



## Evaluation of the SDG Joint Fund Project - Social Protection for the Sustainable Development Goals in Malawi: Accelerating Inclusive Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals (2020-2021)

### INTRODUCTION

This report presents a summary of findings, lessons, and recommendations from the evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Joint Fund Project - Social Protection for the Sustainable Development Goals (SP4SDG) in Malawi: Accelerating inclusive progress towards the SDGs (2020-2021). The evaluation was jointly commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), also referred to as the Participating United Nations (UN) Organizations (PUNOs). The PUNOs were responsible for the SP4SDG implementation in Malawi. The evaluation was conducted by a team of independent consultants and data collection took place in September 2021.

### SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

The SP4SDG aimed to support the Government of Malawi (GoM)'s social protection system to meet emergency food needs and reduce the vulnerability of those at risk of food insecurity by 2022. The United Nations Joint SDG Fund contributed a total of USD 1,999,937 to the programme. Implementation of the SP4SDG started in January 2020 and ended in December 2021 with three envisaged outcomes: -

- **Outcome 1:** The Malawi social protection system is adapted to meet emergency food needs together with the humanitarian sector. (WFP)
- **Outcome 2:** The Government of Malawi increases its share of the social protection budget and undertakes measures to improve the efficiency of spending. (UNICEF)
- **Outcome 3:** The Malawi social protection system is more comprehensive and integrated. (ILO)

### EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The purpose of the SP4SDG evaluation was to ascertain why certain results occurred or not and to draw lessons and good practices to inform operational decision-making. The evaluation served the dual and mutually reinforcing objectives of accountability and learning. The specific objectives of the evaluation were:

- To assess the extent of achievement of the results and the targets set out in the joint programme results framework.

- To understand the extent to which the joint programme contributed to accelerating progress towards the SDG, focusing on social protection.
- To fulfil the commitments made to commission an evaluation for learning and accountability.

The evaluation covered interventions on strengthening the national social protection system, and implementation of project activities at the local government district level.

### EVALUATION STAKEHOLDERS AND USERS

The main stakeholders of the evaluation are the GoM, the WFP, UNICEF and ILO country and regional offices. The GoM, WFP, UNICEF, ILO, and other key stakeholders will use the findings to enhance the social protection SDG targets in the design and implementation of similar programmes, including short-term, medium-term, and long-term options for resourcing and financing. In addition, the GoM will use the evaluation findings to understand the extent to which the joint programme met its objectives and draw valuable lessons to inform policy development and implementation options and contribute to successive policy strategies. Furthermore, the GoM and stakeholders in the social protection sector may use the evaluation to inform capacity-strengthening approaches and interventions for broader policy development, institutional coherence, and linkages with other national social protection programmes.

### APPROACH AND METHODS

The evaluation used a mixed methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data was collected through desk studies, direct observation of the project performance, interviews with beneficiary and non-beneficiary households, focus group discussions (FGD), and key informant interviews (KII) with community, district, and national stakeholders. Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, and human rights issues were reflected throughout the evaluation design, processes, data collection and reporting.

# SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

## RELEVANCE

**The joint programme results framework was aligned with relevant GoM social protection policy goals** and the UN strategic objectives. The SP4SDG results framework components were aligned to three Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP II) policy pillars on consumption support, resilient livelihoods, and shock-sensitive social protection (SSSP).

**The inclusion of older people as beneficiaries contributed to the GoM goal to provide social support to older people as stipulated in the National Social Support Policy (NSSP).** The SP4SDG Outcome 3 supported the design of social programmes aimed at enhancing the quality and coverage of social security schemes where 12 percent of the targeted beneficiaries were 60 years old or above. Outcome 3 also contributed to the enhancement of Malawi's social protection interventions, social accountability mechanisms, and institutional capacity.

**The lean season response (LSR) cash-based transfer was considered relevant to meeting the immediate food needs of the most vulnerable groups in the Nsanje District.** The provision of financial support contributed to zero hunger during the 2019/2020 lean season and helped people to afford nutritious food and remain healthy with improved well-being. FGDs revealed that unconditional cash-based transfers were particularly appropriate for households headed by women, persons with disabilities, the chronically ill, and elderly people who could not work and earn money for daily food consumption.

**The double-up payments due to COVID-19 restrictions enabled households to invest in agricultural activities, purchase livestock, and basic non-food items and cover health care costs.** This had the dual effect of building the economic capacity of households while contributing to their improved nutritional status.

