

SUMMARY OF THE MNSSP REVIEW REPORT



A STAKEHOLDER-DRIVEN REVIEW OF THE MNSSP'S DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

A STAKEHOLDER-DRIVEN REVIEW OF THE MNSSP

In June 2016, Government of Malawi launched a six-month comprehensive stakeholder-driven review of the Malawi National Social Protection Programme (MNSSP, 2012-2016). This brief summarizes the key programme and system-level observations identified during the review. Detailed analysis and recommendations can be found in the full report.

SOCIAL PROTECTION FRAMEWORKS IN MALAWI

The Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP) was designed to operationalize the National Social Support Policy (NSSP) over the period of 2012-2016, based on the NSSP's vision of enhanced quality of life for those suffering from poverty and hunger and improved resilience of those vulnerable to shocks.

The NSSP has four strategic objectives, which are:

- (1) to provide welfare support to those unable to develop viable livelihoods,
- (2) to protect assets and improve the resilience of poor and vulnerable households;
- (3) to increase productive capacity and asset base of poor and vulnerable households, and
- (4) to establish coherent synergies by ensuring strong linkages to economic and social policies, and disaster management.

To achieve these objectives, the MNSSP prioritized five intervention areas: Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP), School Meals Programmes (SMP), Public Works Programmes (PWP), Village Savings and Loans (VSL) and Micro-Finance (MF).

The review assessed the performance of each MNSSP programme against strategic outcomes and objectives, reported here under six themes: *relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, institutional capacity, and sustainability*.

Discussions on linkages to agricultural interventions and humanitarian responses are provided, in addition to points raised on the performance of the MNSSP system as whole, in terms of: *design, implementation, and financing*.



PROGRAMME LEVEL FINDINGS OF THE MNSSP REVIEW

Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP)

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|-------------------------------|---|
| Relevance | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Clarify objectives of the SCTP with respect to graduation: Should the SCTP become a graduation programme, and if so, what support should be provided to those unable to graduate?◆ Strengthen the sustainability of impacts through expanding linkages and referral mechanisms to complementary services◆ Gap analysis: Strengthen targeting capacity through the UBR to ensure beneficiaries are harmoniously aligned between PWP and the SCT. |
| Effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Establish an annual "automatic" review of transfer levels: Transfer levels should be based on a consistent formula.◆ Review the 10% eligibility threshold once national coverage is achieved and possibly target all ultra-poor and labour constrained households. |
| Efficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Strengthen financial harmonization and align the operational and financial cycles of donors and implementers.◆ Develop harmonized institutional implementation arrangements shared by all donors and implementers.◆ Strengthen reporting and financial management capacity of districts for reporting financial management functions.◆ Review alternative payment systems such as e-payment system or third-party payment systems. |
| Institutional capacity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Strengthen district level management capacity to reduce the need for central staff to frequently travel to districts.◆ Review capacity constraints and incentives of Community Social Support Committee members: Consider switching to a 'professionalization' of community level implementation.◆ Social Support Committee members: Consider switching to a 'professionalization' of community level implementation. |
| Sustainability | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Develop a strategy to increase Government financial contributions◆ Develop a business case for SCTP funding |

Review workshop on linking social protection and the annual humanitarian response to food and nutrition insecurity (© ILO)

Public Works Programmes (PWP)

