



## TEAM MALAWI

**Agencies Represented:** The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare and The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

**Problem:** Extreme poverty among vulnerable and labor-constrained households in Malawi; challenges targeting social service beneficiaries, resulting in high inclusion and exclusion errors

**Policy:** The National Social Support Policy, implemented via the Malawi National Social Support Program

**Objective:** Improve the design, implementation, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation of the social cash transfer component of the program in Malawi, and to learn how to simplify the policy and track data to inform implementation

**Funding:** Social Support Fund (SSF) composed of funding from the Government and contributions from development partners, NGOs, and the private sector

## THE PROBLEM:

The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare in Malawi is working to eradicate extreme poverty among vulnerable households through social protection programs. Evidence suggests that the Social Cash Transfer Program, which targets ultra-poor and labor-constrained households, has had significant positive impacts on several outcomes, including consumption, asset accumulation, and school enrollment. Now, the challenge is to improve the design, implementation, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation of social support interventions in Malawi, and to learn how to simplify the policy and track data to inform implementation.

## THE POLICY:

The National Social Support Policy was originally developed in 2009. The plan to implement it, the Malawi National Social Support Program, was re-launched on June 20, 2018. The social cash transfer program (SCTP), one component of the policy, is an unconditional cash transfer specifically targeting labor-constrained, ultra-poor households. This means that to be eligible for the program, a household must be unable to meet the most urgent and basic needs, and have three times as many “not fit to work” members as “fit to work” members. Beneficiaries are selected through a community-based approach, with oversight from the local District Commissioner’s Office and the District Social Welfare Office, and transfer amounts are determined by the size of the household and the number of children enrolled in primary and secondary school.<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of government, private sector, civil society, United Nations, and international non-governmental agencies and organizations involved in implementing the cash transfer program. The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development is the lead agency in policy formulation and implementation guidance; the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare provides technical support towards program planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation at the national level; and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development provides technical support at the district level. Development partners and civil society organizations help to mobilize resources and monitor compliance.

The SCTP is funded through a Social Support Fund (SSF) composed of funding from the Government of Malawi and contributions from development partners, NGOs, and the private sector. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria provides a large portion of the funding; other major

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<sup>1</sup> Abdoulayi, S. et al. (2015). Malawi Social Cash Transfer Program: Midline Impact Evaluation Report. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

donors include the German Government, Irish Aid, the European Union, and the World Bank.<sup>2</sup> UNICEF provides funding for evaluations.

### **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND STATUS:**

The SCTP, which began as a pilot program in one district in 2006, now operates in 18 districts in Malawi, reaching approximately 175,064 beneficiaries. The aim is to cover all 28 districts in Malawi, and targeting of beneficiaries is underway in the remaining 10 districts, with support from World Bank.

Baseline data from 2010 was used to inform the targets for a recent iteration of the program, and the program was evaluated by external consultants in 2012 and 2016. Both evaluations found positive impacts of the program on children and their caretakers, evidence of behavior change within beneficiary households, and increased access to and linkages with other social services, and proved crucial in convincing stakeholders to continue to support and fund the program. Independent evaluators will continue to conduct evaluations of the program every four years. The Ministry of Gender meets regularly with donor partners and other stakeholders to examine the lessons found during implementation, including the findings and recommendations from impact evaluations, and decide whether to accept those lessons and how to program implementation and related manuals.

Currently, the Ministry of Gender is the only ministry with an established management information system, which is managed by consultants and generates reports based on program data, the Integrated Household Survey, the Core Welfare Indicator Survey, Vulnerability Assessment Committee analysis and reports, and annual and monthly reports from relevant programs. Data on program implementation, the capacity of partners and implementing agencies to conduct monitoring and evaluation, and progress and cost-effectiveness in reducing vulnerability to hunger and poverty is fed into the national monitoring and evaluation system.

Despite the relatively weak monitoring and evaluation system at the national level, increased access to evidence has strengthened the government's ability to advocate for standardization across the program. Evidence has been essential in identifying areas of improvement and has led to recommendations for simplified strategies. However, challenges with financial resources and government capacity has hindered effective implementation of those strategies and has resulted in only partial realization of policy goals. Moving forward, in addition to securing additional funding, the government will be focused on building staff capacity to execute improved strategies.

### **KEY CHALLENGES:**

- **Inadequate M&E:** The Malawi National Social Support Program is fragmented at the national level due to weak monitoring and evaluation systems. While there is a plan for a coordinated monitoring system with agreed-upon indicators, it has yet to be established.
- **Enrollment errors:** Because of Malawi's deep poverty, there are challenges in identifying and verifying the eligibility of beneficiaries, which results in high inclusion and exclusion errors. Community-based targeting approaches are also often not understood by community members.
- **Low coordination:** The lack of a coordinated approach to implementation across different levels of government and donor partners has contributed to the low achievement of policy goals.
- **Government funding:** Inadequate financial resources and staffing, especially at the district level, have hindered effective implementation. Programs under the National Social Support Policy are largely donor-funded, and thus fragmented into specific interventions, rather than taking an integrated approach. Government funding for the programs is very limited.

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<sup>2</sup> Abdoulayi, S. et al. (2015).

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Donor support: The SCTP has successfully secured financial support from donors.
- Reliability: Payments to beneficiaries are made regularly, and there is good communication with rural communities. Targeting of beneficiaries and capacity of staff implementing the STCP have improved.
- Impact: According to the midterm evaluation, “after only one year of operation, the SCTP has already been able to have a far-reaching impact on beneficiary households [...] these impacts tend to be higher among the poorest households, highlighting the important fact that the value of the transfer matters considerably for both the range and depth of impact one can expect from the program.”<sup>3</sup>

## WHAT’S NEXT:

- The Malawi team has three main priorities for the workshop and for the program moving forward, with the goal of creating a more integrated, efficient, and effective system.
- The first priority is around improved data for decision making. They are interested in discussing how to improve evidence creation and data collection with clear indicators, and how to incorporate that evidence and data into strategy and policy formulation. This will require improved monitoring and evaluation systems, and harmonized targeting and data collection across all levels of the cash transfer program. For improved accountability, the Malawi team is also hoping to learn how to derive evidence from routine program implementation and how to motivate higher level policy makers to utilize that evidence.
- The second priority is learning how to more efficiently use available resources to realize policy goals, including how to more effectively target beneficiaries. The Government of Malawi recently adopted the Unified Beneficiary Registry (UBR), which will offer one integrated source of information on households that are eligible for various programs and services that fall under the National Social Support Policy. The UBR will not only strengthen coordination between the various programs, but will also help improve targeting, data sharing, and distribution of programs and benefits.<sup>4</sup> The social cash transfer program is currently the only program feeding data into the UBR, however the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development is in the process of developing and integrating a monitoring information system. The Malawi team hopes that the UBR will allow for common identification, payment, and case management systems; increased financial integration; and the ability to shift beneficiaries across programs based on needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities, and recognizes the challenge and importance of ongoing data collection to update the UBR over time.
- The final priority is around strengthening institutional coordination of the social protection sector. The Malawi team hopes to clarify the roles and responsibilities of cash transfer coordination structures at the community, district, and national levels, and create single coordination structures where relevant.

<sup>3</sup> Abdoulayi, S. et al. (2015).

<sup>4</sup> “About the UBR in Malawi.” [http://www.ubr.mnssp.org/?page\\_id=2](http://www.ubr.mnssp.org/?page_id=2)

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