National Social Protection Strategy 2025-2030

Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization
Poverty Reduction and Social Protection
P.O Box 30136
Lilongwe 3
Malawi

March 2026

Foreword

The Government of Malawi, through the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization, is pleased to present the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025–2030. This five-year Strategy represents a renewed commitment by Government to address poverty, vulnerability, and inequality by strengthening and expanding the national social protection system.

The Strategy has been developed following extensive consultations with stakeholders at national and district levels, complemented by insights from relevant empirical studies and international best practices. It sets out clear priorities and strategic interventions to ensure that social protection in Malawi evolves into a more comprehensive, inclusive, and shock-responsive system. The approach adopted in the Strategy reflects a lifecycle perspective, recognizing the distinct vulnerabilities that Malawians face at different stages of life, from infancy through old age.

The NSPS identifies key strategies and interventions to address persistent challenges such as widespread poverty, vulnerability to climate and economic shocks, and limited access to essential services. In responding to these realities, the Government, development partners, and implementing agencies will collectively pursue actions that will build human capital, enhance resilience, and safeguard the welfare of the poor and vulnerable especially women, children and the elderly. Successfully addressing these challenges is expected to generate transformative impacts not only on household well-being but also on Malawi's broader social and economic development trajectory.

The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization assures all Malawians, as well as our partners, that this Strategy will serve as a guiding framework for coordinating, financing, and delivering social protection interventions in an efficient, transparent, and sustainable manner. It is our conviction that the NSPS 2025–2030 will provide a solid foundation for building an equitable and resilient society in which no one is left behind.

Joseph Mathyola Mwanamveka
Honourable Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Government of Malawi, and in particular the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to all institutions and individuals whose contributions made the development of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025–2030 possible.

I am especially grateful to the support by the German Development Cooperation implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ Malawi) and also to UNICEF for the generous financial support provided towards this important national undertaking. This support has been instrumental in ensuring that the process was successfully concluded.

I also acknowledge with deep gratitude the valuable inputs and data provided by various Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), whose technical expertise enriched the quality and comprehensiveness of this Strategy.

My appreciation further goes to the Development Partners working in the social protection sector, whose collaboration, insights and shared experiences greatly informed the preparation of this Strategy.

The Ministry also recognizes the pivotal role of the Poverty Reduction and Social Protection (PRSP) Team, who offered dedicated technical and logistical support to the consultants engaged in this assignment, ensuring that the Strategy is well-aligned with Malawi's policy frameworks and international commitments.

I am equally indebted to the District Officials who were consulted during the drafting process. In particular, I extend my extend gratitude to the District Commissioners; Directors of Planning and Development; Directors of Education, Youth and Sports; Directors of Public Works; District Social Welfare Officers; Monitoring and Evaluation Officers; School, Health and Nutrition (SHN) Coordinators; among others, for their time, practical insights, and commitment. Their contributions provided critical perspectives from the local level, ensuring that the Strategy responds to the real needs and priorities of communities across the country.

Finally, i wish to express our appreciation to all stakeholders, too many to mention individually, whose collective efforts and commitment have shaped this Strategy. It is the Ministry's hope that the spirit of partnership demonstrated throughout the process will continue to guide the implementation of the NSPS 2025–2030, for the benefit of all Malawians, particularly the poor and vulnerable.

Cliff Chiunda, PhD
Secretary to the Treasury - Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Boxes

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AGCOM	Agriculture Commercialization
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AIP	Affordable Inputs Programme
ARC	African Risk Capacity
ARSPS	African Regional Social Protection Strategy
CAHWs	Community Animal Health Workers
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
COMSIP	Community Savings and Investment Promotion
CS-EPWP	Climate-Smart Enhanced Public Works Programme
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CSSC	Community Social Support Committee
CUCI	COVID-19 Urban Cash Intervention
DAHLD	Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development
DCPCs	District Civil Protection Committees
DEAC	District Environmental Adaptation Committee
DoDMA	Department of Disaster Management Affairs
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DSSC	District Social Support Committee
EPWP	Extended Public Works Program
FARMSE	Financial Access for Rural Markets, Smallholders and Enterprise Programmes
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FIES	Food Insecurity Experience Scale
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IHS	Integrated Household Survey
JEFAP	Joint Emergency Food Aid Program
KYC	Know-Your-Customer
MDA	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MDHS	Malawi Demographic and Health Survey
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MICS-EAGLE	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey-Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity
MIP-I	Malawi 2063 First Ten-Year Implementation Plan
MIS	Management Information System
MISA	Multiple Indicator Survey on Ageing
MNSSP	Malawi National Social Support Programme
MoFEPD	Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization
MoGCDSW	Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare
MSR	Malawi Social Registry, formerly known as the Unified Beneficiary Registry (UBR)
MTR	Mid-Term Review
MUAC	Mid-Upper Arm Circumference

MVAC	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee
MWK	Malawi Kwacha
NEEF	National Economic Empowerment Fund
NEP	National Education Policy
NFCF	National Financial Coordination Forum
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NID	National Identity
NLGFC	National Local Government Finance Committee
NMNP	National Multi-Sector Nutrition Policy
NSMP	National School Meals Program
NSPP	National Social Protection Policy
NSPS	National Social Protection Strategy
NSSTC	National Social Support Technical Committee
OPC	Office of the President and Cabinet
PRSP	Poverty Reduction and Social Protection
PSP	Payment Service Provider
PWP	Public Works Programme
SBCC	Social and Behaviour Change Communication
SCTP	Social Cash Transfer Programme
SCTPS	Social Cash Transfer Programme Secretariat
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFP	School Feeding Program
SLGs	Savings and Loans Groups
SMART	Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SSF	Social Support Fund
SWOT	Strength Weaknesses Threats and Opportunities
ToR	Terms of Reference
TRG	Technical Reference Group
UBR	Unified Beneficiary Register
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
VLD	Village Livestock Development Committees
VSL	Village Savings and Loans
VSLG	Village Savings and Loans Group
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WRA	Women of Reproductive Age

1 Introduction

The National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025-2030 is anchored in the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) 2024-2029 which expanded scope and adopted the lifecycle approach. The policy goes beyond mere social support to broader social protection aspects encompassing social assistance, social insurance, social welfare services, labour market policies, as well as a variety of public and private instruments aimed at eradicating poverty, addressing vulnerability, and combating social exclusion. The strategy translates the broader priorities in the policy into specific strategic approaches for realisation of programmatic objectives, hence providing strategic direction for the operationalisation of the NSPP.

1.1 Background

Frequent existence of widespread risk and the recurrence of shocks are a major cause of poverty and exacerbated malnutrition in Malawi. The Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MHDS) and other studies have continuously reported higher levels of stunting and other forms of undernutrition among poor low-income households compared to those in the wealth quintiles. Poor households are characterised by poor diets and poor access to nutritious foods; suboptimal childcare and feeding practices; a poor health environment; and lack of access to quality health and other services.

The most at-risk populations in such situations include women of reproductive age especially pregnant and breast-feeding women, infants and young children, school-aged children, people with disabilities and older persons. Therefore, while looking at national poverty rates gives us a helpful picture of general levels of poverty and vulnerability across the population, it is also useful to look at how people experience poverty and face several specific risks and vulnerabilities at different stages across the lifecycle in order to respond according to issues affecting each category of the population. The following sub-sections provide an overview of the current situation in Malawi for pregnant women and infants, school-age children, working-age people and older persons (based on the 2024 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey and the 2019-20 Integrated Household Survey (IHS), except where stated).

Pregnant women and infants

The first 1,000 days of child life, starting from conception to two years of life, is the most critical stage for human physical and cognitive growth and development. During this stage of the life-cycle, vulnerabilities include chronic malnutrition, which can result in permanent poor physical growth and development resulting in stunting and reduced cognitive development which may cause compromised intellectual ability that may lead to poor school performance, reduced academic and professional achievement and low work productivity as adults; missed immunisation which increase the risk of preventable diseases among the children; inadequate growth monitoring which may result in missed opportunity for early detection of growth failure, illness and growth defects; limited access to ante-natal, post-natal and subsequent medical care; poor parenting (including child abuse and neglect as well as the absence of mental stimulation). In emergency situations, vulnerability is exacerbated by the possible loss of parental care from bereavement or migration.

The 2024 MDHS reported that 38% of children under the age of 5 are stunted, 2% are wasted, 10% are underweight and 6% are overweight. Infant and young child feeding practices were also found to be sub-optimal which result in low dietary intake of various nutrients required for child growth and development. Only 60% of children under age 6 months are exclusively breastfed and only 24% of children aged 6–23 months are fed with the minimum dietary diversity attributed to persistent food insecurity. Food insecurity is associated with low availability of diverse and nutritious food in terms of quantity and quality, low access in terms of physical access and purchasing power and utilisation in terms of food choices and combinations to enhance dietary diversity. These are all compounded by inconsistent supply of food due to seasonal variations considering that Malawi is still highly dependent on rain-fed agriculture with irrigation still at low scale; and lack of sustainability due to effects of climate change that have resulted in recurrent natural disasters and poor livelihoods among the majority in Malawi. Malawi is one of the countries that are suffering from the adverse effects of climate change especially unreliable rains characterised by short wet seasons, erratic rains which are either too heavy or too low to support production of various crops, long dry spells and devastating floods and cyclones. Many communities have limited resilience to the recurrent and multiple vulnerabilities, shocks and stresses that have been occurring in the country as a result of climate change and particularly in disaster prone districts. These adverse effects also affect maternal nutrition and health. According to the 2024 Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART) survey, the overall minimum dietary diversity for women was at 14.9%, putting them at high risk of malnutrition. During the same time a total of 94% of the households were food insecure based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), and 70% resorted to cutting down on food quantities including skipping meals, staying a whole day without food and eating less due to lack of food or means to access food.

In addition, overall, only 67% of children aged 12–23 months are fully vaccinated with basic antigens. Such poor feeding and care practices increase the risk of malnutrition and increased disease burden from preventable diseases leading to poor health and increased vulnerability during emergencies. The burden of diseases is exacerbated by delays in seeking of care when the child is sick attributed to many factors such as long distance to health facilities and lack of transport. Micronutrient deficiencies are also common, with anaemia affecting 28% of children under the age of five years, 35% of adolescent girls (10-14 years), and 32.7% among women of reproductive age (WRA) aged 15-49 years (MDHS, 2015/16) which further increase vulnerability among this population group. Early pregnancy is also common with the 2024 MDHS reporting 32% of young women age 15–19 who having ever been pregnant which increases their vulnerability to malnutrition, poor pregnancy outcomes and dropping out of school. According to SMART survey, 2024, based on Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC), the prevalence of pregnant and breastfeeding women who were undernourished was at 6.6%t, but as high as 17.8% of pregnant and lactating adolescents were wasted.

The under-5 mortality rate is 48 deaths per 1,000 live births reduced from 63 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2015/16, and the infant mortality rate is 35 a decline from 42 deaths per 1,000 live births recorded in 2015/16. Nearly all women (96%) reported receiving antenatal care from a skilled provider for their most recent live birth or stillbirth in the 2 years preceding the 2024 MDHS survey, however, only 62% of women had four or more antenatal care visits for their most recent live birth or stillbirth and 79% of women took iron-containing supplements during their most recent pregnancy while only 65% of women with a live birth and/or stillbirth in the 2 years preceding the 2024 MDHS received a postnatal check within 2 days after delivery. These figures indicate that uptake of these critical services is still sub-optimal and increase vulnerability of pregnant women to poor nutrition status and pregnancy outcomes. However, the percentage of live births assisted by a skilled provider has increased markedly over the past three decades, from 53% in 1992 to 96% in 2024 and this positive trend needs to be sustained.

School-age and adolescence

Adolescents are people between 10 and 19 years of age, while the school-age group covers those from 6 years of age and includes adolescents. These groups present a critical demographic and stage of physiological, psychological, emotional and other forms of development. They do represent a pertinent group for the economic and social development of a nation. At the same time, this age group stands a chance for being neglected due to its age overlap with other groups including middle childhood (ages 6-12), the youth (15-24 years of age), and women of reproductive age (15-49 years of age), as such they are missed out in many programmes including social and economic protection, nutrition and health care which increase their vulnerability to social-economic challenges which has potential to compromise their health, education, nutrition and economic status. This population group is considered a window of opportunity in building a population that is not at risk of intergenerational effects of malnutrition through special focus and investment in adolescent nutrition.

Vulnerability for this age group (6-19 years) is exacerbated by poverty which may expose them to child labour, dropping out of school or inability (for whatever reason) to access quality education or to have a satisfactory environment in which to study; malnutrition, which promotes intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, domestic violence and other forms of Gender-based Violence (GBV); harmful practices, sexual abuse, early marriages and pregnancy. In addition, the loss of parental care from bereavement which may likely lead to child headed households, broken marriages or migration increase the vulnerability of this category of the population depriving them for social, economic, health, nutrition wellbeing and increase the probability of having street and children and other disadvantaged situations.

One of the biggest risks for school aged children and adolescents is the risk of not completing their education which pose a big threat to human capital development. The 2022 UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey-Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity (MICS-EAGLE) analysis found that the primary completion rate in Malawi is 33 per cent, indicating that two-thirds of the children of primary school completion age did not complete primary education. Completion rates decline for junior secondary school to 23 per cent, and further drop to 15 per cent for senior secondary level. At all levels, rural and poor children have completion rates below the average for all of Malawi, whereas urban and richer children have completion rates above the average. In particular, children belonging to the poorest quintile have much lower completion rates than other groups. In primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels, the adjusted net attendance rate is still lower for children with functional difficulties, yet education is a vital prerequisite for combating poverty, empowering women, and economic growth, protecting children (especially those with disabilities) from hazardous and exploitative labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment, and influencing population growth.

Working age

Unemployment and under-employment for the working age (18-60 years) are less of a concern in Malawi than in other parts of southern Africa. The latest Labour Force Survey (from 2013) registered the ‘strict’ unemployment rate at 6.6 per cent; the youth unemployment rate was 8.6 per cent. Generally, unemployment is more stuck in urban zones, the Southern area, the youth segment as well as workers with intermediate and advanced levels of education. The unemployment rate was estimated to be flat during the 2010s with a minor rise of 0.4 percentage points from 2019 to 2020 as an impact of imposed lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ‘broader’ unemployment rate (people who are unemployed and want to work but not actively seeking for job) was 20 percent in 2013, which is more common among women (26 percent) than men (14 percent).

Thirty-four per cent of women have experienced physical violence since age 15, and 20 per cent have experienced sexual violence. Less than half of women (40 per cent) who have experienced any physical or sexual violence have sought help to stop the violence, and about half (49 per cent) have both never sought help and never told anyone about the violence.

