Child-sensitive Social Protection in Malawi

Summary of Analysis and Recommendations

This brief provides a summary of findings from analysis carried out on the child-sensitivity of the social protection system in Malawi, commissioned by Save the Children in 2020. The intended audience includes central and line ministries of the Government of Malawi, bilateral and multilateral development partners, international NGOs, civil society organisations and independent agencies, among others.

Purpose of analysis

About 60 percent of Malawi’s children live in multi-dimensional poverty¹, meaning they experience deprivations across a wide range of areas beyond monetary poverty, including health, nutrition and education, among others. We know from evidence that child-sensitive social protection (CSSP) can help prevent, at scale, a wide range of childhood deprivations.² While Malawi’s social protection system has grown in scale and scope, it has never been analysed from the perspective of how it benefits and affects children. This analysis shines a light on the implications of the social protection system for children and provides recommendations to make it more child-sensitive.

Methodology

The analysis was informed by a literature review and key informant interviews conducted in Malawi in February 2020. The analysis blends UNICEF’s child-sensitivity analysis of social protection guidance³ with a widely regarded tool used to assess social protection systems - the Core Diagnostic Instrument (CODI)⁴ – where the eight criteria have been adapted to incorporate a child’s lens. The criteria are: (i) inclusiveness, (ii) impact and adequacy, (iii)

² Marginalised children refers to those who face barriers to participation and development that are not purely economic, but also political, social and cultural.
⁴ The CODI Framework has been developed by the Inter Agency Social Protection Assessments (IAPA), with the support of WorldBank, UNICEF, WFP, EU, DFID and Save the Children.
appropriateness, (iv) respect for rights and dignity, (v) governance and institutional capacity, (vi) financial and fiscal sustainability, (vii) coherence and integration, and (viii) responsiveness.

**Main social protection schemes in Malawi by stage of the life course and relationship to children**

The analysis focused on the three major programmes within the Malawi National Social Support Programme II: The Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP), public works and school meals programmes. These schemes are categorised below by whether they provide: benefits directly for children; benefits to families or households in which children may live but are not intended only for children; and benefits provided to individual adults but which nevertheless may benefit children indirectly (such as an old age pension).

**Table 1: Main social protection schemes by how directly children may be expected to benefit**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Children in SCTP households</th>
<th>Children in Public Works households</th>
<th>Children in Food for Assets households</th>
<th>Children participating in School Meals Program</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
<td>93,385</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>416,809</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>2,996,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>143,337</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>653,531</td>
<td>91,000* (Estimate)</td>
<td>401,856** (estimate)</td>
<td>2,996,902</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coverage**

The coverage of social protection in Malawi is relatively favorable in comparison to rest of Africa; social protection programmes have been estimated to cover 25 percent of the population, compared to an average of 10 percent across Africa. However, this does not consider issues of adequacy or impact and just 12 percent of the total number of children living in multidimensional poverty in Malawi are found in SCTP beneficiary households, with a further 9 percent in public works beneficiary households. Putting aside the provision of school meals, the report finds that the overwhelming majority (79 percent) of poor children living in Malawi are not in a household that benefits directly from cash or in-kind transfers.

The main findings of the report are summarized in Table 3 below against each of the eight CODI criteria that were analysed. Overall, the report finds that, despite the seemingly favorable coverage level, once we consider evidence on each of the eight areas below, such as the impact and adequacy of the current social protection provisions as well as appropriateness and financial and fiscal sustainability, there are considerable gaps in terms of delivering on the needs of children.

