



# Reviewing the Malawi National Social Support Programme

## Mid-line Review: System level challenges





# Reviewing the MNSSP system

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- 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

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### 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

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### **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 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

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### 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

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### **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

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### 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)

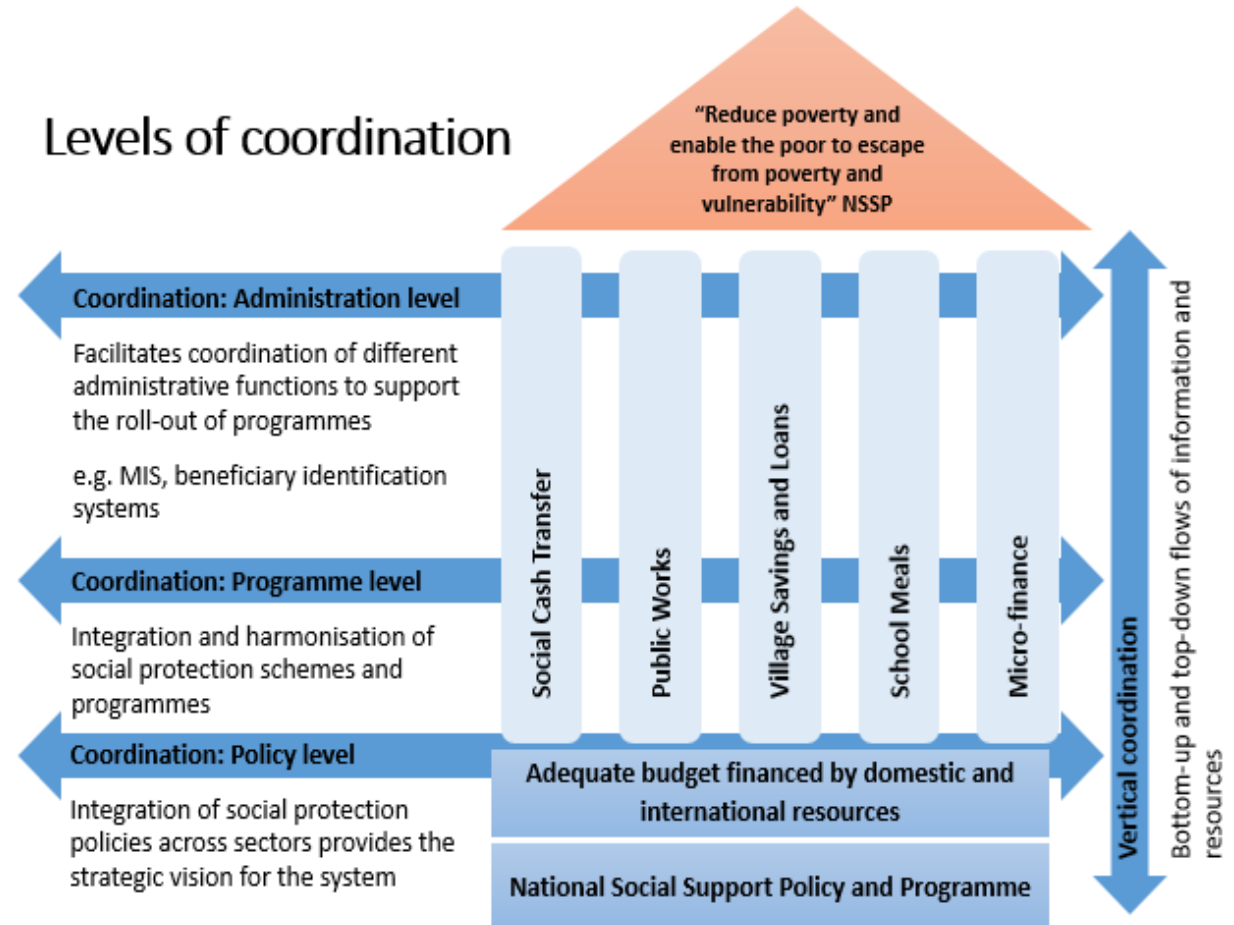


# MNSSP system review:

## 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

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### 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

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### 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

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### 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

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### **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

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### 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