Older persons

The vulnerabilities faced in old age (60+ years) include increasing frailty and a decreasing ability to work, with a considerably increased incidence of disability, with one in three reporting some form of disability (Multiple Indicator Survey on Ageing - MISA 2017). However, the same 2017 MISA found that nearly 70 per cent of older persons were engaged in agricultural-related work for more than 10 days in the past 12 months preceding the survey. Due to food insecurity, older persons employed several mechanisms to avert the hunger situation; 93 per cent of such households had skipped or limited the number of meals as a coping strategy in the last 12 months.

There is also the possible lack of care from family (sometimes combined with care responsibilities for grandchildren), dangers of isolation and stigmatisation, and discrimination in areas such as accessing the labour force or obtaining credit. The loss of independent income can lead to growing social exclusion: as older people become less able to contribute to their kinship networks – for example by helping their grandchildren – they may face growing isolation and loss of support from others, many of whom are, themselves, struggling to provide for their children.

Despite rising coverage of social protection and labour programmes, older persons remain largely excluded, with only 2.3 per cent receiving a pension, leaving the vast majority without adequate income security in old age

2 Strategic analysis

2.1 Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis

This section presents a SWOT analysis of the current social protection system in Malawi, based substantially on the Mid-Term Review of MNSSP II, and updated through the consultations to develop NSPS. This has been included to provide a background understanding of the existing strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats within the social protection system in Malawi, to inform and strengthen key priority areas of success on which Malawi can capitalise and build. The results of this SWOT analysis feed into the strategic outcomes and outputs presented in Chapter 3.

Table 1 -SWOT analysis of social protection in Malawi

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Existence of a comprehensive national policy for social protection. • Political commitment as reflected in alignment with Malawi 2063 and MIP-I. • Longstanding programmes (e.g., SCTP, Public Works Program - PWP, School Meals, Affordable Inputs Programme) provide institutional experience. • Expanding use of digital systems (Malawi Social Registry, e-payments, Management Information Systems - MIS). • Presence of coordination structures across ministries, districts, and partners. • Strong community involvement in programme delivery. • Existence of GRM • Shock-response experience (cyclones, CUCI) • Existence of Multi-donor Trust Fund	• Targeting inefficiencies • Coverage gaps, especially social insurance • Low benefit levels • Absence of legislation on social protection • Inadequate and poor outreach and communications • Fragmentation and duplication across programmes with limited harmonisation. • Inadequate domestic financing and over-reliance on development partners. • Weak capacity for monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management. • Limited shock-responsiveness and scalability of programmes. • Inadequate integration of disability and youth-sensitive approaches. • Weak inter-sectoral coordination, especially at local authority level. • Delays and inefficiencies in programme delivery mechanisms. • Limited functionality of the District Coordination Structures
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Transition to lifecycle objectives/coordination • Multi-channel and choice-based delivery systems • Cash plus and linkages • Improved MEAL for evidence-based advocacy • Innovative sources of funding such	• Uncertainty of future financing for social protection • Fear of loss of autonomy and influence • Inconsistent and sometimes conflicting targeting approaches across programmes • Weak involvement and marginalization of district structures in programme design and implementation which limit local ownership

as African Risk Capacity for financing crop failure or drought, Private Sector and Corporate Social Responsibility contributions, earmarked taxes/levies dedicated to social protection, etc. • Improved outreach and communications • Integration of social protection into broader resilience, climate adaptation, and disaster risk management agendas. • Potential to leverage digital innovations (mobile money, biometric ID, integrated registries). • Alignment with international commitments (SDGs, AU Agenda 2063, African Union Social Policy Framework). • Ongoing decentralisation reforms offer opportunities to strengthen local delivery systems. • Expanding private sector and non-governmental organization (NGO) partnerships in social protection delivery. • Existence of a social registry • Regional peer learning from other African countries advancing social protection. • Studies on coordination, UBR, and capacity-building	and sustainability • Climatic shocks that erode gains made • Climate shocks, food insecurity, and pandemics increase vulnerability and strain the system. • High population growth and urbanisation increase demand for social protection services. • Donor fatigue or shifting global priorities could reduce external support. • Corruption and governance challenges risk undermining trust in the system.

2.2 Stakeholder Overview

There is a wide range of stakeholders involved in the social protection space in Malawi. Key stakeholders in the implementation of the NSPP and the NSPS include the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization; Office of the President and Cabinet; Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development; Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare; Ministry of Labour; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology; Ministry of Agriculture; Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs; Ministry of Health; and other Government Ministries; District Councils; Development Partners and Non-Governmental Organisations. Their roles and responsibilities have been well articulated under Institutional Arrangements.

3 Vision, Goal, Strategic Outcomes and Objectives

The National Social Protection Strategy aligns to the vision, goal, overall objective, and guiding principles and values that are set out in the NSPP, 2024-2029.

3.1 Vision

Enhanced quality of life for people suffering from poverty and hunger, improved resilience of those vulnerable to risks and shocks and supported flexible and rapid scale-up to enable effective responses to shocks and provision of seasonal or short-term emergency assistance where needed.

3.2 Goal

The strategy will gradually build a comprehensive and coherent social protection system that combats poverty and vulnerability while contributing to economic growth, human capital development, equality and equity through programmes which improve food security and nutrition, support access to basic social services, enhance livelihoods and assets, and protect households at risk from shocks thereby facilitating the movement of people out of poverty. The ultimate purpose is to enhance the quality of life for individuals suffering from poverty, hunger and different forms of vulnerability in order to improve the resilience of those vulnerable to risks and shocks.

3.3 Strategic Outcomes

Implementation of this strategy is expected to realise the following outcomes:

1. Strengthened human capital accumulation.
2. Enhanced resilience to asset erosion among the poor and vulnerable.
3. A strengthened shock-sensitive social protection system.
4. Improved quality and expanded coverage of social security, addressing risks across the life cycle.
5. Enhanced institutional capacity within the social protection ecosystem.

3.4 Strategic objectives

The overall objective of the policy is to provide social protection across the spectrum of well-being according to the lifecycle approach comprising of instruments including social assistance, social security and livelihoods interventions that will contribute to the attainment of the Malawi 2063 agenda. The specific objectives of the policy are to:

1. Provide welfare support to the poorest and most vulnerable populations to improve their standard of living.
2. Complement welfare support with broader productive livelihood interventions that help at-risk populations withstand shocks and build sustainable livelihoods.
3. Establish the foundations for a comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social security or protection system that aligns with international standards, including provisions for those working in the informal sector.
4. Strengthen the systems and capacities of stakeholders to effectively manage social protection programmes.
5. Safeguard long-term income generating potential for the poor and vulnerable.

3.5 Guiding Principles

The implementation of the strategy will be guided by a number of guiding principles that will enable and generate ownership and commitment from government and stakeholders. The guiding principles include:

i) **Government-led** to steer strong government ownership, commitment and leadership in provision of the social protection services within a framework that promotes good governance, accountability and transparency.

ii) Promotion of a **comprehensive, flexible, shock-sensitive system** that encourages comprehensive, protective, preventive, promotional, and transformational approach to ensure holistic approach to addressing the predictable needs of households while also addressing covariate risks.

iii) **Gender responsiveness** to ensure to ensure mainstreaming of gender related issues in all social protection interventions to enhance equality of opportunity in addressing high risks and vulnerabilities including gender norms, roles, and inequalities that are encountered by poor people, particularly children and women.

iv) **Adequacy** to ensure sufficient support and resources to bring people out of poverty, allowing them to address risks and cope with vulnerabilities specific to their circumstances

v) **Needs and evidence-based programming** to ensure that programmes address the needs identified and target people who meet the eligibility criteria.

vi) **Timely, harmonised, coordinated and reliable** with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities and ways of working amongst all stakeholders ensuring that all activities are firmly anchored in the priorities and objectives for development, poverty reduction, humanitarian assistance, climate change and disaster risk reduction with strong linkages to the work streams and programmes implemented under other relevant national sector policies in order to ensure complementarity.

vii) **Support and promotion of resilient livelihoods** to ensure that the ultra- poor are adequately empowered to graduate from poverty and reduce their vulnerability to risks and livelihood shocks.

viii) **Equity and social inclusion** to adequately reach those who are marginalised or discriminated against on account of geography, religion, social groupings, gender, age, livelihood, or disability.

ix) **Common and sustainable long-term funding** from Government and development partners using appropriate mechanisms (basket funding) that provide predictable and institutionalised consistent funding to social protection.

x) **Stakeholder engagement and participation** in the design, planning, implementation and governance of social protection policies and programmes through direct involvement and/or representation to facilitate client centred approach and multi-stakeholder response.

xi) **Progressive Realization** to progressively achieve higher levels of social protection, reaching as many people as possible guided by international standards, social dialogue and the national context.

xii) **Client/Beneficiary Centered Approach** to meet specific needs of clients and beneficiaries, ensuring they are relevant and responsive to the client needs and context.

4 Strategic Priority Areas, Strategies and Interventions

The strategy will facilitate implementation of the seven priority areas stipulated in the National Social Protection Policy (2024-2029) in order to achieve its goal, objectives and outcomes. Aside these seven priority areas the strategy will also mainstream various cross-cutting issues including gender, disability and environment and climate change bringing the priority areas to eight. The priority areas include:

1. Social Safety Nets;
2. Resilient Livelihoods;
3. Nutrition – Sensitive Social Protection;
4. Shock – Sensitive Social Protection;
5. Social Security;
6. Creating an Enabling Environment for Social Protection Systems and Programmes; and
7. Cross - cutting issues.

A number of strategies and activities will be implemented under each priority area as outlined below:

4.1 Priority Area 1: Social Safety Nets

Social safety nets interventions will be implemented to protect the poor and vulnerable groups from extreme poverty and social exclusion. The purpose is to provide a cushion for individuals and households to ensure a minimum level of well-being during times of need. The safety nets interventions will enable poor and vulnerable members of society to meet their basic needs, develop their capabilities and increase their social and economic participation. The key programmes under this priority area include: i) SCTP, ii) PWP, iii) Food for Work, iv) Input for Work, v) Agriculture Input Subsidy, vi) School Feeding Programme (SFP) and vii) Bursary Schemes.

Objectives:

In order to provide welfare support to the poorest and most vulnerable populations to improve their standard of living, the following objectives will be pursued.

1. To strengthen social safety nets coverage and adequacy
2. To expand social safety nets coverage.

Strategy 4.1.1: Improve the provision of adequate social safety nets benefits

Activities

i. Expand coverage of the SCTP focusing on and ultra-poor households in rural and urban areas,
ii. Establish and roll out digitalized monitoring for SCTP targeting, delivery,
iii. Conduct impact assessment on digitalized monitoring for SCTP targeting, delivery
iv. Develop, apply an indexation model and integrate it to the SCTP MIS to guide adjustments of SCTP benefit levels in response to inflation, devaluation, or cost-of-living changes.

v. Integrate high-risk groups (Elderly-headed households i.e. 65+, households with persons with severe disabilities, Women and child-headed households, Pregnant and lactating women, chronically ill and Youth) into social safety nets
vi. Implement public works programmes in all 35 district and urban councils focusing on catchment management and national infrastructure development
vii. Scale up home grown and other evidence-based models of school feeding and bursary schemes for vulnerable youth.
viii. Develop Youth benefit schemes for Social Safety Nets households

Strategy 4.1.2: Strengthen community involvement and social accountability in beneficiary selection

Activities

i. Roll out Social Protection Social accountability guidelines across all districts.
ii. Form and capacitate community-based accountability structures or committees i.e. HGRM, SP
iii. Conduct citizen and beneficiary satisfaction surveys on SP Program implementation
iv. Conduct capacity building for grassroot CSOs and CBOs to promote social accountability.
v. Roll out Social Protection Social accountability guidelines.
vi. Conduct community-based project selection for public works programs to help communities to prioritize sub-projects according to their needs and context.
vii. Roll out Harmonized Grievance redress structures in all districts in line with the Harmonized Grievance Redress Mechanisms Guidelines (HGRM) to promote accountability and to address complaints.
viii. Review targeting criteria for social safety nets programmes to reflect evolving local vulnerabilities and needs.
ix. Publish beneficiary lists for transparency at community level and SP service centers.
x. Raise existence awareness on the importance and usage of the social registry as a tool for SP targeting.

Strategy 4.1.3: Enhance delivery mechanisms for timely response in safety net programmes.

Activities

i. Review and improve delivery systems with adaptive digital targeting mechanisms and clear linkages across all safety net programmes.
ii. Conduct national and local awareness campaigns on safety net programmes to improve understanding and participation.
iii. Strengthen targeting accuracy for the SCTP and PWPSocial Safety Nets Programme through use of the Malawi Social Registry (MSR)
iv. Expand the digitalization of the electronic transfer system across districts" to reflect that its one system across all districts
v. Develop and operationalize Service Delivery Performance Standards for payment timeliness across all districts

Strategy 4.1.4: Promote community awareness and sensitization on various safety nets programmes.

Activities

i. Develop and distribute translated, disability-inclusive Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials on safety nets, including livestock nutrition, health, and food security benefits
ii. Organize Social Protection Weeks every year with high-level government involvement, featuring talks, debates, and broadcasts to raise programme visibility.
iii. Establish a "Champion of Social Protection" award to recognize outstanding committees and community initiatives in promoting safety nets.
iv. Strengthen the Social Protection toll-free hotline for accessible, real-time information on social protection programmes.

4.2 Priority Area 2: Resilient Livelihoods

Under the Resilient livelihoods, the focus will be on building the ability of individuals, households and communities to withstand and recover from shocks and stresses that disrupt their livelihoods. This strategy will increase access to and engagement of individuals and households in diverse, tailored pathways that build resilient livelihoods in order to deal with challenges that the ultra-poor often struggle with such as lack of skills, knowledge and adaptive strategies to construct sustainable livelihoods, limited access to financial services and diversified income sources which hamper their capacity to cope with adverse events and perpetuating poverty. To achieve this, the following strategies and core activities will be implemented in line with the set objective:

Objective

In order to ensure that poor and at-risk individuals and households engage in diverse and tailored pathways to recover from shocks, build resilient livelihoods, graduate from vulnerability and safeguard long-term income generating potential and sustainability for the poor, the objective below will be pursued:

1. To empower individuals, households and communities to build their resilience to cope with and recover from socio-economic shocks and to promote mind-set change towards graduation pathways.

Strategy 4.2.1: Strengthen linkages among social protection programmes and with other basic social services.