**The joint programme swiftly reacted to the global COVID-19 pandemic by increasing its scope, re-designing key priority areas,** and amending the results framework, and output-level indicators. These changes, however, resulted in the removal of gender performance indicators from the results framework, and the failure of the joint programme to address the systemic gender mainstreaming challenges in Malawi.

**The joint programme created an enabling environment for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to strategically engage in key SP4SDG areas.** KIIs revealed that ILO was instrumental in creating a platform for CSOs to engage in

strategic social protection policy debates and facilitated non-governmental organization (NGO)/CSO capacity strengthening. However, more efforts are required to support the transformational aspects of social protection in Malawi where CSOs play a critical role.

## COHERENCE

**The joint programme resided and fit firmly within the social protection and humanitarian policy space in Malawi.** Through technical assistance, the joint programme supported the GoM and implementing partners to develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) which outline practical mechanisms for implementing horizontal expansion of existing social protection cash-based transfer programmes under the shock-sensitive social protection (SSSP) approach.

**The joint programme supported the GoM to finalize its social protection financing strategy** by producing three critical documents: the financing and expenditure brief, the budget brief, and the fiscal space analysis in the financing e-newsletter article. Combined, these documents provide an operational analysis of the social protection financing trends in Malawi, examine both on and off-budget resource allocation and explore the feasibility of increasing domestic resource coverage for financial sustainability.

**The PUNO interventions attempted and, in some areas, succeeded in aligning with and supporting the GoM policy environment** while working in close collaboration with development partners. There was work in progress on systems strengthening, providing lessons for enhanced social service delivery, and influencing an increase in GoM financial resource allocations to social protection.

**The joint programme contributed to and supported existing GoM coordination mechanisms for implementing social protection interventions at various levels.** The programme leveraged the expertise of the PUNOs to ensure targets and outcomes were coherent and effective. The joint programme also leveraged the PUNOs' combined experiences of working with development partners to ensure harmonization and continuity of social protection interventions. However, there is room for strengthening coordination among the United Nations partners and a more joint approach is required when working on joint projects.

## EFFECTIVENESS & COVERAGE

**The joint programme's approach in setting out its interventions to align with the GoM policy on lean season response mechanisms was broadly successful.** Significant contributions were made to provide the GoM with a potential

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basis to replicate a shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) model at scale, given its strategic importance.

**Implementation timeframe:** Stakeholders highlighted that the joint programme duration was not sufficient to fully address the existing problems in the country. There was a recognition that the joint programme implementation had not been ongoing long enough to make a meaningful contribution to the social protection sector. A more realistic and time-bound development objective could have better defined the incremental change the joint programme envisaged to achieve by the end of the 2-year programme.

**The joint programme promoted a participatory consultative process for a government-led review of the NSSP and the draft policy analysis document.** It was envisaged that the new policy framework would result in increased coverage of social protection through the inclusion of social insurance schemes which target workers in the informal sector. The GoM's commitment to the development of social pension cash transfers presents a critical step to ensuring the social protection system is more comprehensive in promoting a just society and human rights obligations.

**Outcome 1 was considered the most important intervention for the joint programme to meet its development objective.** The SRSP prototype had the potential to lay the foundations for women and men in Malawi to achieve and aspire to enhance their quality of life and improve resilience to shocks. However, the quantities and scale of the SRSP prototype highlighted the harsh reality of the broader, unmet, and ambitious commitments in the social protection policy arena.

**Resource allocation to social protection:** Despite the increase in resource allocation to the social protection sector, the evaluation team noted that it was too early to assess the changes in strengthening the political commitment to increase the GoM's proportion of domestic funding under Outcome 2: financial analysis of the social protection strategy. Activities to improve capacity for social protection expenditure were delayed and decisions on approaches to address this only started in 2021. In addition, the public expenditure tracking survey and bottleneck analysis to assess the flow of government resources in the entire social protection cash transfer system were ongoing at the time of evaluation. Furthermore, the improved knowledge and commitment objective was shifted in 2021 and its budget allocation was re-purposed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**There was a considerable shift from the original joint programme design concept under Outcome 3.** The envisaged work on the social protection legal framework was abandoned and replaced with policy support analysis and review, with an emphasis on a more comprehensive and

integrated social protection system. Progress was, however, noted in three areas of work: (i) Policy Framework Analysis (Draft May 2021), (ii) National Social Support Policy (NSSP) Review (April 2021 draft), and (iii) Old Age Social Pension Brief Technical Note (August 2020).

