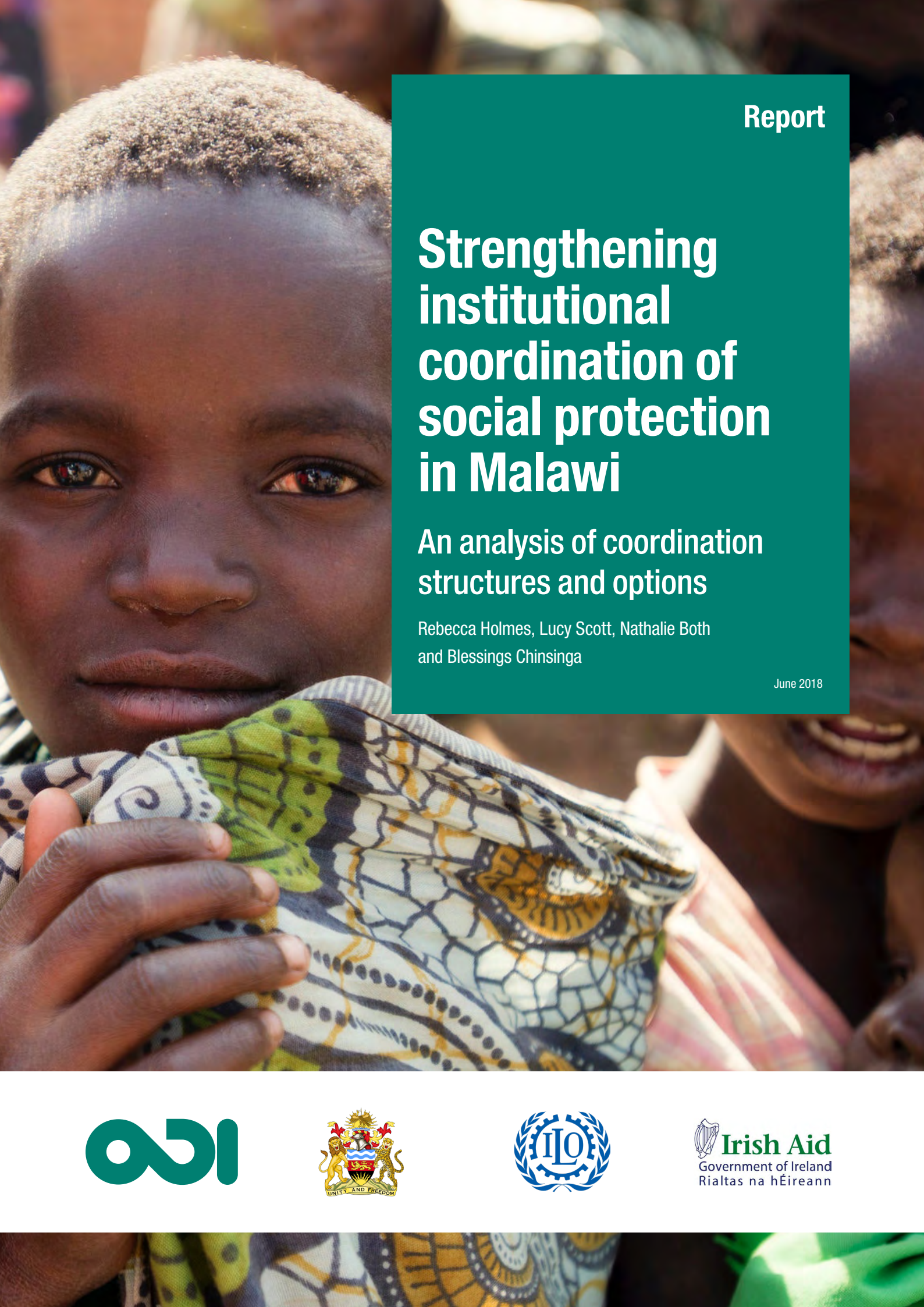




Report

Strengthening institutional coordination of social protection in Malawi

An analysis of coordination structures and options

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Contents

Acknowledgements	3
List of boxes, tables and figures	5
Acronyms	7
Executive summary	9
1 Introduction	13
1.1 Background to the study	13
1.2 An ambitious new social protection framework for Malawi and the need to strengthen coordination	13
1.3 Study rationale and objectives	14
1.4 Details of the study and research methodology	15
1.5 Structure of the report	15
2 Analytical framework	16
2.1 Institutional arrangements	16
2.2 Institutional coordination	16
2.3 Dimensions of coordination and institutional arrangements	17
3 Analysis of existing institutional arrangements and coordination in the social protection sector	20
3.1 Overview of institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms at the national level	20
3.2 Strengths and challenges of coordination structures at the national level	22
3.3 Donors and development partner coordination	31
3.4 Overview over district level coordination structures	32
3.5 District level strengths and challenges	33
3.6 Overview of sub-district coordination structures	37
3.7 Strengths and weaknesses of sub-district coordination structures	38
4 Conclusion	42
5 Options for strengthening institutional arrangements in the social protection sector	44
5.1 Options for improving coordination: Tools for improving coordination within existing institutional arrangements	44
5.2 Options for improving coordination: Adapting institutional coordination structures at the sub-district, district and national levels	48
5.3 Options for improving coordination	52

References	55
Annex 1 Research methodology	56
Annex 2 Institutional Coordination Figure at national level	59
Annex 3 International experiences of institutional coordination	60

List of boxes, tables and figures

Boxes

Box 1	Challenges of a cross-pillar coordination approach	26
Box 2	Findings for specific TWGs	27
Box 3	Challenges around reporting and information sharing at the TWG level	29
Box 4	District level structures	31
Box 5	Reasons for limited buy-in of MNSSP II programmes into the harmonised DSSCs	36
Box 6	Reasons for limited buy-in of MNSSP II programmes into the harmonised DSSCs	36
Box 7	Committees at the Traditional Authority level	37
Box 8	What can be learnt from other committees in Malawi?	45
Box 9	Improving district-level accountability: The experience of Rwanda and Kenya with performance contracts	46
Box 10	Donor coordination in Ethiopia	47
Box 11	Bringing the social protection vision from the national to the district and local level: Rwanda's experience	48
Box 12	Institutional coordination in Rwanda	52
Box 13	International experiences with single implementing agencies or departments for implementing social protection	53

Tables

Table 1	Coordination intensity scale	19
Table 2	National level coordination structures	21

Table A1	Stakeholders at the district and sub-district – Dedza	56
Table A2	Stakeholders at the district and sub-district – Balaka	57
Table A3	Stakeholders consulted at the national level	57

Figures

Figure 1	Dimensions of institutional coordination	17
Figure 2	Social protection institutional coordination structure	23
Figure 3	Institutional structures relevant for social protection at the district and sub-district	33
Figure 4	Proposed option for re-configured coordination structure at the national level	51

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.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Poverty remains high in Malawi, with approximately 50 percent of the population living below the national poverty line (NSO, 2012). Ultra-poverty is defined as an inability to even afford the basic daily recommended food requirement and affects around 25 percent of the total population (NSO, 2012). Meanwhile, poverty and vulnerability remain predominantly rural phenomena; the poverty incidence in rural areas is around 57 percent and around 85 percent of households are engaged in agriculture (NSO, 2012), with nearly all agricultural households dedicating at least some of their land to the main staple crop, maize.

The Government of Malawi has recognised the significant role that social protection can play in addressing the persistently high levels of *ultra*-poverty and poverty in the country, and in 2012 launched the National Social Support Policy (NSSP) to coordinate the work of five existing programmes with the objective of extending coverage and reducing poverty in an “integrated, coherent, coordinated and sustainable manner” (GoM, 2012). The NSSP sets out a vision of ‘enhanced quality of life for those affected by poverty and hunger, and improved resilience for those who are vulnerable to risks and shocks’. To operationalise the NSSP, the government also developed the Malawi National Social Support *Programme* (MNSSP) encompassing five core intervention areas:

- Social cash transfer programme (SCTP);
- Labour-intensive public works (PWPs);
- Targeted school meals;
- Village savings and loans programmes (VSLs); and
- Microfinance programmes

These interventions are designed for households at different levels of poverty, with the SCTP aimed at the poorest, labour constrained households; public works for poor households with labour capacity and microfinance being for the less poor with capacity to increase productivity. Targeted school meals are geographically focused (mainly in the southern and central districts), and social protection beneficiary households are encouraged to join VSL programmes where they are available.

The MNSSP II, coordinated by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MoFEPD), envisages that there will be linkages across these five

different social protection programmes. For example, that SCTP beneficiaries will be able to access VSLs and that, as they mature, VSL members will then be able to access microfinance (MF). However, the implementation of each programme is the responsibility of a different line ministry and implementation occurs through separate institutions at the district and local levels.

Moreover, in addition to the five core programmes under the MNSSP there are other non-contributory forms of support for ultra-poor, poor and vulnerable households which operate outside the remit of the MNSSP. These include the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) which is under the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD); the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) emergency response (coordinated by Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) in the Vice-President’s Office); and various livelihoods and resilience-building activities predominantly funded by donors and implemented by development partners and NGOs.

As such, an institutional coordination structure was established as part of the MNSSP in 2012 which aims to strengthen coherence and coordination *across the five social protection programmes and their key actors*, as well as *with other relevant sectors*.

1.2 An ambitious new social protection framework for Malawi and the need to strengthen coordination

In 2016, the MoFEPD launched an inclusive and stakeholder-driven review of the MNSSP to inform the priorities for a successor programme, the MNSSP II. The new framework will run from 2018 to 2023 and builds on the successes and lessons learned during the implementation of the MNSSP. It is organised around **thematic priority areas and provides clear strategic policy guidance on promoting linkages, strengthening systems, and improving monitoring activities**. The shift to thematic priority areas, called ‘pillars’, is to ensure greater alignment of individual programme objectives with the objectives of the National Social Support Policy (NSSP) and the MNSSP II. These thematic pillars are:

- **Pillar 1: Consumption Support** – Provision of consumption support through timely, predictable and

adequate cash and/or in-kind transfers to poor and vulnerable households throughout the lifecycle.

- **Pillar 2: Resilient Livelihoods** – Promoting resilient livelihoods through tailored packages based on individual, household, and community needs via graduation pathways, inter-programme linkages, and by facilitating access to and utilisation of services beyond the MNSSP II.
- **Pillar 3: Shock-sensitive Social Protection** – Developing a shock-sensitive social protection system that meets seasonal needs, prepares for – and respond to – unpredictable shocks in cooperation with the humanitarian sector, and supports recovery and the return to regular programming.

In addition to the three thematic pillars, the MNSSP II provides guidelines and strategic actions for the realisation of **linkages between programmes and services, as well as the strengthening of coordination and implementation systems.**

The MNSSP II recognises that the needs of poor and vulnerable households change over the course of the lifecycle and during times of shocks. As such, the MNSSP II is not structured around individual interventions or around programmes targeting specific groups of the population. Instead it recognises the need for all social support programmes to coordinate and jointly work towards providing consumption support and building resilient livelihoods. By increasing the shock-sensitivity of the social protection system, improvements in people's livelihoods can be protected against exposure to shocks.

The MNSSP II represents an ambitious shift towards a more integrated and multi-layered social protection system that seeks to provide adequate consumption support to poor and vulnerable individuals and households, while, at the same time, supporting the development of resilient livelihoods and creating effective linkages to the humanitarian sector.

In order to achieve this vision, a range of Government and non-Government stakeholders need to closely collaborate in the design and implementation of interventions, which requires an effective and efficient institutional coordination structure. Recognising this, the first six cross-cutting Strategic Actions for Systems Strengthening of the MNSSP II focus on strengthening institutional coordination:

1. Further strengthen the capacity of the PRSP division to provide strong leadership to the implementation of the MNSSP II
2. Enhance strategic guidance and oversight function of the National Social Support Steering Committee (NSSSC) and the National Social Support Technical Committee (NSSTC)
3. Strengthen technical working groups at national level and align them with the integrated nature of the MNSSP II

4. Strengthen donor and development partner coordination
5. Establish harmonised coordination and implementation structures at district and community levels
6. Improve institutional coordination and information sharing amongst community, district and national level

1.3 Study rationale and objectives

Despite the MNSSP establishing an institutional coordination structure, several challenges to achieving the objectives of coherence and coordination at the national and the district levels have been identified, thus prompting this review on assessing the current institutional coordination framework, and identifying future areas for change.

In 2016, the MoFEPD launched a review of the MNSSP, which is expected to lead to the design of a new, improved MNSSP II in 2017. The review highlights how, despite MNSSP coordination structures, and the intention of the programme to improve coherence and coordination across social protection programmes, the five MNSSP programmes continue to operate in relative isolation at the national and the district level. For example, at the district level, each programme has a separate committee and is implemented independently from one another, despite covering overlapping populations. Coordination challenges are also evident between the government and development partners, as well as the social protection sector and other relevant interventions, including within the field of agriculture, food security, resilience, and livelihoods. The isolation in which the MNSSP operates in practice undermines the potential impacts of social protection on poverty reduction and livelihood support.

This report presents the findings from the research study on the “Assessment of Institutional Coordination Mechanisms of Malawi's Social Protection Sector and Development of Recommendations for a Strengthened Institutional Coordination Framework”. It was commissioned by the ILO and the Government of Malawi's Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Planning in January 2017. The study has three primary objectives to:

- Provide a synthesis of current **evidence on strengths and weaknesses of existing coordination structures** at the national and sub-national levels;
- Document **international experience of institutional coordination mechanisms in relation to social protection** through a literature review, drawing primarily from experiences within the region; and
- Present a **set of options for strengthening institutional arrangements in the future**, to stimulate discussion around institutional coordination and to inform the development of MNSSP II.

1.4 Details of the study and research methodology

This study analyses the coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of existing institutional coordination mechanisms of Malawi's social protection sector and develops exploratory options for strengthening coordination in the sector. This work aims to provide inputs into the ongoing, multi-stakeholder process of elaborating a MNSSP II in 2017. The focus of this review is on institutional coordination mechanisms of the MNSSP five programmes, along with those between the MNSSP, key disaster response, agriculture, resilience and livelihoods interventions.

The research methodology includes three tracks (for full details, please see Annex 1):

- Desk-based review of institutional coordination in Malawi, and international experiences (primarily focused on southern and eastern Africa);
- Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions at the national, district (Dedza and Balaka) and sub-district level (including community representatives and beneficiaries). The objective of these interviews is to generate an understanding of the key challenges to coordinate both horizontally and vertically across different actors and levels of government and community, as well to solicit opinions and ideas for how to overcome these challenges to enable more effective coordination mechanisms;
- Co-creation workshop with participants from the national and district levels to validate findings and discuss options for future institutional arrangements.

The research approach investigates both horizontal and vertical institutional mechanisms in the social

protection sector (see analytical framework in Section 2) and draws on a set guiding questions developed for the semi-structured interviews held with key informants and focus group participants. This approach draws on the ADB Capacity Assessment Toolkit, which has three components: 1) reviewing *dissatisfaction* with the current institutional system, 2) understanding the *change process* and its credibility amongst stakeholders, and 3) developing a *vision* and support structure based on a strong sense of ownership (ADB Capacity Assessment Toolkit, 2011).

This approach also focuses on i) **identifying existing** institutional roles, actors, structures, and coordination mechanisms; ii) **analysing** the strengths and weaknesses in existing institutional roles, responsibilities and coordinating structures; and iii) **identifying opportunities** to overcome these weaknesses by identifying shortcomings and engaging in adaptation and learning processes.

1.5 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the analytical framework which guided the research methodology and analysis. Section 3 provides an overview of current institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms at the national, district and sub-district, and analyses the strengths and challenges of institutional coordination at all three levels. Within each of these sections attention is also paid to vertical coordination. Section 4 provides a summary of the key challenges, and Section 5 presents options for strengthening institutional arrangements in the future at the sub-district, district and national level.

2 Analytical framework

Poverty and vulnerability are by nature multidimensional and a number of different interventions are required in order to address them (ILO, 2017). These can include protective measures to prevent poverty, such as cash transfers, as well as promotive measures to empower households, including education and livelihood support. In turn, there is growing recognition of the importance of building shock-sensitive social protection by improving linkages between social protection, resilience, and humanitarian interventions to help households withstand the impacts of predictable seasonal food insecurity and climate-related shocks.

A coherent set of integrated policies – adopting a *systems* approach – are thus required to address the multidimensional nature of poverty and vulnerability. These are often provided by a number of different sectors, including labour and social security, education, agriculture, and health. Development partners often also play an important role in funding and delivering social services.

2.1 Institutional arrangements

Institutional arrangements play a central role in determining the success of social protection in addressing poverty and vulnerability. “Institutional arrangement” refers to the networks of entities and organisations involved in planning and implementing social protection programmes, and such arrangements are highly dependent on the policy environment as well as the historical evolution of institutions in the country (Samson et al, 2010).

For institutional arrangements to be effective, three elements are identified as key:

- An overall policy coordination process;
- Policy design and implementation functions;
- Cross-cutting delivery institutions, mechanisms or structures (ibid).

Analysis of institutional arrangements aims to identify which ministries or institutions are most appropriate to house these activities. This will depend on their capacity to undertake such activities. In turn, the locus of authority for the planning of social protection programmes also depends on the extent to which such programmes fit within the existing responsibilities of the different ministries/institutions. Finally, the choice of delivery mechanisms and their location will depend on the level at which implementation activities are decentralised.

The aim of the analysis is to identify how performance can be improved and if performance is found to be lacking, whether a) institutional arrangements need to be redesigned (for example creating new institutions for coordination or moving implementation activities from one ministry to another); or b) institutional capacity needs to be strengthened for institutions to better undertake these activities.

Whilst institutional arrangements influence the success of given programmes, coordination between institutions determines the success of overarching social protection policy. Coordination between institutions involved in the planning and implementation of social protection is itself shaped by the existing arrangements, but coordination efforts can also involve reforms to institutional arrangements.

2.2 Institutional coordination

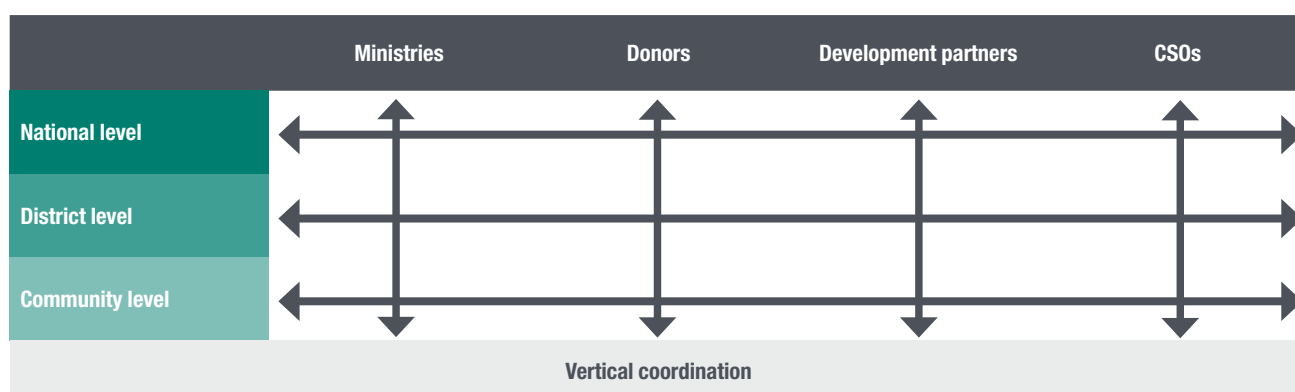
The ILO defines institutional coordination as the “alignment and harmonisation of all stakeholder activities (at the operational level) in a coherent and holistic way to reach clearly identified and shared objectives (at the policy level)” (ILO, 2016: p. 9). In the context of social protection, “stakeholders” encompass all the actors – at the national and local level, as well as the various development partners and local CSOs – involved in the policy, planning and implementation of social protection programmes.

Thus, the objective of increased coordination is to take advantage of the complementarities that exist between different programmes by increasing the interaction between them, and is found to lead not only to better performance of individual programmes, but also of the social protection system as a whole, both with regards to the efficiency, but also with regards to their effectiveness in addressing vulnerability and building resilience (Robalino et al., 2012).

These benefits are especially important in low-income countries, which can ill-afford costly inefficiencies in the design and implementation of their social protection programmes (ibid). Yet low-income countries often face the greatest challenges in improving coordination, due to the financial and technical capacity of existing institutions to implement coordination mechanisms.

