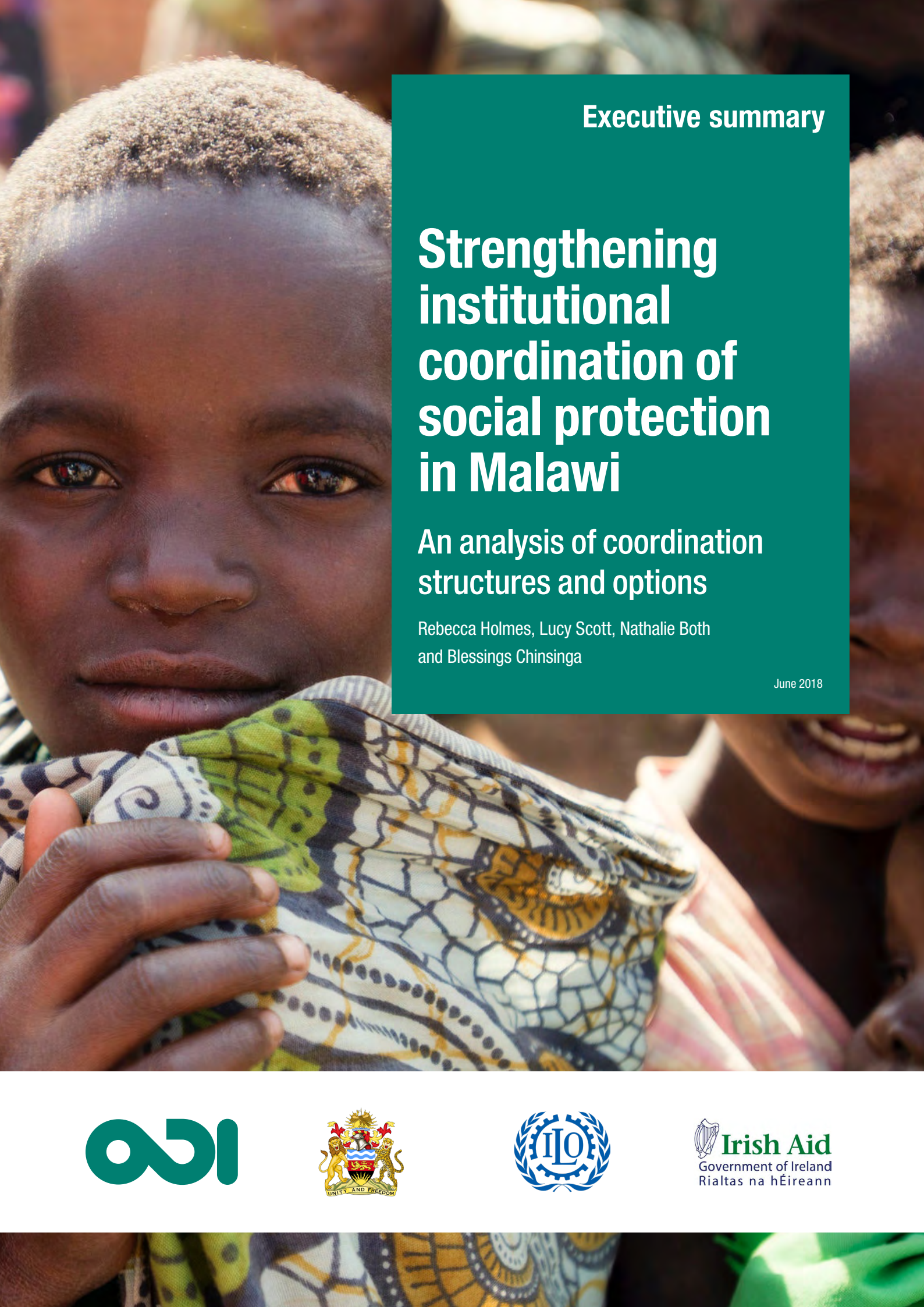


A close-up photograph of a young child with dark skin and short, curly hair, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The child is wearing a patterned garment with green, yellow, and blue designs. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people.