**There were differences in rights and entitlements between the joint programme LSR cash transfer policy and the GoM social cash transfer.** Under GoM, households that were not available on the day of cash distribution received their cash transfer in arrears. Conversely, the WFP policy did not allow payment in arrears during the next distribution, a practice that is routinely undertaken during the regular social cash transfer payment sequencing. It was argued that households already survived the preceding month through other means, therefore, no need for payments in arrears.

**The joint programme effectively applied the GoM's beneficiary selection processes to identify appropriate households for the LSR interventions.** Relevant data and available information were utilized to identify appropriate target groups, to effectively support the lean season crisis and respond to GoM COVID-19 coverage in urban areas. The coverage was influenced by the GoM policy and targeting guidelines, a process in which the PUNOs were actively engaged.

**The use of a Unified Beneficiary Register (UBR) for beneficiary selection reduced inclusion and exclusion errors that were common with community-based targeting.** The COVID-19 crisis resulted in a rapidly reduced urban household income due to job losses. Therefore, the GoM implemented a cash transfer intervention targeting the urban population and beneficiaries were adequately identified. The joint programme provided critical support to the COVID-19 Urban Cash Intervention (CUCI). For example, UNICEF supported the GoM to conduct beneficiary verification, validation, and registration in urban cities, including the establishment of a CUCI call centre, in collaboration with the private sector. These processes contributed to strengthening the national social protection system.

**The COVID-19 pandemic exposed knowledge gaps in responding to economic and health crises in both rural and urban areas.** Support to the CUCI generated useful lessons for responding to pandemics. The lessons highlighted the need to enhance the social protection system to promote coverage extension and introduce a range of social protection benefits. The CUCI targeting processes also revealed the need to discuss the merits of categorical targeting approaches for regular social protection programmes within the broader humanitarian-development nexus debate.

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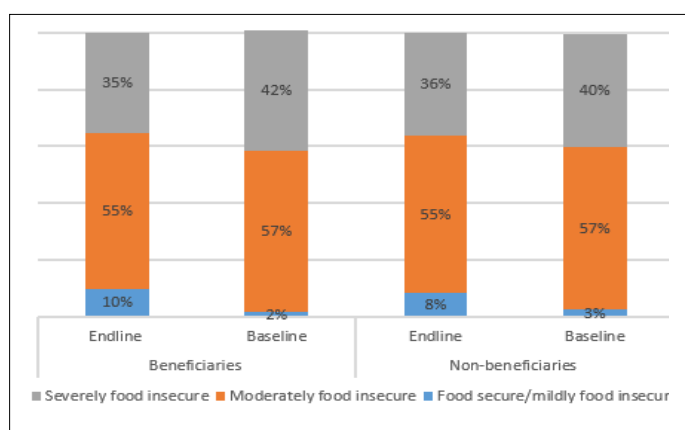
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The joint programme’s contribution to the lean season response (LSR) improved food security and reduced the use of negative coping strategies for many vulnerable households in Nsanje. 9.9 percent of the beneficiary households were food secure/mildly food insecure, and 54.9 percent were moderately food insecure and therefore used no or low coping for reduced coping strategy index (rCSI)<sup>1</sup>. Only 35.2 percent were severely food insecure at the time of the evaluation (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Categorical classification of food security based on the rCSI for Nsanje (Source: SP4SDG Evaluation Report, Page 32)



There was a relatively higher rCSI at baseline for both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries compared to rCSI values at the end-line. Despite the failure to reach the set rCSI value of 12 by the project, the trend line in Figure 2 shows a reduction in shocks experienced by vulnerable families.