As the definition above suggests, coordination is broken down into two elements: setting up agreements on the shared goals that are to be achieved, and increasing the integration of activities of different

Figure 1 Dimensions of institutional coordination



Source: adapted from ILO (2016)

programmes to achieve those common goals (World Bank, 2000). These different aspects of coordination take place at different levels of governance: whilst goal coordination will occur at the national level by greater coherence between policies and programme design, coordination of means and activities will take place at the district and sub-district level through greater integration of operational/administrative activities. Finally, coordination will be required within each level of governance (horizontal coordination), as well as between the levels (vertical coordination) (ILO, 2016). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of these different levels and types of coordination.

2.3 Dimensions of coordination and institutional arrangements

2.3.1 National level coordination

Policy coordination

Policy coordination at the national level is the highest level of engagement. This level comprises not only the presidential office and line ministries responsible for the different social protection programmes and other relevant interventions (such as education and resilience), but it also includes donors, CSOs, and development partners.

In order to identify the institution within government which is best placed to oversee social protection policy, the institution's leadership characteristics need to be evaluated along the following three lines:

- Sincere political commitment to social protection;
- Political influence to secure resources;
- Institutional capacity to manage the social protection policy (Samson et al, 2010).

Successful institutional arrangements at this level often requires that policy-making activities be concentrated in a single entity, such as a Board or a Council (ILO, 2017).

This institution aims to provide policy guidance, but also oversee coordination processes. Indeed, each of the institutions and entities engaged in policy are likely to have individual priorities and agendas. The lead agency overseeing coordination will be responsible for setting out a clear strategy or goals for social protection within the context of national development objectives, and will aim to create a shared understanding of common goals, and concentration of efforts. Limited coordination at the policy level leads programmes to work in a fragmented manner, and can cause different programmes to neutralise each other's efforts. Moreover, "the lack of coordination at the policy level is often replicated at the local level" (ILO, 2016:14).

Programme design and financing

The programme level is where decisions are made about which programme design, instruments, and financing mechanisms will be used for implementation. Actors at this level include line ministries, development partners and CSOs.

With regards to institutional arrangements at the programme level, the fact that multiple cross-sectoral programmes exist to address poverty means that planning and design functions will be undertaken by a variety of ministries, NGOs and development partners. These functions within each of the relevant institutions should be defined in clear roles, usually set by the institution managing the policy and coordination process. As mentioned above, effective institutional arrangements will require that programmes match/relate to ministries' existing responsibilities, and that the capacity of the ministries/NGOs to undertake programming and planning activities is adequate (World Bank, 2004).

In turn, coordination at this level would aim to take advantage of synergies existing at the programme level and identify how closer integration can be designed into the various programme activities (planning, budgeting). This will depend on the point to which the programmes are complementary and/or cover similar population groups (World Bank, 2000). Better coordination at this

level can increase the impact of individual programmes by linking them to one another, whilst limited coordination causes separate programme to work in silos and can lead to gaps or overlaps in coverage of existing social protection programmes (Devereux et al., 2008).

2.3.2 District and community level coordination

Operationalising social protection

The operational level is where social protection programmes are implemented and services are delivered, and encompasses the various divisions and agencies, CSOs and development partners at the district and/or community level.

Institutional arrangements at this level depend on decentralisation policies and the choice of delivery mechanisms. Coordination is highly dependent on the institutional arrangements existing at this level, as the delivery mechanisms that are adopted can themselves foster coordination. Coordination efforts at this level will aim to identify which implementation activities (including the registration and targeting of populations, management of information, or delivery of benefits) can be integrated between programmes. The use of administrative tools which can be shared between programmes at this level can serve as the foundations (or “Trojan Horse”) for greater coordination at other levels (Robalino et al., 2012). Conversely, fragmentation of social protection programmes at this level can often result in the duplication of work of the various implementation agencies.

The importance of institutional capacity to deliver social protection programmes cannot be overemphasised as this determines the success or failure of efforts to address poverty (World Bank, 2004). Cash transfer programmes involving targeting or public works programmes require greater capacity than others. In identifying the adequate locus for implementation of such programmes, institutions’ capacity must therefore be an important part of the assessment. Contracting out implementation activities to NGOs with greater capacity than the government is often used to ensure better results than keeping such activities within existing government institutions.

2.3.3 Vertical coordination between all levels

Institutional arrangements and coordination structures in the context of vertical coordination broadly overlap, as vertical coordination refers to the integration of all three governance levels described above, and is considered essential for the efficiency of coordination efforts within each individual programme as well as in decentralisation efforts. Vertical coordination ensures that the activities to operationalise social protection at the district and sub-district level, align and integrate according to the goals set at the policy and programme levels which take place at the national level. At the same time, the information collected at the local level (about the

number of beneficiaries or implementation effectiveness for instance) needs to feed into policy and planning at the other levels. Vertical coordination thus relies on both top-down mechanisms (in terms of delegating responsibilities, allocating budgets, monitoring) and bottom-up mechanisms (on feedback and reporting, as well as the communication of information collected at the district/sub-district level) (ILO, 2016).

2.3.4 Intensity of coordination

While the different dimensions of coordination provide a framework to understand where types of coordination mechanisms can occur, the *intensity* of coordination provides a framework to evaluate the quality and character of the relations between institutions along each dimension, i.e. how coordination works in practice, and the quality of this coordination. Here, the assessment focuses on the suitability of seven key features considered essential for achieving effective coordination and seeks to identify the barriers or challenges to greater coordination (ILO, 2016; Robalino et al., 2012). These features are: vision, structures, responsibilities, communication, accountability, and resources. An analysis of these features also provides a basis for understanding the capacity of various institutions to undertake policy, programming and implementation activities, the locus of authority overseeing such activities, as well as the gaps in coordination. It can thus feed into the analysis of the appropriateness of existing institutional arrangements.

The different levels of intensity are presented along a spectrum, and as one progresses along the spectrum, the relations become increasingly formalised and institutionalised, communication between programmes becomes more regular, and activities are undertaken with greater integration. Table 1 outlines the intensity scale, wherein each new rung of intensity reflects a qualitative shift in the level of coordination and integration (Mattessich, 2001; ILO, 2017). In turn, these rungs are defined by specific types of relations and agreements.

Assessments of which institutional arrangements may be most appropriate at each dimension also need to take into consideration the fact that more intense coordination will require greater investment (in terms of setting up new committees or administrative tools) and increased institutional capacity. Indeed, closer coordination arrangements without the necessary improvements in institutional capacity may be ineffective (Bassett et al., 2012; ILO, 2016). However, these features are highly integrated and changes to some features can have positive knock-on effects on others. For example, integrated administrative tools (identified in Table 1 under *resources*) can significantly improve *communication* channels at all levels. In turn, greater clarity in the roles and *responsibilities* of authorities at each level can also improve *accountability* mechanisms. Improved coordination (or more intense coordination) can therefore be achieved with initial changes along some few key features.

Table 1 Coordination intensity scale

	Low-intensity coordination	Medium-intensity coordination	High-intensity coordination	Integration
Vision	Goals are specific to each programme	Programme goals are reviewed to improve compatibility and complementarity	Common vision and goals exist and are integrated in programme activities at all levels; complementarities between programmes are defined	Common vision and goals exist and are integrated in programme activities at all levels; complementarities between programmes are defined
Roles and responsibilities	Responsibilities are defined within each programme only	Responsibilities of coordination structures between some programmes are clear	Responsibilities of coordination structures for all programmes are clear (set out in ToRs or Implementation Manual) and enable synergies to be operationalised	Responsibilities of policy, programme and implementation actors are clear (set out in ToRs or Implementation Manual) and enable synergies to be operationalised
Structure/institutional arrangements	Relations between programmes are informal, each institution functions separately	Relations between some programmes are formalised but programmes continue to function in relative isolation	Relations between programmes are formalised through functional structures (i.e. meetings are held systematically; membership to each coordination structure is appropriate, etc...)	Previously independent policy/planning/implementation institutions are merged through the creation of specialised ministries/district coordinators
Communication	Information between programmes is conveyed as needed	Communication channels are established	Multiple communication channels are created; the right information reaches the right people; effective grievance mechanisms are established	Integrated institutions provide mechanism for continuous communication processes between programmes
Accountability (vertical coordination only)	Accountability lines are defined within each programme	Accountability lines are clear but not functional (i.e. reporting does not take place systematically, etc.)	Accountability lines are clear and functional	Accountability lines are clear and functional
Resources	Financial and administrative resources remain separate for each programme	Financial and administrative resources are pooled/shared between some programmes	Financial resources are pooled and administrative tools are shared between all programmes	Financial resources are pooled and common administrative tools are used by all all programmes

Source: adapted from Mattessich (2001:61) and ILO (2017)

3 Analysis of existing institutional arrangements and coordination in the social protection sector

3.1 Overview of institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms at the national level

3.1.1 Vision

The NSSP sets out a common vision for social protection in Malawi. The NSSP objective is to coordinate the work of Malawi's main social protection programmes with the goal of extending coverage and reducing poverty in an "integrated, coherent, coordinated and sustainable manner" (GoM, 2012). The NSSP sets out that the vision of social protection is to "enhance quality of life of the most vulnerable through productive interventions, welfare support and improved management of risks and shocks." (ToRs for the National Social Support Committee).

The Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP) was established as a mechanism to achieve the NSSP vision.

3.1.2 Institutional arrangements and key actors

The MNSSP is coordinated by the Poverty Reduction and Social Protection (PRSP) Division in the Economic Planning and Development (EP&D) department, which sits in the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MoFEPD).

The MoFEPD provides leadership on policy and coordination for social protection and is the secretariat for the MNSSP. The Ministry strives to harmonise the implementation of the policy and programmes with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MoLGRD) through the establishment of integrated institutions at the Local Authority and community levels.

The MoFEPD has no role for implementing social protection. Instead, social protection programmes are implemented by other Ministries. As the list below shows, most of the programme areas have numerous actors implementing separate programmes under each social protection instrument (MoFEPD "NSSP Library of Indicators" 2017¹; Kamanga, 2016; Kardan, 2016; O'Neill and Hall, 2016). In addition, various donors provide the majority of funding towards social protection programmes (with the exception of microfinance).

- **Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP):** Led and implemented by the Directorate for Social Protection Services (DSPS) in the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW). Donors include the Government of Malawi, EU, Irish Aid, KfW Germany, and World Bank.
- **Public Works Programmes (PWPs):** Led by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MoLGRD). The national programme, MASAF, is funded by World Bank and implemented through the Local Development Fund (LDF) Technical Support Team (TST). Other actors currently involved in public works programmes include Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and of Forestry (DoF) and WFP.
- **School Meals Programme (SMP):** Led by the Department of School Health and Nutrition in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). Other programmes, implementers and donors include Government of Malawi, GIZ, EU, WFP, and Mary's Meals.
- **Village Savings and Loans (VSL) schemes** are coordinated through the Ministry of Industry

1 List sourced from MoFEPD "NSSP Library of Indicators" collected during interviews, June 2017.

and Trade (MoIT). There are over 100 different programmes in operation mostly funded through non-government sources, including DFID, Irish Aid, Norway, World Bank, USAID. Other actors include MoGCDSW, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLG&RD), Reserve Bank of Malawi (RBM), MFIs, NGOs and CBOs, Village Agents.

- **Micro-Finance (MF) Programmes** are coordinated through Reserve Bank of Malawi (RBM). Programmes are run through Micro-Finance Institutions (MFIs), Mobile Phone Companies (MPCs), NGOs and CBOs, Tertiary Training Institutions (TTIs)

3.1.3 The current MNSSP coordination structure

As a way of coordinating all the various social protection programmes and actors, and to promote harmonisation and coherence across social protection programmes, the MNSSP coordination structure was established.

The PRSP division is responsible for coordination of the MNSSP. It is the Secretariat of the NSSSC. Five people make up the Secretariat – one Director, two Deputy Directors and five Economists, each acting as a desk officer for one MNSSP programme. The PRSP Division is also

the Secretariat of each MNSSP Technical Working Group (TWG) whereby a PRSP desk officer is responsible for each TWG, and it is their responsibility to call for the TWGs. However, the line ministries are responsible for chairing the TWGs, and with the co-chair they are responsible for calling the meeting, setting the agenda, sharing information and minutes. There are ToRs for the NSSSC, NSST and TWGs (Authors' interviews, June 2017; Terms of Reference for the National Social Support Committees).

Different types of decisions can be made by the NSSSC, NSSTC and TWGs (see description below). If one group does not have the authority to make a decision, then it is passed upwards – so from the TWGs to the NSSTC and finally to the NSSSC.

The established structure to coordinate social protection as outlined in the MNSSP is presented in Figure 2 and discussed in more detail below.

National level coordination structure

See Table 2.

Sub-national level coordination structure

MoFEPD is only present at the national level. Therefore, at the sub-national level the ministry strives to harmonise

Table 2 National level coordination structures

Cabinet Committee on Social Development	The Cabinet Committee on Social Development discusses social support issues before they are presented to the Cabinet for decisions.
National Social Support Steering Committee	The National Social Support Steering Committee (NSSSC) provides oversight and decision making in the design and implementation of the national social support agenda. In addition, the committee is responsible for mobilising and approving resources and ensuring coherence and the complementarity of social protection interventions (GIZ, 2015). The NSSC comprises Principal Secretaries from fifteen line ministries along with representatives from three main donors and development partners, as well as the Executive Director of the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA). The NSSSC is chaired by the Chief Secretary to the Government, the co-chair is UNICEF and it is supposed to meet twice a year (GoM, 2012).
National Social Support Technical Committee	The National Social Support Technical Committee (NSSTC) brings together thirty-four member institutions from Government, implementing institutions, development partners and civil society. In bringing these members together it is responsible for the design, development and implementation of social support programmes, monitoring and evaluation of interventions, and the provision of technical advice to the NSSSC. The committee aims to meet quarterly and is chaired by the MoFEPD, with the PRSP division acting as the secretariat. Most donors and development partners attend.
Technical Working Groups	Five Technical Working Groups (TWGs) have been established, one for each of the five programmes of the MNSSP. PRSP provides secretariat services for each of these. The TWGs were set up to be chaired by the relevant line ministry and co-chaired by either a development partner or non-governmental organisation (GIZ, 2015). Participation is open to all relevant stakeholders and many donors, DPs, implementers and NGOs attend. Given the multiplicity of actors working in each programme area, the TWGs aim to promote the effective coordination of planning, financing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation within their programme, and evidence building for interventions to maximise their impact on the poor. This includes targeting, coordination, harmonisation, resource mobilisation, monitoring and evaluation, regulations and standardisation. The TWGs also act as technical advisors to the NSSTC.
Task forces	There are a number of task forces too, which are set up as separate entities to feed into the NSSTC. For example, the MNSSP II Task Force (set up to lead the review of the MNSSP I and support the development of the revised MNSSP II); the Graduation Task Force (e.g. with participation from donors, government and development partners); and the Unified Beneficiary Registry (UBR) Task Force. These task forces are coordinated by PRSP, which reports their findings to the NSSTC (GIZ, 2015).

the implementation of the policy and programme with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MoLGRD) and through the establishment of a range of committees at the district and sub-district levels.

- At the **district level**, **District Councils** are responsible for coordinating and implementing social support activities, together with CSOs, NGOs and line ministries. The **harmonised DSSC** has been established (by the MoFEPD) in some districts to coordinate social protection programmes.
- At the **sub-district level**, it is the role of **Area Development Committees (ADC)** and **Village Development Committees (VDC)** to work with **Community Social Support Committees (CSSC)** to oversee implementation of social support activities with special emphasis on targeting.

Other relevant institutional structures are the MVAC emergency response and related emergency response clusters: Emergency response clusters coordinate the activities of government agencies and development partners during periods of humanitarian crises. For example, during the 2015–2016 Food Insecurity Response six clusters were engaged to take the lead: Food Security, Agriculture, Nutrition, Education, Protection and Coordination. These clusters are led by the relevant ministries and co-led by the main development partner in any given areas. There are also monthly inter-cluster coordination meetings which provide strategic and cross-sectoral coordination of humanitarian programmes. The clusters work through existing coordination structures. Thus, DoDMA coordinates all humanitarian response through the Humanitarian Response Committee (HRC) at the central level. District Councils coordinate the response at the district level through the District Executive Committees. The Clusters then coordinate response planning and implementation at the operational level.

3.2 Strengths and challenges of coordination structures at the national level

This section assesses the strengths and challenges of current institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms at the national level. It draws on key informant interviews with national level actors (see Annex 1). It examines how the current coordination structure functions in practice at the national level (the NSSC, NSSTC and the Technical Working Groups) by examining:

- **The roles and responsibilities** of key actors and the committees/working groups
- **The functionality of meetings** in terms of timing and regularity of meetings, participation in the meetings and meeting agendas

- **Communication channels** throughout the coordination structure at the national level
- **Accountability mechanisms** at the national level
- **Resources and capacity** at the national level.

Overall, there are mixed views with regards to how well the institutional structure works at the national level. As described above, the MNSSP institutional coordination structure was set up specifically to promote coordination across the various institutions and implementers working on social protection. A number of key informants noted that this structure works well and makes sense, however, a number of challenges were also identified. Some of the challenges are specific to each of the committees or groups (discussed in detail below), but there are also some overarching vertical and horizontal challenges within the national level steering structure identified by some key informants:

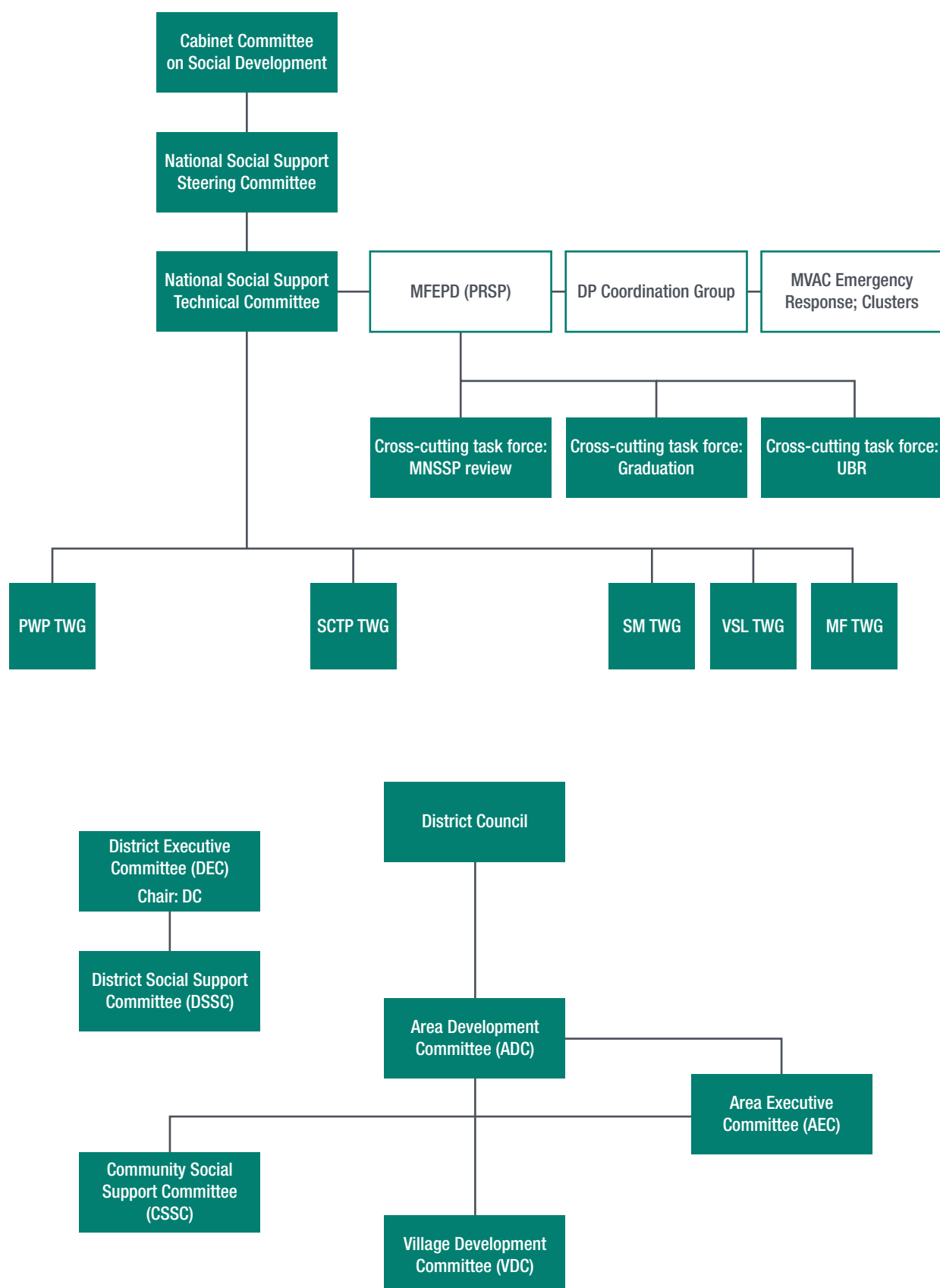
- **There is limited guidance, and therefore understanding, among some social protection practitioners, of how the overall MNSSP coordination structure is supposed to function, and where specific decisions on the MNSSP are supposed to take place.** This is particularly related to how the NSSC and NSSTC work, and how the national level committee relate down to implementation.
- **There are a number of bottlenecks within the structure which limit its functioning at the national level.** The NSSC at the higher level is supposed to be influenced by the NSSTC, which in turn is dependent on the TWGs. However, if the TWGs do not have the correct information from the district to feed up to the NSSTC, and the NSSTC is not strategic enough (but just focuses on information sharing), these create bottlenecks up to the NSSC where decisions are made.
- **The functioning of the TWGs varies by programme.** At least three of the programmes (SCTP, PWP and SMP) have established additional programme-specific meetings with development partners. This has been deemed necessary as these forums are used to make programme-specific decisions with donors (see Figure A1 in Annex 2). This multiplicity of meetings raises the question of the role of the MNSSP in creating the TWGs by programme.
- **The various task forces have thus far not been well integrated into the MNSSP structure,** and have largely operated independently of the core MNSSP structure.