- Relevance**
 - ◆ **Develop a clear definition of PWP objectives and expected outcomes** and use to re-design and align PWP.
 - ◆ **Harmonize objectives and design parameters of PWP across** implementers based on common target groups, length of employment, and wage rates.
 - ◆ **PWP to provide sustained support** to beneficiaries through long-term programmes and repeat-targeting of beneficiaries, and evaluate the impacts of this strategy.
 - ◆ **Develop a concept for how PWP might be designed to respond to shocks.**
- Impact**
 - ◆ **Ensure maintenance of community assets:** Focus on increased community valuation of assets and strengthen community involvement in selection and design of assets.
 - ◆ **Increase focus on skills development for PWP beneficiaries** that works towards increased resilience, productivity, and employability.
 - ◆ **Increase focus on food security** through generating and maintaining assets that have direct impacts on individual or community level resilience and food security.
- Effectiveness**
 - ◆ **Strengthen linkages amongst interventions.**
 - ◆ **Regularly review the PWP wage rate.**
- Efficiency**
 - ◆ **Strengthen information management systems and accountability** through the adoption of the Mthandizi MIS.
- Institutional capacity**
 - ◆ **Develop a human resource strategy for implementers,** to ensure adequate staffing levels and staff capacity.
 - ◆ **Develop guidelines to harmonize programmes across implementers.**
- Sustainability**
 - ◆ **Conceptualize a graduation strategy**



Students enjoying school meals in Mangochi (© WFP)

School Meals Programmes (SMP)

- Relevance**
 - ◆ **Achieve clarity on primary and secondary objectives:** Develop a theory of change on how SMP directly contribute to the various objectives, including impact on nutritional and educational outcomes, as well as local agricultural production.
 - ◆ **Clarify the relationship between the SCTP and SMP,** as both aim to increase enrollment.
 - ◆ **Develop a strategy to extend provision of school meals.**
- Impact**
 - ◆ **Strengthen harmonization of SMP implementation across the sector and improve cooperation among implementers**
- Effectiveness**
 - ◆ **Harmonize implementation across implementers:** Standardize feeding portions of centralized model based on nutritional requirements and cost-effectiveness.
 - ◆ **Strengthen focus on nutrition, such as** nutritional education
 - ◆ **For decentralized SMP, develop sets of low-cost nutritious and regionally sensitive menus.**
 - ◆ **Develop a system for technical support towards decentralized SMP:** Develop a system of agricultural and nutritional advice to ensure that schools plant regionally appropriate and nutritious produce for a year-round supply.
 - ◆ **Develop complementarity between decentralized and centralized SMP:** Consider allowing the centralized model to act as a back-up system in case of production shortages.
- Efficiency**
 - ◆ **Develop a sector-wide M&E system based at the MoEST.**
 - ◆ **Develop a strategy to link SMP to other programmes.**
- Institutional capacity**
 - ◆ **Develop a capacity building strategy for the SHN Department within MoEST.**
- Sustainability**
 - ◆ **Develop a medium-term plan for programme handover to the Government,** including capacity building and technical assistance components.
 - ◆ **Strengthen the evidence base on the advantages and disadvantages of SMP implementation modalities:** For instance, build evidence on the sustainability, reliability, and quality of service community volunteers in relation to paid staff.



A VSL group in Balaka (© WFP)

Micro-Finance Programmes (MFP)

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|------------------------|---|
| Relevance | ◆ Consider developing loans for small-scale irrigation systems and agricultural techniques. |
| | ◆ Develop a training package for clients, such as on financial literacy, accounting, and business skills. |
| Impact | ◆ Strengthen capacity building of clients |
| | ◆ Develop a system of certification for loan officers to ensure minimum professional standards. |
| Effectiveness | ◆ Develop strategies for using the National ID system for improved service, outreach and reduce cost of lending. |
| | ◆ Develop sector-wide standards for M&E to track loan performance. |
| Efficiency | ◆ Strengthen basis for cooperation amongst MFI and Government through regular sector-wide discussion fora. |
| | ◆ Government to focus on creating an appropriate regulatory framework and work with the sector in harmonizing implementation through best practice guidelines. |
| Institutional capacity | ◆ Develop strategies to reduce the cost of lending to improve financial sustainability of MFI. |
| | ◆ Government and donors to increase investments into institutional and physical infrastructure, such as improved access to rural communities and the national ID. |

Village Savings and Loans Programmes (VSL)