Executive summary

Strengthening institutional coordination of social protection in Malawi

An analysis of coordination
structures and options

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Cover photo: Children in a village in Lilongwe, Malawi © Jamie Mink/Unsplash.

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Acronyms

ACPC	Area Civil Protection Committee
ADC	Area Development Committees
AEC	Area Executive Committee
CSSC	Community Social Support Committees
COMSIP	Community Savings and Investment Promotion
CONGOMA	Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi
DC	District Commissioner
DCPC	District Civil Protection Committee
DCT	Donor Coordination Team
DEC	District Executive Committee
DESC	District Environmental subcommittee
DNCC	District Nutrition Coordination Committee
DoDMA	Department of Disaster Management Affairs
DPD	Director of Planning and Development
DSSC	District Social Support Committees
EP&D	Department of Economic Planning and Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FISP	Farm Input Subsidy Programme
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GVH	Group Village Head
HRC	Humanitarian Response Committee
ILO	International Labour Organization
LDF	Local Development Fund
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
LODA	Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (Rwanda)
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MF	Microfinance programmes
MK	Malawi Kwacha
MNSSP	Malawi National Social Support Programme
MoCEDD	Minister of Civic Education, Culture and Community Development
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoFEPD	Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
MoLYSMD	Ministry of Labour, Youth, Sports and Manpower Development,
MoGCDSW	Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare
MoGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (Ghana)
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoIT	Ministry of Industry and Trade
MoLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MoTPW	Ministry of Transport and Public Works
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MVAC	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee

NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRS	National Resilience Strategy
NSSP	National Social Support Policy
NSSSC	National Social Support Steering Committee
NSSTC	National Social Support Technical Committee
OPC	Office of President and Cabinet
PRSP	Poverty Reduction and Social Protection Division
PSNP	Productive Safety Nets Programme
PWP	Public Works Programmes
RBM	Reserve Bank of Malawi
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SC	Steering Committee
SCTP	Social Cash Transfer Programme
SMP	School Meals Programme
TA	Traditional Authority
TC	Technical Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
TWGs	Technical Working Groups
UBR	Unified Beneficiary Registry
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VC	Village Committees
VCPC	Village Civil Protection Committee
VDC	Village Development Committee
VP	Vice President
VSL	Village Savings and Loans Programme
VUP	Vision Umurenge Programme
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

In 2012, the Government of Malawi launched the National Social Support Policy (NSSP), which aims to address the high levels of poverty and ultra-poverty in the country by adopting a harmonised approach to social protection. The policy aims to coordinate, expand and strengthen Malawi's main social protection programmes and to better integrate the social protection system in other priority sectors such as agriculture and disaster risk management. The Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP) was created to operationalise the NSSP by providing a framework for designing, implementing, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating prioritised support programmes under the policy. Selected programmes include the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP), labour-intensive Public Works Programmes (PWP), targeted School Meals Programmes (SMPs), Village Savings and Loans Programmes (VSLs), and Microfinance Programmes (MF).

The MNSSP institutional coordination framework consists of a National Social Support Steering Committee (NSSSC) and a National Social Support Technical Committee (NSSTC), which were created to provide strategic and technical guidance to the sector, supported by five Technical Working Groups (TWGs), each for one of the five programmes included in the MNSSP. At the district level, coordination and oversight of social protection programmes is carried out through the District Council and various programme-specific committees, including the District Social Support Committees (DSSCs). At the sub-national level, local government institutions – the Area Development Committee (ADC) and the Village Development Committees (VDC) – are responsible for overseeing the implementation of social support activities, together with programme-specific structures, such as the Community Social Support Committee (CSSC) that implements the SCTP. At the national level, overall coordination responsibility of social protection is provided by the Poverty Reduction and Social Protection (PRSP) Division in the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MoFEPD), with line-ministries, such as the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) in the case of the SCTP, being responsible for the implementation of social protection programmes.