3.2.1 Roles, responsibilities and functioning of existing coordination structures

National Social Support Steering Committee (NSSC)

Both the NSSC and the NSSTC, as well as the five TWGs have their objectives and roles and responsibilities defined in the document “Terms of Reference for the National Social Support Committee”. Key informant

Figure 2 Social protection institutional coordination structure



interviews indicated that they are generally aware of the objectives of the meetings, and who should attend.

As discussed above, the main objective of the NSSSC is to provide oversight and decision making in the design and implementation of the national social support agenda. The roles and responsibilities of the NSSSC are to:

- **Provide overall policy direction, advice and recommendations** to the Cabinet on matters related to social support.
- **Approve the design and adjustment** of the Malawi National Social Support Programmes (MNSSP);
- **Mobilise and approve equitable allocation of resources** for social support programmes.

The ToRs state that the NSSSC is chaired by the Chief Secretary to the Government, and the Secretary for Economic Planning and Development is the Secretariat. As mentioned above, membership includes Secretary to the Treasury and Secretaries of relevant line ministries, the Country Manager of the World Bank, the Country Representative of UNICEF, the Executive Director of CONGOMA, as well as representatives from the German Embassy and Irish Aid.

Recent reports state that the NSSSC meets regularly and is “considered to be increasingly functional” (MoFEPD, 2016; O’Neill and Hall, 2016), however, key informant interviews for this study also noted challenges with the functioning of the NSSSC in practice:

- A number of key informant interviews noted that the NSSSC is not functioning as expected because **meetings have not been called as per the required schedule and not been allocated sufficient time**. The latest SC meeting took place in July 2017, just after the in-country work for this assignment. A reason for this could be because at the time of the study, the MNSSP II was in the process of being developed, and as such they had not called a NSSSC and NSSTC recently. However, this indicates how the MNSSP II process has operated outside of the MNSSP institutional coordination structure, instead of being an integrated part of it. Other comments from key informants on the regularity and timing of the NSSSC include that three hours is not seen as enough time to achieve the objectives of the meeting.
- In terms of participation in meetings in practice, key informant interviewees noted that **some actors and programmes are not well-represented in the NSSSC**. The chair of the NSSSC should be the Chief Secretary to the Government – but key informants noted that due to time pressures, the Chief Secretary usually delegates this to somebody else who is available.

Sometimes this is delegated to a present PS of a line ministry. Interviewees noted that in general it is a challenge to obtain high-level political participation in this meeting from relevant ministries (e.g. only one PS attends). This has implications for achieving the objectives of the SC, as more junior officials who are often delegated to attend instead of the Secretary do not have the authority to make decisions that are supposed to be made at the committee meetings.

- Moreover, interviewees also noted that the agenda is sometimes not well prepared in advance, and indicated that PRSP (as the Secretariat) sets the agenda unilaterally, often sharing it at late notice. Interviewees also reported that there is **limited depth to the discussions in the NSSSC**. Instead, the format largely consists of PRSP giving presentations, and stakeholders being briefed and updated about programmes’ activities. Stakeholders also noted that there is limited follow up on meeting action points, and that it is not clear who is responsible for following up on these.

National Social Support Technical Committee (NSSTC)

As discussed above, the NSSTC is the technical advisor to the NSSSC, and ensures that the MNSSP links to the national development agenda. The roles and responsibilities of the NSSTC are:

- **Develop and review** the National Social Support Policy and Malawi National Social Support Programme;
- **Oversee the design and implementation approaches and mechanisms** for the various components of the MNSSP to maximise impact on poverty reduction;
- **Monitor and evaluate** programme component implementation;
- **Provide technical guidance** on implementation challenges that may arise;
- **Ensure equitable programme coverage;**
- **Provide progress reports** on MNSSP and recommendations to the NSSSC; and
- **Commission independent studies** on issues of interest and concern.

The ToRs state that the NSSTC is chaired by the Secretary for Economic Planning and Development. The MoFEPD – PRSP acts as the secretariat. There are 34 members, from Ministries, donors and development partners.²

- Like the NSSSC, the NSSTC **also faces challenges in the regularity and timing of meetings**. Prior to this study, the two most recent NSSTC meetings took

2 Participation in 2016 meetings included several Permanent Secretaries (from the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development and MoEST in December, with the latter acting as the Chair); two Chief Directors (Ministry of Health in December and in March from MoFEPD; the Chair); several Directors (from the Ministry of Transport, MoLGRD and MoFEPD in March and in December from MoLGRD and MoFEPD) and two Deputy Directors (from MoFEPD and MoH in December).

place in March 2016 and December 2016. Moreover, key informants noted that the NSSTC does not meet regularly enough to effectively deal with issues arising from the TWGs, so the TWG issues are not regularly addressed and decisions are not made (the TWGs meet every two months, the TC meets every quarter).

- In terms of participation, key informant interviewees reported that, like the NSSSC, **junior staff are sometimes sent as representatives** and not all 34 members are represented in the meeting (see also footnote 2, which lists the participants in the 2016 meetings showing some high-level participation, but also that not all the thirty-four line ministries are represented). Key informants noted that this affects the functioning of the NSSTC meetings as junior representatives are unable to make decisions without their superiors' consent. Key informants noted that ideally somebody of Director or Deputy Director-level should be present in addition to representatives at a junior level.
- In terms of the agenda, interviewees reported that **the NSSTC largely focuses on programme-specific issues, rather than cross-cutting themes or systemic issues** (as described in the objectives above). As such, it replicates the TWG structure below it. Moreover, it was reported that the meeting is used as a forum for sharing information, rather than focusing on strategic or technical decisions which are stipulated in the objectives, issues discussed are not always followed up on, and there are no clear lines of accountability.
- **The NSSTC does not always receive sufficient information from the TWGs to inform and guide decisions.** The NSSTC is dependent on issues feeding up from the TWGs to be discussed. While some TWGs have substantive discussions, this varies significantly across the TWGs. Overall, there is disappointment that the NSSTC is not achieving strategic objectives through decision-making. Some interviewees also noted that the SCTP disproportionately dominates discussions in the committee, partly because the SCTP TWG functions the best and because of relatively well-functioning M&E and reporting mechanisms of the SCT (as discussed more below).

Programme-level Technical Working Groups (TWGs)

The overall objective of the TWGs is to promote the effective coordination of planning, financing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and evidence building of the interventions so as to maximise their impact on the poor. The TWGs share views, advice and deliberate on issues submitted by members including progress reports on the status of formulation, implementation of strategies and programmes. These issues may include targeting, coordination, harmonisation, resource mobilisation, monitoring and evaluation, regulation and standardisation. The ToRs state that the TWGs will also act as technical advisors to the NSSTC and ensure that the programme contributes

to the successful implementation of the MNSSP. The specific roles and responsibilities of the TWGs are to:

- Build partnerships to enhance coordinated planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the component;
- Share information among implementers (geographic coverage, target groups, implementation challenges, best practices etc.);
- Review implementation standards and modalities of interventions (transfer level, wage rates, in-kind, quality of works, etc.);
- Harmonise policies and approaches;
- Standardise M&E indicators;
- Facilitate harmonisation in implementation of the component;
- Share information on promoting linkages with other MNSSP components as well as other national development initiatives;
- Identify and promote implementation of best practices of the component;
- Examine and make recommendations on common and/or crosscutting implementation challenges;
- Prepare quarterly component progress report for submission to the NSSTC.

The TWGs are to be chaired by Government whilst the co-chair is selected from either a development partner or non-governmental organisation.

The following key findings can be highlighted:

- **There is variation in the level of functionality and performance of the TWGs.** Key informants noted that the SCTP TWG functions well, and no problems were reported in terms of the regularity, timing of meetings. Interviewees reported that the regularity of meetings is a challenge with the PWP TWG as they do not meet every quarter, and also with the SMP TWG. The latter, at the time of this study, had only met once this year. Stakeholders noted that meetings do not take place regularly, it often happens at short notice and there's limited planning in advance of the meeting. Key informants noted that the variation in TWG performance is partly dependent on the RPSP desk officer's ability (and authority) to convene the meetings, as well as other factors, including bottlenecks in communication and limited M&E data. Currently, there is only one desk officer from PRSP for each programme. Some key informants mentioned that was not enough, but others noted it is the level of seniority that would make a difference – TWGs should have a higher-level Desk Officer – Deputy Director for each programme in TWG.
- **There is some variation in stakeholders' views of the objectives of the TWGs and the existence of parallel programme-specific coordination undermines the role of TWGs.** Some note the objectives to share information on the specific programme intervention

area, others report that this is a forum for technical decisions. The SCTP, PWP and SMP all have additional programme-level meetings where donors and/or Governments discuss programme-specific issues (see more in Box 1). These are deemed as necessary, particularly by donors, to discuss and agree on narrow programme-related issues, rather than the general programme-area issues which are discussed across the range of actors within the TWG. It should be noted, however, that these **parallel groups effectively undermine the established and Government-led TWGs, by shifting some programme-specific decisions and discussions away from the TWGs.**

- **The extent to which the TWGs achieve coherence within the specific programmes is in some cases rather limited.** Key informant interviews noted that some implementers still tend to interpret policy independently and run their specific programmes differently, contributing to fragmentation within programme component. Whilst participation in the TWGs is open to all relevant implementers, not all

are actually involved in the TWGs which further contributes to fragmentation of information. MF and VSL TWGs especially face challenges in streamlining implementation, partially due to limited and irregular attendance of the various implementers.

- **There is little evidence that the current structure around the programme-focused TWGs facilitate cross-programme linkages and coordination.** Indeed, the structure of the programme-focused TWGs tends to reinforce programme silos and fragmentation because they focus on coordination within the programme area (where there are multiple donor and implementing partners), rather than cross-programme coordination. Key informant interviews noted that there are also limited opportunities for the different MNSSP programmes to “talk” to one another horizontally at a strategic level (see Box 2). Because the TWGs are programme focused (and although there are cross-overs with people who attend) they are not well designed to foster cross-programme learning or information sharing. While some people sit on

Box 1 Challenges of a cross-pillar coordination approach

Under the MNSSP, as the framework for operationalising the NSSP, three objectives are trying to be achieved: 1) coherence within each social protection instrument; 2) coherence across social protection programmes; and 3) coordination between social protection and other priority sectors. However, there are challenges to achieving these objectives. Whilst the set-up of the MNSSP coordination structure supports objective 1) – i.e. coherence within each social protection instrument through the formation of the programme-focused TWGs – it is unclear how to achieve objectives 2) and 3).

At the level of the TWGs, the PRSP desk officers’ role is to ensure that decisions made in these meetings align to MNSSP objectives, but no operationalisable plans for coordination have been developed. Therefore, currently the TWGs and NSSTC do not have set objectives, milestones or reporting mechanisms directly related to coherence and integration objectives of the MNSSP vision. This makes it difficult to operationalise horizontal coordination and linkages at the programme and operational levels (see also O’Neill and Hall, 2016). Without an operationalisable vision and policy of integration and coherence, the programme-focused TWGs run as individual projects, and with limited enforcement or even guidance from policy at the programme level, implementers within a specific programme area interpret policy independently and run their specific programmes differently, contributing to fragmentation within programmes, and isolation from the other MNSSP programme.

Where integration or linkages between programmes have taken place, this has largely been ad hoc, implementer specific and not necessarily directed from the policy vision. For example, conversations around coordinating PWP with the production of food for ‘home-grown’ SMP came about from beneficiaries’ suggestions, the SCTP linkages and referrals project is primarily led by UNICEF, the automatic inclusion of SCTP beneficiaries into the MVAC response arose out of need in the 2016/7 emergency response. On the ground there also remain negative political and public attitudes around “double dipping” (households receiving more than one programme or benefit) which effectively limits a programming approach aimed at increasing households’ access to coordinated forms of support. However, there do seem to be positive changes at the national level around linkages between programmes and double dipping, as programme linkages are being discussed more widely and are explicitly included in the MNSSP II

With MNSSP II there is greater clarity than previously over the vision for objective 2); promoting coherence across MNSSP programmes. Through the three pillars focusing on the thematic priority areas of consumption support; resilient livelihoods and shock-sensitive social protection, the MNSSP II aims to bring together the five programmes to achieve a coherent set of objectives. However, while programme linkages are now conceptualised and articulated more clearly under MNSSP II, there is still no clear institutional vehicle for these linkages to be realised. Therefore, whilst there is a general understanding amongst some stakeholders that there need to be linkages and harmonisation, it remains to be determined how to achieve this through programme design, implementation or cooperation.

Box 2 Findings for specific TWGs

SCTP TWG

- In addition to the SCTP TWG, the MoGCDSW, MoFEPD and donors who fund the SCTP also have a regular DP and PS meeting, and coordination group meetings¹. This has implications for the format and agenda of the TWG as key informant interviews suggest that these additional meetings are where programme-level decisions are made, rather than the SCTP TWG. This by-passing of established structures is considered to weaken the TWGs, as key decisions are made elsewhere.
- Interviewees noted that they understood the aim of the SCTP TWG is to share programme and experiences of SCTP and resolve challenges, and recent work in the SCTP TWG has focused on extending the coverage of cash transfers to new districts and rolling out the UBR.
- There is a perception amongst stakeholders that the SCTP TWG functions the best out of the TWGs. One reason for this is that there's only one implementer, the MoGCDSW (although there are multiple donors which result in multiple financial and administrative requirements), that data is collected, analysed and coordinated through one Management Information System (MIS) (where information from the district comes from bi-monthly reports, district officers' progress reports, and a quarterly M&E report) and the relatively high-level of motivation around the SCTP and availability of resources also helps the group to function more effectively.

PWP TWG

- Key informant interviews understand the aim of the TWG PWP is to provide technical guidance and discuss technical issues. Recent discussions have been around the wage rates debate and discussing the Living Standards Basket (with the Ministry of Labour). In terms of participation in meetings, LDF is the chair of the PWP TWG although the Ministry of Local Government should be the chair (it is currently the co-chair because of fluidity of positions in the ministry). LDF is the funding agent – it has no control over the officers and local councils who are responsible for implementation. Interviews suggested that there is a future opportunity for the Ministry of Local Government to chair again because of a new appointment. Other sectors are also represented at the meetings.
- However, key informants noted a gap in the fact that there are currently no linkages with the Ministry of Transport and Public Works (this Ministry is a member of the NSSSC and NSSTC). Interviewees reported that there is potential for future engagement with this Ministry as they devolve this year.

SMP TWG

- Key informant interviews noted that they understand the main objectives of the SMP TWG to plan together and implement what has been planned, to discuss emerging issues, and to provide technical support to implement the programme. Interestingly, WFP established a DP group who meet quarterly and provide support to the government in the SM TWG. In this group, WFP is chair and this also includes Mary's Meals, GIZ, and implementing partners – what is discussed here is conveyed to the government through the TWG. It is seen as a necessary group because DPs have resources and are better able to discuss these issues amongst themselves and then offer support to the government in a coordinated way (the SMP are implemented by seven different implementers, using different modalities, and resources are not channelled through one ministry).
- This multiplicity of actors and modalities also affects how the TWG functions, as priorities are different among implementing partners. Moreover, there is a perception that the government does not have a strong sense of priorities for SMP, and development partners instead are taking a lead (e.g. the example given here is that DPs have supported policy development over the last 3 years and now supporting the dissemination of this).
- Coordination between the MoEST and MoFEPD is not seen to work effectively in practice through the TWG. In terms of participation in meetings, key informant interviewees identified there is a problem of representation in this working group. There is only one representative of the SMP in the MoEST in Lilongwe and reports suggest that key stakeholders do not prioritise the meeting.

1 The SCTP programme has to coordinate multiple funders as there is fragmentation in donor administration, financing and reporting requirements of the SCTP. For example, Irish Aid request to receive a quarterly report and ad hoc monitoring reports from the district. The MoGCDSW prepares a consolidated report and then breaks-out sections for particular donors. Each donor requests a separate audit – although interviews suggest that they would prefer to have one good institutional audit, which could be an option in the near future.

Box 2 Findings for specific TWGs cont'd

VSL TWG

- The VSL TWG is chaired by the Minister of Civic Education, Culture and Community Development (MoCECD), with CARE, and NGO, action as the co-chair. Stakeholders questioned whether, given the pro-poor nature of VSL programmes, the MoIT is the appropriate institutional anchor. Indeed the MNSSP review highlighted that the ministry does not participate actively in the TWG and that Care has effectively take-over as the chair.
- Stakeholders also noted that not all VSL implementers attend the TWG, which, while understandable given the large number of implementers, reduces the ability of the TWG to coordinate implementers. These findings are also noted in the MNSSP review. It was noted that the VSL TWG suffers from limited coordination and low levels of information sharing between implementers, district staff and the TWG, resulting in fragmented implementation.

MF TWG

- The MF TWG is chaired by the Reserve Bank of Malawi (RBM) and consists of a large number of pro-poor MFIs.
- Coordination between MFIs are noted to be challenge, as MFIs expressed limited trust in Government due to Government's history of direct provision of micro-credit, and perceive each other as competitors.
- MF and VSL TWGs are an example of limited coordination between programmes. For instance, the relationship between VSL and MF interventions has not been developed and it is unclear whether they are complementary programmes based on a progression from VSL to MF or whether they are to target different populations.

one or more TWGs, and there are objectives listed in the ToRs about cross-programme coordination and information sharing, this does not seem to happen in practice. Organising the TWGs into instrument-focused programmes facilitates the objective for intra-programme coordination, but not for MNSSP-wide coordination and coherence. Without an explicit objective or reason to coordinate (e.g. either because of policy direction, or because of programming/administration linkages) this is not happening at the TWG level.

- **There is also limited information sharing on outcomes from the NSSC and NSSTC back down to the TWGs.** Some key informants noted that they are not aware of the decisions or outcomes from SC and TC meetings. Given that the TC and SC are where the cross-programme and oversight issues of the MNSSP are discussed, it is important that these discussions filter down into the programme-level meetings (and further down to implementers at the sub-national levels too). An additional point to note from key informant interviews is that there is not a systematic approach to learning from, or sharing information between, the task forces either.

3.2.2 Information sharing and reporting

Information sharing across the MNSSP is promoted through the committee meetings, TWGs and through the PRSP M&E database, which the PRSP oversees centrally and aims to collect programme-specific information for discussion at the TWG level. A central M&E database was designed to facilitate the reporting of district-level

programming information, through pre-defined indicators from the District Commissioner (DC), to PRSP. The MoFEPD, as the coordinating body for M&E, would be responsible for this database, and line ministries (e.g. MoEST for school meals, MoGCDSW for the SCTP) would access this information (Authors' interviews).