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|------------------------|--|
| Relevance | ◆ Develop clear implementation guidelines for all organizations including provisions for capacity building, M&E, information sharing and reporting. |
| | ◆ Develop business cases: Implementers to undertake an assessment of the cost and possible profits of investments available to VSL groups. VSL group members should be trained in identifying viable business ideas. |
| Impact | ◆ Implementers to develop a sector-wide capacity building curriculum. |
| | ◆ Define expectations, core services, and standards of VSL. |
| Effectiveness | ◆ Develop a harmonized capacity building package. |
| | ◆ Harmonize staff training requirements. |
| Efficiency | ◆ Study complementary funding to VSL groups. |
| | ◆ Develop a sector-wide M&E system |
| Institutional capacity | ◆ Consider whether the VSL would be better placed under the auspices of the MoGCDSW. |
| | ◆ Strengthen Government oversight: Develop a framework that includes information sharing arrangements, as well as national and district level coordination and planning structures. |

Sustainability

- ◆ Ensure self-management capacity of groups: Strengthen group training to reduce the need for field officers to facilitate pay-outs.
- ◆ Graduation into cooperatives: Develop a strategy to facilitate the formalization of VSL groups.

SYSTEM LEVEL FINDINGS OF THE MNSSP REVIEW

MNSSP DESIGN

Programmes' relevance and consistency

- ◆ MNSSP focuses mainly on economic development aspects of social protection (e.g. income protection) with limited emphasis on social and human development. While this focus is understandable given Malawi's widespread and deep poverty and represents a core function of social protection systems, social protection also has the potential to make substantive contributions towards other development objectives, such as education, health, social inclusion, reduction in vulnerabilities, and increases in wellbeing.
- ◆ Integration of programme design and objectives is an ongoing process within the MNSSP. While individual programmes objectives are relatively well defined - though with varying degrees across the five interventions - there is little clarity as to how the different programme objectives complement and articulate with each other. The various interventions included in the MNSSP are conceived (hence implemented) in relative isolation.
- ◆ Strong resistance to "double dipping" of communities limits the opportunities for complementarities and multi-dimensionality in social protection. Different programmes seem to be directed to different "clienteles", leading to little interaction between programmes with a strong focus on providing income security (SCTP, PWP, SMP) and those that aim to enhance productivity or economic autonomy (VSL, MF).
- ◆ Some programmes suffer from a lack of clearly defined primary and secondary objectives. For instance, the SMP assumes certain impacts on multiple objectives with unclear prioritization and lacking a coherent theory of change.

Coverage and coherence of the MNSSP

- ◆ The coverage provided through the MNSSP for Malawi's poor and vulnerable is limited. Given the high levels of poverty and vulnerability in Malawi and the limited resources available for social protection it is not surprising that many stakeholders find the current coverage of social protection provided through the MNSSP as inadequate. Programmes are not implemented universally and often only reach a fraction of their target groups. Untargeted populations often receive only limited and inconsistent support through other initiatives.
- ◆ MNSSP does not explicitly address the social protection needs of the elderly and the disabled outside of the SCT and the PWP. While there is no programme that directly addresses the needs of the elderly and the disabled, they do make up a significant number of SCT and in some PWP programmes.

Targeting design challenges

- ◆ **Poverty targeting approaches are seen as difficult to implement in Malawi due to widespread and dynamic poverty**, which increases the risk of arbitrary exclusion of potentially eligible beneficiaries and inclusion errors. Stakeholders mentioned communities have limited understanding of the MNSSP eligibility criteria of, especially the SCTP, noting that rural communities often perceive all to be equally poor and therefore have limited understanding of poverty rankings that facilitate beneficiary selection processes.
- ◆ Some questioned the distinction between households with and without labour capacity—a key component of the MNSSP's beneficiary selection process— noting that labour constrained households have been found to have productive potential when supported through the SCTP, while poor households with labour capacity, may at times require basic income protection to allow for more sustainable impacts on livelihoods.

