



Reviewing the Malawi National Social Support Programme

Mid-line Review: System level challenges





Reviewing the MNSSP system

- Key objective to assess the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, instructional capacity, and sustainability of individual MNSSP programmes
- However, the **MNSSP is more than a set of programmes**
- MNSSP is a policy framework designed to ensure the implementation of **programme linkages, effective coordination and cooperation, as well as the harmonization of programmes**
- How was the MNSSP performance ‘as a system’?
- Key system level observations made during the review, organized through the following analytical lenses:

Design gaps

- Relevance of the MNSSP; coherence of programme objectives; adequacy of coverage

Implementation gaps

- Institutional structure; institutional capacity and operational systems; quality of support delivery

Financial gaps

- Financial sustainability; harmonization of funding; Government commitment, cost-effectiveness



MNSSP system review:

Design gaps

Design gaps

- Relevance of the MNSSP; coherence of programme objectives; adequacy of coverage

Coverage of MNSSP for Malawi's poor and vulnerable

- Programmes are not **implemented universally and coverage rates are inadequate** in relation to need
 - PWP reach a fraction of ultra-poor/poor households with labour capacity; SMP implemented in select districts only; SCT eligibility threshold
- Many **ultra-poor and labour constrained households excluded from the SCT** due to the cut-off and do not benefit from any other programme
- **Limited focus on infants and children** outside the SCT and SMP
 - Inadequate focus on nutrition and human capital investment aspects SP
- **Limited focus on the elderly and disabled** outside of the SCT



MNSSP system review:

Design gaps

Challenges with targeting based on poverty and labour capacity

- **Poverty targeting challenging to implement in Malawi** due to widespread and dynamic poverty: Risk of arbitrary exclusion and inclusion errors
- Different programmes for households with and without labour capacity, but **are households so distinct?**
 - SCT beneficiaries have been shown having productive potential
 - PWP beneficiaries also need some basic income protection
- **Lack of coherence between PWP and SCT** design leads to a fragmented safety net
 - SCT focusses on ultra-poor and labour constrained households; PWP on poor households with labour: Are ultra-poor households with labour excluded?
 - Disagreement whether PWP focus on the poor or ultra-poor with labour
 - Limited protection elements of PWP - Low wages and limited working days limit PWP transfers and impacts



MNSSP system review:

Design gaps

Relevance and consistency of programmes' objectives

- Lack of clarity among stakeholders, including government, donors and implementing agencies, on the objectives of programmes
- Lack of conceptualization of the relationship between the SCT and SMP
 - Both aim to increase school enrolment a but work in isolation
- Lack of clearly defined primary and secondary objectives of SMP
 - SMP assumes impact on multiple objectives with unclear prioritization and lacking a coherent theory of change
- VLS/MF: Lack of clarity on the programmes' relation to MNSSP programmes
 - Complementary interventions or targeting separate groups?



MNSSP system review:

Design gaps

Graduation expectations

- Controversial expectation of SCT households to graduate out of poverty not reflected in programme design
 - No consensus on whether SCT is a 'graduation' or 'protection' programme
- Expectation of 'graduation' from VSL to MF has not been conceptualized
- **Bias against double-dipping** means people can only join one programme, effective or not
 - This limits graduation opportunities, that could derive from receiving complementary interventions
- All programmes considered on same level (poverty reduction) even though they may address different social protection functions (protection/promotion)



MNSSP system review:

Implementation gaps

Implementation gaps

- Institutional structure; Institutional capacity and operational systems; Quality of support delivery

Institutional structure and coordination

- **Fragmented and often uncoordinated programme implementation**
- **Largely donor-funded programmes** implemented with generally **low but varying degrees of utilization of Government systems**
 - Spectrum from very limited tangible Government involvement (VSL, MF, SMP), to significant use of Government systems (SCT, PWP)
- National level coordinating forums to be increasingly regular and functional
 - Some programmes are often not represented and do not provide updates
- **Fragmented programme oversight and implementation structures** at district level
 - Overlapping memberships but uncoordinated committee structures
 - Number of forums with similar/overlapping mandates a cause of inefficiency