Despite efforts to create a harmonised and coordinated approach to social protection, challenges remain with regards to the integration of the various social protection programmes, which continue to operate in relative isolation both at the national and district levels. Thus, in the context of the 2016–2017 review of the MNSSP, this study was commissioned to examine current

institutional coordination issues within Malawi's social protection sector, identify the factors behind the persistent fragmentation of the MNSSP, and to present options for improving institutional coordination and coherence within the MNSSP II, the successor programme to the MNSSP. This study employed a multi-pronged research approach that included desk-based research on institutional coordination in Malawi and relevant international experience in neighbouring countries; key informant interviews with stakeholders at the national, district and sub-district levels in June 2017; focus group discussions with programme beneficiaries; and a co-creation workshop to review the findings and discuss recommendations.

The research utilised an analytical framework to examine coordination across six key areas: i) vision; ii) roles and responsibilities; iii) structure of coordination; iv) communication; v) accountability; and vi) resources and administrative tools. The key questions asked within these six domains were:

- Is there a common **vision** across the MNSSP?
- Are there clear **roles and responsibilities** across MNSSP actors that enable synergies to be operationalised?
- Are relations between social protection programmes formalised through functional **coordination structures**?
- Are there integrated mechanisms to **communicate** between programmes and governance levels?
- Are **accountability** lines clear and functional?
- Are financial **resources** pooled or shared, and common **administrative tools** used across programmes?

The study finds that several aspects of coordination and integration are functioning well within these domains. Notably, stakeholders view that the PRSP division is the appropriate institution to be coordinating and leading policy of the MNSSP at the national level. Interviewees also noted that the coordination structure at the national level offers the opportunity for relevant line ministries and development partners to communicate and share information through the technical working groups and the technical committee. Moreover, at the district level, there is optimism that the harmonised District Social Support Committee (DSSC) can be a future opportunity to provide coordinated oversight of social support programmes. The experience of the Unified Beneficiary Registry (UBR) as a shared administrative tool was also noted across stakeholders at the national and sub-national levels as a good example of coordination in practice.

However, the research also identified a number of challenges. Whilst social protection policy and programming appear clear at the national level, with stakeholders understanding the vision of the MNSSP, at the sub-national level the understanding of social protection – and the MNSSP – is not clear.

Across the MNSSP actors, there is also uncertainty about what coordination looks like in practice – at both the policy and the programmatic and operational levels, with the exception of a few examples (e.g. the UBR). This limited understanding of coordination in the context of Malawi's social protection system makes it difficult to operationalise linkages and coordination in practice.

While some aspects of the coordination committees are considered to be working well, not all committees are functioning effectively. For example:

- High-level national coordination structures, the National Social Support Steering Committee (NSSSC) and National Social Support Technical Committee (NSSTC) are **mainly used to share information rather than to discuss and engage in technical issues and strategic decision-making** across the MNSSP;
- Existing coordination structure lends itself to intra-programme coordination through the set-up of the Technical Working Groups (TWGs) by social protection instrument, and there is **limited opportunity to communicate horizontally across TWGs**. Some programmes also have established separate meeting groups with donors and development partners to discuss technical and financial issues, which raises questions about the objectives of the TWGs;
- At the district and sub-district levels, while committees meet regularly, they **are designed to be programme-specific, reducing the scope for inter-programme coordination** and contributing to the creation of programme silos;
- Committees which are supposed to oversee linkages and coordination between MNSSP programmes – e.g. the NSSTC, the District Councils (and the sub-committee DSSC), and the ADCs and VDCs – all face challenges to their effective functioning in practice for various reasons, ranging from practical issues such as limited attendance, to more structural issues such as programmes by-passing local government structures.

Specific bottlenecks have also been identified in relation to communication and information sharing between district and national level. For example:

- **Information that districts send to the TWGs is frequently of poor quality or incomplete**, which limits the ability of the TWGs, and therefore the NSSTC and NSSSC, to act on information and make informed decisions. This creates a bottleneck within the system and reduces the effectiveness of national-level coordination and policy guidance.

- **Fragmentation of programmes and committees, as well as incomplete decentralisation at the district level, is not conducive to streamlining information sharing and communication between stakeholders and programmes**. This results in the District Councils not always being informed of the activities of NGOs and development partners in their districts, and some programmes by-passing local government structures (ADC and VDC) for reporting. In turn, the proliferation of committees implementing social protection programmes, and the lack of shared fora in which issues can be discussed, reinforces fragmentation of implementation by programme and creates bottlenecks in the system.