Figure 2: rCSI classification for Nsanje (Source: SP4SDG Evaluation Report, Page 32)

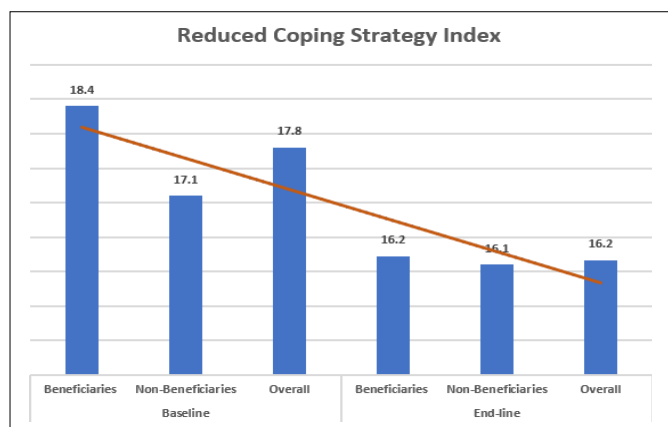


Figure 3 (a) shows the coping strategies used by the beneficiary and non-beneficiary households to cope with the

lack of food or money to purchase food. Generally, **negative coping strategies were more prevalent among non-LSR households than they were among LSR recipient households.**

Figure 3: Livelihood coping strategies employed by households in Nsanje (Source: SP4SDG Evaluation Report, Page 34)

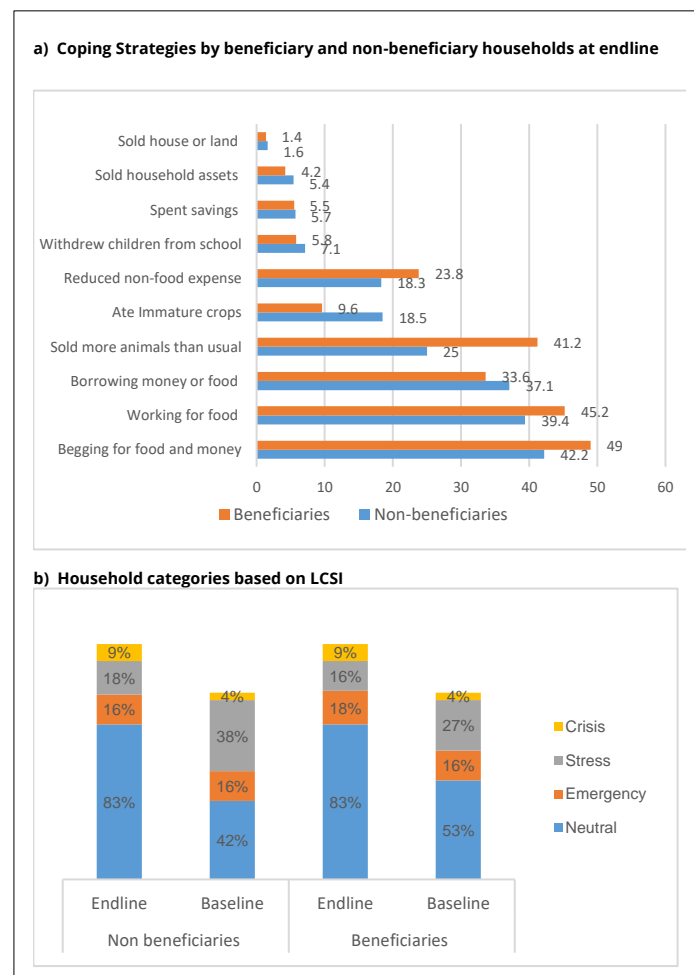


Figure 3 presents the severity of **household-level coping categories** which shows that: -

- Nearly half of the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries resorted to begging for food from relatives and friends.
- More than one-third of the LSR beneficiaries coped by working for others (ganyu) and borrowing after depleting their stock of staple food.
- 41.2 percent of beneficiary households sold the livestock they acquired through the LSR cash to buy food.

<sup>1</sup> The reduced coping strategy indicator (rCSI) is an experience-based indicator measuring the behaviour of households over the past seven days when they did not have enough food or money to purchase food.

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- Nearly one-quarter of the beneficiary households (23.8 percent) reduced non-food expenditures.
- The use of negative coping strategies that have detrimental effects on personal dignity and on future livelihoods and consumption, such as selling a house or land and household assets and withdrawing children from school was very low.

**Cash transfer payments:** the double-up on cash transfer payments due to COVID-19 restrictions presented an opportunity for livelihood investments which some beneficiaries successfully managed to exploit. These include investing money in VSLs, small livestock, rain-fed agriculture, irrigation farming and education for young children for immediate and future benefits.

**Sharing of cash transfers:** Although the joint programme interventions communities were sensitized to avoid sharing the cash with others and use it for buying food, many beneficiaries reported being forced to share the cash.