MNSSP system review:

Implementation gaps

Institutional capacity and operational systems

- **Inadequate information management systems (MIS) and M&E frameworks**
 - Government relies on reports from implementers rather than being able to directly monitor programme implementation
- **Inadequate staffing levels at district level across most programmes**
 - Shortages prevail for all categories of staff especially at district and community levels
- **Inadequate resources and infrastructure for implementing agencies**
 - Especially SCT implementers noted limited infrastructure
- **Heavy reliance on community volunteers in many programmes**
 - Concerns about the reliability, sustainability, and effectiveness



MNSSP system review:

Implementation gaps

Quality and timeliness of delivery of support

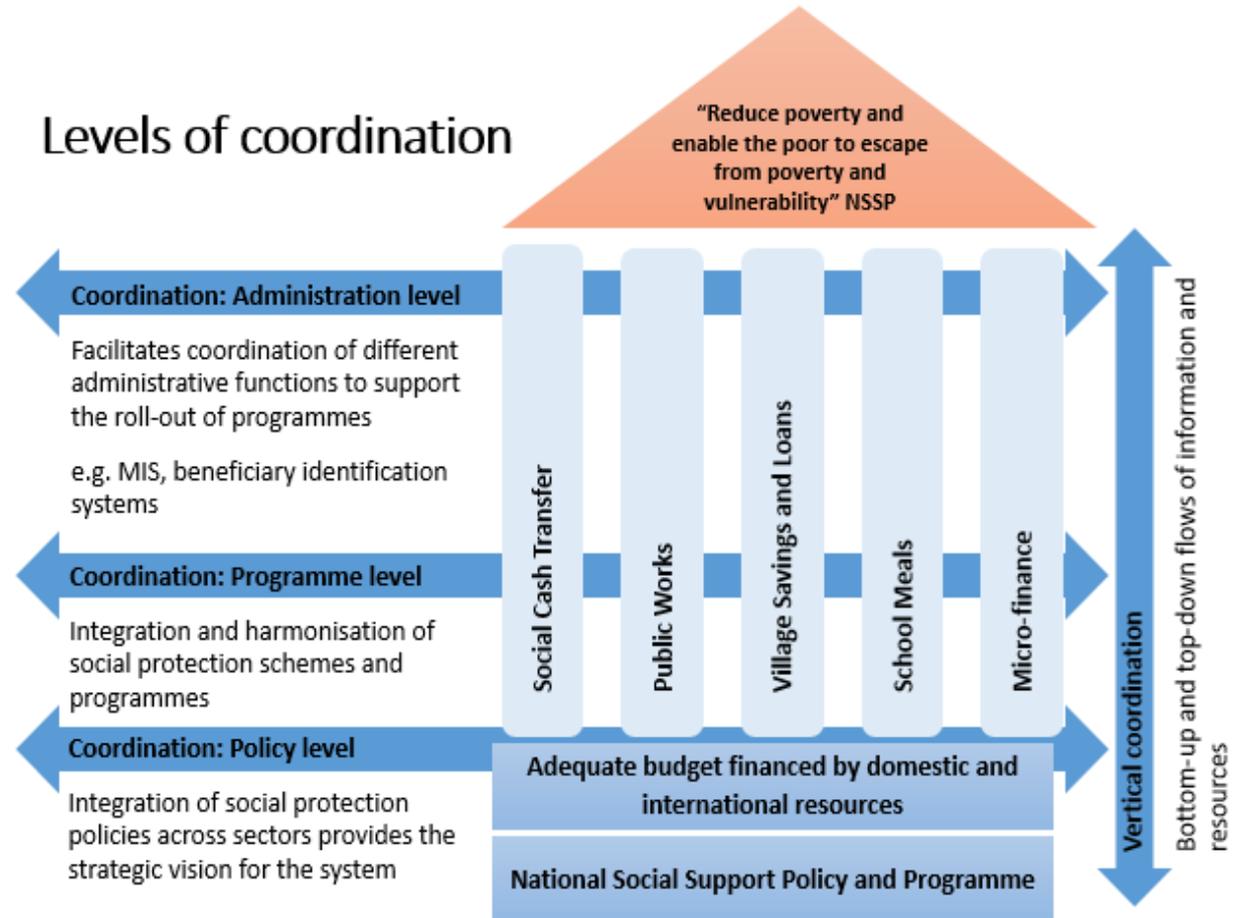
- SCT transfers increasingly paid on-time but challenges remain (Thyolo)
- **Lack of predictability and consistency** in the calculation of SCT transfer levels
 - Levels set based on resources available rather than a consistent formula
 - Adjustments are done infrequently, on an ad-hoc basis, and take long to implement
- **Challenge with self-targeting for PWP** due the trade-off between the need for a meaningful wage and the requirement to keep the wages low enough not to attract 'non-poor' beneficiaries (inclusion errors)



