



## TESTIMONIES

*"It was fair to receive this additional support because SCT cash amounts are very small and meant for survival. The Sctp cash is not even enough to buy a bag of maize during this period of the year. I would not have been included by the community if it was not for this decision [on Automatic Inclusion]. By getting this assistance, I was able to feed my family properly."*

***Estor Elliott, 25, Balaka district, Malawi***

Estor is responsible for her son and 6 brothers and sisters. She benefits from the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP), providing support to the poorest 10% labour constrained families. The SCTP aims to reduce poverty and hunger, and to increase school enrolment. The SCTP USD\$16 a month transfer, enables Estor to buy food for her family, and pay for farm and school related expenses. Nevertheless, the SCTP is insufficient to cover household food needs during the lean season, when key commodity prices rise significantly, especially in the context of the last El Niño event, which exacerbated the situation. Through the piloting of Automatic Inclusion, SCTP beneficiaries were considered for humanitarian response, helping them meet their needs during the recent crisis.



*"This year, I engaged in farming with a very positive mind knowing that if my crops failed because of drought, I would be saved by insurance compensation and not be desperate to find food. All my worries were relieved by the drought insurance"*

***Ester Saizi,  
a small-scale farmer in Balaka***

Ester is participating in a WFP productive asset creation and index-based insurance programme, that also supports saving and credit. In 2016, Ester received insurance payouts together with 499 farmers following the impacts of El Niño. She joined the scheme after suffering several years of losses in her crop production due to drought

- including the 2014/15 growing season when 2.8 million people fell into food insecurity due to climatic adversity. The insurance payout helped her to buy additional food to supplement her harvest and apply practices that help stimulate faster recovery. Evidence, tools, and systems from the programme are being leveraged to help inform the redesign of the Malawi National Social Support Programme.

*"The project has benefitted my family and I in so many ways. Prior to benefiting from the project I only had access to food and non-food assistance provided by WFP, UNHCR and partners. My family is now empowered and I hope to be self-reliant in the longer term".*

***Amani Mwamini Dorcas, a refugee woman from the DRC,  
residing in the Dzaleka camp, Malawi***

Since 2016, Amani, along with other refugees and asylum seekers in the Dzaleka camp, are supported by UNHCR and partners with rearing domestic animals. A UNHCR socio-economic household survey, revealed that the majority of the refugee population is completely dependent on aid and assistance. This led to the development of a Livelihoods Strategy. UNHCR rolled out a livelihood project at the end of 2016, which targeted the most vulnerable refugees in Dzaleka camp.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Although considerable progress has been registered in some key development indicators, poverty, chronic food and nutrition insecurity remains prevalent in Malawi. Apart from producing adverse effects on human development, and on the economy 10.3% of Malawi's GDP is lost as a result of child under nutrition<sup>1</sup> - this situation also makes households extremely susceptible to economic (e.g. inflation) and climatic (e.g. drought) shocks that further reduce their access to economic opportunities as well as nutritious food.

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<sup>1</sup> Cost of Hunger, Malawi, 2015.



Various programmes and policies exist in Malawi to address poverty and eradicating extreme hunger. One such policy is the 2012 Social Protection Policy, known as the National Social Support Policy (NSSP), whose broad vision is: “Enhanced quality of life for those affected by poverty and hunger, and improved resilience for those who are vulnerable to risks and shocks.”<sup>2</sup> Its implementation, through the Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP) has seen various successes over the past years. The recent review of the programme has identified the need to improve on the design and implementation of its main programmes and build a system that covers more people, provides more predictable, complementary support to respond to the multiple and compounding needs of the population, so as to effectively improve impact on poverty reduction.

Key obstacles faced in the last two years have been successive and compounding climatic shocks, from historic flooding in 2015, to the strongest *El Niño*, coupled with high rates of inflation. With limited capacity and time to recover between shocks, households’ needs have increased tremendously, from 8% of the country requiring lifesaving assistance in the 2014/2015 lean season to 40% during the 2016/17 lean season. Households in some affected districts have been receiving emergency assistance at a value that can meet their basic food and nutrition requirements for up to eight months of the year over multiple consecutive years.

Given this context, the new MNSSP also focuses on meeting beneficiaries’ seasonal needs, prepare for, respond to unpredictable shocks together with the humanitarian sector, and support recovery – commonly referred to as shock-sensitive social protection – in order to best address chronic and acute needs in the most effective way, whilst examining potential efficiency gains, framed around broader discussions on operationalizing the humanitarian-development nexus as one way to ‘break the cycle of food and nutrition insecurity’ in Malawi.

## PROMISING PRACTICES FROM PAST EXPERIENCES

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### GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT:

There is consensus among national stakeholders that the **first and foremost contribution of social protection to humanitarian crises is to perform its core function better**. The most important way to make a social protection work in a humanitarian context is to design and implement it well so that it meaningfully contributes to reduce chronic vulnerability and increase the capacity of households to withstand a shock.