Activities

i. Link ultra-poor social protection beneficiary households to complementary services including health, education, bursaries, school feeding, maternal and child health services, and adolescent girls' support programmes.
ii. Link vocational skills and entrepreneurship training for youths from social protection beneficiary households and provide start up packages.
iii. Link SP beneficiaries to climate-smart public works and environmental management services including soil and water conservation, forest establishment and management, and riverbank protection works, in coordination with relevant MDAs and LAs, to strengthen natural resource management and reduce adverse climate change effects.
iv. Provide training for social workers and other service providers so that individuals understand their roles in connecting beneficiaries of SP to various social assistance programs and services.

v. Map social protection–relevant service providers and programmes to facilitate systematic referral and linkage of social protection beneficiaries to complementary services.
vi. Create and publicize a formal referral system and linkage framework that connect affected individuals to the mapped programmes existent in the areas for specific needs-based support in healthcare, education or social welfare programs and economic empowerment.
vii. Utilize a multi-sectoral coordination, reporting and feedback framework to assist in targeting and monitoring support given to SP beneficiaries and reduce duplication.
viii. Conduct joint planning and programming.
ix. Collaborate with Local Authorities to identify viable income-generating activities and facilitate market linkages and value chain development for the identified off-farm activities, livestock and crop products.

Strategy 4.2.2: Enhance access to productive resources and skills for vulnerable populations.

Activities

i. Establish and train livelihood groups and cooperatives with bankable business plans.
ii. Provide start-up capital and tools for Income Generating Activities (IGAs) to SP beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups.
iii. Procure and distribute small livestock to vulnerable households or groups and support them to access extension services and training in livestock husbandry practices.
iv. Facilitate access to improved livestock breeds and appropriate technologies through public-private linkages.
v. Provide vocational and entrepreneurship trainings & skills and starter packs to vulnerable populations.
vi. Develop labour standard conditions for public works programmes.
vii. Conduct assessment of social protection risks and needs for population in the informal economy sector
viii. Facilitate policy dialogue to inform development of social protection interventions for populations in the informal economy, including women and persons with disabilities.
ix. Capacity building for extension workers on the mechanisms and approaches of social protection to the informal economy
x. Develop and disseminate a Business Choice Guide to identify viable livelihood opportunities and support social protection beneficiaries in selecting appropriate income generating activities.
xi. Conduct mind-set change training to strengthen productive skills utilization, work readiness, and entrepreneurship among vulnerable populations and community leaders.
xii. Scale up graduation programmes with financial packages to support sustainable economic activities for social protection beneficiaries.
xiii. Facilitate skills development for vulnerable households by implementing prior learning approaches
xiv. Monitor the impact of irrigation and livestock programs on household resilience
xv. Conduct joint planning meetings and coordination sessions between the Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development (DAHLD), the SCTP Secretariat, clusters and Local Authorities to align livestock and social protection interventions.

Strategy 4.2.3: Promote climate-resilient income generating activities.

Activities

i. Train social protection beneficiaries and communities in climate-resilient agricultural and livelihood practices.

ii. Train and support ultra poor and vulnerable households in climate-smart livestock practices including improved housing, resilient breeds, rotational grazing, pasture improvement, drought-resilient animal production and access to livestock services.
iii. Train social protection beneficiaries and participants in Climate smart technologies and greening the environment, disaster preparedness, community-based multiplication of planting materials and seeds for drought resistant crops and fish fingerlings to promote access to the drought resistant crops and agriculture technologies.
iv. Train vulnerable populations on how to make and use energy-efficient cooking stoves; and climate-resilient energy products (e.g., briquettes, virtual stoves) to reduce the time women spend on firewood collection and preserve trees and forestry reserves.
v. Support ultra poor households with climate-resilient agricultural practices (e.g., drought-resistant crops, use of manure, afforestation and other agro-ecological innovations.

Strategy 4.2.4: Diversify income sources, including agricultural and off-farm activities to build resilience.

Activities

i. Support ultra-poor and vulnerable households to engage in diversified and integrated agricultural livelihood activities including poultry, livestock, fish farming, agro-processing and other high-value production systems.
ii. Support youth and women in forming agriculture enterprises farmer groups/cooperatives in crops, bee keeping, fish and livestock and engage in production of high value agriculture products and value addition linked to local and regional markets.
iii. Train ultra-poor and vulnerable households to engage in income-generating activities such as agro-processing and crafts-based livelihoods.

Strategy 4.2.5: Improve access to financial services for greater financial inclusion.

Activities

i. Link mature Savings and Loans Groups (SLGs) to microfinance institutions such as NEEF, Community Savings and Investment Promotion (COMSIP) Cooperative Union, Agriculture Commercialization (AGCOM) to support income generating/business innovations to vulnerable groups.
ii. Lobby with financial institutions to design affordable loan schemes to the poor and link the vulnerable groups.
iii. Engage Private sector players as off takers and link vulnerable groups to them.
iv. Create market channels for beneficiaries at both local, regional and global level and link ultra poor households to them; and train the households on how to produce high quality products, packaging and product promotion etc.
v. Expand mobile money and agency banking outreach in rural areas to support loan disbursement and access to banking services.

Strategy 4.2.6: Promote inclusive savings and loans schemes.

Activities

i. Monitor SLG growth and reinvestment rates.
ii. Develop innovative Savings and Loan products tailored to the needs of the poor and encourage beneficiaries to participate in SLGs
iii. Link VSL groups to financial literacy programs.
iv. Support VSL schemes among the vulnerable groups.

4.3 Priority Area 3: Nutrition – Sensitive Social Protection

Nutrition-sensitive social protection is key in improving nutrition outcomes, as such this strategy will encourage integration of nutritional outcomes and nutrition interventions into social protection programs in order to address the nutritional needs of vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant and lactating women, and other at-risk groups. The Nutrition sensitive interventions will help to reduce maternal and child malnutrition by addressing underlying causes associated with availability of a healthy environment, access and uptake of health services, food security to ensure consistent availability, access and consumption of diverse nutritious foods, education to ensure adequate knowledge and skills for maternal and child care, and WASH for disease prevention and control, maternal and child care. Nutrition sensitive social protection has potential to contribute to prevention of malnutrition among vulnerable communities and at-risk groups through food benefits, cash for buying food and interventions that promote food security, on-farm and off-farm income generating activities, access to micro-financing services and market linkages. This strategy is promoting use of Social Protection programmes and platforms to improve nutrition outcomes among the beneficiaries. To achieve this, the objective and activities below will be implemented.

Objective

1. To incorporate nutrition-related interventions in national social protection programmes to reduce micronutrient deficiencies and other forms of malnutrition.

Strategy 4.3.1: Promote nutrition-sensitive value chains within social protection.

Activities

i. Promote nutrition-sensitive value chains within social protection.
ii. Conduct sensitization on production and consumption of diverse nutritious foods among social protection beneficiaries.
iii. Providing optimal nutrition in shock-response interventions.
iv. Conducting WASH awareness among social protection and vulnerable households
v. Integrate Nutrition with SP by linking social protection beneficiaries to nutrition programmes, deliberately targeting high-risk communities and individuals, and providing nutrition messaging and nutrition support to SP beneficiaries.

Strategy 4.3.2: Promote production and consumption of diverse nutritious foods among social protection beneficiaries

Activities

i. Develop, disseminate and distribute nutrition IEC materials for learners, parents, communities and beneficiaries of other SP programmes.
ii. Train SP beneficiaries and staff in food production, storage, processing, food utilization and management, dietary diversification focusing on locally produced foods and recipes and bio-fortified and fortified foods.
iii. Undertake Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) activities targeting SP beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups using various channels and contact points.

Strategy 4.3.3: Empower vulnerable populations with Integrated Homestead Farming packages.

Activities

i. Train schools and communities on home-grown school feeding and climate-smart farming.
ii. Empower ultra poor and vulnerable populations with Integrated Homestead Farming packages.
iii. Design an affordable minimum package or hamper for Integrated Homestead Farming (IHF) and support eligible vulnerable households with start-ups and access to extension services to implement the IHF.
iv. Support SP beneficiaries in VSLs or groups with group-based nutrition and income generating assets such as fishponds, livestock or group vegetable gardening
v. Use sustainable food production technologies to support diversification of school and household meals.
vi. Establish and maintain school, community, and household food production platforms for diversified nutritious food production and nutrition education.

Strategy 4.3.4: Ensure optimal nutrition in shock-response interventions.

Activities

i. Conduct rapid nutrition and health assessments to identify needs among populations and schools affected by shocks, including floods, droughts, disease outbreaks, and other emergencies.
ii. Identify malnourished social protection households and provide them with take-home rations (learners) and targeted food support to affected households/individuals.
iii. Monitor the use of the food support for informed decisions.

Strategy 4.3.5: Harmonize coordination mechanisms for nutrition and social protection interventions.

Activities

i. Establish and operationalize a national Technical Working Group on Nutrition and Social Protection (SP) integration, co-opt SP coordinators into DNCC, ANCC and VNCC structures, and conduct stakeholder coordination meetings including quarterly reviews and annual joint planning for nutrition programme delivery in SP programmes
ii. Create a database for capturing and reporting nutrition at risk groups enrolled in SP programmes, impact, challenges, lessons learnt and areas to improve.
iii. Harmonize and roll out training manual on Nutrition sensitive social protection interventions.

4.4 Priority Area 4: Shock – Sensitive Social Protection

Shock-sensitive social protection will focus on implementing interventions that will protect individuals, households, and communities affected by cyclical livelihood shocks and seasonal vulnerabilities, as well as sudden and unexpected shocks such as natural disasters, economic crises, or health emergencies, in order to mitigate their impact on vulnerable populations. Strategies and core interventions that will be implemented in line with this objective include:

Objective

1. To protect individuals, households and communities affected by cyclical livelihood shocks and seasonal vulnerability

Strategy 4.4.1: Design scalable programmes to address acute needs during shocks.

Activities

i. Pre-identify vulnerable households, map the vulnerable households in high-risk areas for quick interventions and establish contingency beneficiary lists for SCTP and PWP expansion.
ii. Develop scalable response plans based on MVAC and rapid assessments to ensure data-driven scalability which should also include designing and implementing temporary urban emergency cash transfer programmes to respond to inflation and price shocks
iii. Develop, operationalize and disseminate SOPs, contingency plans and operational manuals for rapid scaling of social protection programmes and orient relevant service providers
iv. Operationalize the scalability mechanism for SCTP and PWP during droughts, floods, and pandemics in collaboration and linkage with emergency response.
v. Promote real-time monitoring, communication and reporting systems to track program implementation, feedback for immediate action and impact during shocks.
vi. Ensure coordinated and collaborated implementation of scalable programmes in all the councils.
vii. Operationalize disaster risk financing and roll out scalability handbooks, contingency plans, and protocols (with weather triggers) for rapid emergency cash support.)
viii. Activate clusters to facilitate their instant coordinated action for timely response and delivery of support.
ix. Conduct joint needs assessment with other humanitarian and development actors to get a complete picture of the needs of the affected people.

Strategy 4.4.2: Establish predictable, multi-year support system for poor households to reduce annual emergency responses.

Activities

i. Develop a predictable and comprehensive multi-hazard contingency plan
ii. Design safety net programs that can be quickly adapted and expanded during emergencies.

Strategy 4.4.3: Strengthen district-level governance of humanitarian and social protection programmes.

Activities

i. Strengthen local authority level coordination structures among humanitarian and social protection actors
ii. Build local authority capacity for humanitarian and social protection programming during shock response. management, rapid assessment, shock data analysis, trigger setting, response planning, resource mobilization, reporting etc.
iii. Empower local communities to actively participate in disaster risk management and social protection

iv. Regularly orient district-level coordination structures on national DRM and social protection strategies.

Strategy 4.4.4: Link vulnerable households to complementary services

Activities

i. Conduct a supply capacity assessment to identify and map available services (e.g., health, education, agriculture) in target areas, ensuring they can accommodate additional beneficiaries.
ii. Establish referral pathways by formalizing agreements with service providers, outlining roles, responsibilities, and processes for referring and receiving beneficiaries.
iii. Train extension workers and community-based facilitators on the referral system, ensuring they can effectively identify needs and connect households to appropriate services.
iv. Develop and disseminate a service directory in local languages, accessible formats, and through various channels (e.g., community meetings, radio) to inform households of available services.
v. Implement feedback mechanisms, such as community scorecards or suggestion boxes, to monitor the quality and accessibility of referred services.
vi. Collaborate with local leaders and community groups to raise awareness about available services and encourage utilization among vulnerable households.
vii. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Linkages and Referrals system

Strategy 4.4.5: Integrate an environmental perspective in shocks and pandemic prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Activities

i. Mainstream climate resilience indicators in SCTP and EPWP project designs.
ii. Monitor climate impacts on household welfare using community feedback tools and design
iii. Promote pasture reseeding, rotational grazing and tree-planting post-disaster.
iv. Assess ecosystems (e.g., wetlands, forests) that provide natural buffers against disasters and mitigate risks, mobilize communities and jointly develop and implement a strategic plan to protect and rebuild the ecosystems.
v. Foster collaboration between SP, environmental, agriculture, health and disaster management agencies to align objectives.
vi. Create awareness among communities and engage them in environmentally conscious response efforts, such as waste management or protecting local ecosystems during emergencies.
vii. Implement climate-smart public works projects and community-based climate adaptation initiatives to enhance resilience of vulnerable households and local communities.
viii. Train communities on environmental shock preparedness, pandemic prevention measures, and environmental risk assessments.
ix. Monitor environmental impacts of shock response programs.
x. Incorporate environmental risk assessments into program designs.
xi. Implement cash plus interventions on climate resilience.

Strategy 4.4.6: Strengthen mechanisms for comprehensive accounting for vulnerable groups in social protection programming

Activities

i. Conduct advocacy campaigns to highlight the importance of accounting for vulnerable groups in social protection and DRM.
ii. Strengthen inclusive mechanisms for vulnerable groups to report issues or provide feedback on social protection programs, ensuring responsiveness and accountability.
iii. Train local leaders and local organizations on inclusive social protection and their role in supporting vulnerable groups during disasters.
iv. Monitor inclusion of vulnerable groups in social protection and shock response programs.
v. Disaggregate targeting data by gender, disability, and age.
vi. Engage vulnerable groups in designing shock response interventions.
vii. Conduct sensitization on inclusive emergency response at community level
viii. Scale up vertical expansion mechanisms by providing timely emergency cash top-ups including school attendance bonuses and, food shortage top-ups to vulnerable households during climate, health or price-related shocks focusing on children with disabilities, children under-2 (first 1,000 days) and children in child-/women-headed households.

4.5 Priority Area 5: Social Security

Under this priority area, the strategy will facilitate the establishment of a comprehensive, adequate, and sustainable social security system that aligns with international and national standards, including provisions for those working in the informal sector. The purpose is to enhance the coverage, quality, and range of social security benefits and products to individuals and households across the formal and informal sectors in order to facilitate access to healthcare and income security, especially in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity, or loss of a breadwinner. The strategy aims to reduce inequalities in the access of benefits from available social security services, while strengthening the ability of individuals and households to invest in their future well-being. To achieve this, the following strategies and major activities will be implemented:

Objective

1. To enhance coverage, quality, and range of social security benefits and products both in the formal and informal sectors.

Strategy 4.5.1: Develop and strengthen social insurance schemes.