However, in practice it does not work like this, and **programme reporting remains fragmented and information difficult to access by the PRSP division which hinders their ability to coordinate and convene across the MNSSP** (note the exception of the SCTP because of the data collected regularly through the MIS) (see Box 3).

A number of factors were reported by key respondents to the challenges in reporting and information sharing:

- Collating data on social protection implementation is a challenge because of the **wide range of implementers, including government and non-governmental implementers**, who are required to report and monitor progress on programme implementation.
- Difficulties in reporting mechanisms, with **the level and progress of decentralisation affecting data collection and communication from the district level to the national level**. The decentralised process stalled in 2010, and has only recently been reinstated (2014), which has resulted in challenges to ensure decentralisation functions as policy and the constitution states. As such, the process of decentralisation in Malawi is not uniform across the country or across ministries, and reporting requirements are often unclear (this is discussed more

in section 3.3). As one interviewee noted, there are better communication and information flows to the TWGs where decentralised functions are working (e.g. local councils and councillors feed into TWGs on their knowledge of programmes) compared to line ministries which have not devolved and only report on part of the picture at the district level.

- **Some ministries are protective of the information and may be reluctant to share, often only sharing partial data.** Individual programmes prefer to report to their respective line ministries who in turn do not always readily share their data with PRSP. These communication and information gaps at the TWG level create bottlenecks further up the MNSSP coordination structure at the TC and SC level, limiting effective strategic decision-making at these levels.

Recent discussions suggest that because of the challenges involved in obtaining the data from implementers through the M&E database there is a new plan to develop a shared MIS system for MNSSP sub-programmes, such as VSL and SMP. In theory, this could potentially be a good resource and mechanism to collect information. As discussed above, stakeholders note the SCTP MIS greatly facilitates the functionality of the SCTP TWG as information is readily available and easily accessible.

3.2.3 Resources and capacity for coordination

Both human and financial resources were identified as constraints to the functioning of the MNSSP coordination structure. The limited guaranteed funding

to support the MNSSP structure in performing its key duties was also identified by a study carried out by GIZ in 2015. As such, departments have no recurrent budget to ensure that committees can meet. This was identified as one of the causes of some of the NSSC meetings not being held regularly. Currently, funding is provided by LDF, UNICEF and/or GIZ. However, key informants noted that it should be the responsibility of the government – and resource mobilisation is one of the tasks of the PRSP (see list of roles and responsibilities). The relatively low priority of social protection in national policy was identified by some key stakeholders as a reason explaining limited financial commitments from the government to further fund social protection and coordination committees at all levels³.

Limited human resources, technical capacity and skills – both individually and within the system – were also identified as key challenges which prevent some of the TWGs and committees from progressing and functioning as intended. The key issues identified are that MoFEPD is understaffed, and other sector representatives are also overburdened with work (e.g. the one staff member coordinating SMP from the MoEST). Other areas of need identified include that MoFEPD staff need more focused training and/or need more senior people in positions to carry out the expected roles and responsibilities to convene the coordination meetings effectively and overcome some of the challenges noted above in the discussion of the SC, TC and TWGs. There is also an understanding that there has been a focus on capacity building over the last few years, which has

Box 3 Challenges around reporting and information sharing at the TWG level

Across the different TWGs, the following challenges were identified among the key stakeholders:

- The PWP TWG noted that the challenge is there is no direct ministry to report to (and again, multiple operators including NGOs and the LDF).
- Key informant interviews reported that the multiple implementers of SMP do not report into the M&E common framework, there are multiple channels of communication operating at once, and only one person from the MoEST is responsible for SMP at the national level which puts additional burdens on their time (compiling data collection is seen as extra job). This makes it difficult for the PRSP desk officers to carry out their role in the TWG. As such, in the school meals TWG there is limited data coming up into to the TWG, and this means that neither the line ministry nor MoFEPD have good programme-level information.
- Key informants also noted that it had previously been difficult to get data on microfinance, but now the PRSP desk officer receives data from the Reserve Bank which facilitates data flows. In the case of VSL, the desk officer finds it challenging to collect data from the multiple different organisations operating VSLs, but COMSIP has a well organised database which facilitates data reporting. However, with over 100 VSL implementers, this only provides a partial picture.
- In comparison, information flows relatively well between the MoGCDSW and the TWG and the NSSTC. This is partly because of the MIS and that someone is responsible for data collection. The MoGCDSW also receive bi-monthly reports from the district, and district officers give progress reports. There's also a quarterly M&E report.

3 Note that as a coordinating division, PRSP also do not have the remit to send finances to the district level to fund the functioning of the committees.

successfully built the skills of individuals. However, this can only go so far when the governance and institutional environment that they work in is challenging⁴.

3.2.4 Issues around the role of the PRSP Division

The PRSP division is mandated to provide leadership on the development and coordination of social protection programmes in the country. The objective of the Division is to strengthen poverty reduction and social protection systems by improved coordination, harmonisation of design and implementation of programmes to contribute to the achievement of the MGDS goals. Specifically, the roles and responsibilities of PRSP are to:

- Provide leadership in the design of poverty reduction and social support programmes;
- Provide technical guidance and expertise in the implementation of poverty reduction and social support programmes to ensure optimum impact on poverty reduction;
- Support the creation of linkages among poverty reduction and social support programmes and with other socio-economic programmes;
- Set standards and modalities of programme to ensure effectiveness of programmes;
- Monitor and evaluate poverty reduction and social support programmes in relation to achieving the MGDS objectives;
- Coordinate with humanitarian response and disaster risk reduction to maximise impact of social protection to build resilience of the most vulnerable;
- Provide technical support and leadership in knowledge and evidence building for poverty reduction and social support programmes;
- Provide leadership in resource mobilisation for poverty reduction and social support programmes from Government, development partners and other non-state actors;
- Serve as secretariat for the NSSSC, and the NSSTC and component Technical Working Groups.

As such, the tasks of PRSP noted above are related to the divisions' convening, coordination and leadership roles. Achieving these objectives are highly dependent on PRSP authority to influence and support the other ministries, donors and development partners to play their respective roles – to participate in the meetings, to share information, to act strategically and collaboratively *within* and *across* programme areas.

Some challenges have been identified with regards to the PRSP division's ability to achieve these objectives. Underpinning how well MNSSP coordination functions in practice is the issue of accountability, which was identified as a critical challenge in the MNSSP coordination structure.

Whilst PRSP's role is the Secretariat and to coordinate the whole MSNPP system, to develop policy, coordinate and guide policy implementation, PRSP do not have the authority to hold line ministries to account, and moreover, it is not clear who PRSP are accountable to (and how this accountability is held up). As a result PRSP faces difficulties in ensuring that line ministries participate in meetings, and that implementers report on and share M&E data, and there is limited follow up on meeting action points (particularly of the NSSSC and NSSTC) – a feeling that it is not clear who is responsible for following up on these.

The following critical points have emerged from the analysis:

- **The main challenge here seems to be that accountability remains at the programme level and to the programme funder, rather than through the coordination structure (and therefore to PRSP and MoFEPD).** The programmes are implemented through other line ministries and NGOs who, in the case of the former, report directly to Cabinet, and in both cases to their donors. As such, this means that the line of accountability goes to individual line ministries and donors, often bypassing PRSP. In theory, the fact that PRSP sits in the MoFEPD should give it more authority, but it has been reported that other ministries do not view MoFEPD as having such authority. For example, priority for data and reporting is connected to line ministry and funding lines – i.e. donors funding line ministries and/or NGOs – and data from these implementers does not always feed up to PRSP.
- **This is further exacerbated by MoFEPD limited presence at the district-level** where social protection implementation takes place. Previously, at the district level, there were M&E officers who were representatives of MoFEPD. However, with administrative reforms (including the ongoing process of decentralisation) this is no longer the case.
- **There is limited donor understanding (or acknowledgement) of EP&D's coordination role.** For example, donors funding NGOs, and data from NGOs does reach PPSP. Some key informants noted that some DPs do not prioritise information sharing and communication with the PRSP division.
- **There is no board to hold PRSP and MoFEPD accountable as the ministry and division responsible for the delivery of the MNSSP,** (because it's a coordinator), although there is the Cabinet Committee on Social Development which is the highest committee which could hold MoFEPD to account. Cabinet Committees are convened from time to time when relevant issues emerge – for example, recently the PRSP presented the revised MNSSP II to the Cabinet. The re-involvement of this committee could also

⁴ Note that there is existing literature on governance and institutional challenges more broadly in Malawi, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these in more detail.

give MoFEPD a stronger mandate to hold Ministries to account. Moreover, key informants noted that accountability needs to come from the bottom as well as from above – but it currently this does not happen. The SC, TC and TWGs are not held accountable to individuals/ beneficiaries/ institutions below it.

- Whilst a number of key informant interviews noted that PRSP is the right institution to play the MNSSP leadership and coordination role, others also suggested that **the level of authority that is held by PRSP – both in terms of the seniority of desk officers, as well as the division/ministry as a whole – may not be enough to provide the high-level leadership and convening role that is required.** Part of this is to do with the level of seniority of the desk officers – some key informants noted that the Desk Officers should be a Deputy Director or Chief representative level and this would overcome the problems faced at the TWG levels (e.g. in terms of demanding data and convening meetings). However, it is also important to put this in context. With previous public sector reforms, the Department of Economic Planning was moved from the President's Office to become its own ministry and eventually merge with the Ministry of Finance. The role of the department has also changed over time. While part of the President's Office, the department had the mandate to approve each ministry's planning, and also had representatives at the sub-national level. Stakeholders recognised that successive waves of public sector reforms have reduced

the ministry's convening and coordination capacity as it no longer directly controls the plans of ministries and has limited ties to the sub-national level.

- **There is also an issue that the role of the PRSP division is starting to shift from one of policy coordination to being involved in providing guidance on streamlining implementation.** This includes through developing 'best practice guidelines' for implementing agencies; being involved in the roll-out of the UBR and in orientation for harmonised district social protection committees as well as being involved in programme TWGs. This raises the question of whether the PRSP division should extend its mandate to become an implementation 'umbrella' – coordinating and harmonising the implementation arrangements across MNSSP programmes – or rather whether it should maintain a role as policy and M&E coordinator (this is discussed more in section 5).

3.3 Donors and development partner coordination

According to the MNSSP structure, there is a development partner NSSP coordination group, which in theory feeds into the MNSSP structure. DPs are also represented across all the groups and committees in the MNSSP structure.

DP coordination itself – and particularly donor coordination – is reported as a challenge in achieving improved harmonisation and coherence within the MNSSP.

Box 4 District level structures

District Council

- Within the **District Council**, the **District Commissioner (DC)**, who is the head of the District Council and a representative of the MoLGRD, is the individual through which information on programmes should flow from the national to the district and then sub-district levels. In other words, in the context of decentralisation, they should be the key point of entry for development partners, donors, NGOs and line ministries for work at the district and sub-district levels. Meanwhile, it should be through the DC that programmes report on progress to the national level.
- The **Development and Planning Committee (DPC)** is one of the key service committees of the District Council and all development requests are directed to this committee¹. The mandate of the Development and Planning Committee is to plan and oversee the implementation of development interventions alongside other service committees under the District Council. The DPC comprises the committee chair, traditional authorities (TAs), members of parliament (MPs); interest groups (business, women, farmers, people living with disabilities and religious groups) and the Director of Planning and Development (DPD). Deliberations of the various service committees (including sector-specific committees) are then taken to the full District Council where sector heads are invited to present their reports. Political representatives including MPs and elected Councillors are also present at full council meetings, which should take place quarterly. The full District Council is the primary mechanism for ensuring high-level political oversight of development interventions in the district.

1 Development requests to the District Council originate from Village Committees (VCs) which are then passed up to Village Development Committees (VDCs) to Area Development Committees (ADCs) to the Development and Planning Committee (also known as the Development Committee or Planning and Development Committee) and then to full District Councils.

Box 4 District level structures cont'd

District Executive Committee

- Within each district, there is a principal technical coordination committee – the **District Executive Committee (DEC)** – which is chaired by the DC, and where sector heads are represented. There are a range of subcommittees of the DEC for coordination, all of which report into it. Each subcommittee is chaired by the DPD and comprises sector heads and often NGO and CSO representatives. This means that membership of subcommittees is often common to all with subcommittees containing multiple and overlapping members (Holmes et al., 2017; O'Neill and Hall 2016). The subcommittees most relevant for the social protection sector are described below.

District Social Support Committee

- The **District Social Support Committee (DSSC)** was originally formed in SCTP districts for the implementation and oversight of the SCTP and continue to act mainly as SCTP committees. However, in Dedza, Mchinji and Phalombe, the DSSC has evolved, with the support of DPs (GIZ in the case of the first two districts and FAO in the latter), to be the **primary committee for the coordination of all the MNSSP programmes at the district level**. In other words, the DSSC is now “harmonised”. It is also the intention that a harmonised DSSC will be introduced in Balaka following the implementation of the UBR in October 2017. The aim of the harmonised DSSC is to **provide leadership across social protection programmes at the district level** (GIZ, 2015). The Terms of Reference (ToR) for these DSSC describes their objective as, “to promote the effective coordination and harmonisation of social protection programmes so as to maximise their impact on the poor”. According to the ToR, it should be meeting once a quarter.

District Environmental Subcommittee

- One of the tasks of the **District Environmental Subcommittee (DESC)** is to provide technical advice on the implementation of PWP. It includes representatives from forestry, roads, land resources, community development, fisheries, and environment and irrigation departments.

District Civil Protection Committee

- The **District Civil Protection Committee (DCDP)**, again comprising sector heads, provides oversight of disaster response. Depending on the disaster-proneness of a district, this committee is either active around the year or is active in preparation for and humanitarian response.

District Nutrition Coordination Committee

- In both Balaka and Dedza, the **District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC)**, introduced approximately 3–4 years previously (in the case of Dedza), is seen by district-level staff as one which is functioning relatively well. These subcommittees comprise a range of sector heads and currently receive donor funding. National level development partners suggest that this regular funding stream may be a reason for the reportedly good performance of these subcommittees.

The DP coordination committee is not accountable to the government, and often action points are not taken forward. There is a perception that, with some exception, donors and development partners could be better coordinated within and across programmes. Whilst it is noted that the NSSP DP coordination group has started to discuss their activities no longer on a programme by programme basis but along the 3 pillars of the MNSSP II (ILO, personal communication, November 2017), DPs often divide up their work geographically which contributes to fragmentation of programme implementation. Funding and reporting are also fragmented, undermining MNSSP coherence. These challenges are further exacerbated by the absence of a strong lead donor which could lead to improved DP coordination.

3.4 Overview over district level coordination structures

Turning now to the district level, to implement the MNSSP, **District Councils** are responsible for coordinating and implementing social protection activities, together with CSOs and NGOs and coordinating all the implementing partners.

In addition to the above subcommittees of the DEC there are a range of programme task forces and coordination committees for the oversight of programmes. A few examples of these include the NGO subcommittee and the **District Environmental Subcommittee** in the case of PWPs; COMSIP Task Team and VSL Network that are concerned with how to link

VSLs to the SCTP and that report into the COMSIP Desk Officer; Child Protection Committee and the Gender Committee that are to mainstream these issues across programmes in the district and report into the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO).

There is also the **District Training Team**, comprised of extension workers which play the role of ‘trainers of trainers’; orienting other extension workers on their role in providing advice and oversight to particular programmes. The training team plays an important role in the SCTP, as well as in other social protection initiatives, such as the roll-out of the UBR.

An organogram of the main committees and institutions at the district and sub-district levels involved in social protection implementation, or relevant for it, are presented in Figure 3.

3.5 District level strengths and challenges

The following sections assess further the strengths and weaknesses of institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms at the district level, examining how the District Council, the Development and Planning Committee, the District Executive Committee and its sub-committees (including the DSSC) function in practice, as well as the implications for coordinating and implementing social protection programmes. The findings are drawn from key informant interviews carried out in Balaka, Dedza, Mzimba and Salima and have been discussed and validated KII and a workshop at the national level.

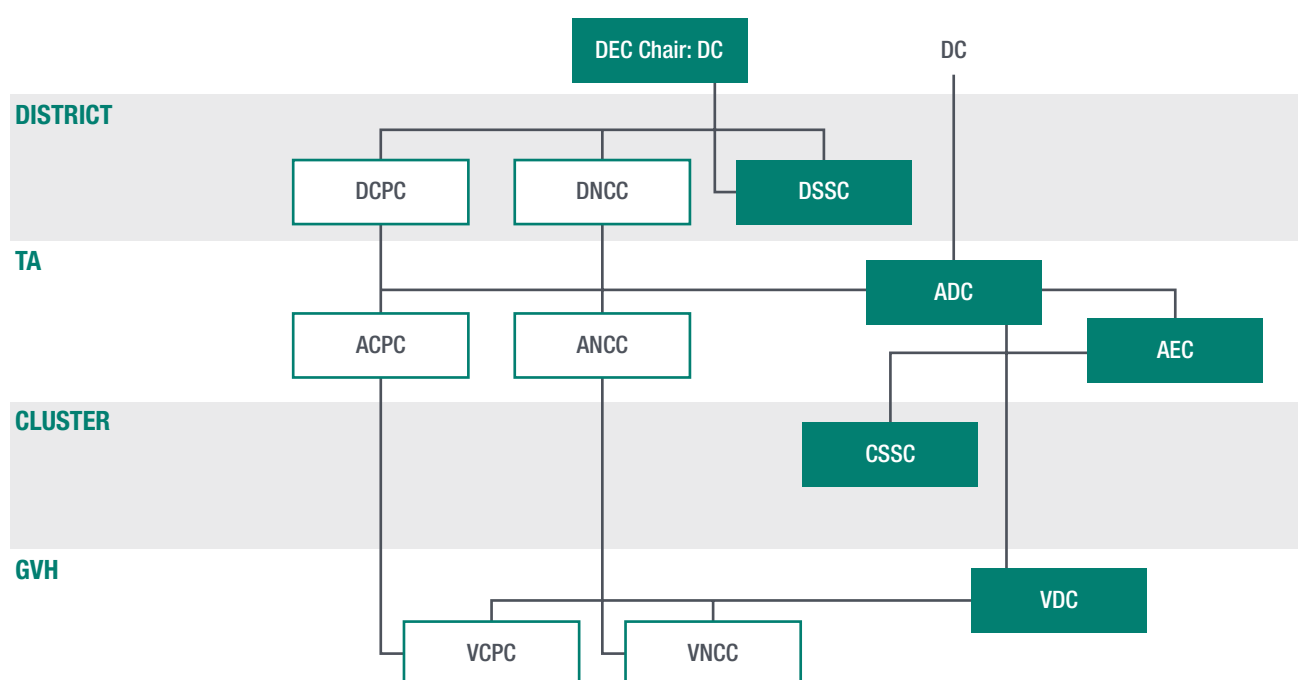
Overall, interviews suggest that district level sectors and implementers are largely working towards agendas

and targets set by respective line ministries, with sector staff each working to achieve the vision of their own programmes, rather than the cross-cutting vision of the MNSSP. The MNSSP is therefore just one vision at the district level, among a range of visions promoted by different sectors. In addition, there seems to be limited understanding at the district level of social protection concepts, as well as the MNSSP vision for social protection in Malawi. The absence of a shared vision on social protection at the district level is a key constraint towards coordination at the district and sub-district level, as will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

District Council (DC)

- Key informant interviews suggest that a main challenge to achieving coordination of social support programmes is that there is uneven information that the DCs receive on the various programmes. For example, DCs should receive information from all sectors and implementers about planned development projects operating in the district. However, this does not necessarily happen and DCs are not always aware of the range of programmes implemented in their district – especially projects implemented by DPs and NGOs which are often not reporting adequately to the DCs. This has important implications for the coordination of social protection programmes, particularly SMPs, VSLs and MF interventions as these are mainly implemented by NGOs, CSOs and DPs. It was noted that improved mechanisms for information sharing between DCs and implementers are key in allowing DC stakeholders to effectively coordinate interventions, avoid duplication of efforts and to enable synergies between programmes.