### EXPERIMENTING WITH THE EXPANSION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES IN RESPONSE TO CRISIS:

Several interventions aiming to expand or piggy-back on social protection programmes have been implemented and reviewed to inform the design of scalability features of the key social protection programmes. These include:

- **Expansion of School Meals Programmes:** As part of efforts on protecting educational and nutritional gains, WFP and partners scaled up its Schools Meals Program. The Initiative assisted 61,000 students in 71 previously uncovered primary schools in four severely food insecure districts to ensure education continuity (November 2016 - April 2017) through monthly Take Home Rations consisting of 3kg of Corn Soy Blend. Evidence showed improved enrolment, stabilised attendance and retention rates. Moving forward efforts by the Government and WFP will focus on extending the coverage of regular school meals programmes to these districts, as they are among the most food insecure and vulnerable to shocks, while still working to enable the expansion of the programme in times of need.

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<sup>2</sup> GoM, 2012, National Social Support Policy, p.8



- **Automatic inclusion of Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP) beneficiaries in the humanitarian caseload:** Based on findings of high exclusion of households receiving the SCTP during community-based targeting for humanitarian food assistance, a policy decision was made to include the 132,916 ultra-poor households receiving a basic cash grant under the government-led social cash transfer programme in the drought affected districts in the drought response caseload for 2016-2017. SCTP beneficiaries received full rations, be it cash-based or food-based, just like other beneficiaries of the humanitarian response. The findings of the review are currently used to inform the design of upcoming emergency food responses and targeting directives regarding the consideration of SCTP households for other forms of assistance, if and when eligible.

#### INVESTING IN SYSTEMS BUILDING:

The Government of Malawi, with support from development partners has developed a Unified Beneficiary Registry (UBR), which is a national registry capturing socio-economic data for poor households. It is initially capturing data for the poorest 50% of the population in each district and is being currently rolled out in 1/3 of the country (10 districts). The purpose of the registry is to serve as a repository of potential beneficiaries of various social protection programmes who can be selected in line with programme specific eligibility criteria. In 2016, WFP with the Government and NGO partners, conducted a trial to examine the operational benefits and feasibility of using the UBR to assist with humanitarian targeting. While findings highlighted issues to address for future systems alignment, there are clear opportunities to create linkages. Some important next steps include: digitizing the humanitarian process; creating an interface between data management systems; and strengthening the UBR (data sharing protocols, grievance mechanisms etc.). If properly designed and implemented with the right investments made, these linkages could go a long way to advance the humanitarian-social protection nexus agenda, reduce humanitarian costs, and strengthen the capacity of the UBR and of the government to more effectively deliver social protection.

## MAIN CHALLENGE(S) AHEAD AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

Among issues identified as critical for Malawi to move forward on providing basic social protection to crisis-affected populations, the Government is committed to:

#### CLEARLY DEFINE THE SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICY FRAMEWORK, OPERATIONALIZE & PRIORITIZE ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Despite facing these multi-dimensional aspects of fragility, the Government of Malawi has invested, with support from development partners, in building a government-led social protection system that has grown in maturity and impact. The new 5-year social protection strategy (MNSSP 2.0) which was developed in a very participatory way, including key stakeholders at both central and local levels, proposes a holistic framework to transition households away from poverty and hunger, and that promotes a shock-sensitive system, coordinated with the humanitarian sector. In order to ensure its operationalization, the Government is currently working under the leadership of The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MOFEPD) to develop an implementation plan which outlines each pillar of the strategy, its objectives, the strategic actions and the specific activities that will be required to meet these. The government, with support of partners, is also prioritizing activities based on the feasibility of their implementation in the short/medium term and potential impact. This carries the risk to leave behind more small scale emerging issues, such as the issue of refugees in Malawi. The country has hosted refugees for over 2 decades and in the past 3 years has continued to witness a steady increase of new arrivals mostly from DRC and Burundi.



## HAVING ALL STAKEHOLDERS COME TOGETHER

Better aligning social protection and humanitarian action takes place within a rapidly evolving field, with many actors interested in bringing the agenda forward, while at the same time working with a limited evidence-base of what works. It also takes place in a context of diversity, bringing together humanitarian perspectives and longer-term social protection thinking, governmental- and non-government stakeholders, development partners, UN agencies, first line responders, and donors with different mandates. Leveraging this diversity as a resource for mutual learning and innovation is key for a contextualized design and effective implementation of shock-sensitive features in the Social Protection system.

## DON'T FORGET FINANCING:

Key attention needs to be put on funding. Despite a heavy reliance on external funding, the financial commitment of the Government to the social protection system is increasing and should keep increasing. The production of evidence of impact will be key in this regard. In addition, it will be key to explore how to make social protection funding more efficient and effective (through a pooled fund) and explore channelling options of humanitarian funds to finance scalability of the system, assessing cost and time implications and reliability.

## USEFUL RESOURCES

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(Forthcoming), Towards a shock-sensitive social protection system for Malawi ,UNICEF, 2017, [The review of the policy decision: the automatic inclusion of Social Cash Transfer Programme beneficiaries into the food emergency caseload](#)

WFP, 2016, [Better Support for the Poorest in Malawi](#)

WFP, [2017 Malawi Country Brief](#)

2014, [Joint Assessment Mission Report: Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi](#)