows the keywords that workshop participants proposed for the loss and damage narrative at the end of the study.

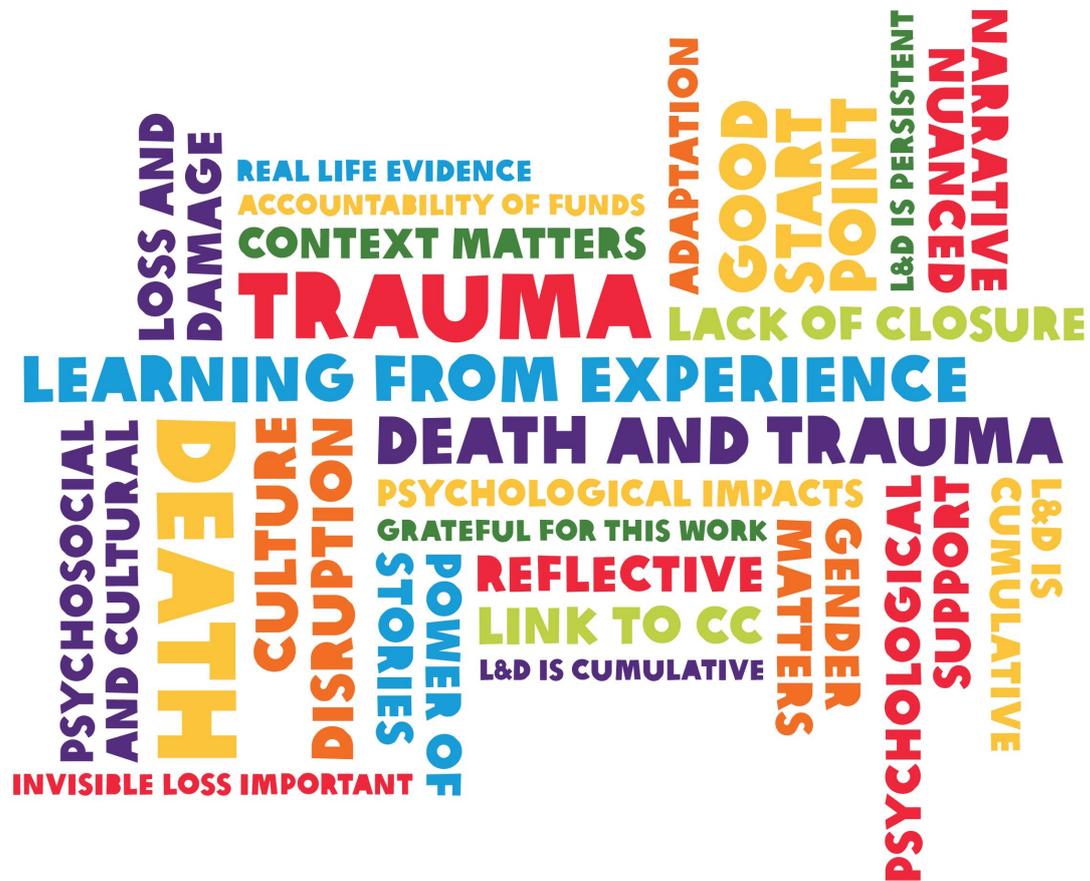


Figure 4. Key words proposed by participants for the loss and damage narrative.

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Cover photo: Joyce Luka and her daughter are seen standing on what remains of their family house was swept away by Tropical Storm Ana at their village in Chikwawa, southern Malawi on 9 September 2022.
Credit: Thoko Chikondi/Oxfam.

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