Figure 3 Institutional structures relevant for social protection at the district and sub-district



- Political representatives in the Dedza DC also noted that the information which is reported at the full council meeting is largely progress reports. This provides little opportunity to reshape the project in advance or as it is being implemented. Meanwhile, if people question the activities of a particular programme during a full DC meeting they are informed that these are set centrally and so there is no scope for amendments. This limited scope to discuss the implementation and design of programme is considered to reduce political and district-level ownership and reduce incentives for district level stakeholders to engage with programmes and hold implementers to account.
- **The fact that only PWP is a subcommittee of the DC limits council members' oversight over other MNSSP programmes.** Moreover, it was reported that the DC has more knowledge on some social protection programmes – notably PWPs – than others. This is a question of political oversight. The DC has several committees through which it discharges its duties and responsibilities. In addition to those on health, education and development and planning there is one on PWP. This reflects the involvement of the DC in the implementation of the PWP (including in the sectors of roads, fisheries, irrigation, land resources and forestry). Deliberations of these service committees are then taken to the full DC where sector heads are invited to present their reports. As the DC Chair in Balaka explained, because of the PWP service committee at the council level the DC is more conversant with PWP than the other social protection programmes. This means that Councillors are motivated to supervise PWP. He noted that he has heard about VSLs, SMP and SCTP mainly through reports presented to the DC by sector heads but does not discuss the programmes in detail. Given the more limited understanding by the DC of these other programmes, they are less able to be able to hold the sector implementers to account. A key question here is about how to link the political arm of the councils with the DSSCs, which we discuss further in section 5.
- **In the context of incomplete decentralisation, communication channel between implementers, DCs, line ministries and the MoFEPD are complex and undermine PRSP's central coordination function.** Under Malawi's decentralisation policy, sector heads should be reporting through the DC (and the DEC) to their respective line ministries, creating direct lines of accountability to the DCs. However, in reality, many sector heads are reporting directly to their respective line ministries (at the national level), involving the DCs and committees to only varying extents and in an ad-hoc manner. This is explained by a DC; *"There are still some elements of dual allegiance by sectors to report directly to the line ministry. For example, the*

DEM [District Education Manager] wants to report directly to the Ministry [of Education] and the DHO reports directly to the Zone Coordinator [of the MoH], so dual elements of reporting are still there. You will see the DHO telling you that, bwana, I am going to a meeting somewhere but you were never communicated to about that meeting... so yes challenges are still there in terms of the reporting system."

District Executive Committee (DEC)

- **Key informant interviews with district officials from Balaka, Dedza, Mzimba and Salima pointed to the importance of the DEC for district-level coordination.** They all noted that the DEC is meeting on a regular basis, which was also affirmed by national-level stakeholders. The relatively well-functioning nature of the DEC has been attributed to it being chaired by the District Commissioner, underlining the importance of individuals and their roles within committees and how they function. Interviewees perceive that the District Commissioner, as the appointee in charge of the district, has significant convening power.
- **District representatives pointed to the importance of every sector being present at the DEC and being instructed to provide a regular report and update.** This report can either be presented at every DEC meeting (as in Mzimba) or through sectors being assigned different DEC meetings in which to present updates of their activities (as in Dedza). It was however also noted by DEC stakeholders that, in their experience, reliable reporting from social protection programme is not the norm, given the tendency to report directly to line ministries.

District Social Support Committee (DSSC)

In terms of the DSSC, this study carried out interviews in Balaka and Dedza districts to illustrate differences in progress towards the harmonised DSSCs. In Dedza, the harmonised DSSC has been launched by the MoFEPD although the harmonised committee has not yet met, and in Balaka the DSSC is not yet harmonised – it is still a function of the SCTP.

A number of key issues were discussed:

Buy-in from Social Protection Programmes

- **There is concern over the ability for the DSSC to become truly "harmonised" across the social support programmes when the SCTP continues to dominate the committee** (also see Box 5). At the district level, stakeholders beyond the MoGCDSW view the DSSC as a vehicle for the implementation and oversight of the SCTP (and that is what it was originally

intended to be). Because of this, as explained by a key informant in Balaka, it is not supporting coordination across social protection programmes;

“On coordination, I should be honest there is a problem. Because it would appear this committee [the DSSC] was championed by Government under the Social Cash Transfer Programme, as such other members feel left out. So it is like a baby of that programme [the SCTP]. Or maybe the challenge is that this committee was designed to cover the Social Cash Transfer Programme at the Ministry of Gender, and all the activities are funded by the Ministry of Gender. Maybe that’s why we have this problem because the allegiance is tilted towards the Ministry of Gender, so it does not bring in all the social protection programmes.”

- Funding received from the MoGCDSW was reported to be a key reason why the DSSC is viewed as a committee for overseeing the SCTP.

Resources dedicated to the functioning of the DSSC

- **Stakeholders note limited resources and lack of clarity around allowances for attending the DSSC.** The ToR for the harmonised DSSC states that, ‘implementers of each programme should rotate and fund the meetings.’ However, a MoGCDSW representative in Dedza felt that programmes other than the SCTP didn’t have budget-lines to cover the costs of meeting attendance. In Balaka meanwhile, it was reported that NGO representatives have opted-out of the DSSC as they are too busy and consider the lunch allowance being offered of MK 2,500 as too little. A lack of available transport was given in Dedza district as another barrier for attending coordination committees and so for meetings being called – with the offices of different ministries being scattered throughout the town centre. This is not to endorse the view that NGO and government staff should be provided with allowances or transport to attend different committees. Rather, it is likely that financial and logistical difficulties, when combined with other demands on time and the limited immediate utility of committee meetings, people are choosing not to attend.

Roles, responsibilities and membership

- Amongst stakeholders, there is a limited understanding of the roles and responsibilities of sector representatives at the district level beyond the MoGCDSW, even in Dedza, where the harmonised DSSC was introduced in November 2016. Rather, the DSSC was viewed as an institution for the oversight of the SCTP and there seems to be limited buy-in from other sectors and programmes. There are several reasons for the limited buy-in that are outlined in Box 5.

- **Questions around the appropriateness of the DPD chairing the DSSC.** While in theory the DPD is the appropriate chair of the DSSC (the DPD is the chair of all sub-committees), stakeholders questioned whether he/she is necessarily the best person to chair the DSSC, as the DPD has limited incentives to drive the activities of different subcommittees; it is not something on which their performance is assessed. In addition, DPDs face wide-ranging demands on their time and there is a high turnover of MoLGRD staff.
- **There are ongoing discussions as to which district members participate in the DSSCs.** There is a question around which is the most appropriate officer-level (sector head or programme coordinator) to participate in the DSSC and this will depend on the specific objectives of the DSSC. Meanwhile, representatives from Salima also noted that there should be guidelines for NGO membership of the harmonised DSSC, for in their experience some NGO attend these committees that were not necessarily involved in social protection programming. One SHN Coordinator reported that they were not a member of the DSSC, rather the DEM was a member. In this case, the SHN Coordinator wondered:

“Honestly I do not have any idea [why I am not in the DSSC]. As a person, I feel that there are a lot of experiences which if shared can help to link all the social support programmes and promote progress”.

- **Repetition of responsibilities for individuals and time burdens involved in the sub-committees.** Previous studies have also highlighted that the same district authorities usually participate in each committee which is a huge burden on their time (GIZ, 2015). For instance, sector heads sit on both the DEC as well as many of the subcommittees. In both Balaka and Dedza several respondents reported that they felt that some of the responsibilities of a harmonised DSSC were being undertaken by the District Civil Protection Committee (DCPC). In Dedza it was reported that the DCPC was only active during certain periods of the year, while in Balaka the DC reported that it met quarterly to anticipate and prepare for disasters as well as on a needs-basis due to the proneness of the area to natural hazards. The DCPC coordinates the MVAC, WFP’s Food For Assets (FFA) and PWP but not the SCTP. Here, the DC suggested that the DCPC and DSSC could be merged as they have similar members and similar roles and responsibilities and this would be an effective means of coordinating all social protection programmes.

Reporting and accountability

- **The DSSC has the potential to receive relevant programme information, although there are some challenges relating to NGOs information channels.** Key informants in Balaka indicate that although

the DSSC is only focused on the one programme (SCTP) that other sector heads are members of it makes it easier to get information from the other sectors (government) and to share information with them on the SCTP. However, they still struggle to get information from most NGOs since they have their own targets, set by their donors that they must meet and report on. In general, formal communication channels are narrow and focus on reporting on programme implementation progress.

- **Unclear lines of accountability of DEC subcommittees, including the DSSC.** Given the dual reporting arrangements discussed above, it becomes unclear who is holding not just individuals, but also

Box 5 Reasons for limited buy-in of MNSSP II programmes into the harmonised DSSCs

- Lack of clarity over the function and objectives of the harmonised DSSC and how this differs from the SCTP-DSSC
- The SCTP undertakes regular beneficiary payments throughout the year and so there is a reason for a coordination forum focused around SCTP activities. Meanwhile, PWP only take place for a few months of the year – the Director of Public Works asked what would be the purpose of him sitting in DSSC meetings throughout the year.
- The harmonised DSSC is an initiative of MoFEPD and was launched by MoFEPD representatives. Sector heads argued that there had been insufficient orientation given about the roles of the committee particularly for those representatives beyond the SCTP. They were also not aware of any ToR for the DSSC.
- When compared to the SCTP DSSC, the harmonised DSSC includes additional representatives from Youth and from NGOs. Otherwise, respondents from Dedza noted that the membership of the two DSSCs is the same (see Box 3 which presents the structure of the harmonised DSSC, as outlined in the ToR). The main reported change which has taken place with the harmonised DSSC is that the Secretariat is now with the District Social Welfare Office (DSWO), while previously the District M&E Officer (a representative of MoLGRD) was the Secretary. The reasons behind this re-assignment of secretarial responsibilities are unclear, but it is likely to have reinforced the impression that the DSSC is a committee for oversight solely of the SCTP.

coordination subcommittees, at the district level to account. Indeed, a key weakness of the current coordination arrangements at the district level is limited accountability, particularly of the DSSC. This is also closely related to limited clarity over the roles, responsibilities and objectives of the subcommittee. In particular, there are no performance metrics for assessing the work of the subcommittee.

Institutional capacity

- **Challenges related to capacity and institutional memory.** DEC subcommittees tend to have high membership turnover with *ad hoc* orientation and/or induction activities (Kamanga, 2015). There is also the challenge of the rotation of MoLGRD civil servants at the district level, with them regularly being shifted from one location to another. Meanwhile there are few formal handovers or regular documenting of processes. The result is that there is little institutional memory at the district level (Simon, 2016). This was evident in Dedza where there was currently no DPD and there had been three different DPDs since February 2015 when the UBR started. This is particularly detrimental to the effective functioning of a range of subcommittees, including the DSSC, as it is the role of the DPD to chair these.

Box 6 Reasons for limited buy-in of MNSSP II programmes into the harmonised DSSCs

- Chair: Director of Planning and Development (DPD)
- District Agricultural Development Officer (DADO)
- Education (School Meals) – School Health and Nutrition Coordinator
- District Education Manager (DEM)
- District Health Officer (DHO)
- District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO)
- District Irrigation Officer (DIO)
- District Forestry Officer (DFO)
- District Youth Officer (DYO)
- District Community Development Officer (DCDO)
- Assistant Disaster Risk Management Officer (ADRM)
- NGO Network Representative plus one implementing agency
- M&E Officer (M&EO)
- Director of Public Works (DPW)
- Director of Finance (DOF)
- MIS Officer (MISO)

Overall, despite the harmonised DSSC not yet functioning as intended in Dedza, all individuals consulted at the district level thought that, in principle, the idea of a harmonised DSSC with responsibilities for the oversight of all MNSSP programmes was worth pursuing.

3.6 Overview of sub-district coordination structures

The implementation and coordination mechanisms of the MNSSP is less clear at the sub-district level, although key institutions are the **Area Development Committees (ADC)** and **Village Development Committees (VDC)**, which work with **Community Social Support**

Committees (CSSC) to oversee implementation of social support activities with special emphasis on targeting.

This section provides an overview of the primary institutional structures at the sub-district level which are relevant for social protection implementation and oversight, and discusses their strengths and weaknesses in implementing and coordinating social protection activities.

It is important to note that, in terms of governance structures at the sub-district level, traditional leaderships and administrative units continue to operate alongside elected representatives and institutions. Below the district is the Traditional Authority (TA). There are approximately 250 Traditional Authorities in Malawi that are overseen by hereditary TA positions – the geographical areas and population of these TAs varies.

Box 7 Committees at the Traditional Authority level

Area Executive Committee

- The **Area Executive Committee (AEC)** comprises of Government extension workers from across sectors, including from agriculture, community development and education. The AEC is elected from all extension workers for a period of three years. It is supposed to meet monthly. The AEC provides technical oversight and advice on project implementation. Other technical committees report into it – including the health advisory committees, school committees and agricultural stakeholder committees. The AEC also provides technical advice for the development of **Village Level Action Plans (VLAP)**, in the implementation of PWP and SMP. It is important to note that there is no committee which reports into the AEC for the SCTP; rather individual extension workers provide this link. In addition to the AEC chair being a member of the ADC, AEC members are also members of VDCs at the lower level. This is to help the VDC members to understand better how decisions about development interventions are made.

Area Civil Protection Committee (ACPC)

- The role of the ACPC is to assess situations of emergencies emanating from natural hazards such as floods, drought and storms. Following a natural hazard, they assess levels of damage, the number of victims and present this information and recommendations to the District Civil Protection Committee (DCPC). ACPC members are selected from all the **Group Village Heads (GVH)** in the area, who are members of the **Village Civil Protection Committee (VCPC)** at the lower level.

Community Social Support Committee

- The **Community Social Support Committee (CSSC)** is responsible for the implementation of the SCTP, including, alongside Community Development Assistants (CDAs), for community sensitisation and awareness raising as well as for beneficiary selection and a certain degree of beneficiary monitoring/ advising. Given the varied population sizes at the GVH level, CSSCs are at the level of clusters, with one cluster comprising 800–1,500 households. These committees comprise approximately nine people, selected locally based on their education-levels and trustworthiness. The CSSC is supported by, and reports to, extension workers who then report to representatives of the MoGCDSW at the district-level.

Village Development Committee

- At the GVH level, the **Village Development Committee (VDC)** is present. It comprises a cross-section of the population. It is the umbrella committee at the GVH level – in other words – all committees at this level should report into it. VDCs then report into the ADC, where the chairmen are represented. The VDC is responsible for overseeing the implementation of PWP (and in theory, the other programmes too, but they often by-pass the VDC as discussed further below).

Village Civil Protection Committee

- The **Village Civil Protection Committee (VCPC)** is concerned with assessing damage following natural hazards and supporting the response. It reports to the ACPC.

Below the TAs are the sub-Traditional Authority (STA). Below the STA is the Group Village Head (GVH) level, made up from each village which has a hereditary Village Headman. A Group Village Head (GVH) is selected by the chiefs and has authority over five or more villages. This means that the GVH area and population varies markedly across the country.

At the TA level, the **Area Development Committee (ADC)** represents formal Governance structure. The objectives of the ADC include resolving problems which arise in the villages, reporting issues affecting the area to the DC and referring technical programme issues to the **Area Executive Committee (AEC)** (see below).

The AEC comprises Government extension workers from across sectors, including from agriculture, community development and education. The ADC Secretary is the chair of the **Area Executive Committee (AEC)**, while the Traditional Authority (also a hereditary position that has responsibility for the administrative unit of the TA) acts as an advisor to the ADC. The ADC is the umbrella committee at the TA level – in other words, all other committees at this level should report into it. The ADC itself may report to the Councillor and the TA, as it is the responsibility of these two individuals to update the District Council. Other committees at the TA level are presented in Box 7.

There are also a range of other committees at the village or community level. These include village committees and those on water management and forestry. There are no committees at the village level for social protection or for disaster response. The ‘lowest’ level committee for social protection is the CSSC, described above, which is exclusively for the SCTP and is at a ‘cluster’ level; a unit derived for administration of the programme.

3.7 Strengths and weaknesses of sub-district coordination structures

In theory, all information on social protection programmes should flow-up through the VDC and ADC structures to the district-level. The same should take place with information coming from the district; it should be channelled downwards through the various local government structures, from the ADC and AEC down to the VDC. The discussion below, drawn from key informant interviews in Balaka and Dedza, illustrates a number of issues identified in coordinating and implementing social protection programmes at the sub-district level in practice.

In particular, the following key findings emerged:

- There is a general lack of understanding around what coordination means at the local level, and who is responsible for specific roles and ensuring coordination.

A key finding from fieldwork in Balaka and Dedza is that the roles and responsibilities of different committees and individuals in relation to coordination and linkages are not always clear. This is the case for both members of that committee and for people outside the committee. As noted by an AEC Chair in Dedza ‘we are moving ignorantly’ and are operating ‘by the grace of God’, having neither an initial orientation or training nor having seen a ToR for the committee. CSSC members in Balaka district noted that one of their tasks is trying to ensure that SCTP beneficiaries are not left out of other programmes. They note that *“some people in the communities speak ill about them [SCTP beneficiaries] and think they receive a lot of money and do not want them to benefit from other programmes.”* This desire that SCTP and PWP beneficiaries do not ‘double-dip’ in terms of benefiting from more than one programme was also stressed by beneficiaries in Dedza. Indeed, in Dedza it is unclear to AEC members whether people should be able to benefit from multiple programmes or not. As they note; *“this is outside our knowledge. There are sometimes disparities in knowledge between us and the district so it is not always clear to us.”*

It is unclear to stakeholders who is responsible for facilitating linkages for SCTP beneficiaries. In particular, whether this was the role of the CSSC or whether it is the role of extension workers.

In relation to the UBR, just a few AEC members interviewed in Dedza were involved in data collection, despite, in theory, this being a responsibility of the AEC. There were also varied reports from stakeholders in Dedza over who collects the UBR data – whether it was the AEC or the CSSC (extension workers reported that they collected it with the CSSC guiding them to the houses). The involvement of the CSSC in UBR data collection has also contributed to a degree of confusion by community members over the purpose of data collection.

- There is no one committee or sub-committee which aims to provide coordination or oversight for all social protection programmes at the sub-district level. Rather, implementation and oversight is done through separate committees and/or Government extension workers.

While VDCs and ADCs have a role in the oversight and implementation of PWP, they are not involved in the other MNSSP programmes; the SCTP, SMP or VSLs. Each of these uses its own committees; the CSSC in the case of the SCTP, school committees for SMP and the VSLs rely on Community Development Assistants (CDA). In Dedza, the ADC noted that it would like to be involved in the implementation and oversight of the SCTP. However, a clear reason was not given about why they feel this should be the case. Meanwhile, representatives of the Ministry of Civic Education, Culture and Community Development (MoCECD) felt

that it made sense for the CSSC to play a role in all social protection programmes; overseeing them all to ensure they are implemented to a high standard.

There has been some discussion as to whether social protection committees and ACPC committees have similar roles and responsibilities. However, interviewees suggested that despite partially overlapping mandates in theory in practice, it was possible to separate the roles and responsibilities of the ACPC and the range of committees implementing MNSSP programmes. In Balaka, ACPC members said that their committee does not really link with the CSSC, with the exception of the 2016 MVAC, which included all SCTP beneficiaries on a pilot basis, during the SCTP/MVAC Automatic Inclusion Pilot. In relation to PWP, though, the ACPC chair points to an interesting linkage;

“Sometimes we receive public works programme to do with afforestation, let’s say to plant trees in a given area, so VDCs work hand in hand with ACPC and VCPC in the implementation of the project and this has really helped in the success and sustainability of the project because ACPC continue to mobilise people to take care of the trees even after the public works is over by instilling a sense of ownership in the community”.

This is just one instance where local initiatives were reported to be promoting programme linkages. As noted by the MNSSP stakeholder review (MoFEPD, 2016), many linkages between MNSSP programmes and between these programmes and other sectors are ‘neither guided by a specific policy nor facilitated through shared administrative systems’ but rather are the initiative of local actors.

- Whilst the ADC, AEC and VDC are Government structures in which communication, coordination and oversight of the various social protection programmes could take place, only the implementation of the PWP and SMP utilise these. The SCTP has created parallel structures to these local Government forums, and many NGOs in practice do not participate either.

Technical committees at the sub-district level – TA, GVH or village – are largely separate committees, rather than subcommittees of local Government structures – the ADC or VDC. Vertical coordination between the ADC and VDC is promoted through chairs of the ADC sitting on the VDC, while horizontal coordination between the ADC and AEC is encouraged through the chair of the AEC acting as the secretary of the ADC. However, it is noteworthy that there is no prescribed membership of CSSC on the ADC. According to a TA in Balaka, if ADC membership included one member from every vital social protection committee then this would enhance coordination and relationships between the committees. The ADC in Dedza and the ACPC in Balaka both

thought it was important either for one VDC member or for one ADC member also to be a CSSC member so that information on the SCTP can be shared.