Transfer adequacy

- ◆ **Stakeholders observed a lack of predictability and consistency in the calculation of transfer levels** for the SCTP and PWP. Further, adjustments are done infrequently, on an ad-hoc basis, and take long to implement.
- ◆ **Stakeholders noted that the 'self-targeting' approach of PWP poses a unique challenge to provide meaningful levels of social protection:** There is a need for adequate transfer levels to achieve impact, whilst keeping them low enough to not attract 'non-poor' beneficiaries.

MNSSP IMPLEMENTATION

High level ownership and coordination

- ◆ **The MNSSP is fragmented at national level.** The MNSSP's institutional coordination and implementation structure consists of a number of line ministries, which are tasked with implementing programmes, and the MoFEPD, which holds the overall mandate to coordinate the MNSSP and develop social protection policies. Inadequate M&E systems at the apex of the MNSSP is a key challenge towards the Ministry's mandate.
- ◆ **MNSSP consists of largely donor-funded programmes implemented with generally low but varying degrees of utilization of Government systems.**
- ◆ **Some Donors contribute to the MNSSP fragmentation** by narrowly funding specific interventions rather than taking a more holistic approach towards social protection in Malawi.

Institutional coordination capacity

- ◆ **MNSSP implementation was seen as fragmented and based on ineffective coordination structures, especially at District level**, where overlapping memberships of a set of uncoordinated committees was seen as a key cause of inefficiency and ineffectiveness, and a barrier to cross-programme linkages.

- ◆ **Ineffective coordination structures reduce information sharing between sectors and programmes**, which seems to be particularly problematic at the district level, with national level coordinating forums meeting regularly and considered to be increasingly functional.

- ◆ **Lack of standardized implementation and harmonized guidelines was considered to contribute to fragmentation**, between implementers and across pillars.

Institutional implementation capacity

- ◆ **Inadequate resources, infrastructure, and staffing levels, especially at district level, were reported across most programmes.**
- ◆ **Heavy reliance on community volunteers in many programmes (SCTP, SMP) raises concerns about reliability, sustainability, and effectiveness**, whilst others supported these arrangements for their low cost and ability to involve communities in the provision of social protection.

- ◆ **Transfers are increasingly paid on time but challenges remain.** PWP implementers report frequent delays in payment of transfers, mainly due to delayed funding towards the District Councils that implement the programme.

- ◆ **Programmes are frequently implemented with inadequate MIS and M&E frameworks.** This hinders policy makers and implementers from adequately assessing programmes' performances and in the tracking of beneficiaries.

Linkages and integration of MNSSP programmes

- ◆ **Linkages between MNSSP programmes are mainly found at the programme level.** Existing linkages within the MNSSP are mainly implemented on a pilot basis and there are few national initiatives.
- ◆ **The UBR and the harmonized targeting of beneficiaries for the SCT and PWP is the most prominent example of an administrative link.** Going forward, the UBR database will be able to effectively facilitate sound programme level linkages.

MNSSP FINANCING

- ◆ **Government financial contribution is very low and stagnant across all MNSSP programmes.** This raises concerns over Government commitment to leadership and ownership.

- ◆ **Funding arrangements of the MNSSP are fragmented and inefficient** in part due to concerns over fiduciary risks which have led to the limited utilization of Government financial systems by donors. No programme under the MNSSP has a harmonized approach to financing and there is lack of coordinated planning documents, such as harmonized budgets and work plans. Each donor has different financing modalities, funding time-frames, and reporting requirement.

- ◆ **There are common delays in the disbursement of funds managed or provided which affect programme efficiency**, in particular PWP.

- ◆ **Stakeholders expressed concerns about frequent reports of mismanaged programme funds.** The SCTP has received some adverse audits, and reports of mismanaged PWP funds have appeared in the local press.