## EFFICIENCY

The **COVID-19 pandemic** affected the start of the joint programme implementation in 2020 and deprived it of critical opportunities required to influence policy-based discussions due to the lack of GoM strategic face-to-face meetings. Field visits to assess the implementation processes of the operating partners were also not possible for several months during the crucial programme start-up phase.

**The change of Government led to adjustments to the joint programme and the re-purposing of key strategic programme outcomes areas.** To respond to this changing environment, the joint programme had to fundamentally make changes in advancing the commitment to pursue the legislative space for the social protection sector that had been previously envisaged.

**The choice of cash transfers over food distribution resulted in cost savings.** With food distributions, the costs for transportation of commodities, warehousing and storage, security, and post-harvest management to prevent losses and maintain quality would have been both higher and logistically challenging. These assertions, however, assume that the value of the food and cash transfers are equivalent to ensure that any estimated savings are not due to differences in the value of the monthly cash or food distribution, but rather reflect efficiency gains in programme implementation.

Stakeholders reported that **the joint programme LSR was efficiently implemented, and the level of efficiency compared favourably with similar national social protection programmes.** The implementing costs of the LSR

cash-based transfer in Nsanje were estimated at around 6.5 percent for the horizontal expansion. The vertical expansion component, implemented through the national system during the lean season, was estimated to be 1 percent. The regular Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP) data showed that the implementation costs for SCTP were less than 15 percent.

**The efficiency of the LSR process resulted from the ability to allocate significant sums of money to manual cash distribution while spending less on administrative costs.** The cash-based transfer implementation relied on existing civil society, social protection organizations, government systems and community structures to undertake substantial preparatory work. These additional costs need to be further assessed to determine the overall efficiency of the delivery mechanisms.

**There was limited documented evidence to indicate that a full value-for-money assessment was conducted to inform the options and operational considerations** for the joint programme contribution to the national SRSP cash transfer intervention in Nsanje. The SRSP utilized existing national social cash transfer programme modalities which may have been in limited scope and, or flexibility, thus affecting the joint programme's ability to adapt to the system to enable a cost-efficient delivery process.

**No cases of misappropriation or abuse of funds were recorded.** The use of the Malawi Red Cross Society (MRCS) offered the best value-for-money option and time efficiency. The MRCS demonstrated compliance with all contract provisions. This includes timeliness in the delivery of cash transfers, timely submission of pay-out and funds reconciliation reports, compliance with the approved distribution plans and full accountability for the funds advanced.

## IMPACT

**The shock-sensitive LSR cash transfer was key and made a critical impact both at a household and community level.** This finding concurred with the evidence suggesting that humanitarian assistance is needed almost every lean season due to the frequent cycle of floods and droughts. In the context of the humanitarian-development nexus, the recovery period should be sustained to mitigate the long-term inter-generational cycle of disaster-related vulnerability. **This underlines the need for a more holistic, integrated and coordinated development approach to a regular crisis.**

According to stakeholders, **a notable change attributed to the joint programme was the integration of social**

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**protection interventions** such as school meals, social cash transfers, village savings and loans (VSLs) and microfinance to enhance the impact envisaged by the Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP II). These are considered fundamental building blocks to improving the pathways out of poverty for many vulnerable families.

The joint programme social cash transfer was a demonstrable example to the GoM that **the existing social protection systems can be effectively adapted to meet specific crisis needs**, both for periodic LSR and public health emergency response, for example, COVID-19. The innovative use of targeting and verification processes presented a potential scope to apply in other social assistance interventions going forward.

**The joint programme contributed to the framework for the development of a comprehensive social protection legal and financing framework in Malawi.** However, the future direction for the joint programme's policy analytical work remains unknown given that most of the Outcome 3 key activities were ongoing and could extend beyond the timescale of the joint programme. This reinforces the need for a better political economy analysis of the social protection sector to inform and prepare for the potential challenges in the future.

**The LSR bridged the hunger gap, improved household food security, and contributed to enhancing local economic activities.** The selling of local food by traders to LSR beneficiaries improved market functionality and increased food access, diversity, and consumption. KII and FDG respondents highly valued the LSR assistance because: -

- households improved diet diversity, and reduced the risk of undernutrition,
- children returned to school and dropout rates drastically reduced,
- girls remained in school instead of working or marrying off early as a coping strategy,
- teenage pregnancies and marriages reduced,
- households refrained from ganyu (casual work) and concentrated on their homestead gardens, and
- households headed by women consumed better than recorded at baseline.