Underlying these challenges are both pragmatic and structural issues. For example, understaffing and limited funding of social protection coordination mechanisms, the limited capacity of staff members to fulfil their responsibilities (as a result of limited understanding of their roles and/or overburdened time), as well as technical capacity gaps were all identified as key challenges to the effective functioning of current institutional coordination arrangements. More structural challenges, however, relate to the following issues:

- **Programme fragmentation and multiple actors operating in the social protection environment**, which create challenges for the PRSP to successfully convene, coordinate and lead all the actors of the MNSSP at the national and sub-national levels;
- **Unclear lines of accountability between ministries, donors and implementing agencies** means that reporting sometimes bypasses the PRSP. Instead, implementers report directly to their line ministries or to international donors;
- **Lack of MoFEPD presence at the sub-national level, and limited linkages to Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MoLGRD) to bridge this gap.**

The challenges to institutional coordination are diverse, and a multifaceted approach is required in order to foster greater harmonisation and coordination. To tackle these challenges, the report sets out a number of options which consider:

- Specific tools for improving coordination within existing institutional arrangements;
- Adapting current institutional coordination structures at the sub-district, district and national level; and
- Developing alternative institutional arrangements to strengthen institutional coordination.

In sum, these options include:

Tools for improving coordination within existing institutional arrangements: Options presented below focus on pragmatic tools and approaches that can strengthen

coordination, such as the allocation of regular funding for coordination structures and formalised roles and responsibilities, which can be implemented in the short-term and do not require changes to the institutional framework.

- **Formalise and fulfil roles and responsibilities for the effective functioning of coordination at all levels and establishing institutional partnerships for coordination:**

- Development of an implementation plan across the MNSSP II, with explicit objectives, activities and monitorable deliverables that can guide the work of committees and TWGs.
- Formalisation of roles and responsibilities between the PRSP and other ministries, donors and development partners across the MNSSP II coordination structure through MoUs.
- Establishment of a strong and functional working relationship between PRSP and the MoLGRD to strengthen PRSP policy, coordination and oversight roles in the implementation of social protection more effectively.
- Monitoring of roles and responsibilities of the committee meetings, and of the members, and hold individuals and committees to account through e.g. the introduction of performance contracts.

- **Provide capacity development for effective coordination:**

- Allocation of funding towards committee meetings at all levels.
- Orient committees on the purpose and function of social protection programmes and the MNSSP II coordination roles, e.g. by establishing and ensuring awareness of ToRs and ensuring programme communication strategies include a focus on coordination and harmonisation.
- Support and provision of training where necessary on conducting functional and effective coordination meetings – this may include for example, on how to prepare for meetings in advance, how to draft agendas, how to facilitate coordination meetings to ensure productive outcomes, preparing meeting minutes, how to delegate responsibilities for action points.

- **Strengthen development partner coordination and reducing fragmentation:**

- Development of principles within the development partner coordination group on how they can best support MoFEPD's coordination role, including identifying specific areas of need for financial and/or technical support to improve the coordination functions across the MNSSP II.
- Establish regular and formal interaction with PRSP and the development partner coordination group, and consider allocating one or two development partners to act as representatives, liaising with the government on social protection issues on behalf of all development partners.

- Move forward with social support fund recommendations of more coherent funding of social protection programming by donors.
- Develop a MoU between the Government and development partners to clarify short-to medium-term priorities of MNSSP II, on the basis of the MNSSP II Implementation Plan, which should involve key principles and activities to guide stakeholder actions, and outline responsibilities and roles for stakeholders and how this contributes to a more coherent and coordination approach to social protection.

- **Improve communication and awareness across MNSSP actors:**

- Ensure that MNSSP II documentation is supported by a clear articulation of what coordination and harmonisation means in practice for each social protection (and other relevant) programmes (see the MNSSP communication strategy (PRSP, 2016)). This might include developing a communication document for the entire structure of the MNSSP and running a sensitisation campaign for key actors.
- Ensure that all relevant actors can access information on social protection to encourage synergies across programmes.