Linking the SCT and the MVAC humanitarian response in Chikwawa (© WFP)

LINKS TO THE BROADER SOCIAL PROTECTION SECTOR

Agriculture, livelihoods and resilience initiatives are not well aligned to the MNSSP system. Stakeholders found very few linkages between MNSSP programmes and agricultural, resilience, and livelihood interventions, despite policy level overlaps. It was recommended that coordination between the sectors should be improved and that linkages should be conceptualized based on a mapping of agriculture, livelihoods and resilience initiatives.

Policy, programme, and administrative linkages between social protection and the MVAC are weak and not systematically developed. Existing linkages are mainly implemented on an ad-hoc and pilot basis, primarily on the programme level and dependent on the initiative of implementers. It was recommended that effective coordination structures between the MNSSP and MVAC should be developed and that a strategy should be developed that would allow social protection programme to respond more effectively and efficiently to livelihood shocks. This could be achieved through greater flexibility in financing and programming.

KEY STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUCCESSOR TO THE MNSSP

Based on these findings, stakeholders prioritized the following areas of focus for the development of a successor to the MNSSP:

- ◆ **Develop a programme with improved policy objectives and sustain efforts towards integration.**
- ◆ **Develop a programme that supports both economic and social development.** A more nuanced understanding of programme objectives will enable the development of a system that protects the most vulnerable, prevents households from falling into deprivation, and promotes human and social development as well as sustainable livelihoods.
- ◆ **Develop a system that reduces chronic poverty and vulnerability to poverty, and is capable to respond to shocks.** The MNSSP II is to increase efforts to reduce chronic poverty and vulnerability to poverty through strengthened protective, preventive and promotive social protection programmes. Capacity and preparedness to provide adequate support to Malawians suffering as the result of a livelihood shock should be developed. This 'shock responsiveness' could be achieved through increased flexibility of 'core' social protection programmes as well as systematic linkages to the MVAC.
- ◆ **Enhance concrete policy level linkages,** despite the NSSP and the MNSSP stressing the importance of cross-programme coordination and linkages, and the existence of numerous contacts and overlapping objectives between programmes. Stakeholders noted that inadequate intra - MNSSP linkages, as well as limited efforts and resources dedicated to the operationalization of potential linkages have resulted in few deliberate level linkages within the MNSSP system. However, increasingly linkages are being piloted.
- ◆ **Strengthen livelihood support within social protection.** It was suggested that a "promotive social protection pillar" should be embedded into the successor MNSSP. This pillar would coordinate relevant livelihood interventions and create, complementarities to income support provided through social assistance or protective programmes.
- ◆ **Build two graduation pathways.** A medium-term graduation pathway via livelihood enhancement interventions would focus on skills development, access to capital, and livelihood development. A long term graduation pathway via human capital development would be supported through access to education, health, and nutrition interventions, aiming to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty.
- ◆ **Develop an integrated social protection system.** The development of the successor to the MNSSP is a great opportunity to improve on the MNSSP by strengthening a coherent and integrated social protection system for Malawi. Moving towards a more integrated system could be realized through harmonization of targeting and data collection, common identification, payment, and case management systems, increased financial integration, and the ability to shift beneficiaries across programmes based on needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities.
- ◆ **Strengthen institutional coordination mechanisms** of the social protection sector, focusing on clarifying roles and responsibilities of coordination structures at community, district, and national level and creating single coordination structures where relevant. Capacity building of these structures was also seen as a priority.
- ◆ **Develop a system for programme linkages.** Based on clarified programme objectives, experiences from existing linkages pilots, an efficient institutional and administrative system is to be developed that can, where relevant and feasible, facilitate linkages between prioritized social protection programmes, relevant services, and the broader social protection sector. Such linkages should contribute towards increasing livelihood support within social protection.
- ◆ **Strengthen accountability particularly at community and district levels, and improve evidence creation and data collection efforts with** clear indicators and improved monitoring and evaluation systems for improved accountability across all levels.

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