**Most households bought small livestock after receiving the double payment in February 2021.** The evaluation found that 13.5 percent of the beneficiaries (compared to 11.6 percent of non-beneficiaries) acquired small livestock after participating in the LSR, while 36 percent had chickens and 3.2 percent owned pigs. Households highlighted that livestock is an important asset and a source of food, and manure and promotes gardening, thus contributing to

improving their nutritional status. Households also reported that livestock symbolises wealth and can be sold to address pressing needs including food, healthcare, and educational costs for children.

**The injection of LSR cash into rain-fed agriculture and winter cropping in places with residual moisture helped reduce food insecurity.** 95.8 percent of the households reported no distress sales of household assets and 98.6 percent never considered selling a house or land to meet food needs. Households that participated in the LSR perceived themselves to be better off than they were at the outset of the intervention. Notably, this change in perceived welfare status was even higher among households that could not work or receive any remittances from relatives and friends, such as the elderly, chronically sick and households headed by women.

## SUSTAINABILITY

**The joint programme was inherently deliberate about the sustainability and scalability of its interventions.** The programme built institutional sustainability by working with and through social protection organizations and government frontline workers at the national, district and community levels. This is a critical factor for the successful phase-over of the responsibility for the activities introduced and supported by the programme.

**Capacity strengthening at a policy and social protection systems level:** The joint programme successfully undertook several key activities dedicated to strengthening the capacity of government officials across various ministries, with a potential to roll out and scale up. Despite the capacity strengthening initiatives for social protection being a step in the right direction, more should be done on the scope and scale for institutional strengthening to result in a meaningful impact. In addition, a more detailed assessment of the systemic institutional capacity strengthening requirements throughout the social protection sector is urgently needed.

**The GoM financing is a critical factor for sustaining SRSP interventions.** The joint programme contributed to assisting the GoM to increase its share of the social protection budget and undertake measures to improve the efficiency and sustainability of spending, which is key to ensuring continuity of social protection activities.

**To promote the sustainability of social protection systems, the GoM needs to increase its investment in the sector to meet poverty reduction commitments.** Given that 90 percent of the social protection programmes were funded by development partners, there is a need to develop a realistic exit strategy. The SRSP approach was established

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and to a large extent grounded in GoM policy commitments. However, considering that the sustainable notions of SRSP with only GoM resources are highly unlikely, the social protection sector could potentially remain donor-dependent for quite some time.

## GENDER DIMENSIONS

**The joint programme did not invest sufficiently in the gender and inequality areas of social protection** to provide any analytical framework. Although the PUNOs implemented gender as set out in the project document, the outcome-level gender aspects were not fully assessed. The absence of gender analysis is a key concern in terms of social protection cash transfers being the vehicle for transformational change and learning to reduce inequalities.

**The joint programme results framework and theory of change (ToC) were minimalist in defining gender and social inclusion performance targets.** Little explicit attention was given to gender and inclusion in the joint programme design and results framework. Despite the conducive policy levers contained within many GoM policies, the absence of any specific noticeable interventions on gender mainstreaming in the joint programme was a missed opportunity.

**The deliberate selection of female members of a household as recipients of cash transfers was a positive attempt to promote gender inclusion.** Household surveys revealed that close to two-thirds of women (63.9 percent) in the sample were recipients of cash transfers. This finding, although slightly less, is consistent with the PUNOs statement that women constituted 70 percent to 75 percent of the LSR cash transfer recipients in the Nsanje District. Thus, the joint programme prioritized women in line with SDG gender equality goals.

**In the case of Nsanje where polygamy is common, the cash assistance to women helped them take care of their households while men were tending to their other families.** The LSR recorded cases of gender-based violence where polygamous men received cash and failed to share it among all the wives, therefore leaving the other wives destitute. The other common complaint was the husband and wife fighting after receiving the cash due to misunderstandings on how to use it, resulting in the local chiefs confiscating the cash from the recipients. Cases of chiefs getting cash from recipients were also common. Some of the chiefs were interrogated and prosecuted by the police and paid back the money.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**Financing:** The underlying ambition of the joint programme was to create a financing ecosystem that enhances the national financing infrastructure with a trajectory towards increased GoM revenue mobilization for sustaining results in the social protection sector. This area of work requires further technical support on institutional capacity strengthening and policy formulation.