Activities

i. Review and reform national pension and health insurance schemes
ii. Support design and implementation of the workers' compensation fund.
iii. Capacity building of government, CSOs, employers, and workers on the implementation of the social security schemes.
iv. Support the enactment of the Draft National Health Financing Bill
v. Enhance financial stability, transparency, and accountability in the management of social insurance schemes.
vi. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of social security systems
vii. Facilitate mandatory enrolment of civil servants into comprehensive social insurance.To develop a deliberate initiative to accommodate/ include all civil servants to be on medical schemes. -policy guidance.
viii. Design and pilot unemployment insurance benefits package for the unemployed working-age population
ix. Enhance interoperability of databases and information flow across social security schemes
x. Developing and establishing a national health insurance for the whole population

Strategy 4.5.2: Develop affordable and innovative social security schemes for the informal sector.

Activities

i. Conduct an assessment of social protection risks and needs for the population in the informal sector.
ii. Develop and pilot a gender sensitive pension scheme with simplified registration and flexible contribution for the informal sector- To have the activities split into 2. 1. Develop and 2. Piloting.
iii. Design and pilot a social protection benefits package for informal sector workers, including maternity, disability, and survivor benefits for dependents of deceased contributors.
iv. Sensitize informal workers on available micro-insurance and pension schemes.
v. Formalize linkages between cooperatives and social security institutions
vi. Provide capacity building to informal workers through cooperative leaders on contributory schemes.

Strategy 4.5.3: Link employment creation and social insurance for decent work.

Activities

i. Support the review of the National Job Creation Strategy, National Labour and Employment Policy
ii. Support the development of a national roadmap for the implementation of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection initiative
iii. Conduct mapping and alignment of social protection and skills development policies and programs
iv. Integrate social protection programs with labor market policies
v. Promote access to decent work opportunities, including training and skills development
vi. Promote registration of small enterprises with social security schemes through incentives, bundled benefits, and simplified registrations.

Strategy 4.5.4: Strengthen coordination and collaboration among informal sector stakeholders.

Activities

i. Facilitate capacity building of informal economy unions and representatives to support coordination and collaboration
ii. Establish a national platform for informal worker organizations
iii. Conduct joint policy dialogues with informal sector associations

4.6 Priority Area 6: Creating an Enabling Environment for Social Protection Systems and programmes

The strategy will strive to create an enabling environment that will facilitate effective and sustainable social protection delivery systems and programmes. It will promote coordinated multi sectoral social protection interventions at national, district and community levels through good governance encompassing strong leadership and coordination, reinforced institutional and human capacity, supportive policies and reliable and consistent financial resources. The strategy will further ensure that investments in delivery of social protection interventions are increased at all levels and that legal frameworks governing social protection are strengthened and enforced. As such the following strategies and core activities will be implemented:

Objective

1. Ensure that multi sectoral social protection interventions are well coordinated at national, district and community levels.

Strategy 4.6.1: Strengthen and harmonize social protection coordination structures at all levels.

Activities

i. Finalize and operationalize the MSR coordination framework.
ii. Develop institutional mandates and SOPs for MSR data use and inter-ministerial access.
iii. Lobby for sustainable financing arrangements for the DHGRM, ASPCs and DSPCs
iv. Conduct quarterly meetings for the National Social Protection Technical Committee and Sector Working Groups
v. Develop and disseminate national social protection coordination guidelines (NSPCG)
vi. Conduct annual joint sector reviews and planning of social protection programmes

Strategy 4.6.2: Develop participatory approaches in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of social protection programmes and interventions.

Activities

i. Conduct annual social accountability forums at national, district and community level.
ii. Conduct community consultations for programme design and Document beneficiary feedback and apply the program adjustments.

Strategy 4.6.3: Ensure complementarity in designing and implementation of social protection interventions with relevant interventions in other sectors such as Humanitarian, Education, Health, Agriculture

Activities

i. Support the implementation of the CS Social Protection Network Strategic Plan
ii. Develop harmonized joint implementation frameworks with health, agriculture, education, social protection and humanitarian response
iii. Align targeting and delivery mechanisms with humanitarian aid systems

Strategy 4.6.4: Enhance communications and advocacy in the social protection sector.

Activities

i. Use multi-channels or platforms to share progress, challenges, and success stories on social protection.
ii. Conduct annual advocacy campaigns to promote public awareness of Social Protection Programmes.
iii. Develop evidence-based campaigns and dashboard tools to demonstrate the economic return on employment and social security investment, in order provide a case for increasing coverage and promoting decent employment
iv. Create a harmonized communication structure for proper reporting

v. Create messages. IEC materials that target specific groups of people for a better understanding of social security

Strategy 4.6.5: Promote public-private partnerships in social protection programmes.

Activities

i. Develop and operationalize a private sector engagement framework for social protection, including clear roles, partnership modalities, and supportive legal and institutional arrangements
ii. Establish an operational framework that promotes stakeholder engagement, integrity, transparency and accountability
iii. Design and facilitate Private-Public Partnership social security schemes.
iv. Mobilize partnerships with financial institutions and private sector actors to expand reach and efficiency of safety net delivery.

Strategy 4.6.6: Strengthen resource mobilization to ensure sustainable investments from government and non-government sources.

Activities

i. Conduct annual budget analyses on SP and lobby for increase in funding for social protection programmes
ii. Organize annual stakeholder's roundtable discussions and policy dialogues for SP financing
iii. Develop and present a SP financing investment case to Cabinet and Parliament
iv. Advocate for dedicated budget lines for major SP programmes

Strategy 4.6.7: Establish a social protection monitoring and evaluation system to track the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of social protection programmes.

Activities

i. strengthen labor market information systems (LMIS) and integrate with social protection systems (MSR, pension, health insurance)
ii. Conduct regular evaluations of major SP programmes to measure adequacy and generate evidence to inform programming.

Strategy 4.6.8: Strengthen human capacity for effective programming and delivery of social protection services at all levels.

Activities

i. Implement the harmonized Social Protection Capacity Building Strategy to strengthen human, institutional, and governance capacity for effective programme management, coordination, accountability, and evidence-based response.
ii. Develop a Social Protection Curriculum to be used in formal and informal education spaces

Strategy 4.6.9: Strengthen the MSR for effective targeting of social protection programmes

Activities

i. Regularly update the MSR for identification of the most vulnerable and most at-risk populations and needs based support to facilitate recovery from disasters and chronic poverty.
ii. Roll out dynamism framework protocols including privacy and data security protocols.
iii. Enhance SCTP MIS for data management and process.

Strategy 4.6.10: Strengthen harmonized targeting mechanisms for social protection programmes

Activities

i. Support the design and development of a comprehensive National Social Protection Act
ii. Conduct capacity building on the implementation of the National Social Protection Act
iii. Review and update existing legal instruments related to social protection.
iv. Advance policy and regulatory framework for financial products on social protection net programs.

Strategy 4.6.11: Enforce legal instruments to guide implementation of social protection interventions and programmes.

Activities

i. Disseminate approved SP laws and guidelines to Local Authorities and implementers
ii. Develop a comprehensive M&E framework to track adherence to and enforcement of the Act

Strategy 4.6.12: Enhance institutional capacity and legislative frameworks for delivery of effective and sustainable social security schemes or services.

Activities

i. Review/strengthen legislation for social insurance schemes, including workers' compensation fund, pension, labor protection and health insurance.
ii. Train social protection implementation staff members on social security administration.
iii. Train social protection institutions in actuarial planning and scheme management.
iv. Facilitate the establishment of unified regulatory bodies or strengthen existing ones, for example, establishing a National Health Insurance Management Authority to manage the social health insurance fund
v. Establish/strengthen grievance redress mechanisms for social insurance schemes

4.7 Priority Area 7: Cross – Cutting Issues

Cross-cutting issues that will be addressed include gender equality, disability inclusion, environmental sustainability and food security. This will be done to ensure that social protection programmes are equitable, inclusive, complementary and responsive to the diverse needs of the population. The following strategies and core activities will be implemented to address cross-cutting issues:

a) Disability Inclusion

Strategy 4.7.1: Enhance disability inclusiveness in social protection programmes and projects.

Activities

i. Design agriculture support modules tailored to persons with disabilities.

ii. Develop a disability inclusion training manual and orient service providers on disability inclusion practices
iii. Develop and disseminate guidelines for mainstreaming disability in social protection programmes in accordance with Section 31(3) of the Persons with Disabilities Act.
iv. Train implementers of social protection programmes at all levels on their obligation to prioritize and respond to the specific needs of persons with disabilities as required under Section 31(2) of the Persons with Disabilities Act.
v. Conduct a national accessibility audit of all SP programs (SCTP, PWP, SFP) and make them disability sensitive
vi. Monitor implementation of all SP programmes to ensure that persons with disabilities are included.
vii. Engage and collaborate with organizations of persons with disabilities in program design

Strategy 4.7.2: Promote access to social protection interventions for households with persons with disabilities.

Activities

i. Full roll out of categorical targeting and registration for persons with disabilities particularly those with severe disabilities and functional limitations in all SP Programmes.
ii. Include sign language interpreters in SP programmes training sessions and community awareness meetings.
iii. Include persons with disabilities in the governance structures of social protection programs
iv. Reform (i.e. revise eligibility criteria, adjust benefit levels, and redesign delivery mechanisms to account for disability-related costs) Social Protection Schemes to reflect disability related costs
v. Produce SP programmes application and awareness materials in accessible formats e.g. braille, large print, sign language, audio, and easy read.
vi. Provide tailored benefits for disability needs.

Strategy 4.7.3: Promote disability- inclusive programming in social protection

Activities

i. Disaggregate SP programmes data by disability status.
ii. Include disability-specific indicators in SP M&E tools and systems
iii. Provide accessible grievance mechanisms for beneficiaries with disabilities.
iv. Train social protection community structures on disability inclusion in social protection.
v. Partner with disability advocacy groups for program implementation.

b) Gender Mainstreaming

Strategy 4.7.4: Ensure gender balance in capacity- building initiatives.

Activities

i. Review disseminate and roll out social protection gender mainstreaming guidelines and manual.
ii. Roll out gender mainstreaming capacity building for SP district officers, community. structures (VDCs, AECs), and frontline staff implementing social protection.
iii. Ensure more than 40% female participation in all SP trainings where possible.

Strategy 4.7.5: Ensure gender balance in decision-making roles.

Activities

i. Advocate for women's representation in SP programme committees and boards.

Strategy 4.7.6: Promote the use of participatory approaches to involve women in programme or project design.

Activities

i. Conduct consultations on gender sensitive social protection programme design and reviews targeting key stakeholders
ii. Facilitate women-only discussions at both community and district levels for feedback and programme improvement.

Strategy 4.7.7: Ensure that all social protection programmes are gender-sensitive.

Activities

i. Develop gender-responsive indicators across SP programmes
ii. Train M&E officers in use of gender-responsive monitoring tools in SP programmes
iii. Conduct gender analysis of social protection programme guidelines/manuals

Strategy 4.7.8: Promote positive parenting interventions in social protection.

Activities

i. Promote child protection activities as family-shared responsibilities.
ii. Integrate positive parenting modules in all social protection programmes.
iii. Train social protection community structures to deliver positive parenting messages using SP platforms.

c) Climate Change and Environment

Strategy 4.7.9: Ensure the integration of environmental considerations in the design, implementation and monitoring of social protection interventions.

Activities

i. Apply environmental screening before livestock intervention roll-out.
ii. Incorporate environmental risk assessments into food insecurity response plans
iii. Monitor environmental impacts of social protection projects
iv. Develop environmental integration guidelines for SP interventions
v. Train SP programme stakeholders in environmental safeguards

Strategy 4.7.10: Promote the inclusion of environmental aspects when assessing vulnerabilities, exposure, and potential impacts of disasters.

Activities

i. Train District Councils on environmental vulnerability assessments
ii. Develop early warning systems for climate-related shocks
iii. Integrate climate and environmental vulnerability into SP risk assessments
iv. Strengthen linkages between Social Protection and Disaster Risk Management systems, incorporating Anticipatory Action to enable timely and proactive responses to shocks.

Strategy 4.7.11: Manage the impacts of environmental drivers such as climate change, the spread of pathogenic organisms and hazardous substances that pose risks to human health.

Activities

i. Promote pasture planting, parasite control, and proper manure handling.
ii. Promote climate-resilient irrigation and livestock programs
iii. Coordinate with health clusters to address pathogenic risks during shocks
iv. Train SP benefits communities on managing environmental health risks
v. Develop contingency plans for climate and health-related shocks, integrating Anticipatory Action measures such as forecast-based cash top-ups, pre-positioning of essential supplies (food, agricultural inputs), early livelihood protection (e.g., livestock feed, seed distribution), and rapid activation of nutrition and health services for vulnerable groups.

5 Implementation Approach

The strategy will be implemented through a multi-sector approach to facilitate holistic support to the Social Protection clients. This entails involving different stakeholders who may have diverse and dynamic priorities, programmes, levels of commitment and attitudes. To facilitate proper coordination, collaboration and strong leadership, the strategy will expedite creation of an enabling environment, systems strengthening, evidence-based programming, robust monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning and adopt a life-cycle approach.

5.1 Creating an Enabling environment

The strategy will facilitate a conducive environment to enable effective delivery of Social Protection services and programmes by various stakeholders. To nurture the development and implementation of a strong social protection system, it is important to put in place a healthy enabling environment. As illustrated by 3, this includes ensuring an adequate policy and legislative underpinning for social protection entitlements; strengthening governance and coordination; investing in adequate human resources to implement programmes; ensuring a robust financing strategy; and putting in place the necessary mechanisms to use social protection as the basis for effective response in the event of shocks.

Figure 1: Components of a strong enabling environment for social protection

a) Strategy, policy and legislation

While Malawi has several national, regional and global policy and strategic frameworks in support of Social Protection as stated in 1.2 and 1.3, a key gap that remains is a legislative underpinning for the country's commitment to social protection. In the absence of a law on social protection, the sustainability of social protection programmes and initiatives risks being undermined and is left open to changes in successive government priorities, which could undermine the coverage and adequacy of current and future social protection programmes. Good practice suggests that social protection should be embedded in legislation, which is critical for protecting its sustainability and protecting the rights and entitlements of social protection beneficiaries.

Limited legislation exists for areas related to the social protection agenda. For example, the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Bill 2023, which was enacted in April 2023. However, there is no clear connection made between DRM and social protection within the Bill, which is a key gap.

The 2000 Employment Act embedded legal maternity coverage of at least 60 days of paid leave for women, within every three years. A 2021 amendment to the Employment Act provided for two weeks of paid leave for paternity. While this is a statutory requirement, uptake of this entitlement is sometimes limited by a lack of enforcement and a limited awareness of benefits.