- Lines of accountability are unclear to stakeholders and often circumvent local Government structures, such as the ADC

In terms of issues around accountability, according to a TA in Balaka, the ADC has the mandate to obtain reports on progress from and to monitor the activities of all committees in the area. Most are complying with the ADC request, including the ACPC where the chair notes that *“this helps us to work hard and be accountable”*. However, the TA notes that the CSSC is not complying. This is supported by the CSSC where members explain that they do not report to the local government structure as they are accountable to the district social welfare office.

Beneficiaries, meanwhile, point to the limitations of downwards accountability mechanisms. There are two predominant issues here. The first is the lack of effective grievance handling mechanisms. The SCTP is the only programme in the MNSSP to have a grievance and redress system. MVAC, meanwhile, has suggestion boxes, but beneficiaries didn’t feel that those boxes got to the appropriate authorities. The second issue relates to an unwillingness to complain about seemingly arbitrary programme decisions. As explained by a group of social protection beneficiaries in Balaka; *“we suffer in silence”* and are afraid to raise their concerns either about or with local committees because if they do they may not be able to benefit from any other external assistance programme.

- The SCTP has largely avoided involvement of traditional structures (such as the chief or TA) and of local Government committees including the VDCs and ADCs and has also made few attempts to ensure regular communication with them.

This lack of engagement with traditional structures has resulted in lack of awareness, oversight and contribution by traditional and local Government structures, as explained by a TA in Balaka;

“I can say that for most of these committees we know what they do and report to me, the VDC and ADC. But this committee overseeing the cash transfer programme I have never heard from them nor do they report anything. I am totally blank about their work because we are not involved at any level. We just see them when its payment day passing this place to the payment centre but we have never heard anything or the problems that are there”

This view is supported by members of a CSSC interviewed in Balaka who noted that they have no channels of communication with ADCs or VDCs and, since beginning their work, have only met once with

these committees. This meeting was to address the limited perceived understanding of the SCTP amongst local Government structures and the view that SCTP beneficiaries should not be benefiting from other programmes, such as VSLs or MVAC. This meeting was an initiative of the CSSC. The CSSC also reported that they do not work with chiefs and only engage them where there are pressing problems facing SCTP beneficiaries. They also note that chiefs are unwilling to engage in the programme or to convey messages on its behalf. They view this lack of cooperation as undermining the credibility of the programme as local communities generally believe more easily what is conveyed directly by chiefs than ordinary community members even when these hold positions in development committees. A representative of the MoEST in Balaka illustrates the potentially positive role which chiefs can play;

“I was impressed with what one village head is doing to lobby for workforce at the school garden. He made it mandatory that people should only go to public works after working in the school garden and you can be surprised that their school garden looks smart... I wish we could for example link these programmes and benefit the people.”

- **DPs tend to establish their own committees for programme implementation.**

District, sub-district and national level key informants, all pointed out that the underlying reason for DPs establishing their own committees is because ADCs and VDCs are often not functioning or are deemed to be prone to (financial) mismanagement. In order to ensure effective implementation many projects have therefore bypassed these structures. Respondents thought that this has largely enabled successful implementation and delivery of projects in the short-term but is likely to lead to duplication and inefficiencies in the future. Many stakeholders pointed to the importance of trying to support the capacity building of ADCs and VDCs at the same time as implementing through parallel structures. Particularly in Balaka, respondents pointed to the success of NGO-training for ADCs and VDCs, though this training has largely been project-specific rather than more general capacity building including around committee governance and transparency. However, overall there is a feeling that previous capacity-building initiatives haven't resulted in the outcomes hoped for.

One discussion was, if ADCs and VDCs were functioning, whether all project activities should be undertaken by them – so eliminating the need for other technical committees. However, this was not felt to be a desirable option by both ADC and VDC members as well as other stakeholders. They thought that it would overwhelm a few people with too many tasks and responsibilities and could also encourage elite-capture

and abuse of power by the few who are members of these committees.

Instead, respondents felt that better linking and enabling information sharing between existing committees was a preferable option. As explained by the member of an ADC in Balaka;

“To bring all the functions of these committees into ADC and VDC is not realistic, it will mean putting too much work on a few individuals and the quality will be compromised. Look these committees are well oriented on their roles and they are focused to manage the programmes. As such leaving all these to ADC and VDC will be a very big task to the few people and you know these committees help to deal with biasness and abuse of these functions because everybody is afraid that a lot of people are watching but leaving it in the hands of ADC and VDC will lead into problems of transparency and accountability”.

- **There are bottlenecks in communication between district and sub-district structures.**

AEC members note that there is a weakness of vertical communication between the AEC and the district. They point out that when a programme comes to an area it comes through a sector Ministry and the AEC is not informed; ‘we remain somehow ignorant of what is happening’ explain AEC members in Dedza. They stress the importance of information flowing through the AEC members and not just being passed to the sector leading on the project. While their role is to provide technical advice to improve projects in the area, they, however, struggle to fulfil that role as information is often not being passed through the AEC.

Several stakeholders at the sub-district level pointed to the importance of fora to share information. This would be particularly important to share lessons on experiences of local initiatives for programme linkages (as discussed above). For CSSC and AEC members, exchange visits to committees that are working well were seen as important. While this is happening to a certain extent at the intra-district level it was also thought to be important to inaugurate inter-district learning visits as well. Social protection beneficiaries, meanwhile, pointed-out that there is no one forum where issues about all social support programmes and the relationship between these different programmes are introduced and discussed at the village level on a regular basis. Rather, they see that there are awareness raising sessions and sensitisation for particular programmes.

- **The functioning of committees at the sub-district level are challenged by restricted resources and capacity and unclear lines of accountability.**

Except for extension workers in the AEC, members of other committees are voluntary; though they may receive allowances for specific tasks. Members of the CSSC interviewed in Balaka, explained that the only support they receive is a lunch allowance, usually when they supervise the disbursement of transfers. However, this is inadequate mainly due to the irregularity of transfer payments with disbursements sometimes only taking place once in six months. Moreover, while the CSSC members view their role as having huge opportunity costs, other community members, given their understanding of the substantive payments that SCTP beneficiaries are receiving, believe that the CSSC is getting paid and this can generate tensions. The MNSSP stakeholder review (MoFEPD 2016) also highlights concerns that the SCTP is so reliant on volunteers and that this has implications for the reliability, effectiveness and sustainability of the newly-formed CSSCs. In addition, some district staff expressed concerns that CSSC members often also sit on other local committees, so limiting the time and energy which they can dedicate to the CSSC.

AEC members in both Balaka and Dedza also highlight having no funding to operationalise meetings, which means that meetings are not called regularly (they are expected to meet every month) and when they are, attendance is usually low. In addition, as explained in Balaka; *“most members are busy people and time is a problem.”* For extension workers in the AEC it is not just that they are busy, but also that they have limited control over their time as they are often informed of

tasks at the last minute and end up being pulled in different directions by different sectors and different organisations. In Balaka, a key informant reports that extension workers end-up working on some DP projects more or less as volunteers.

Members of all committees report limitations in terms of both initial orientation and regular training. Social protection beneficiaries in Balaka observe that VDCs and ADCs are dysfunctional largely because they are neither given support nor monitored by the district level staff. They also note that some of the VDCs and ADCs that have been trained or properly oriented in their roles by NGOs are doing reasonably well. They are reasonably transparent and accountable.

CSSC members note a lack of regular orientation sessions with district level staff on their roles, particularly when compared to committees that are facilitated by NGOs. This view is supported by the SCTP coordinator who notes that they are supposed to meet with CSSCs bimonthly on case management and other related issues but rarely do that due to administrative and logistical challenges (including transport). Funding is also not always adequate to permit these meetings to take place. It is not just that training is not as regular as committee members would like but, that when it occurs, it is not considered to be very thorough. AEC members note how district staff are very busy and because of this they do not provide sufficient time for a training session, giving the example that they may get two hours of training when really 1–2 days is required.

4 Conclusion

The findings discussed above have shown that on the one hand, there are a number of coordination mechanisms and functions which are working relatively well, but on the other hand, there are challenges within the current institutional coordination structure which require attention and improvements.

Starting first with the positives, at the national level, stakeholders view the PRSP division as the appropriate institution to be coordinating and leading policy of the MNSSP. Interviewees also noted that the coordination structure at the national level offers the opportunity for relevant line ministries, donors and DPs to communicate and share information through the TWGs and the NSSTC. Moreover, at the district level, there is optimism that the harmonised DSSCs can be a future opportunity to provide coordinated oversight of social protection programmes. The experience of the UBR roll-out 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.

In terms of the challenges, the findings from this study pointed to a number of areas in need of improvement. Whilst the social protection policy (NSSP) and programme (MNSSP) appear clear at the national level, with stakeholders largely understanding and sharing the vision of the NSSPP and MNSSP, at the sub-national level the understanding of social protection – and the MNSSP – is not clear. Moreover, across the MNSSP actors there is uncertainty about what coordination looks like in practice – at both the policy and the programmatic and operational levels, with the exception of few examples (e.g. the UBR).

Whilst some aspects of the committees are working relatively well, not all the coordination committees are functioning as intended. At the national level, the NSSSC and NSSTC are mainly used to share information rather than to discuss and engage in technical issues and strategic decision-making across the MNSSP. The existing coordination structure lends itself to *intra-programme* coordination through the set-up of the TWG by social protection instrument, and the limited opportunity to communicate horizontally across the TWGs (as well as the Task Forces). This problem is replicated at the district and sub-district levels as committees here are also designed by programme component.

The functioning of the structures which are supposed to oversee linkages and coordination between MNSSP programmes – e.g. the NSSTC, DC, ADCs and VDCs – all face challenges to their effective functioning in practice for various reasons. Whilst the NSSTC at the

national level could, in theory, provide the strategic oversight and promote the linkages and coherence envisioned in the MNSSP, this is undermined by limited attendance (especially of staff at the correct levels of seniority), limited attention to strategy and agenda setting, few incentives for the efficient functioning of the committee and limited vertical coordination and information sharing with the TWGs. Indeed, there is variation in the success of the TWGs – and the fact that some programmes also have established separate meeting groups to discuss technical and functional issues raises questions about the objectives of the TWGs and undermines the importance of the TWGs, as key discussions do not take place in those fora.

Specific information sharing and communication bottlenecks have been identified between district and national level through the TWGs. The 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 decisions creating a bottleneck within the system. The 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 DC not always being informed of the activities of NGOs and DPs 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.

Underlying these challenges are both pragmatic and structural issues.

For example, across all levels, key informants interviews highlighted the challenges of understaffing and limited funding of social protection coordination mechanisms, and the limited capacity of staff members to fulfil their responsibilities – this is often a result of limited understanding of their roles and/or overburdened time, as well as technical capacity gaps. Moreover, as mentioned above, it is reported that the harmonisation and coordination objectives of the MNSSP are not well articulated or understood in practice, leading to limited understanding of the manner in which coordination is to be implemented in practice.

Whilst some of the pragmatic challenges may be relatively easy to overcome, there are also more fundamental structural issues underpinning the above

challenges. These relate to issues of 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. Part of the problem is that the PRSP division faces limited authority to hold line ministries and other implementers to account. This is because the lines of accountability are often unclear and implementing agencies tend to bypass the PRSP. Instead, implementers report directly to their line ministries or to international donors (where the funding comes from). Whilst there are some specific tools, such as performance management contracts, which the PRSP division could leverage to ensure reporting and compliance from implementers, more fundamentally, stakeholders note that there seem to be limits to the capacity of the PRSP division, as a pure coordinator without strong links to programme implementation, with no control over programme funding and with limited resources at the sub-national level, to ensure and enforce coordination.

Moreover, as MoFEPD has no presence at the sub-national level, the MNSSP coordination structure is split across the national and district-level, creating a gap in reporting and accountability lines to the PRSP from the district level. Indeed, the lack of clear information

from programme implementation at the district level feeding up into the PRSP division, limits the authority and convening power of the PRSP to coordinate at the national level. The role of the MoLGRD within the MNSSP coordination structure is, in theory, supposed to bridge this gap – as in the context of decentralisation the local government structures such as the DC, the ADC and VDCs have responsibility for coordination of the social protection programmes – but in practice, there is little consistency of the five social protection programmes’ implementation and oversight within these structures. Instead, PWP and SMP use sector-specific and local government structures, VSLs and MF operate outside these structures through NGOs and CSOs with varying degrees of interaction with the local government committees, and the SCTP operates separate local government structures at the local level, such as the DSSC and CSSC.

As such, making changes to the current institutional coordination structure, and incentivising more effective functioning of the committees, would go some way to overcome these challenges. However, there are also some more fundamental underlying challenges which prevent greater coordination and coherence of the MNSSP, and will require more systemic changes in institutional arrangements.

These are discussed in Section 5.

5 Options for strengthening institutional arrangements in the social protection sector

This final section presents options to encourage further discussion on how to improve MNSSP coordination and coherence. These options should be considered alongside other recent recommendations on strengthening capacity and coordination within the social protection sector in Malawi (e.g. Kamanga, 2016).

The options include practical suggestions for improving the functioning of existing coordination mechanisms within the current institutional coordination framework, adapting that framework to better achieve the objectives of the MNSSP at the sub-district, district and national levels, and then exploring alternative institutional arrangements to overcome fragmentation and promote greater authority and leadership to coordinate the social protection sector⁵.

The options are divided into the following:

- Tools for improving coordination within existing institutional arrangements across the MNSSP structure;
- Options for improving coordination and coherence within current institutional arrangements;
- Options for alternative institutional arrangements.

5.1 Options for improving coordination: Tools for improving coordination within existing institutional arrangements

Before discussing specific options for improving institutional coordination at the sub-district, district and national levels, there are **cross-cutting issues that are relevant to improve the functioning of coordination across all levels and committees** which would enable existing coordination structures to work better. These relate to:

- Formalising and fulfilling roles and responsibilities and establishing institutional partnerships for coordination;
- Monitoring progress and enhancing accountability for coordination;
- Building capacity for effective governance and coordination;
- Strengthening DP coordination and reducing fragmentation;
- Improving communication and awareness across MNSSP actors;
- Encouraging political commitment at national and district levels to strengthen participation in MNSSP, including in coordination roles.

1. Formalising and fulfilling roles and responsibilities and establishing institutional partnerships for coordination

Some of the key challenges identified in this study pointed to a lack of effective functioning of committee meetings. This included meetings being called at short-notice, limited participation of relevant members (especially at the higher level of government), agendas not being well formulated in advance, meetings focusing on sharing information rather than discussing strategic issues, meeting action points not being taken up and acted on etc. Moreover, there is no reported action plan for coordination which sets out how programmes could coordinate and harmonise their activities in practice.

Recognising that the revised MNSSP II has explicit strategic action on coordination and a dedicated chapter on linkages, there still remains a need to incentivise and strengthen capacity of members of the DSSCs, ADCs, AECs and VDCs and national level committees, the TWGs, NSSTC and NSSSC, to adequately fulfil their

⁵ See also Annex 2 which provides a brief overview of relevant international experiences of institutional coordination.

roles and ensure meetings are conducted and scheduled and as intended. Box 8 highlights that there are some existing committees which are running quite effectively in Malawi, and lessons can be learnt from these as well as international experiences.

There are a number of tools which can be used to address these challenges. These include:

- **Formalise roles and responsibilities between the PRSP and line ministries and DPs** across the MNSSP coordination structure (including between national and sub-district level) through MoUs.
- **Establish 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.
- **Orient committees on the purpose and function of the MNSSP coordination roles by establishing ToRs, which spell out clearly the roles and responsibilities for each committee and members** at the sub-district, district and national level, focussing on how to achieve coordination and harmonisation in practice and ensure that all members are aware of the ToRs and their specific roles and responsibilities.

2. Monitoring progress and improving accountability for coordination

Stakeholders consistently highlighted the need to clarify and strengthen lines of accountability of implementers towards key MNSSP coordination structures at all levels, including the need to improve regular monitoring

and evaluation for programmes. Strategic actions to strengthen accountability include the following:

- **Develop an implementation plan for coordination across the MNSSP**, including explicit objectives, activities and deliverables related to coordination roles and responsibilities *at all levels* (this could be set at one-year intervals) with monitorable milestones;
- **Monitor the performance of committees and key members in line with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.** In holding committees and key members accountable to their roles, consider using:
 - **Greater checks (and possibly sanctions) for example through performance contracts** (as used in Kenya and Rwanda, see Box 9), which have been found to improve programme performance and institutional processes, including upwards and downwards accountability mechanisms (African Development Bank, 2012; World Bank, 2013b);
 - **Measures to improve bottom-up accountability such as community scorecards or through the implementation of effective grievance and redress mechanisms**, which should enable community members and beneficiaries to voice potential concerns on programme implementation.

3. Building capacity for effective governance and coordination

Capacity gaps at all levels are considered to be a key impediment towards improved coordination and the following entry-points are recommended in strengthening

Box 8 What can be learnt from other committees in Malawi?

In Malawi, the SCTP Coordination Group is seen as a well-functioning committee. It aims to meet every month. Whilst it sits outside of the MNSSP structure, lessons can be drawn on what works well.

It consists of representatives from the WB, EU, Germany, Ireland, UNICEF, MoGCDSW and the Director of PRSP – there are approximately 12–13 people in the group. Discussions within this group are focused on specific issues, demand-driven, and there is follow-up and deadlines set. It is very operational-focused (e.g. following up on outstanding reports on IT issues, training at the district level, on audits, etc.). Importantly, individuals come to the meeting prepared – they have their points they want to discuss and have read, in advance, the necessary progress updates and reports on specific issues. If they are not ready to meet, they postpone the meeting. Action points are written-up with associated deadlines. There are no formal ToRs but the meeting has a structured regular agenda. It is well chaired by the PS, and is focused on getting to the next tranche of payments. It therefore chiefly focused on programme implementation and there is no separate donor discussion forum – just this one with the government. UNICEF has the responsibility for the agenda and provides secretarial support, such as the preparation and circulation of minutes. The agenda is open and anyone can raise an issue to be discussed.

However, key informant interviewees noted that there is not enough consideration of how this group could link in with the SCTP TWG.

At the sub-district level, the **Village Nutrition Coordination Committees (VNCC)**, are reported to be working better at the village level than the **Community Social Support Committees (CSSC)**. They report to the Area Nutrition Coordination Committee (ANCC). One of the reasons why they are considered to work relatively well is their effort to meet regularly with a range of extension workers. Stakeholders also reported close follow-up on committee activities by extension workers. Extension workers from different ministries, such as health, agriculture, community development, regularly sit with the committee, support and monitor their progress.

Box 9 Improving district-level accountability: The experience of Rwanda and Kenya with performance contracts

In the context of their decentralisation policies, and in the face of severe accountability issues, both **Rwanda and Kenya have adopted the use of performance contracts to strengthen service delivery**. Performance contracts are performance-based management tools, which aim to improve service delivery in either local government systems or line ministries and strengthen accountability processes.

In essence, performance contracts are formal service agreements signed between line ministries, public agencies, and districts (in the case of Rwanda) or between the President's Office and line ministries (as in the case of Kenya) for the latter to reach specific targets on policy actions such as social welfare, good governance and economic development. The performance contract details objectives and measurable indicators, as well as the activities required to achieve them. How these objectives are set depends on the country. In the case of Rwanda for example, they result from the consolidation of both national-level policy priorities and locally-defined needs.

The signatories to the performance contract must then report regularly on their progress in meeting the targets, and are then held publicly to account for their performance. In the case of Rwanda, bi-annual public sessions during which the evaluation of the District Mayors' performance is presented to the public are conducted. Recognition is given to those local authorities which have succeeded, whilst measures to improve performance are identified in districts that have not. In the case of Kenya, the performance of each Ministry is reviewed at the end of the reporting period and the Ministries are ranked in order to success, with the results published in the media.

Both Kenya and Rwanda have seen improvements not only in implementation performance and service delivery, but also reporting and accountability.

capacity, especially those related to effective governance, communication and transparency.

- **Allocate recurrent funding for committee meetings at all levels;**
- **Provide training where necessary on conducting functional and effective coordination meetings:** This may include trainings on how to prepare for meetings in advance, how to draft meeting agendas, how to facilitate coordination meetings to ensure productive outcomes, preparing meeting minutes, how to delegate responsibilities, following up on action points.
- **Build capacity on governance and transparency at all level:** In line with the implementation of the MNSSP II, Government, DPs and other relevant stakeholders should develop and implement a harmonised approach for capacity building on key aspects of governance and transparency, especially at sub-district levels. Areas of focus could include: monitoring and evaluation, information channels and data sharing, as well as approaches to strengthen bottom-up and top-down accountability.