- **Encourage political awareness at national and district levels to strengthen political commitment towards MNSSP II, including in coordination roles:**

- Promotion of collaborative agenda setting, support to political champions of social protection, and strong high-level political commitment to the coordination committees to ensure that they function as intended and relevant participants regard these committees as strategic.

Adapting institutional coordination structures at the sub-district, district and national levels: The range of options presented below go beyond short-term 'fixes' to the functioning of existing structures and recommend realistic but potentially significant reforms to Malawi's institutional coordination structures at all levels that can be realised during the implementation of the MNSSP II.

- **At the sub-district level:**

- Maintaining all existing committees but ensure reporting into the Area Development Committee (ADC) or Village Development Committee (VDC).
- Introduce a harmonised forum for grievances to avoid duplication of roles and responsibilities.
- Establishing programme-specific subcommittees of the ADC and VDC tasked with coordination and implementation of programmes.
- Creating a harmonised committee for social protection at the sub-district level.
- Combining a harmonised social protection committee with the Area Civil Protection Committee (ACPC).

- **At the district level:**
 - Rolling-out the harmonised District Social Support Committees (DSSC) to all districts and ‘re-launch’ it in districts where it has already been introduced to avoid confusion that it focuses only on the SCTP.
 - Streamlining DSSC membership to comprise sector heads and programme coordinators of programmes under the MNSSP II or directly relevant for it.
 - Consider integrating the DSSC with the District Civil Protection Committee (DCPC).
 - Establish the DSSC as a subcommittee of the District Council (DC) to strengthen district-level ownership and improve information sharing.
- **At the national level:**
 - Establishing Pillar Working Groups on the core pillars of MNSSP II, which are consumption support, resilient livelihoods and shock-sensitive social protection to foster harmonisation and alignment between relevant programmes and ensure progress towards MNSSP II strategic objectives on system strengthening.
 - Establish Systems Working Groups on, for instance, Financing, Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning (MEL), and Systems Strengthening and Capacity Building to ensure progress on important cross-cutting issues.

Developing alternative institutional arrangements to strengthen coordination: The final set of options discusses a range of alternative institutional arrangements that would require substantive reforms to the existing coordination structure but have the potential to substantively enhance coordination. These options could form the basis for a discussion on the ideal future institutional coordination structure for Malawi’s social protection sector.

- **Establishing a national social protection agency:**
 - Establishing a singular agency responsible for the implementation of all relevant social protection programmes in Malawi. The advantages of such reform include promoting unity of purpose, reducing

fragmentation and promoting direction by providing a predictable, consistent and sustainable framework for long-term bureaucratic accountability.

- **Promote PRSP to the status of a department, headed by a Chief Director:**
 - Raising the institutional status of the division to that of a department would put the unit at the same level of seniority as implementing departments in line ministries. Ideally such department would be led by a Chief Director, whose seniority would allow him/her to engage confidently with line ministries. The promotion of PRSP to a department with a Chief Director would also strengthen its prominence within MoFEPD and ensure a stronger focus of the ministry on social protection. However, concerns for the implications of public-sector reforms will need to be considered.
- **Consider relocating the PRSP division within the Government:**
 - Moving the PRSP Division to the Office of President and Cabinet (OPC) or Vice President’s Office. The advantage of this would be to achieve greater convening powers to ensure higher representation and improve access to data, reporting to PRSP and accountability.
 - Integrating PRSP and DoDMA at the office of the Vice President to raise the institutional profile of social protection and strengthen shock-sensitive social protection, as well as international and national efforts to better align humanitarian and developmental interventions. However, there is the caveat that within the public sector, there is a trend of moving responsibilities back to line ministries, and the focus on disaster reduction may overshadow social protection’s poverty reduction objectives.
 - Moving EP&D to serve within the Secretariat of the new Planning Commission to provide clear and strategic guidance to implementers. As the Planning Commission is to be mandated through the Act of Parliament, this ensures high level authority and consensus across the political divide.



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