**Cash transfers:** The LSR cash-based transfer with its mix of adaptable interventions provided a useful and viable replicable model that can be integrated into existing social protection programmes and systems.

**Monitoring and reporting:** The performance and tracking of joint programme results would have benefited from better documentation and appropriate analysis of the assumptions underpinning the ToC.

**Partnerships:** The joint programme could have benefited from investing more in nurturing relations with GoM colleagues to demonstrate a viable partnership approach to achieve the programme objectives.

**Gender and mainstreaming:** With the wealth of experience and knowledge on gender issues in Malawi, the PUNOs could have articulated more nuanced and practical approaches required for the social protection sector to address the challenges of gender inequality and social exclusion which are both systemic and deeply rooted. The responsibility to ensure gender is mainstreamed at every level of the joint programme fell between the gaps. Future joint United Nations programmes should create the space to challenge and ensure that gender equality and social inclusion issues are institutionalized and mainstreamed.

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# EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a summary of recommendations for WFP, UNICEF, and ILO, based on the three SP4SDG joint programme outcomes.

## **Outcome 1: Malawi Social Protection System is adapted to meet emergency food needs together with the humanitarian sector**

### **1. Improve value for money analysis of shock-sensitive social protection cash transfer interventions. (WFP & UNICEF)**

1.1 Explore and adopt the use of an e-payment system using electronic platforms by third parties such as banks and mobile money operators to reduce the costs of packaging the money, transporting it to districts, paying for mileage and daily subsistence allowances, and providing security at every distribution point. E-payments will also speed up transactions and enable beneficiaries to receive their cash instantly in their bank accounts or mobile wallet. The joint programme should take advantage of the involvement of Irish Aid, the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare and UNICEF in the SCTP and learn how categories of people like the elderly and those in remotest areas who may not have bank accounts, or a mobile phone can be better served using electronic platforms and ensure they are not left behind. In addition, the costs of e-payments such as bank charges, opening account balances, and transport to and from the banks for the poorest households residing far from towns should not be transferred to the beneficiary. *(WFP & UNICEF)*

1.2 WFP and UNICEF should consult with other United Nations agencies, development partners, and the Government of Malawi (GoM) to develop guidelines and modalities for e-payments in Malawi. *(WFP & UNICEF)*

**2. Share the results of the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) for validation before final publication.** There is a need to involve social protection organizations during vulnerability assessments and share the results for validation before they are published. This will help to make the necessary adjustments on time and increase trust in the newly adopted Unified Beneficiary Registry (UBR). *(WFP)*

**3. Strengthen targeting capacity by validating the UBR yearly to ensure only deserving households benefit.** WFP should collaborate and ensure the UBR is updated before the coming LSR (November 2022-March 2023) and that the entire process involves district officers, community leaders and local committees upfront to remove households that have migrated, relocated, or moved out of the poverty line. The validation exercise will prevent distortion in the identification of actual beneficiaries by distribution teams. *(WFP)*

**4. WFP should intensify sensitization of all local leaders on the issue of beneficiary identification and selection** using the new UBR system, including the consequences of forcing their subjects to share entitlements with non-beneficiary households to reduce cases of prosecution which lead to hatred among community members. *(WFP)*

**5. Support full recovery of the most vulnerable households.** In future programmes, there is a need to include the following interventions as part of LSR to support the recovery and graduation of vulnerable households from yearly support: -

5.1 Continue to provide consumption support to safeguard households' productive assets and prevent asset depletion during times of financial distress. *(WFP & UNICEF)*

5.2 Strengthen linkages between cash transfers, village savings and loans (VSLs), and small businesses that can help the poor quickly recover. *(WFP & UNICEF)*

5.3 Promote linkages with other programmes that support income-generating activities and food security. *(WFP & UNICEF)*

**6. Early planning is important to reduce pressure and work overload.** Social protection organizations reported that planning for the LSR of December 2020 to March 2021 was delayed until around the same time when cash transfers were to start. Several activities were therefore done under pressure within a short period and other activities were circumvented in the process. There is a need to start planning in time to reduce panic, minimize work overload towards the start of the coming LSR and increase the efficiency of service delivery. *(WFP & UNICEF)*

**7. Provide arrears to households that are absent.** The District Social Welfare Office suggested that WFP should show uniformity and provide arrears because no household can choose to be absent from cash distribution without a valid reason. This problem could also be reduced if the recommended e-payment is adopted. *(WFP & UNICEF)*