**Table 3: Summary findings based on the CODI criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>• There is currently no cash transfer program specifically targeted for the benefit of children.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Just one in five of all poor children are benefiting from cash or in-kind transfer programs directed to households.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Only 2.1% of all children under 5 years (a critical period of physical and cognitive growth) are covered by SCTP.</td>
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<td>Impact and adequacy</td>
<td>• <strong>SCTP</strong>: Evaluations show impacts on consumption, livelihood, earnings, increased school enrolment and regular participation for SCTP children already enrolled in schools. However, there is little effect on new enrolment, grade progression or school completion. The school bonus is inadequate to make a significant difference to new enrolment and retention. There are no positive impacts of the SCTP in reducing the levels of chronic malnutrition among young children. The impact of SCTP is eroded over time due to lack of indexation to inflation.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Public Works Programme</strong>: No analysis has been conducted to date on the impact of public works programme on children. Independent impact evaluation has found no evidence of improved food security.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>School Meals Programme</strong>: Overall, there is lack of rigorous evidence on impacts of programme, despite being the largest social safety net intervention in Malawi in terms of budget and coverage. By</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 For details into the findings and recommendations for each of the eight criteria, please see full report.
itself, school meals cannot be a sufficiently powerful social protection instrument to address children’s nutrition or education needs.

**Appropriateness**
- Despite its focus on social and human development, emphasis on children in MNSSP II is limited and not addressing major child needs, such as early childhood development and nutrition.
- M&E framework for the MNSSP II is weak with regard to the level of information on children; lacking indicators on child outcomes.

**Respect for rights and dignity**
- A harmonised approach to complaints is being developed, but gaps remain with regard to child participation and social accountability.
- There is increasing analysis on the links between child labour and social protection programmes in SCTP, which could be extended to all programmes.

**Governance and institutional capacity**
- There is no dedicated strategic alignment or active coordination among social protection actors with interest in well-being of children – a missed opportunity to advance child rights.
- Institutional capacity at sub-national level is inadequate, which has meant eligible households remaining on waiting lists, transfer levels not reflecting appropriate levels of school bonus, etc. In combination with limited beneficiary understanding and social accountability mechanisms, the constraints to case management mean vulnerable households and children are not getting the level of support they need.

**Financial and fiscal sustainability**
- Government spending on social protection is extremely low compared to the regional average and not aligned with needs of poor and vulnerable children.
- The amount of information and analysis in relation to child-sensitive public financing, looking at the proportion or quality of social protection expenditure that indirectly or directly supports children, is limited.

**Coherence and integration**
- SCTP Linkage and Referral pilot system sought to assist SCTP to access social services and maximize the impact of transfers. Unfortunately, inadequate supply of services (especially in education, agriculture and counselling for HIV), and other challenges such as distance, fees or closed lists constrained the impact of the pilot.
- Emerging efforts to improve outcomes for children through ‘cash plus’ are welcome, but supply side will need to be addressed to achieve desired results.
- There is a danger for children and vulnerable groups if participation in “graduation” initiatives is linked to ineligibility for long term social protection programmes.

**Responsiveness**
- Significant progress has been made in the capacity of the system to respond to shocks, as evidenced by vertical expansion of the SCTP every year since 2017-18 and a range of other initiatives. However, a number of fundamental operational issues remain and the visibility of children is limited. A particular concern is that the dominant lens remains food insecurity, yet recent UNICEF analysis shows that children suffer temporary yet significant changes in non-food related deprivations during the lean season in Malawi.
# Recommendations

Social protection in Malawi has achieved a great deal over the past decade and there is much to be proud of. However, failing to invest in Malawi’s children now will perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of poverty in the future. Child-sensitive social protection presents an opportunity to help break that vicious cycle. Urgent action is required to invest in children and sow the seeds of a prosperous Malawi. The priorities should include the following:

1. Introduce nutrition-sensitive social protection initiatives based on global best practice, with a focus on the critical first 1,000 days of life (from pregnancy to the child’s second birthday);

2. Address the low coverage of children in social protection, through trialing more categorical (age-determined) approaches to targeting, in line with recent proposals for an old-age pension;

3. Develop a road map to improve education outcomes for social protection beneficiaries;

4. Establish a credible government-led financing strategy for social protection;

5. Strengthen social accountability mechanisms, including for children.

Achieving these five priorities will require a team effort. There are no shortcuts but working in partnership can often yield higher returns. In order to maintain a strong focus on the importance of investing in children, perhaps the time is ripe to establish a Coalition for Child-sensitive Social Protection to deliver this agenda; an alliance for the future of Malawi.