This strategy will facilitate introduction of a legal framework to provide a constitutional guarantee to underpin its social protection programmes, to allow the harmonised, consistent and trusted delivery of services at scale and to make justiciable the entitlements of beneficiaries under the main programmes. In the next five years, the Government of Malawi – in collaboration with civil society organisations working on social protection in Malawi – will begin to build a comprehensive legal framework for the social protection sector by drafting a Social Protection Law to legislate the main social protection programmes, including lifecycle social assistance delivered initially through the SCTP and the Climate Smart Public Works Programme (CS-EPWP), livelihood support delivered through economic inclusion programmes, and the expansion of labour laws to accommodate a broader range of social insurance benefits. The expected outcome of this process will be a legal framework to provide a constitutional guarantee to underpin the social protection programmes, to allow the harmonised, consistent and trusted delivery of services at scale and to make justifiable the entitlements of beneficiaries under the main programmes.

b) Governance and coordination

Good governance is a pre-requisite to successful, efficient and effective provision of Social Protection programmes and services. The strategy will strengthen good governance in all domains including leadership and support, capacity building, coordination and collaboration, financial resource mobilisation and accountability, reinforcement of M&E and reporting for regular data generation to inform programming and planning, advocacy and building champions in adolescent nutrition

The current governance and coordination of the social protection sector at national and district levels are described below.

National level

The highest-level coordination body of the social protection sector is the National Social Protection Steering Committee (NSPSC), chaired by the Chief Secretary in the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC). This is closely supported by the National Social Protection Technical Committees (NSPTC), chaired by the Director of Poverty Reduction and Social Protection in the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization. The secretariat and convenor for both Committees is the PRSP Division.

When it comes to implementation, the responsibility for the design and implementation of programmes is under the respective ministries, principally:

- The Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) is responsible for the management of the SCTP, including its vertical and horizontal expansion in response to shocks.

- The delivery of the CS-EPWP is the responsibility of the National Local Government Finance Committee implementing although the technical lead is the Department of Land Resources and Conservation.
- The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the Affordable Inputs Programme (AIP), although this has been recently declared to directly become part of social protection delivery.
- The Ministry of Labour is responsible for labour and social insurance programmes.
- The Department of Disaster Management Affairs in the OPC is responsible for the shock-responsive and lean season interventions.
- The Ministry of Education is responsible for the delivery of the school meals programmes.
- The Ministry of Health/Nutrition Department links with the Ministry of Education in the delivery of school meals programs that promote home grown approaches and overall oversight of nutrition programmes.

To ensure the coordination of the numerous stakeholders involved in the governance and implementation of social protection, MNSSP II provided for the establishment of several technical working groups organised around three thematic pillars: consumption support, resilient livelihoods and shock-responsive social protection.

Successive reviews and studies have noted that the prescribed coordination arrangements have not performed as expected and have suggested that these should be revised. In particular, there have been challenges with the utilisation of the pillar working group coordination mechanism and many of the working groups either do not meet or meet infrequently. The strengthening of a coordination mechanism for the social protection sector is a key priority area for the NSPP 2025-2030.

Local government level

Public service delivery is partially decentralised and the responsibility for the delivery of some public services and initiatives in each district sits under the Local Authority. The SCTP is overseen by the District Social Support Committee (DSSC); the District Environmental and Social Committee is responsible for the CS-EPWP; the District Civil Protection Committee is responsible for shock response; and the District Nutrition Coordinating Committee is responsible for school meal programmes.

The SCTP, at the community level, is supported by volunteers comprising the Community Social Support Committee (CSSC). The volunteers undertake activities at the village level such as informing households about payments or monitoring household changes, which are reported to the District Social Welfare Staff. The CS-EPWP is overseen by a Catchment Management Committee, and some foremen/women are selected from the community and paid for by the programme.

At the Traditional Authority level, there is no coordinating body responsible for the SCTP although the CS-EPWP activities are overseen by Catchment Management Committees. At the Group Village Headman level, the volunteer committees for the social protection programmes – the CSSC and the Village Natural Resource Management Committee (VNRMC) – are more focused on supporting implementation than coordination.

The challenges with local-level structures are well documented in the literature and include:

- Weak coordination and collaboration: according to literature and consultations, this is largely due to a lack of incentives (non-monetary) for coordination and collaboration, like joint planning and budgeting of services and projects. Many stakeholders do not see the value addition for coordinating activities.

- Duplication of efforts and projects by partners: partners also bring to the districts completely packaged interventions that can offer little scope for meaningful collaboration, some of them targeting the same beneficiaries as individuals or geographical areas.

It is expected that through this strategy, the social protection sector and delivery structures will be reviewed to ensure they are well governed and coordinated to optimise the effectiveness and efficiency of delivering social protection and maximise the complementarity of programmes by different partners. In an ideal situation, we would reorient the social protection coordination structure to reflect the life cycle approach and also ensure that the local government level structure mirrors the national level. However, this may create an alignment challenge with the priority areas in the policy. It is more practical to craft the sub-committees around the core policy priority areas. The understanding here is that the Policy priority areas already encompass the life cycle approach. It is also important to note the capacity challenges that constrain local governments to manage too many sub-committees. The local government level structure will therefore have to be lean, with a broader social protection focus as opposed to specific policy priority areas or life cycle elements.

The national level structure will maintain the National Social Protection Steering Committee and the National Social Protection Technical Committee. Five sub-committees will be created under the National Social Protection Technical Committee as follows;

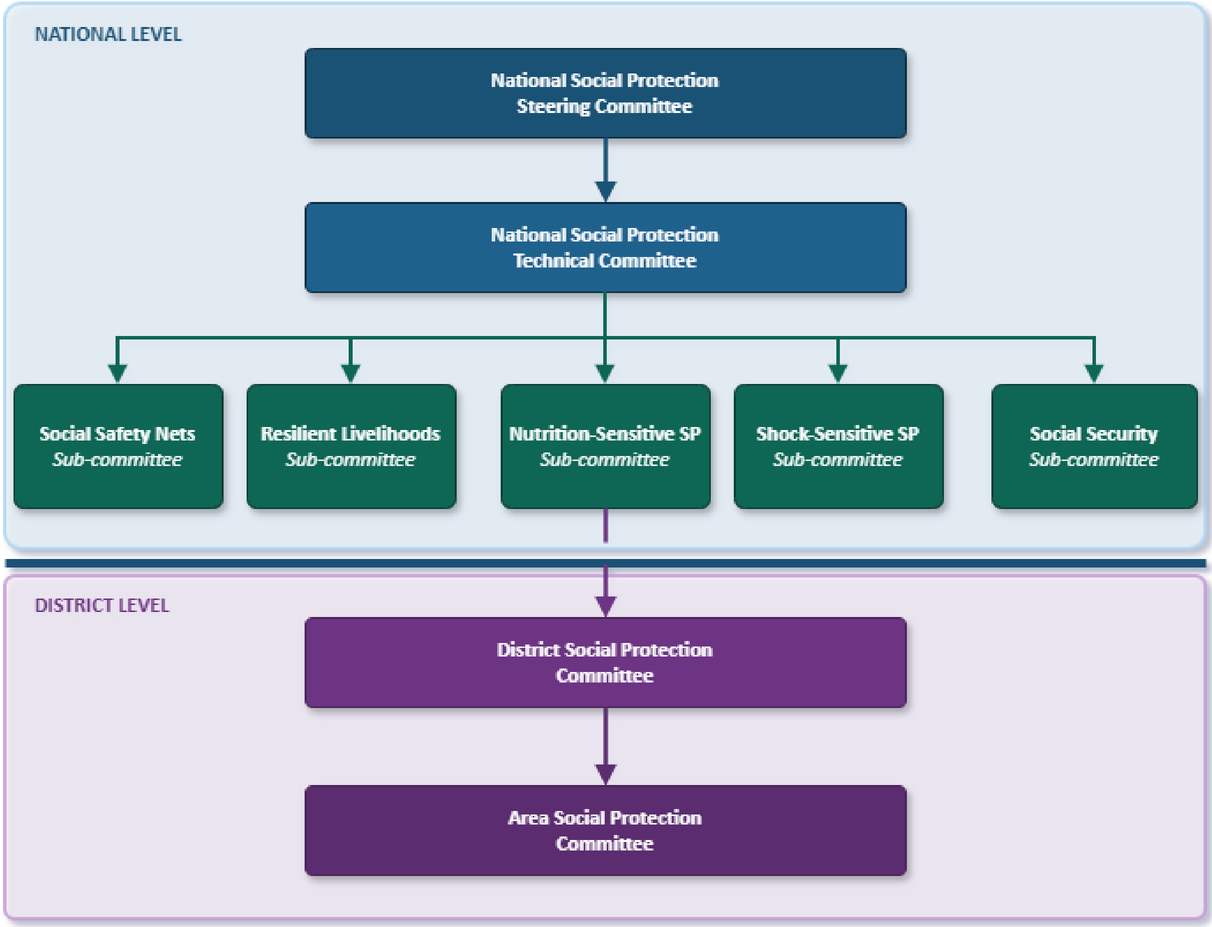
a) Social Safety Nets Sub-Committee
b) Shock Sensitive Sub-Committee
c) Social Security Sub-Committee
d) Nutrition Sensitive Sub-Committee
e) Resilient Livelihoods Sub-Committee

Each of the sub-committees will be guided by terms of Reference (ToRs). The ToRs for each sub-committee will be extended to include cross-cutting issues and relevant aspects of enabling environment.

The Social protection law is expected to strengthen the convening power of PRSP. Functionality of the committees will be further enhanced by clarity of ToRs and improved agenda setting.

The local government level structure will be the one in the recently adopted Social Protection Coordination Guidelines. At Council level, the District Social Protection Committee will be the overarching committee at that level and it will not have sub-committees. The Area Social Protection Committee is the committee at community level. The diagram below presents the new social protection coordination structure.

Figure 2: Proposed governance and coordination structure for social protection in Malawi under a lifecycle approach



To move towards this vision of governance and coordination for the social protection sector over the next five years, the following actions will be implemented:

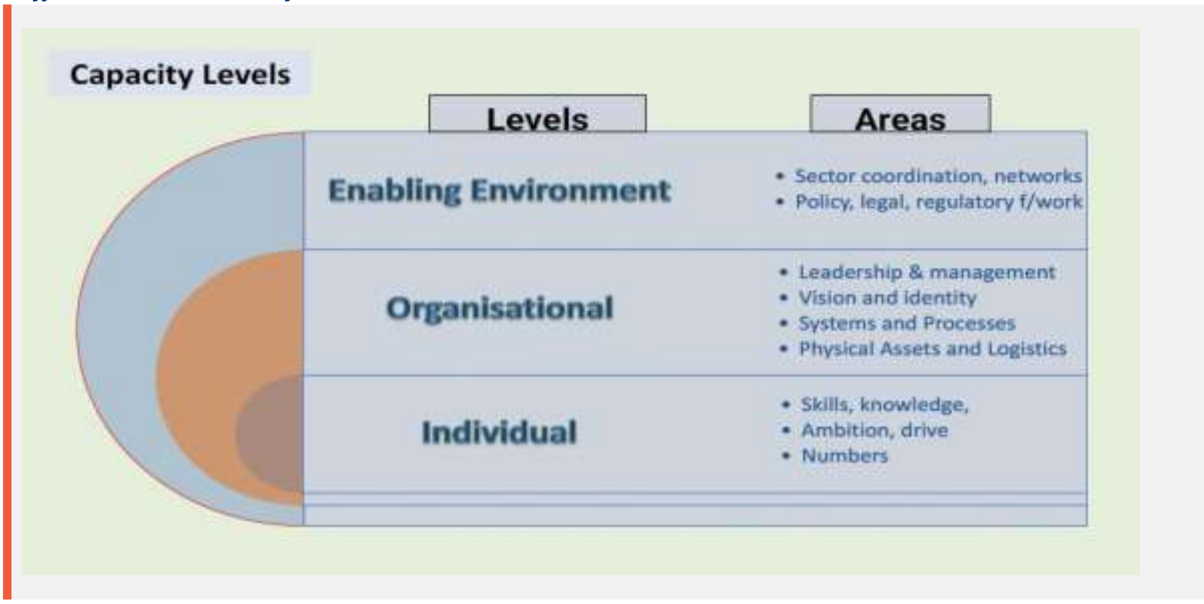
- **Define in further detail, through comprehensive consultations, the terms of reference of each one of the committees**. This will include clearly defining the mandate, membership and accountability structure of each committee and sub-committee.
- In line with the proposed structure, **develop a plan to ensure that the mobilization of adequate resources for social protection can be brought under the management and control of a single entity**, focusing on strengthening power and management linkages around it. In this way, whether the entity gets directly involved in the implementation or simply provides funding, the governance and coordination would be greatly unified and enhanced through joint planning, budgeting and monitoring activities. A political decision must be made on whether PRSP will remain solely a coordinator or become more involved in the work of implementation.
- **Improve and strengthen Leadership, support and collaboration on information exchange and joint monitoring** of social protection programmes, especially at the district level
- **Explore and support joint planning and monitoring of social protection activities at the district level** to reduce duplication of efforts and reduce time demands on usually understaffed district-level offices and to facilitate joint response to issues. This would greatly reduce the number of field missions by different partners at different times of the year to monitor their programmes.

c) Reinforce Institutional and Human Capacity

The success and effectiveness of social protection in Malawi will depend in large part on the institutional and human capacity in place to deliver and monitor an inclusive social protection system. While capacity has been built over the years, there is a clear need to strengthen both institutional and human capacity at all levels, with current capacity constraints resulting in delays in the implementation of activities.

The Government of Malawi commissioned a capacity needs assessment exercise that investigated the coordination, steering and related capacities of the PRSP, UBR management team and Local Authorities of Balaka, Nkhotakota and Thyolo in the area of social protection. Importantly, this assessment notes that “the capacity to deliver” is not limited to ensuring the adequacy of skilled staff (what is commonly referred to as the individual level), but invariably requires intervention at the organisational level to address any identified weaknesses in organisational capacities such as leadership, systems and process and physical assets, and at the enabling environment level (policy and regulatory framework, coordination and governance arrangements).

Figure 3: Conceptual framework to understand the intersecting levels of capacity required for an effective coordination function



Source: Land and Mokoka (2023).

The assessment found that capacity issues arise at the individual, organisational and enabling environment levels (as illustrated in 5). The report concluded that they are interlinked and ideally should be looked at and addressed in totality to ensure sustainable improvements in both institutional and human capacity.

Most notably, the assessment confirmed that the most pressing challenges arise at the organisational level. For PRSP, these relate to clarifying the strategic objectives and structure of the division. For the UBR management team, these relate to the impending process of institutionalisation and decentralisation. For the Local Authorities, these relate to the legal status, role and functioning of the DSSC.