**8. Increase gender equality and inclusion by improving the basket to include foods for pregnant and breastfeeding women and young children.** WFP and UNICEF should explore ways to add super cereal and super cereal+ to the current basket of maize, pulses, and cooking oil for households with pregnant and lactating women, and children under 2 years of age, respectively (without retrogressing to food distribution which has proven to be costly to implement). These groups of people have additional food and nutritional needs and can be better served if the suggested or similar foods can be included in the food basket. *(WFP & UNICEF)*

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**9. Build sufficient technical capacity in the gender, vulnerability analysis and mapping, and monitoring and evaluation units of United Nations partner agencies** to

support programme teams in operationalizing and mainstreaming gender and social inclusion performance targets in joint programmes. *(WFP, UNICEF & ILO)*

**10. Plan ahead of time on how to reach hard-to-reach areas.** *(WFP)*

**Outcome 2: Malawi Government increases its share of the social protection budget and undertakes measures to improve the efficiency of spending**

**11. To ensure the social protection sector in the country does not remain heavily dependent on donors, UNICEF should: -**

- 11.1 Continue to develop a strategy to increase Government financial contributions to the social protection sector. *(UNICEF)*
- 11.2 Engage and facilitate dialogue with development partners and key GoM ministries to promote the harmonization of social protection funding mechanisms. *(UNICEF)*
- 11.3 Secure additional funding for social protection programmes. Thus, allow for a diversified set of financing streams and lobby GoM for additional funding. There is a need to continue engaging GoM in all the processes to promote greater participation and ownership. *(UNICEF)*
- 11.4 Strengthen the project reporting, and financial management capacity of districts (government and CSOs) to reduce the need for central staff to frequently travel to the districts. *(UNICEF)*

**Outcome 3: Malawi social protection system is more comprehensive and integrated**

**12.** Leveraging the ongoing work of the ILO-Irish Aid partnership project and enhancing financial management and fiscal sustainability for the social protection project funded by the European Union, the joint programme has supported the development of the Social Protection Policy. The policy provides a sound foundation for defining the scope, objectives, and legal framework for the social protection system in Malawi. **ILO and its partners proposed the introduction of an old-age social pension scheme and the expansion of contributory social protection in the Social Protection Policy.** A Bill was submitted to the parliament for review and consideration. *(ILO)*

**13. ILO should take a leading role in continuing to support the development of the SCTP strategy and its full implementation in Malawi, having been involved in the development process.** Additional consultations are needed to finalize the policy framework document and update the NSSP policy. After the policy is validated by the GoM, the PUNOs should support the GoM to disseminate the updated NSSP to stakeholders. *(ILO)*

**14. ILO should continue to lobby for the introduction of old-age social pensions and expansion of contributory social protection in the SCTP strategy.** The PUNOs should support the GoM to finalize, launch, and disseminate the SCTP strategy. *(ILO)*

**15. As part of dissemination work, ILO should train GoM staff at national and district levels on changes in the SCTP strategy and NSSP,** to familiarize and further enhance their capacity to implement social protection activities. *(ILO)*

**Reference:**

Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the management response are available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/malawi-social-protection-sustainable-development-goals-2020-2021-evaluation>

For more information, please contact the Office of Evaluation [wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org](mailto:wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org)

## ACRONYMS

<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>CUCI</b>	COVID-19 Urban Cash Intervention
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GoM</b>	Government of Malawi
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interviews
<b>LSR</b>	Lean Season Response
<b>MNSSP</b>	Malawi National Social Support Programme
<b>MRCS</b>	Malawi Red Cross Society
<b>MVAC</b>	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>NSSP</b>	National Social Support Policy
<b>PUNOs</b>	Participating United Nations Organizations
<b>rCSI</b>	Reduced Coping Strategy Index
<b>SCTP</b>	Social Cash Transfer Programme
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operating Procedure
<b>SP4SDG</b>	Social Protection for the Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SRSP</b>	Shock-responsive social protection
<b>SSSP</b>	Shock-sensitive social protection
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>UBR</b>	Unified Beneficiary Register
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VSL</b>	Village Savings and Loans
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

*Summary drafted by: Lindiwe Kwidini*

*WFP Regional Bureau for Southern Africa – RBJ Evaluation Unit*

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