4. Strengthening development partner and donor coordination

Fragmentation within the donor and DP community is a key challenge to enhancing coordination across the MNSSP. Even within programmes (e.g. the SCTP) donor financing and reporting requirements are uncoordinated and place significant demands on line ministries e.g. in

terms of reporting requirements. As such, there is a need to strengthen donor and DP coordination in a way which supports a coordinated social protection approach. In other countries, such as Ethiopia (see Box 10), the role of donor coordination is seen as critical to presenting one "voice" to the government.

Specific actions and tools to strengthen donor coordination include⁶:

- **Develop principles within the donor coordination group to support MoFEPD's coordination role:** This includes identifying specific areas of need for financial and technical support to improve the coordination functions across the MNSSP (including support for technical issues as well as more practical issues around establishing a more systematic support to coordination structures);
- **Developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government, donors and DPs:** This should clarify short-to medium-term priorities of MNSSP II, key principles and activities to guide stakeholder actions, and outlines responsibilities and roles for each DP and how this contributes to a more coherent and coordination approach to social protection;
- **Establish systematic interaction between PRSP and the DP coordination group:** Also consider allocating one or two donors or DP to act as representatives and liaise with the Government on social protection issues on behalf of all donors and DPs.
- **Move forward with social support fund** recommendations of more coherent funding of social protection programming by donors.

6 See also recommendations from GoM's (2016) learning exchange to Ethiopia report

Box 10 Donor coordination in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP) benefits from the financial and technical assistance from nine development partners, and Ethiopia has been lauded as an example of successful coordination between the government and development partners. Steps undertaken by the Government of Ethiopia include:

Firstly, Ethiopia **harmonised all donor funding for the PSNP through a Medium-Term Expenditure and Financing Framework**, which brings together actual and projected expenditures with confirmed and indicative donor commitments to ensure a consistent and timely flow of funds.

Secondly, Ethiopia has been **successful in promoting coherence between donors. In the face of competing priorities, the government led the negotiation of a set of basic principles to guide the design and implementation of the PSNP**. These were laid out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which was signed between the Government of Ethiopia and development partners. The resulting document describes the overarching priorities of the programme and the key principles to guide stakeholder actions. This has helped foster a harmonised approach towards PSNP among both donors and government.

The MoU also led to the creation of two donor coordination mechanisms. The first was the Donor Coordination Team (DCT), which aimed to provide a forum to establish common positions, policy consensus and mechanisms for government engagement. The DCT helped foster an environment of trust and respect amongst all stakeholders, and has become the focal point for donor engagement, providing a venue in which consensus can be built. The MoU also created the Joint Coordination Committee (now Joint Strategic Oversight Committee) which was established to harmonise donors' engagement with the Government and created a framework to promote dialogue. The responsibilities of these structures are included in the PSNP Implementation Plan, thus ensuring that these mechanisms fit strategically in the national social protection coordination framework.

In addition, there was a large core support to the PSNP Secretariat and to building systems and capacity at the national and subnational levels – this included particular technical aspects such as targeting and MIS, but in addition on more generic skills such as power point presentations and communication skills.

5. Improving communication and awareness across MNSSP actors

It is clear that there are a number of information and communication bottlenecks throughout the MNSSP structure which hinder its effective functioning and coordination. Part of the problem is that there is little understanding between the different levels of what each part of the MNSSP structure are doing and how to coordinate from the bottom to the top, and vice versa. This means that in practice, many stakeholders (particularly at the community and district levels) are operating “blindly” as to what coordination means in practice, and what their roles are to achieve greater coordination and coherence. At the national level, a major bottleneck is PRSP division not receiving programme M&E reports from the districts from each of the programmes.

Ways to overcome some of these challenges include:

- Ensure that the MNSSP II document 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 coordination structure of the MNSSP II, not just the national level, which details the various committees' roles, responsibilities and how they relate to another.

- Running a sensitisation campaign from the national through to the local level on what the MNSSP coordination and harmonisation objectives are and how they can be achieved (e.g. as in Rwanda – see Box 11). This could be done through awareness raising and the use of media. This also needs to include promoting the MNSSP as a coherent set of programmes to the ADCs and VDCs as well as at the community-level to try and tackle the aversion to ‘double-dipping’, as well as focusing on national level political actors to improve political commitment to social protection.
- Ensure that all relevant actors can access information on social protection to encourage synergies across programmes, e.g. establish a database of MNSSP information hosted by PRSP to enable access to relevant information and to provide evidence on the impacts of social protection in Malawi.
- Ensuring that programme communications strategies (e.g. the SCTP) have an explicit focus on coordination and harmonisation.

6. Encouraging political commitment at national and district levels

The functioning of the higher-level coordination committees (NSSTC and NSSSC) are dependent on the participation of high-level government officials. As such, there should be continued emphasis on ensuring political buy-in and strengthening of high-level political

Box 11 Bringing the social protection vision from the national to the district and local level: Rwanda's experience

During the implementation of the Vision Umurenge Program (VUP) in Rwanda, similar issues with the challenges of understanding of programme objectives at the District and sub-district levels were observed. In order to address this issue and strengthen staff knowledge and capacity, the government used television and radio shows, as well as newspaper articles and sensitisation meetings to inform local leaders and the general public of the VUP programme. Training and awareness raising around the VUP programmes, policies and procedures were conducted for VUP staff at the national and sector levels, as well as for District Vice-Mayors in charge of Social Affairs and NGO partners.

Procedure manuals were also created for each component of the VUP. And finally, technical training was conducted on specific programme components (including on different M&E activities, financial management and reporting) for VUP staff. The objective of these training programmes was to ensure staff and other stakeholders at all levels had a good understanding of the programme and that implementation of policies and procedures was consistent.

commitment to the MNSSP and high-level participation in relevant meetings. Key suggestions are outlined below:

- Promote collaborative agenda setting to the coordination meetings to ensure that they function as intended and participants are active and motivated to participate in the committees.
- **Engage Parliament and the Cabinet Committee on Social Development:** Since the cabinet committee is the highest level of the MNSSP structure, there should be consideration over what needs to be done to push issues relating to social protection to capture the attention of the cabinet, given that at present it is not convened regularly.
- **At the district level, emphasis should be placed on increasing engagement, and communication, with political actors including the chief, TA and Councillor.** This is not the same as saying that they should play an active role in key aspects of programme implementation (e.g. targeting). Rather, they should be fully informed of programme activities. There is a need to switch from viewing them solely as problems to ignore or to engage with only if necessary (e.g. in instances of complaints) to trying to actively engage them as 'champions' of social protection.

5.2 Options for improving coordination: Adapting institutional coordination structures at the sub-district, district and national levels

Having discussed practical suggestions for improving the functioning of existing coordination mechanisms within the current institutional coordination framework, the following section suggests a range of distinct ways the current framework could be adapted to better achieve the objectives of the MNSSP at the sub-district, district and national levels. These options are based on the analysis presented above, and variations of these options have been discussed with social protection stakeholders

during key informant interviews and the co-creation conference in Lilongwe.

5.2.1 Options for improving coordination at the sub-district level

Specific options for institutional arrangements and coordination at the sub-district level are:

Option 1.1: Maintain all existing committees, build their capacity and encourage reporting into the AEC or VDC

All committees responsible for programme implementation and oversight (such as the CSSC) would also be encouraged to report into the AEC or VDC at regular intervals as well as into their respective sector and technical committees. One way through which information flows between programme implementation committees and ADCs and VDCs could be improved is through representatives from programme committees also being members of one of these two local government structures. Meanwhile, there is a need not just to build the capacity of individual members of these committees, but also of the enabling institutional environment for local governance and development. Further, ToRs would be developed for all committees and they would be given regular orientations on their roles, responsibilities and reporting requirements.

Option 1.2: Maintain all existing committees, build their capacity and introduce a harmonised forum for grievances to avoid duplication of roles.

Of programmes in the MNSSP, currently only the SCTP has a mechanism for grievances and redress. Clearly it is important that other programmes also develop such a mechanism. As we understand this is under discussion, we also propose that a harmonised grievance mechanism for all programmes is developed. While this doesn't directly address coordination *per se* it does provide an entry-point for harmonising the procedures of the different social protection programmes and so moves the MNSSP programmes towards greater integration.

Option 1.3: Abolish existing committees and establish programme-specific subcommittees under the ADC and VDC.

Currently MNSSP programme committees (such as those for the SCTP and PWP) all operate separately and report to different programme coordinators at the district level, in addition to sporadic reporting into the ADC or VDC. Under this option, these existing MNSSP committees would be abolished. In their place, a range of local government subcommittees (subcommittees of the ADC and VDC) would be established to oversee the different social protection programmes.

Integrating *with* local government structures, rather than by-passing them, means that (i) it is prescribed that members of the ADC or VDC would also sit on the committees that oversee MNSSP, programmes ensuring ADCs and VDCs have full information to coordinate the programmes effectively; and (ii) the reporting lines for MNSSP programme committees are clearly into the ADC or VDC, and that these subcommittees are accountable to those local government committees, rather than also to programme-coordinators at the district level.

Option 1.4: Create a harmonised social protection committee at the sub-district level.

This committee would be at a level above the village – perhaps at the level of a cluster or GVH and report directly into the AEC. This committee would be responsible for all social protection programmes. If this committee is established, then it would be necessary to ensure that members have both sufficient training and orientation and receive some regular remuneration. However, technical officers at VDC and ADC levels would serve as secretariats to facilitate proper documentation of the discussions, observations and recommendations for onward transmission to the district level structures and authorities for appropriate action.

Option 1.5: Integrate a harmonised social protection committee with the ACPC.

If a harmonised social protection committee is created (as proposed in Option 1.4) then this could also be combined with the ACPC. This makes particular sense if there are plans to link MVAC with the SCTP or for VCPCs to be involved in the implementation and maintenance of PWP. This committee would again report into the ADC. The advantages of this arrangement are that there will be a committee in place year-round to be preparing for natural disasters, as well as to respond to them. One potential disadvantage of this is that it places social protection squarely within the framework of resilience building and disaster risk reduction and so could move discussions on social protection away from the objective of ensuring basic needs across the life cycle.

5.2.2 Options for improving coordination at the district level

Specific options for coordination and institutional arrangements at the district level are:

Option 2.1: Roll-out the harmonised DSSC to all districts and ‘re-launch’ it in districts where it has already been introduced.

This would support an integrated approach to social protection to facilitate buy-in from other sectors, and by re-launching the committee it would ensure distance from seeing the DSSC as solely responsible for the SCTP. This would include giving DSSC members a proper orientation and perhaps even re-naming the sub-committee so that it is less associated with the SCTP. It may make most sense to launch the harmonised DSSC alongside the implementation of the UBR so that there is a focal purpose for the sub-committee. (Re)-launching the harmonised DSSC would involve:

- Incorporating lessons from District Nutrition Coordination Committees (DNCC) on close cooperation with extension workers and the importance of regular meetings;
- Providing an orientation to include the specifics of roles and responsibilities;
- Involving a range of departments in the orientation in addition to MoFEPD;
- Clarify financing arrangements for committee membership;
- Re-assessing whether MoGCDSW representatives are most appropriate to be the Secretary;
- Re-assessing whether the DPD is, in every district, always the most suitable chair;
- In districts where the SCTP has yet to be rolled-out considering first introducing the DSSC as a harmonised committee, rather than one solely for SCTP implementation and oversight.

Option 2.2: Streamline DSSC membership to comprise sector heads and MNSSP programme coordinators and coordinators of programmes directly relevant for social protection.

This would mean removing representatives from those ministries which do not have overall responsibility for implementation of one of the five social protection programmes such as representatives from agriculture, finance, health and youth. Meanwhile, programme coordinators of MNSSP programmes, such as the SCTP Coordinator and School Meals Coordinator, would be added as members of the DSSC, alongside their respective sector heads. Representatives of all the MNSSP programmes would then be responsible for reporting to and updating the DSSC when it meets.

There remains scope for sector heads of areas ‘directly relevant’ for MNSSP implementation and programme linkages to be DSSC members. These representatives can change over time, depending on MNSSP priorities in each district. However, the primary responsibility for linkages of MNSSP programmes with programmes beyond the MNSSP would not lie with the DSSC. Instead, coordinators of specific social protection programmes would be responsible for bilateral relationships with sectors and programmes beyond the remit of the MNSSP. The DSSC would remain a subcommittee of the DEC and report to it and so it would be in the DEC where broader issues of coordination (beyond two programmes) could be discussed.

Under this option, it would also make sense to have one daily contact desk officer for social protection, or a focal point at the district level for the MNSSP through which informal coordination with district staff can take place (GIZ, 2015). This would further enable coordination between MNSSP programmes and those sectors not represented on the streamlined DSSC.

Option 2.3: Integrate the DSSC with the DCPC.

This subcommittee could be launched with a new name and would remain a technical subcommittee of the DEC. Its membership would comprise those current individuals in the DSSC and the DCPC. Since the two currently have a similar membership this may not mean a significant change in membership structure but would rather constitute a change in roles and responsibilities. Specifically, the subcommittee would be tasked with meeting regularly throughout the year both to plan and prepare for natural hazards and to assess damage and the response following them.

This option makes particular sense if there are plans to link MVAC with the SCTP or for VCPCs to be involved in the implementation and maintenance of public works. However, a potential disadvantage of this is that it might draw the social protection discourse away from ensuring basic needs across the life-cycle. As such, this objective would need to remain explicit within the resilience agenda.

Option 2.4: Have the DSSC as a subcommittee of the District Council.

One option would be to have the DSSC as a subcommittee of the DC, rather than the DEC as it currently is the case. Under this option, all MNSSP programmes would be linked to the DC which would then be a coordinating committee for all these programmes. Specifically, the DSSC could become a subcommittee of the Development and Planning Committee of the DC. The main advantages of this would be that the DSSC would then have both *political* and *technical* oversight. Currently, under the DEC, the DSSC has the technical inputs, but moving it to the DC would also support a more political agenda. It would help the political arm at the district level to have a broader understanding of social protection (beyond PWP), be

able to provide relevant oversight of all social protection programmes, therefore enhancing the ability to link between and among programmes at the district level, and elevate it as a priority issue in political discussions.

This reform would also help political actors to become aware of social protection programmes and their impact, and create a platform for political actors to become champions of social protection. In other words, this proposal has great potential to enhance the alignment between technocratic and political incentives, which is a key driver for ensuring swift and steady implementation of development initiatives like social protection. The implementation of most development initiatives drag because there is often a disjuncture between technocratic and political incentives, which could easily come about if the DSSC would be brought under direct superintendence of the DC.

5.2.3 Options for improving coordination at the national level

At the national level, one option for improving institutional coordination that makes modest changes to the institutional structure is discussed:

Option 3.1: Re-configure existing coordination structures in line with the MNSSP II by integrating pillar-level and systems working groups

This option makes suggested changes to place greater emphasis on MNSSP *cross-programme* coordination objectives (related to the MNSSP II and systems strengthening) and to *strengthen the cross-programme coordination role of MoFEPD*. Under this option, MoFEPD would continue with their coordinating and oversight role of the MNSSP. The proposed changes are illustrated in Figure 4 and Box 12 illustrates a similar structure used in Rwanda.

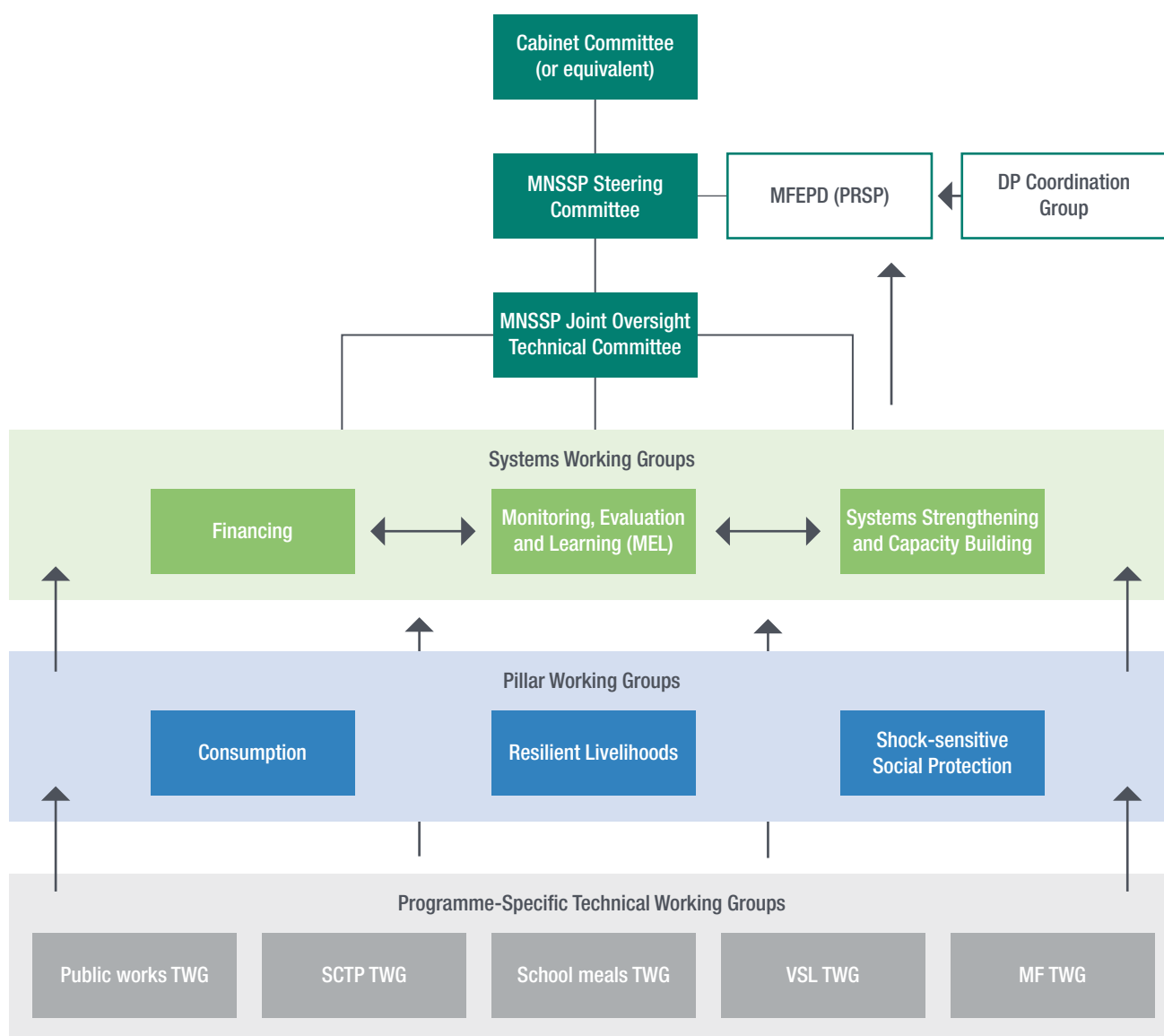
- **Starting from the bottom-up, programme-specific TWG should be strengthened and continue to play an important function of intra-programme coordination.** Whilst it is beyond this paper to discuss intra-programme coordination details in depth, this review has confirmed that challenges *within* the programmes do need to be addressed, but they also serve an important purpose in providing the basis of MNSSP functioning at the national level. Moreover, programme specific groups are still needed as a link between the district and the national level. PRSP desk-officers could retain their role as coordinators within programmes here.
- **The next layer is the pillar working groups, which reflect the new pillars of the MNSSP II.** We recognise that this layer creates another set of meetings for people to attend with important time implications, but we also acknowledge that for the individual programmes to move beyond their siloed objectives, and to reflect the increased coherence of MNSSP II as a *set of programmes* to achieve objectives beyond

their individual programmes, it is important to create space and to invest time in these pillars. Given people's time constraints, one option would be for the pillar working groups to meet according to demand, possibly less frequently than the programme-specific groups and the systems groups. However, this does require the pillar groups to be efficient and strategic.