It is expected that as part of reinforcing good governance in the Social Protection sector, this strategy will facilitate building a social protection system that is resourced with the necessary human capacity – at individual, organisational and enabling environment levels – to ensure its effective implementation and monitoring. As such, in its implementation approach, this strategy will ensure that:

- In the next five years, the Government will focus on **strengthening the capacity** of the PRSP to provide strong leadership and oversight for the implementation of the NSPSNSPS, strengthening the capacity of the UBR Management Unit to oversee the institutionalisation and decentralisation of the UBR implementation and, finally, strengthening the capacity of Local Authorities to implement and monitor social protection activities at the district and community levels. This will involve **increasing staffing levels** and **improving the availability of resources for coordinating functions and programmes** within and across different programmes. It will also involve **clarifying and reinforcing the roles, responsibilities and reporting lines** across all line ministries involved in delivering social protection.
- To guide the implementation of these strategic actions to strengthen capacity, the Government will **develop a comprehensive change management strategy**, laying out priorities and outlining clear roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the plan. The details of this process will be guided by the Capacity Development Plan to follow the 2023 Capacity Needs Assessment Report.

d) Financing

A key challenge is that, at present, the social protection sector is disproportionately financed by both government and donors. For example, at the time of developing this strategy, the flagship SCTP, is financed by the Government in only one out of 28 districts in Malawi. To protect the sustainability of the social protection system in the longer term and support its progressive expansion, this strategy will set out a roadmap towards increasing Government ownership and financing of social protection through a domestic resource mobilization strategy.

A key setback for the financing of social protection in Malawi has been the fragmentation of financing across a proliferation of different donors all with different reporting frameworks and procedures. This resulted in financial management becoming a cumbersome challenge for the Government, which had to deal with several auditors all with separate financial management requirements within a system of fragmented project-based delivery. As the Mid-Term Review of MNSSP II (2021) notes, *"this situation [a fragmented policy and donor environment] makes it difficult for the government to push forward its preferred model: harmonised funding and delivery through e-payments."*

In addition, in the context of the increasing frequency and severity of shocks, there is also an emerging need for contingency funding for the rapid expansion of the sector in response to shocks. Donors (World Bank, European Union, FCDO) have started building crisis modifiers and contingency funding into their programming, targeted advocacy will be conducted among the donors to further develop the capacity for and scale of contingency funding and advocacy among relevant government decision makers to compel government to increase funding to Social Protection programmes and service.

Recently, there has been promising improvement in the coordination and harmonisation of social protection programming due to the establishment of guiding documents and mechanisms which aim to reduce fragmentation, including the establishment of the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF). The MDTF is a platform, initiated and headed by the World Bank, that seeks to pool donor financing into a singular fund to harmonise financing for the sector and strengthen sector implementation. In addition to the World Bank, donors that have currently signed up to join the MDTF include the African Development Bank, the European Union (which will join in 2024), Iceland and the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). This is in line with the government decision to improve coordination of financing to social protection.

The Government of Malawi identified the need for establishment of a Social Support Fund (SSF) (including in the MNSSP II) as a way to address the challenge of fragmented financing and promote greater government ownership, by creating a pooled funding mechanism bringing together domestic and external funding under one common financial management and reporting arrangement. Although a task force called the National Financial Coordination Forum (NFCF) was set up by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization in 2019, (comprising the Government of Malawi and development partners) to consider the way forward for the establishment of a SSF, progress to establish the SSF has been slow. Considering that social protection does not currently have a supportive legal instrument which affects the capacity of policymakers and programme implementers to make investment cases for further funding and political support, through this strategy, a legal framework for social protection will be developed and enacted through parliament. This strategy will build on these efforts to facilitate finalisation and implementation of the pool funding framework for social protection programmes in order to have a vibrant and harmonised financial pool with the Government leading financing arrangements and implementing strategies to mobilise domestic resources to ensure sustainability and government ownership, robust guarantees of financing from development partners, ideally moving towards budget support arrangements, trigger mechanisms in place to respond to shocks in an adequate and timely manner, and a mechanism to enable transfer values to increase in line with inflation to maintain their real value over time. The strategy will also pursue financing linkages to other sources of funding – including the climate fund, international carbon finance, Africa Risk Capacity and financing for refugee support, private sector investments and other domestic resource mobilisation initiatives in order to maximise the financing available for building a robust, inclusive and shock-responsive social protection system for Malawi.

5.2 Systems Strengthening

The strategy will implement efforts that will reinforce systems and processes for effective delivery of the Social Protection services, programmes and interventions. Malawi has made strong progress in the development of its social protection system and, in recent years, has invested in key systems-level initiatives to strengthen the delivery of core programmes, including the roll-out of a UBR, the piloting of e-payments and the development of a strategy for grievance redress. However, as concluded by the MTR of the MNSSP II (2021), there remains a significant amount of delivery reform to be done if Malawi's social protection portfolio is to be streamlined. The MTR highlights it as a priority to *"put in place the essential elements of an integrated end-to-end social protection system that is more than the sum of its parts",* to contribute towards establishing a country-owned and whole-of-government approach to social protection delivery.

Gender, nutrition and disability considerations are mainstreamed into the programmatic elements of the NSPSNSPS, integrating an understanding of how social protection can support and empower women and persons with disabilities to manage the particular risks and vulnerabilities they can experience across the lifecycle. However, it is also crucial that a human rights-based approach (grounded on the five principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and legality) also informs the *processes* through which social protection is delivered to beneficiaries. As such, under each component of the operational system, the NSPSNSPS emphasizes rights and inclusion to ensure that no one is left behind in the delivery of social protection in Malawi. The components that are critical in the operational system are indicated in the figure below.

Figure 4: Components of the operational system that must be in place to strengthen the delivery of social protection

a. Advocacy, outreach and communication

A key factor underpinning the success of any social protection system is an inclusive and effective advocacy, outreach and communications strategy. To apply for a scheme, people need to know that it exists and understand its criteria and application process. They also need to understand how to access payments, whether conditions exist, what compliance entails, and how to appeal if they feel unjustly excluded. Insufficient investment in public communications can result in exclusion of eligible clients from social protection programmes. Effective communications also have an important role across all aspects of programme delivery to strengthen collaboration, linkages and sharing of information. They can reduce the susceptibility of beneficiaries to abuse or exploitation and help counter any local-level politicisation or misunderstanding of the programme among the general population.

At present, while there is a general awareness of social protection and the entitlements that can be accessed under each of the core programmes, the extent of coordinated and standardised outreach to communities in Malawi is low. There is currently no defined responsibility for advocacy activities at both district and central levels and there is no centralised advocacy strategy. Communities are currently reached in a relatively ad hoc manner through a mix of district council and community structures. Feedback between communities and national governance structures takes place through specific programme committees, leading to a situation whereby information is fragmented and non-standardised.

This strategy. Led by PRSP, will develop and implement an inclusive, evidence based, tailored advocacy, outreach and communications strategy that is socialised at all levels, reinforces awareness and empowers beneficiaries to access their social protection entitlements.

b. Registration, enrolment and case management

Registration is the administrative implementation of selection or targeting policy. It involves collecting personal data from potential beneficiaries – such as age, disability status and income – verifying the accuracy of the submitted data and assessing whether it complies with the programme's eligibility criteria. Enrolment involves issuing a registered beneficiary with a token to identify themselves at pay points when receiving cash.

In Malawi, a UBR is currently being rolled out across districts, to use this as the common platform to identify, register and enrol beneficiaries for social assistance programmes. The availability of the UBR has already improved harmonisation across interventions and provides a foundation for future strengthening of delivery systems.

The UBR unit is currently placed within the PRSP Division, with funding from various development partners and in-kind contributions from the Government in the form of human resourcing and office space. The UBR is designed to capture data on demographic and socio-economic characteristics of all households in Malawi. At the time of developing this strategy, the data coverage for 18 districts is at

100 per cent and for the 10 (original) districts is at 50 per cent, but even these remaining 10 districts are currently being re-surveyed to 100 per cent under Phase 3, which will be completed in 2024. In districts where data has been collected at 100 per cent, the UBR has been utilized to identify beneficiaries of emergency programmes, thus supporting the implementation of shock-sensitive social protection. Since 2018 the UBR has been the main data source for targeting social support programmes in districts where data was already collected.

The scope of the UBR also supports the targeting of beneficiaries for other related social and productive programmes, such as emergency assistance, the AIP, and education programmes. When fully developed, the UBR aims to meet most of the data requirements for targeting for a wide range of programmes in Malawi, including those implemented by NGOs and non-state actors.

While the registry is gaining prominence as a source of information for targeting by social protection and emergency programmes, there are coverage challenges, as noted by the UBR Strategy (2022-2026). Other shortcomings include data sharing delays partly due to the centralized nature of the system and its processes, data quality issues emanating from data collection and processing challenges, limited awareness and understanding of the purpose of the UBR among stakeholders, especially at the local level, and lack of frequent data updates. These challenges have resulted in delays in registration for core social protection programmes. The UBR has also suffered financial constraints to review and updating the UBR through regular census every four years, given current fiscal constraints.

This strategy will facilitate use of a comprehensive national government-owned UBR, regularly updated through various innovative approaches such as use of digital tools and operational procedures, decentralised to district level, designing a case management system that can deal with the constant change that is inevitably a feature of social protection programmes, linked directly to the national identity (NID) system and interoperable with other national registries such as civil registration and vital statistics, social insurance, tax, etc. This will be used for a variety of functions and programmes, such as health insurance, emergency response, AIP, and resilience-building, and by a range of actors, both government and non-government, with cost-sharing mechanisms as envisaged in the UBR Strategy (2022-2026).

c. Payments

The delivery of cash to beneficiaries on a timely, reliable and accessible basis is fundamental to the achievement of a social protection programme's policy objective. Crucially, the MTR of the MNSSP II recognised issues of late or unreliable payments as a challenge facing Malawi's cash transfer programmes that can easily undermine the credibility and impact of the programmes.

Malawi is currently, to a large extent, employing in-house payment delivery using simple manual payment systems, though a selection of districts (Balaka, Ntcheu and, more recently, Thyolo) have been piloting an e-payment mechanism for SCTP. PRSP is paving the way for a transformation of the sector through the expansion of electronic payments across all its cash-based interventions. The initiative, pursued through the E-payment Taskforce, chaired by PRSP, aligns with the wider Government strategy for the digitization of payments elaborated in the Government of Malawi Payments Roadmap (2017).

As part of this initiative, the Government of Malawi has been piloting the roll-out of a Harmonized Electronic Payment system. The Harmonized Electronic Payment system was designed by the PRSP and the Taskforce to make use of all existing cash-out avenues available in the country through a card product that would harness the system interoperability brought about by the 2015 National Switch (NatSwitch) project. The Harmonised E-payment Solution prototype was developed based on learnings and best practices from e-payment pilots and in consultation with key stakeholders including the Government of Malawi Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), development partners, the Reserve Bank of Malawi, Commercial Banks, Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), and others.

The solution was endorsed for piloting and roll-out by the NSSTC and NSSSC in February 2021. It was agreed that Thyolo district would be the most appropriate location to pilot the implementation of the new modality by engendering a new partnership between the Government and private sector payment service providers. The Harmonized Electronic Payment system was tested in the district of Thyolo as the sole payment system in place to support the delivery of cash entitlements for the SCTP. Once proven through the pilot the Harmonized Electronic Payment system will be followed by expansion to all other districts.

However, several system challenges remain. Notably, as the MTR of the MNSSP II reports, some propensity for abuse has been recognised whilst the useability for older persons and other marginalised groups has been flagged during fieldwork. A Process Evaluation of the e-payments solution was conducted between November 2022 and January 2023 and identified key gaps in NID coverage among SCTP recipient households, which will need to be addressed. This strategy will build on the current evidence to further improve the efficiency of harmonised E-payments in social protection programmes.

d. Grievance redress

An accessible and effective grievance redress mechanism (GRM) is a fundamental component of any rights-based social protection system. At present, a standardised GRM has not yet been rolled out across all programmes. The GRM set up for the largest social protection programme, the SCTP, provides direct contact with beneficiaries under the manual payment system during pay parades. Four desks are set up: the first for registering attendance; the second for verifying the name on the payroll; the third for receiving payments; and the fourth for registering and following up on any complaints or changes the beneficiary may have to report e.g., changes in household composition or school attendance by children, etc. A voluntary cluster committee is also on hand to help with grievance reporting and following up, including after the pay parade and gets paid a small allowance for supporting the processes.

However, an emerging challenge is that, under the e-payments system, both the direct grievance contact of the beneficiary and voluntary cluster committee allowances are removed. This will require replacement through a robust GRM as e-payments are rolled out and the direct personal contact of the pay parades is lost.

A GRM Strategy has recently been developed by the PRSP to standardise the GRM process across all social protection initiatives and development partners but is yet to be rolled out. The adoption of the guidelines in the design of the CS-EPWP GRM as well as its use in the CUCI programme are further promising steps. However, on the ground, and as noted by the MTR of the MNSSP II, there is considerable work to be done to apply the guidelines in practice and various obstacles of a technical, institutional and even conceptual nature remain to be resolved before a common system can be expected to replace existing programme specific systems. It is a priority of this strategy to facilitate use of a harmonised and rights-based grievance redress mechanism that is standardised across all social protection programmes and initiatives implemented across Malawi and is adequately resourced and socialised to ensure effective implementation at national, district and community levels. PRSP has drafted a strategy which provides clear guidelines and standards for a harmonised grievance redress mechanism to use across social protection programmes and initiatives in Malawi. Over the next five years, a key priority will be the wide dissemination and implementation of this rights-based harmonised GRM system, to operationalise the guidelines presented in the GRM Strategy.

e. Management systems

At present, social protection programmes in Malawi each use their own separate MIS. Before the introduction of the UBR, the SCTP MIS included a module for household data collection. Since the introduction of the UBR, this module has become redundant, and an Application Programme Interface (API) has been designed to link the UBR and SCTP MIS.

Currently, the UBR management unit is responsible for ensuring the interoperability of the MIS systems of key social protection MDAs. UBR management unit staff are tasked with engaging with districts to help them obtain the data they need including in suitable formats. Part of this task involves working with staff in the respective line ministries responsible for the MIS that interface with the UBR system.

In recognition of the need to enhance the shock-responsive of the system, the UBR has incorporated an emergency response MIS that enables the SCTP (and potentially other programmes) to provide both vertical (for example, lean season top-ups) and horizontal expansion in response to shocks, which was used to support the identification of beneficiaries for the CUCI programme.