MNSSP system review: Implementation gaps

Coordination evaluated at two levels

1. Coordination of MNSSP programmes
2. Coordination between the MNSSP and the broader social protection sector (focus on FISP and MVAC)





MNSSP system review:

Implementation gaps

Coordination of MNSSP programmes

- Existing linkages at the programme level are mainly **pilots and not institutionalized**
 - Recently linkages pilots have been initiated, but few are national initiatives
 - Formation of VSL group for SCT beneficiaries
 - Linking PWP beneficiaries to COMSIP
- Linkages between programmes are **ad-hoc rather than systematic**
 - Systematic approach requires greater convergence of programme implementation
- **Pilots have led to a fragmented system**, where some programme linkages are implemented in select districts, depending on the pilot's coverage, the implementing agency, and the initiative of programme and district officers
- The Unified Beneficiary Registry (UBR) is a **major administrative link**
 - Opportunity to formalize administrative and programmatic linkages



MNSSP system review: Implementation gaps

Coordination between MNSSP and MVAC

- Linkages between the MNSSP and MVAC are **not systematically developed**
 - Linkages exist mainly on the programme level
 - Harmonized targeting through UBR pilots administrative linkages
- Existing linkages **based on pilots and depend on respective implementers**
 - Facilitating VSL group formation for MVAC beneficiaries
- **Lack of national guidelines and policies** that define appropriate linkages



MNSSP system review:

Implementation gaps

Coordination between MNSSP and agricultural interventions

- **No formal efforts to coordinate** between MNSSP and agricultural interventions
- **Limited programmatic linkages** between MNSSP and agricultural interventions
 - Facilitation of FISP enrolment for PWP beneficiaries
 - Linkages between HGSF pilots and agricultural programmes
- However, **policy level overlaps between MNSSP and agricultural and resilience programmes**
 - All aim to increase the resilience and (agricultural) productivity of poor and vulnerable households
- **Lack of national guidelines and policies** that define appropriate linkages



MNSSP system review:

Financial gaps

Financial gaps

- Financial sustainability; harmonization of funding; Government commitment, cost-effectiveness

Financial sustainability of the MNSSP

- **Government contribution is very low**, raising concerns over willingness to support the programmes, their sustainability, and Government leadership
- Donor contributions outweigh Government's in all programmes
- **Lack of financial sustainability** of the MNSSP system without sustained donor support
 - Sum of programmes costs over 5 percent of GDP



MNSSP system review:

Financial gaps

Funding arrangements of the MNSSP

- **Lack of coordinated planning documents, budgets, spending plans**
- **Multiple financing models in all programmes**
 - No programme under the MNSSP has a harmonised approach to financing
 - Within the SCTP, which was often cited as the most coordinated of the five NSSP programmes, there are four distinct financing models between the five sources of funding
 - Timelines for funding often are not aligned and the burden of management and reporting for the differing models falls to the District level
- Widespread reports of delays in the disbursement of funds managed or provided by Government
- **Limited utilization of Government financial systems**



MNSSP system review:

Financial gaps

Cost-effectiveness of MNSSP programmes

- **Varying cost-effectiveness of MNSSP programs**
 - VSL and MF are low-cost interventions with potentially significant impacts
 - PWP and SMP are relatively expensive programmes with high administrative costs and limited demonstrated impacts
 - SCT has low non-transfer costs and considerable household impacts