- **Above the pillar-level coordination groups there are three proposed systems working groups, which would aim to promote inter-programme and cross-sectoral collaboration and integrate the task forces, which are currently operating separately.** The objectives of these would be to focus on *strategy and planning* across the programmes, to discuss technical issues across the three areas, with communication across the three working groups, and to make concrete recommendations on key decisions to the Technical Committee. The suggested groups include:

- **Financing** (to discuss funding options, new contingency funds, multi-year funding, pooled funding, linking humanitarian and social protection funding);
- **Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)** (including M&E around policy and programming);
- **Systems strengthening and capacity building** (to discuss UBR, delivery mechanisms, grievance mechanisms, training etc. at national and district).
- **The systems working groups would feed into the NSSTC.** The function of the NSSTC and NSSSC would remain largely the same, taking into consideration the pre-requisites needed. One additional option to consider here is that the system working groups discussed above, could be additional to, or replace the, NSSTC.
- In addition, it is suggested that the **social protection DP coordination group** feeds directly into PRSP in a harmonised way.

Figure 4 Proposed option for re-configured coordination structure at the national level



Box 12 Institutional coordination in Rwanda

Similar to Malawi, Rwanda's Social Protection Working Group also has tiered committee structure. However, the way in which these structures work in practice is very different to Malawi.

A **Leadership Team** meets twice a year to oversee and coordinate social protection activities. It is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the lead Ministry and co-chaired by a DP, and high-level officials from member organisations are represented. Importantly for coordination, the agenda which drives the Leadership Team meetings is set by both the lead minister and the donor co-chair together. This ensures buy-in by all members present, and the meetings lead to fruitful discussions.

A **Technical Team** brings together the technical staff from member organisations and meets on a monthly basis. This Team reports on and discusses experiences and lessons learnt on social protection across all sectors, and builds synergies across government on social protection activities. It is also responsible for monitoring progress in taking forward deliverables in the Implementation Plan.

Finally, four **sub-committees** composed of technical staff from the Technical group provide leadership and coordination on Finance, Policy, M&E, and Social Protection Systems Building. These sub-committees have a lot of authority (devolved through the ToRs drafted by the Government) to make recommendations to the Technical Team. One obvious difference from the Malawi structure is the fact that each sub-committee works on an issue-area which cuts across programmes, which helps prevent the silo effect and contributes to effective coordination. In turn, many of the sub-committees have 1-year tasks/targets. Meeting these targets requires the sub-committees to be focused and for the meetings to be productive. In turn, while the sub-committees are officially meant to meet once a month, in practice they meet as often as is needed. Thus, ahead of the rolling out of UBRs for instance, the "systems building" sub-committee would gear up and meet as often as was required in order to achieve that target.

5.3 Options for improving coordination

5.3.1 Alternative institutional arrangements

Whilst there are practical options which can support the PRSP in its coordination role as discussed above, such as building the skills and capacity of desk-officers, setting out a strategic and clear vision with plans and milestones, establishing performance contracts, establishing MoUs between key actors etc., these may not overcome the core challenge to bolster PRSP's convening power and the problem of programme fragmentation.

The next three options explore ways in which these challenges could be addressed more systemically through alternative institutional arrangements:

Option 4.1: Establish a singular implementing agency for all social protection programmes in Malawi

This first option primarily aims to overcome the issue fragmentation. As discussed earlier in the report, there are numerous implementers delivering various social protection programmes, which make it very difficult to coordinate. The most extreme example of this is over 100 VSL implementers who are required to report to PRSP. At the other end of the scale, the SCTP is implemented by one ministry but through various financial and administrative arrangements, PWP by five (four within government) and SMP seven (MoEST and externally-implemented programmes). During interviews with stakeholders for this study, we opened up discussion on the possibility of creating a new department to integrate the delivery of social protection programmes. There was no consensus

by stakeholders on this, but some agreement that given the close linkages (conceptually and practically) between cash transfers and PWP, one feasible option would be to merge the implementation of both programmes into one department or agency in the future (note that this was done in Ghana where a new Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection was created by merging the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare – see Box 13).

There would be several benefits to establishing a singular entity responsible for the implementation of social protection programmes. It would ensure **unity of purpose and direction by providing a predictable, consistent and sustainable framework for long-term bureaucratic accountability**. This would further allow for the **development of a critical mass cadre of professionals** well versed with issues of social protection from analytical, conceptual and technical standpoints to facilitate the support required for its successful implementation. Having this entity would additionally help to create a well-crafted and articulated vision of social protection popularised with a sense of unity and purpose and would in turn raise its profile as a key policy and programming tool to reduce poverty in Malawi.

The options of whether a single entity would be developed through an existing institution, or through the creation of a new one would need to be discussed further, and there are implications for how this would be organised. For example:

- **Creation of a national agency which is funded directly by Government and donors and takes responsibility**

for the administration and implementation of all social protection programmes, overseen by a Ministry (see examples of South Africa's SASSA and Rwanda's experience in Box 13). The advantages of this include clear accountability lines and responsibility falling within one entity, and also ensuring greater coherence and standardisation of service provision at the national level.

- **A merger or integration of SCTP and PWP (and possibly SMP) into a Department of Social Protection:** This could be housed under the PRSP (which could be elevated to a Department from a Division) so it continues to have direct control over social protection policy. Funding would come directly from Government and donors to PRSP to ensure accountability. This would still require an inter-ministerial coordination platform.

Option 4.2: PRSP to become a department within MoFEPD, headed by a PS or Chief Director

It has been noted throughout stakeholder interviews that PRSP, being a division and headed by director, sometimes lacks the convening power and authority vis-à-vis line Ministries and implementing departments that are headed by a Principal Secretary (PS) or a Chief Director. In the context of often rigid and hierarchical Government protocols and relationships, this lack of seniority is considered to limit the division's ability to demand data and reporting from implementing departments, build high-level commitment and ensure adequate participation in

national coordination structures. The option below seeks to address this challenge.

- **Promote PRSP to the status of a department within MoFEPD, headed by a PS or 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, such as the Department of Social Support Service at the MoGCDSW. Ideally such department would be led by a PS or Chief Director, whose seniority would allow him/her 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, it is also important to note the potential disadvantages of this option. In the context of ongoing public-sector reforms one of the key goals is to rationalise the structure of the public sector, which is deemed top-heavy. Previously EP&D department was headed by a PS but subsequently downgraded to the position of Chief Director. It would therefore be difficult to consider elevating the position of Director of PRSP to the level of PS. This is one of the advantages to consider creating a department or ministry of social protection (see option above) because this would make it institutionally feasible to raise the profile of the directorate.

Box 13 International experiences with single implementing agencies or departments for implementing social protection

In Ghana, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) was created after the 2012 elections to replace the Ministry of Women and Children. The Department of Social Welfare, which previously sat under the Ministry of Employment, responsible for the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme, moved to the MoGCSP, as did the School Feeding Programme later in 2015. The new Ministry is responsible for implementing both the LEAP and the National Social Protection Strategy, and chairs all coordination meetings on social protection with other relevant Ministries. Stakeholders observed that the Ministry made significant success in improving the coordination of the social protection programmes as well as coordination with other sectors.

In South Africa, the Department of Social Development oversees the national social protection sector which includes both social protection grants and services. In the early 2000s the social protection system in South Africa expanded dramatically, which led to increased strain on all social protection staff. To address this issue, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) was established in 2004 to take over the administration and implementation of all social protection grants (including pensions, child support, etc.). The SASSA is overseen by the Department of Social Development which provides policy guidance and monitors the impact and quality of SASSA. Powers and functions are centralised within SASSA, while service units are decentralised, and this has enabled SASSA to achieve greater coherence and standardisation of service provision across provinces and districts.

In Rwanda, the Ministry of Local Government of Rwanda created the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (LODA) responsible for the implementation of Social Protection programmes. LODA has two main responsibilities: social protection and local economic development. However, stakeholders note that personal connections again play a large part in shaping priorities, with social protection becoming side-lined. Reforms have therefore been suggested whereby an implementing agency for the social protection sector be created that is in charge of social protection only, as a means of avoiding competing priorities

Option 4.3: Enhance authority of PRSP by moving it to the President's or Vice President's Office or the new Planning Commission

The three options presented here for further discussion relate to elevating PRSP's authority to enable the Division to better hold implementers to account and ensure high-level political buy-in and commitment:

- **Place PRSP under the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) or the Vice President's office.** Through association with these offices, this option would aim to increase PRSP's position of authority within existing institutional arrangements and strengthen its convening powers vis-à-vis line ministries and other implementers to improve high-level commitment and representation in various committees, improve access to data, as well as accountability and reporting to PRSP.
- **Integrate PRSP and DoDMA at the office of the Vice President.** Similar to the reform option suggested above, this move would raise the institutional profile of social protection, as it would be housed in the office of the Vice President which has more convening powers than the regular ministries and departments. A further advantage would be that such integration would provide stakeholders with an opportunity to lobby for social protection at a higher level within the government setup. The integration of PRSP and DoDMA would be in line with the direction of the MNSSP II to strengthen shock-sensitive social protection, as well as international and national efforts to better align humanitarian and developmental interventions.

However, within these option, there is the caveat that within the public sector, there is a trend of moving responsibilities back to line ministries. Whilst it is true that the OPC and VP have strong convening power and authority over ministries, there is also a risk that these are driven more by personality than systems. As such, in the context of public sector reforms and turnover of staff in positions of authority,

there is no guarantee that this would be a sustainable long-term solution. Another key consideration is the risk that integration with DoDMA could overshadow the objectives of social protection relating to poverty and vulnerability, but strengthen shock-sensitive and resilient objectives of the MNSSP.

- **Move EP&D to serve within the Secretariat of the new Planning Commission.** As the Planning Commission is to be mandated through the Act of Parliament, this ensures high level authority and consensus across the political divide. There is a window of opportunity here, as the Secretariat for the Planning Commission is yet to be identified. This option would require assessing the current institutional set-up of EP&D's capacity to become the Secretariat, and would involve investment in the number and skills of staff to create an EP&D which is fit for purpose to serve as secretariat. For this to happen, there needs to be a process that identifies 4–5 strategic pillars of national development, of which social protection could be one. PRSP would focus on the issues to do with social protection, but the preference would be for the entire EP&D to be the secretariat of the Planning Commission. In sum, EP&D would have to be reshaped depending on the pillars of national development and to support the Commission in the best way possible.

The main advantage of this option would be that social protection would get attention and resources as a national priority which could lead to a set of positive multiplier effects including sorting out a myriad of institutional challenges that make its implementation difficult. Furthermore, it would make social protection an integral part of the national level development discourse. The major disadvantage would be that it may take considerable time before the NPC could be ready to offer strategic guidance to line ministries and establish effective mechanisms to coordinate oversee the implementation of social protection programmes.

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Annex 1 Research methodology

Key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions – district and sub-district levels

District-level research took place in two districts: Dedza and Balaka. Both are approximately 100km from Lilongwe and were therefore easily accessible in the timeframe of this research. In addition, Dedza is a district where an innovative coordination pilot is taking-place – that of using the CSSCs to implement both the SCTP and PWPs. Balaka has both the SCTP and PWPs, as well as the VSLs in operation. Within each district, we visited one village, selected on the basis of the presence of as many of the five MNSSP programmes operating there as possible. In Dedza we visited the village of Bembeke, while in Balaka we visited the Sawali Traditional Authority.

Table A1 provides a list of stakeholders who were consulted at the district and sub-district levels in Dedza, while Table A2 provides a list of stakeholders who were consulted in Balaka. The focus of these consultations was on horizontal coordination at the programme level; horizontal coordination at the operational level and vertical coordination. Interview guides are available on request.

Table A1 Stakeholders at the district and sub-district – Dedza

District level	
Key informant interviews	FGDs
District Commissioner	District Social Support Committee (DSSC)
District Councillor	District Officials (also members of DEC) (Dedza): • District Social Welfare Officer • Chief Public Works Officer • Desk Officer for COMSIP • District Agriculture Development Officer • District School, Health, Nutrition HIV/AIDS, Gender Officer
Director of Planning and Development (District Environmental Officer is acting DPD in Dedza)	
SCTP Coordinator	
District Community Development Officer	
LDF Officer	
A Member of Parliament	
Sub-district level	
Key informant interviews	FGDs
Traditional Authority	Community Social Support Committee (CSSC)
Community Development Officer	Area Development Committee (ADC)
	Area Executive Committee (AEC)
	Social Cash Transfer Beneficiaries
	Public Works Programme Beneficiaries

Table A2 Stakeholders at the district and sub-district – Balaka

District level	
Key informant interviews	
District Commissioner	
District Council Chair	
Acting M&E Officer	
SCTP Coordinator	
District Community Development Officer	
District School Health and Nutrition Coordinator	
District Social Welfare Officer	
Sub-district level	
Key informant interviews	FGDs
Traditional Authority (Sawali)	Community Social Support Committee (CSSC) (Kapalamula, Balaka)
Community Development Assistant	Social Protection Programme Beneficiaries (Sawali)
Area Civil Protection Committee Chair (Sawali)	School Feeding Committee (Sawali)
Area Development Committee Chair Person	
Area Executive Committee (AEC)	

Key informant interviews – national level

The objective of these interviews was to generate an understanding of the key challenges to coordinate both horizontally and vertically across different actors and levels of government, as well to solicit opinions and ideas on ways of overcoming these challenges to enable more effective coordination mechanisms. Table A3 provides a list of the

Table A3 Stakeholders consulted at the national level

Key informant interviews	
Government of Malawi	Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MoFEPD) – EP&D - PRSP
	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MoLGRD)
	Local Development Fund (LDF) Technical Support Team
	Ministry of Transport and Public Works (MoTPW)
	Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW)
	Ayala Consultants (within MoGCDSW)
	Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST)
	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD)
	Unified Beneficiary Registry Task Force
Donors and development partners	ILO
	UNDP
	UNICEF
	EU
	Irish Aid
	WFP
National level (NGOs)	GIZ
	Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA)
	Concern Worldwide

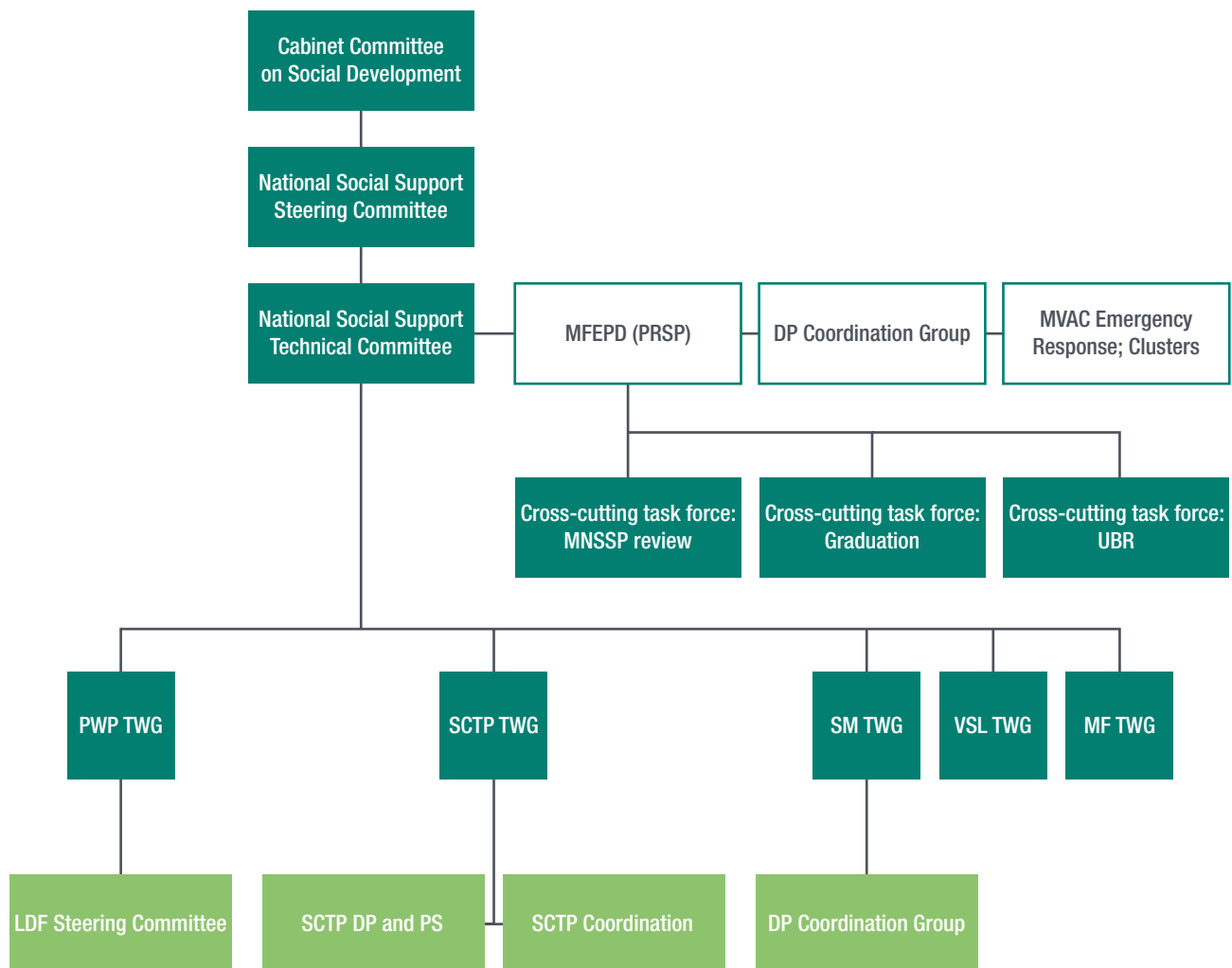
key actors who were consulted. The focus of national-level consultations was on horizontal coordination at the policy and planning level; horizontal coordination at the operational level and vertical coordination. Interview guides are available on request.

Co-creation workshop in Lilongwe

This workshop followed the consultations with key stakeholders and was undertaken in conjunction with the ILO at the end of our fieldwork trip to Malawi. The objective of the workshop was to report back on our initial options of models for institutional coordination so that these could be analysed, discussed and further developed. Following this workshop, the options were refined and the report was written up.

Annex 2 Institutional Coordination Figure at national level

In practice, there are a number of additional programme-specific groups which are not necessarily part of the MNSSP structure, but which support the functioning of social protection programmes.



Annex 3 International experiences of institutional coordination

The following tables provides an overview of the international experiences of institutional coordination. A background paper providing more detail on international experiences is available on request.

Coordination Intensity Scale with Examples from the International Experience				
	Low-intensity coordination	Medium-intensity coordination	High-intensity coordination	Integration
Vision	Goals are specific to each programme	Programme goals are reviewed to improve compatibility and complementarity	Common vision and goals exist and are integrated in programme activities at all levels; complementarities between programmes are defined Example: Ethiopia's MoU with Development Partners setting out principles; Rwanda's awareness raising	
Roles and responsibilities	Responsibilities are defined within each programme only	Responsibilities of coordination structures between some programmes are clear	Relations between programmes are formalised through functional structures (i.e. meetings are held systematically; membership to each coordination structure is appropriate, etc.) Examples: Rwanda's Social Protection Working Group; Ethiopia's Coordination and Management Committee and Joint Strategic Oversight Committee	Previously independent policy/planning/ implementation institutions are merged through the creation of specialised ministries/district coordinators Example: Ghana's Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
Structure/institutional arrangements	Relations between programmes are informal, each institution functions separately	Relations between some programmes are formalised but programmes continue to function in relative isolation	Responsibilities of coordination structures for all programmes are clear (set out in ToRs or Implementation Manual) and enable synergies to be operationalised Examples: Ghana's MoU between LEAP programme and other social service ministries Ethiopia's Programme Implementation Plan	

Coordination Intensity Scale with Examples from the International Experience

Communication	Information between programmes is conveyed as needed	Communication channels are established	Multiple communication channels are created; the right information reaches the right people; effective grievance mechanisms are established Examples: Kenya's Grievance mechanism through the Single Registry and communication campaign on grievance mechanism; Cambodia's Flash Report Cards	Integrated institutions provide mechanism for continuous communication processes between programmes
Accountability (vertical coordination only)	Accountability lines are defined within each programme	Accountability lines are clear but not functional (e.g. reporting does not take place systematically)	Accountability lines are clear and functional Example: Performance Contracts in Kenya and Rwanda	
Resources	Financial and administrative resources remain separate for each programme	Financial and administrative resources are pooled/shared between some programmes	Financial resources are pooled and administrative tools are shared between all programmes Examples: Ghana's Common Targeting Mechanism and National Household Registry; Rwanda's Management Information System; Kenya's Single Registry; Ghana's Institutional Strengthening Plan; Rwanda's efforts to increase staff capacity and staff training	



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