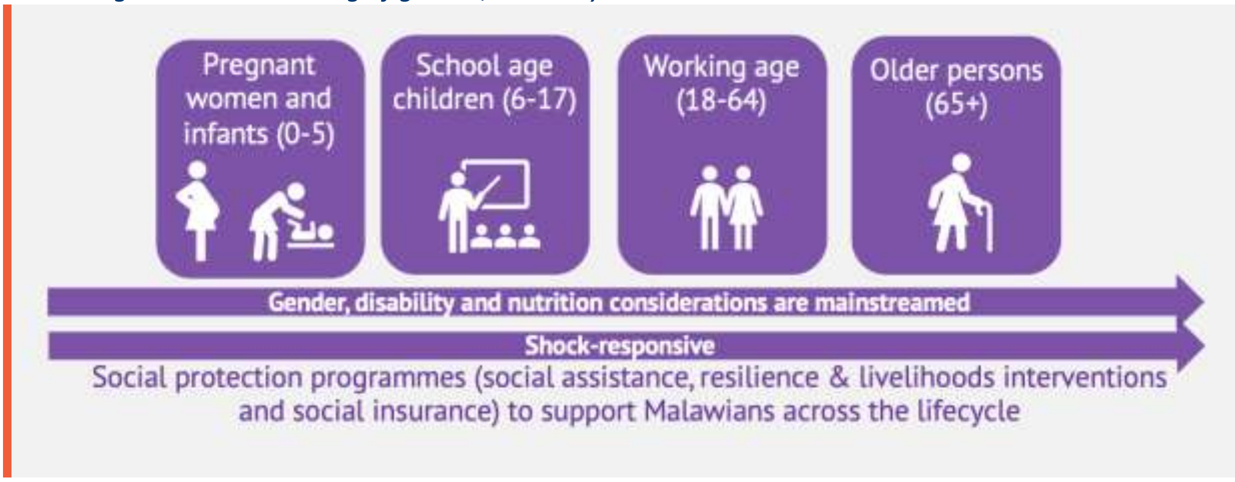
However, a key challenge is the fragmentation of programme MIS, with each programme MIS developed in isolation from the broader sector and other systems and each with different levels of development and investments. In recognition of this challenge, a concept note on a Poverty Reduction MIS was drafted for Government consideration in 2020. This envisions a “Government led & Government owned” MIS that would act as a “Hub and Spoke” to facilitate linkages and to promote coordination between social protection programmes and other services. The system would be designed to operate as an information management gateway between UBR MIS (a social registry information system) on one hand and the other social protection programmes and services on the other.

The strategy will facilitate development and roll out a comprehensive, nationally owned integrated MIS solution for the sector, to enhance the efficiency and transparency of social protection delivery and provide better control and management of the sector by the government.

5.3 Programmes for each age group

This strategy adopted a Life cycle approach, as such the strategy will facilitate delivery of services according to the age requirements for the clients group. The age groups that will be targeted are shown in the figure below.

Figure 5: A lifecycle approach to shock-responsive social protection programming for Malawi, including the mainstreaming of gender, disability and nutrition



5.3.1 Pregnant women and infants

One key social policy for this lifecycle stage is free access to medical services. Legislation exists that mandates maternity benefits for pregnant women in formal employment, but this is weakly enforced, and many employers find ways to avoid such obligations altogether by offering a sequence of short-term contracts rather than a single long-term employment contract. Following revisions to the Employment Act of 2000 in 2021, male employees are entitled to at least two weeks of paid paternity leave every three years.

Studies in Malawi have demonstrated that existing social assistance is relatively ineffective at supporting pregnant women and young infants, yet this is a crucial stage in a person's life, and any deficiencies will have long-term irremediable impacts on their physical, mental and cognitive development. Conventional public works programmes are an unsuitable form of support for this lifecycle stage. Further, a recent study of vulnerabilities of SCTP households conducted by the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) and commissioned by the MoGCDSW (2020) concluded that *"The current SCTP targeting approach tends to exclude families with preschool children".*

A number of issues need to be considered in delivering social Protection to this age group. The factors include:

Gender considerations

Social assistance for this lifecycle stage is focused on the nutrition and health of women and young children of both sexes. But there are important opportunities to engage men to a greater extent, through their inclusion during ante- and post-natal care, and in family planning activities. Links should be made with the Ministry of Health to promote postnatal check-ups and family planning information through social protection programmes.

Women and girls who are pregnant have increased risks of losing their employment or dropping out of school due to pregnancy or child-care responsibilities. Women are at a higher risk of gender-based violence when they are pregnant, due to their increased vulnerability during pregnancy (Bessa et al., 2014). Women who have been abused during pregnancy are more likely to miss or delay attending antenatal check-ups and are more likely to have birth complications, including premature delivery or a baby born with weight (Berhanie et al., 2019). Estimates of intimate partner violence during pregnancy among women in Malawi vary from 5 per cent to 59 per cent (Wetzel et al., 2021).

Nutrition considerations

Proper nutrition during the first 1000 days of human life (from pregnancy to two years of child life) is vital for the healthy development of the foetus and maintaining the health of the mother. Malnutrition during this stage can lead to poor pregnant outcomes such as low birth weight and still birth, retarded physical and cognitive development during pregnancy, stunted growth, frequent infections due to increased risk of diseases and poor school performance and work productivity as an adult. Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months provides infants with essential nutrients and antibodies, contributing to optimal growth and protection against infections during the first 6 months but after 6 months the child is vulnerable poor nutrition whose consequences can be irreversible. Malnutrition during this period can result in long-term (and irremediable) cognitive impairments and learning disabilities and can reduce the child's intellectual and educational potential, and can affect a child's overall health and well-being and future work productivity.

Incorporating this age group in Social Protection programmes and services is critical. Government of Malawi considers a moral obligation to give its next generation of citizens the best possible start in life. There are also strong economic arguments: malnutrition has a significant cost. A stunted child faces a higher risk of dying from infectious disease (1.9 to 6.5 times more likely to die, with this risk rising significantly in cases where there is a concurrence of both stunting and wasting) and the child is likely to perform less well in school (equivalent to two to three years' loss of education). Stunting is associated with impaired brain development, meaning lasting, diminished mental functioning. This, in turn, leads to significantly reduced learning. Adults stunted as children earn a lower income in life (on average, 22 per cent less), which further exacerbates deprivation and perpetuates an inter-generational transmission of poverty.

Disability considerations

Pregnant women and mothers who have disabilities require particular care during this lifecycle stage. For young infants, priority at this lifecycle stage should be given to the early identification of disability in young children. This could be achieved through the development, piloting and rollout of a series of simple functional assessment tools that can be administered at the community level in conjunction with milestone events in the life of young children. It is also important that infrastructure such as health facilities, clinics, Growth monitoring centres (facility or community based) and early childhood development centres are accessible and disability-inclusive.

During implementation of this strategy, all women and men in formal employment will have the entitlement to benefit from a legally mandated, standardised maternity and paternity benefit. In addition, all pregnant women and mothers of children under the age of 2 will receive an infant grant, linked to particular milestone events to provide an incentive for attendance at birth counselling, ante-natal care, facility-supervised birth, birth registration, regular growth monitoring, immunisation, and post-natal care, to ensure improved health and nutrition outcomes.

Linkages/complementary programmes

A nutrition support on its own will not solve the problems of malnutrition and children's vulnerabilities. But it will provide the incentives on which to "hook" other important interventions. While there is an abundance of robust evidence showing that cash transfers have positive impacts on poverty reduction (one of the determinants of malnutrition), their impact on long-term nutritional outcomes has been more limited and inconsistent. While timely cash transfers are a critical part of an approach to address child malnutrition, the evidence indicates that other measures need to complement cash, to achieve consistent nutrition outcomes.

This is recognised in the Government of Malawi's Operational Framework for Nutrition (2023) which sets as its objective to *"ensure that recipients of the SCTP and CS-EPWP access a range of platforms and initiatives that should enhance nutrition outcomes within their households, while also providing them with additional nutrition-specific and sensitive services within the operational delivery of both programmes".* This strategy will prioritise integrating the beneficiaries of social protection programmes within key nutrition platforms providing nutrition-specific and enhancing services. The priority platforms for the Operational Framework will include: Community Care Groups; Community-Based Childcare Centres; Primary Health Care services; Schools; and Village Savings and Loans Associations; Providing social behaviour change communication and other nutrition-specific and enhancing services to recipients of social protection programmes during their participation in programme activities, such as during manual payments or change management meetings of the SCTP or during workdays on the CS-EPWP programme; and regularly engaging with social protection beneficiaries during their participation in the programme and key nutrition platforms to identify those at risk of malnutrition and refer them to the appropriate primary health care service for treatment and support.

Other key complementary programmes for pregnant women and infants include nutrition guidance and surveillance, free access to primary health and post-natal care, provision of micronutrients, and early childhood care. In addition, early contact with, and testing of, pregnant mothers will facilitate existing efforts to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). It will also allow early access to birth registration and the NID system (since identity itself is an important human right for children).

Alongside this, there will be a continued national focus on improved early childhood development, through a coordinated programme of support to mothers and caregivers linked to the child grant, and through an expansion of pre-school facilities operated by the Ministry of Education. There are also important linkages with the immunisation programme operated by the Ministry of Health.

5.3.2 School age

The government of Malawi recognises that today's schoolchildren are tomorrow's workforce which makes it essential to invest in their education and well-being to ensure that they develop to their full potential and enter the workforce as well-qualified and confident individuals, equipped with appropriate skills required by the labour market. If this can be achieved, Malawi will be able to take full advantage of its demographic dividend and benefit from a young and dynamic future workforce that can provide a strong foundation for inclusive and sustainable national economic growth. Reaching out to this age group with Social Protection programmes and services is important.

The key social intervention in this age group is free primary education. Beyond that, currently, there is no social insurance support and only limited social assistance support for this lifecycle stage. The current educational bonus of SCTP provides a small benefit for households selected for SCTP that have one or more children attending school. There are also several scholarship and bursary programmes, operated by Government and non-government organisations, but these are currently fragmented, with limited coordination and coherence between them. There are also some vocational training initiatives for out-of-school youth, but again these have limited coverage.

Finally, there is a national school feeding programme, which covers just over a third of all schools in the country, reaching nearly 2 million of the country's 4.3 million learners. This strategy will facilitate more support to this age group through integration and Programme linkages.

Gender considerations

Similar numbers of boys and girls attend school. Ninety-four per cent of girls aged 6-13 attend primary school compared with 93 per cent of boys, but the net attendance ratio drops dramatically in secondary school: only 18 per cent of girls and 17 per cent of boys aged 14-17 attend secondary school. More girls than boys' benefit from school meals: 976,000 girls compared with 943,000 boys. There are existing programmes to "bring the girl child back to school"; there is an argument for extending such programmes to boys too to utilise the second window of opportunity in adolescence. This strategy will provide social protection support to vulnerable households hosting both at risk boys and girls.

Adolescent girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys, especially from secondary school. In Malawi, the dropout rate for girls in secondary education is 27 per cent and for boys is 4 per cent (World Bank, June 2022). Early marriage and teenage pregnancy are the main reasons for 16 per cent of girls leaving school (ibid.), with economic factors also contributing. In addition, there is a high adolescent fertility rate in Malawi and school-related gender-based violence, usually against young female students, is common, with one study estimating 70 per cent prevalence in Malawi's primary schools (Samati, 2021). The strategy will strive to provide targeted support to adolescent girls to stay in school and complete their education.

Nutrition considerations for adolescents

Adolescent age is considered a second window of opportunity to improve child growth. Good nutrition in school-age children is linked to cognitive performance and academic achievement. Children who receive proper nutrition are more likely to attend school regularly, concentrate better, and perform well academically. Proper nutrition also enhances the immune system, reducing the risk of infections that could disrupt regular school attendance. As children grow to adolescence, adequate nutrition supports the rapid growth and development associated with adolescence, such as bone development, where proper nutrition ensures the acquisition of peak bone mass, reducing the risk of osteoporosis later in life. Vulnerable households with adolescents and the adolescents themselves will be supported through the social protection programmes to protect them from various nutrition disorders.

Disability considerations

Twenty-nine per cent of children aged 2-9 have at least one reported functioning problem or disability. One in five (21 per cent) children aged 2 cannot name at least one object such as an animal, toy, cup, or spoon, while 5 per cent of children aged 3-9 were reported to have speech that was different from normal.

Key considerations for children with disabilities are to ensure the implementation of a fully inclusive education policy, including making schools accessible for children with disabilities (e.g. building ramps and appropriate toilet facilities); training for teachers on the management of children with disabilities; and improving communication on issues to do with children with disabilities in schools by raising awareness.

Continued efforts will be made, including through the social protection system, towards early identification of disabilities in children, based on regular age-based developmental questionnaires. The vision is to have substantially increased the access of children as beneficiaries of social protection programmes, through a gradual expansion of the age of eligibility of a child grant. Alongside the envisaged expansion of school meals and education bonus to ensure that no child is excluded from school based on financial barriers, this will ensure that all children access educational facilities that enable them to grow into responsible citizens; it will contribute to increased access, retention and completion rates.

Linkages/complementary programmes

The Ministry of Education will be a key partner at this stage of the lifecycle, responsible for maintaining free access to education, and possibly extending it, to facilitate the important transition from primary to secondary school. The Ministry of Education will also continue to be responsible for the school feeding programme as an important complementary initiative, ensuring that all primary schoolchildren have access to good quality meals in school, accompanied by a broader integrated package of school health and nutrition complementary services. In addition, given the increasing number of migrants to cities, the urban destitute/street children initiative will aim to reintegrate children with their families through complementary livelihood support.

5.3.3 Working age

The Government of Malawi acknowledges the need to maximise the effectiveness of its workforce for maximum productivity. Opportunities to support this through social assistance will be available through a range of mechanisms, to suit the characteristics and comparative advantage of different types of workers. Of course, the majority of workers in Malawi are agricultural: for those who own land and who have the labour to exploit it, there is a strong argument to support their farming livelihoods through programmes such as the AIP, which (under different guises) has existed for many years. For those with labour capacity, Malawi also has a long tradition of public works programmes, which have again evolved into the current CS-EPWP. More recently, in Malawi and elsewhere, there has been the introduction of economic inclusion programmes, involving more substantial lump-sum transfers, which are best suited to individuals with entrepreneurial skills.

When these types of support can be properly allocated to those who are best placed to profit from them, they have the potential to contribute positively to the economy. But, where they are offered in isolation, there is a tendency to select beneficiaries more arbitrarily, and the productive impacts are significantly reduced: farmers with little land or restricted labour capacity are likely to simply sell their AIP package; public works may negatively impact the health and nutritional status of women and their children who work on them; and lump-sum investments may be wasted if the individuals receiving them do not possess the necessary skills and flair for enterprise. The different types of support have to be properly allocated to maximise the return on investment, which is only possible if they can be offered in parallel, rather than in isolation. This is why it is important, within a lifecycle approach, to offer a range of such options alongside social assistance for other lifecycle stages.

Finally, the investment case for public works rests substantially on the value of the assets created. If public works assets have only limited or temporary use, then, from a beneficiary perspective, the value of undertaking public works is likely to be outweighed by the opportunity costs of participating. Therefore, it is important to carefully monitor the value of the assets created.

Reaching this age group with appropriate Social Protection programmes and services should always be encouraged. Unfortunately, only a small number of formal workers in the Government and private sectors have guaranteed social security benefits. The legal provisions for the coverage of social security risks such as occupational and industrial injuries and sickness are outdated according to international and regional standards and practices. The current social security provision represents an undue burden on employers and the economy.

For those outside the formal sector, there exist several channels through which current social assistance programmes can contribute to improving the livelihoods of the working-age poor: either, for those with land and labour, there is the possibility of access to free or subsidised agricultural inputs; or, for those without land, there are the public works opportunities offered through the CS-EPWP and similar programmes; finally, there are several economic inclusion interventions offered by NGOs. This strategy will build on these and further reinforce their efficiency in contributing to the social security and well-being of this age group.

Gender considerations during support to this age group

Men are more likely to be currently employed than women; 63 per cent of women are currently employed, as compared with 81 per cent of men. Women are more likely to be unemployed, with 9 per cent of women aged 15-64 unemployed in 2022 compared to 5 per cent of men (World Economic Forum, 2022). Women are also more likely to work in the informal sector due to their lower education levels and skills and be paid less than men, as well as more likely to not be paid at all (Oppong et al., 2022).

Almost all married men reported being employed in the last 12 months (98 per cent), which is significantly more than married women (72 per cent). Seventy per cent of married women earn less than their husbands, while only 8 per cent of married men reported earning less than their wives. Employed married women (59 per cent) are likely not to be paid for their work. Decisions over women's cash earnings are likely to be made jointly by husband and wife (47 per cent); 28 per cent of women reported having sole decision-making powers over their money and 24 per cent reported that their husbands control the decisions on how to use their earnings.

Women tend to marry considerably earlier than men in Malawi. The median age at first marriage is 18.2 years among women aged 25-49 and 23 years among men aged 25-49. The median age at first marriage for women aged 25-49 has increased slightly, from 17.8 years in 1992 to 18.2 years in 2015-16; but the percentage of women who were married before the age of 18 remains very high at 47 percent (compared with 8 percent for men). Of women aged 15-19, 29 per cent have already begun childbearing. This strategy will promote gender sensitive social protection programmes.

Nutrition considerations for the working age group

Well-nourished adults are more likely to be productive, contributing to economic growth in their communities and countries. Malnutrition limits the capacities of working-age adults through food and micronutrient deficiencies, which restricts their employment and income-generation opportunities, an important consideration, especially in the case of participation in public works programmes such as CS-EPWP. Proper nutrition also plays a role in preventing non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and obesity, reducing the burden on national healthcare systems and on the care economy (with its disproportionate impact on women). The strategy has well defined strategies and activities that will ensure nutrition is well integrated in social protection programmes.

Disability considerations

In terms of social insurance, there is already a legal provision for workplace injury invalidity benefits. However, this is poorly enforced, and many employers avoid or minimise their obligations.

Otherwise, there is limited Government support to adults with disabilities, with the most significant provided through SCTP (which does not select households based on disability status *per se*, but which indirectly recognises the additional challenge based on the calculation of labour constraints).

There are also challenges in the assessment and determination of disability, which is currently based on a medical approach. The strategy will move towards a functional approach, using tools and methods that could be applied by non-medical specialists at the community level. The vision is that all individuals of working age should have access to social protection when they require it. This will be provided through a consolidated and sustainable combination of contributory and non-contributory programmes. Social insurance reforms that will be implemented will help the progressive introduction of a range of contributory, employment-linked benefits, which may include maternity, sickness, employment injury, invalidity and retirement benefits, and – ideally – unemployment benefits and a fallback of social assistance, provided on a non-contributory basis, as a safety net for those of working age who are not covered by social insurance.

Linkages/complementary programmes

As discussed above, the multitude of resilience-building interventions that are currently offered by a range of quasi-governmental (e.g. Community Savings and Investment Promotion (COMSIP) and Financial Access for Rural Markets, Small Holders and Enterprise Programmes (FARMSE)) and non-governmental organizations (e.g. Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), Save the Children, Self-Help Africa) represent important linkages for working-age beneficiaries of social assistance.

Furthermore, it is essential also to maintain and strengthen the linkages between such social assistance interventions and building resilience to disasters. This is particularly important when considering these interventions aimed at the working age. Beneficiaries of the AIP, for example, should be encouraged towards conservation and climate-smart agriculture; public works should be climate-smart (as the name indicates) and should create assets that build community resilience and strengthen defences against climate-related disasters, such as watershed management, soil erosion control, ecosystem services, etc.

Since public works often have neutral or even negative impacts on nutrition, the Operational Framework for Nutrition also proposes stronger linkages to nutrition services to beneficiaries of CS-EPWP, and this will include the following:

- Providing CS-EPWP participants who are pregnant or lactating mothers with unconditional cash transfers, rather than asking them to work (in effect, temporarily incorporating them within the SCTP); or requiring that they attend care groups instead of their engagement in labour, for which they would receive payments providing them with activities that do not involve labour.
- Establishing childcare centres alongside public work sites so that the children of workers can be taken care of while their mother’s work. Breast-feeding women could be tasked with operating the childcare sites, as their contribution to public works.
- Stopping the requirement for public works participants to provide 30 days of free labour per year.
- Selecting nutrition-sensitive assets for public works projects that build the food security and agricultural capacity of vulnerable families, whether or not they are participating in the public works.

5.3.4 Older persons

Current social protection

There is a contributory pension for Government employees and some workers in the private sector. This has the challenge that it can be, and often is, withdrawn fully or partly as a lump sum, which reduces its value as a source of long-term support to older pensioners. There are also some actuarial uncertainties about the robustness of the Fund, which need to be resolved, but it nonetheless provides a platform upon which this strategy will progressively develop a more comprehensive pension system.

Older persons and persons with disabilities are well-represented in SCTP beneficiary households. A recent analysis found that *"the typical SCTP recipient is elderly, with a chronic health condition or physical disability… SCTP-eligible households are older, and more likely to be headed…than the typical ultra-poor rural household. Due to their age, 58 per cent of recipients suffer from either a chronic health condition, disability or both, a much higher per cent than among all ultra-poor rural households".* However, older persons and persons with disabilities are not systematically captured by the SCTP, and there is no other form of financial support available to those who are not. Nor is there any guarantee even for those in SCTP households that they as individuals will necessarily benefit from the household transfer. The strategy has made an effort to reach out to older persons with social protection interventions

Gender considerations

In Malawi, life expectancy for women is higher than it is for men, with women living until 66 years and men until 59 years (2021), so, so by definition, there are more older women than older men in the country. There are many gender inequalities present at this lifecycle stage. Older women in Malawi, especially those in rural communities, are particularly vulnerable to high levels of poverty, violence and marginalisation. Older women are less likely to be educated than older men, with 65 per cent of men aged over 65 having primary education, compared with 33 per cent of women (World Economic Forum, 2022). Older women are more likely to be widows and live alone, lacking family support and a social support network around them.

Numerous studies in Malawi have identified older women as the most vulnerable in society, with rates of physical and sexual abuse high in this age group (HelpAge International, 2019). As many women might have never entered the labour force or may have worked primarily in informal jobs and/or on care and domestic responsibilities without remuneration, this will impact how elderly women access social protection programmes and services. The strategy has made provisions to bridge these gaps, including through the provision of targeted support to older women and widows, and communications campaigns that are mindful that many older persons may be illiterate.

Nutrition considerations

Good nutrition continues to be essential for maintaining health and independence in older age. It helps prevent malnutrition, supports immune function, and reduces the risk of chronic diseases. Nutrient-rich diets are associated with better cognitive function in older adults, reducing the risk of conditions like dementia. Nutrition support will therefore be provided to this age group through various platforms.

Disability considerations

Disability increases significantly with age. The same UNICEF study of SCTP beneficiaries (2020) found that *"the elderly aged 65 and above had the highest rate of disability compared to the other age groups. Approximately half of the most elderly 80+ group live with some kind of disability".* Disability is more prevalent in rural areas in Malawi, and elderly women are more likely to be disabled (24 per cent) than older men (17 per cent) (HelpAge International, Transfer Project and MANEPO, 2018).

For this reason, it makes sense to consider the introduction of a disability bonus for persons with disabilities. This could either be a separate transfer from the pension, or a supplement to increase its value (as in Zambia where the SCTP transfer is doubled in value for those with disabilities). The advantage of the former solution, as a separate transfer, would be that it could also be offered to persons with disabilities in different age groups. This strategy will facilitate more suitable options for this age group.

Linkages/complementary programmes

The main complementary programme for the elderly is free access to health care, with the Ministry of Health as a key partner. The strategy will facilitate availability, linkages and access by beneficiaries to various programmes and services through different platforms.

5.4 Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

The strategy will encourage tracking of progress towards implementation and achievement of results, stakeholders' accountability in relation to their mandate and evidence generation and documentation of evidence based best practices for learning and programme improvement. As such, the following will be enhanced:

- Implementation of a comprehensive and standardised MEAL system that is operationalised across all programmes and projects to enhance the effectiveness of the social protection sector in Malawi and to provide a strong basis for an evidence-based policy and programme approach.
- Implementation of a results-based management system that will facilitate tracking of transformative changes in the lives of beneficiaries and changes in the ways of working by key institutions.

5.5 The Life Cycle Approach

The key strategic issue to be addressed concerns the transition to a lifecycle approach. This NSPS covers the first five years of implementation of the new NSPP 2024-2029, which is explicit that the NSPSNSPS should adopt *"the life cycle approach to social protection, reflecting the recognition that individuals face different risks and vulnerabilities at different stages in life".* It further states that *"the Policy seeks to harmonise and promote effective coordination and implementation of the various social protection interventions to minimise the lifecycle risks and empower people to meaningfully contribute to personal and national development"*, which recognises not only the desirability of the lifecycle approach *per se* but also the fact that social protection can play a far more important role in "personal and national development" than merely serving as a "safety net".

This Strategy is premised, however, on the likelihood that there will be severely constrained fiscal space for social protection over the five years covered. It attempts therefore to lay out a Strategy that will be broadly budget-neutral, but which will enable a substantial reorientation towards the specified lifecycle approach and a consolidation of the enabling environment and systems that will together provide a launchpad for expanded social protection in the period that follows, once the short-term fiscal constraints have been overcome.

Rationale for a lifecycle framework

There are many justifications for adopting a lifecycle approach to social protection. Firstly, it is the clear direction of travel for social protection in Malawi. The precursor to this NSPS, the MNSSP II had already *"recognized that the needs of poor and vulnerable people change over their life cycles"*; the

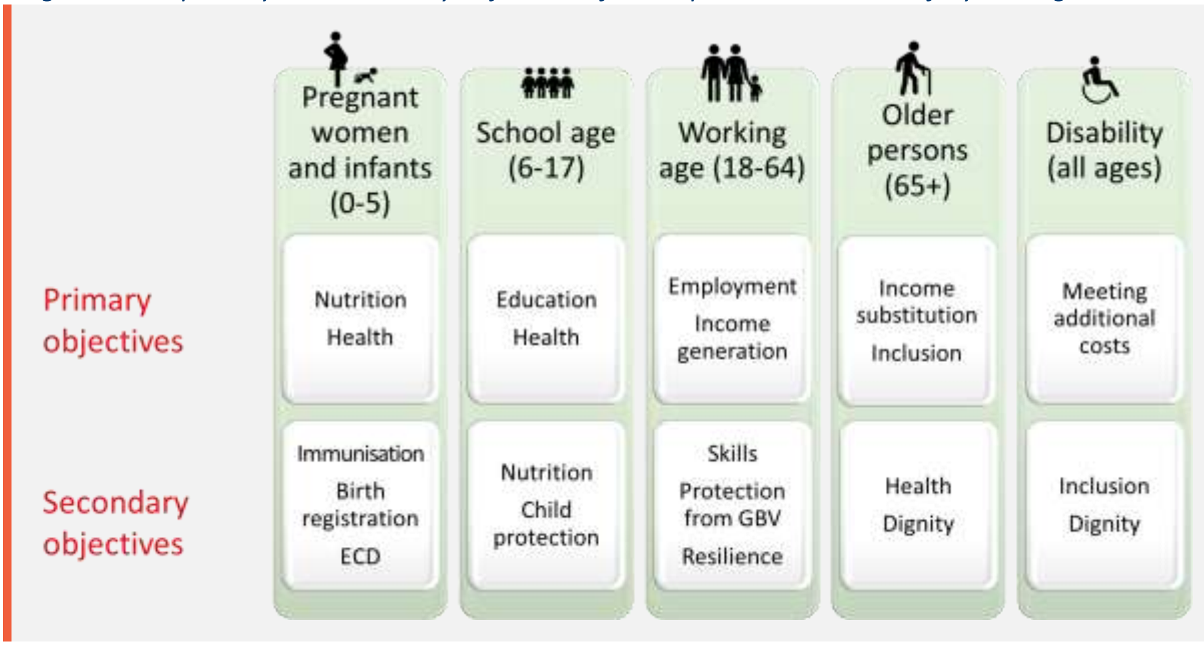
Strategic Plan for the Social Cash Transfer Programme proposes *"primarily a categorical approach, overlain with exclusion of the non-poor"*; and there is a categorical targeting pilot in place in Thyolo District currently. Pursuing a lifecycle approach would also continue the ongoing shift in Malawi's social protection to adopting a focus on the individual rather than the household. This tendency is already apparent in the education bonus of the SCTP for example, and in the current categorical pilot where it is an individual's vulnerability that is taken into account rather than that of a household.

Secondly, this reflects a similar trajectory in several other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where the benefits of a lifecycle approach, both conceptual and operational, are being increasingly recognised. South Africa (with its suite of inclusive child grants, foster child grants, care dependency grants, disability grants, social relief of distress grants and older person grants), Mauritius (universal old age pension and disability pension) and Botswana (universal child support and old age pension) are obvious examples, having operated a full suite of lifecycle social assistance programmes for many years. Other countries, such as Kenya (universal pension and pilot child grant) and Ghana are rapidly moving in the same direction. Still others, such as Lesotho (near-universal old age pension and child grant), Sierra Leone and Zambia, are reorienting their national social protection policies and strategies around the lifecycle. Zambia is a particularly interesting illustration: having begun its SCTP with a model identical to Malawi's, it has now adopted a much more inclusive set of enrolment criteria based on five lifecycle categories: older persons, persons with disabilities, the chronically ill, female heads of large households and child-headed households. As its approach has evolved, it has gained domestic political traction and has seen a massive expansion of its coverage to over 700,000 households with more than 50 per cent of the cost of the programme now being funded by the Government.

Operational benefits of a lifecycle framework

A lifecycle approach is more intuitive for operational purposes because it clarifies the different objectives of different social protection interventions at different stages of the lifecycle, and thereby helps to overcome some of the prevailing areas of confusion around such concepts as graduation, dependency, double-dipping, exit strategies and categorical targeting (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). For example, when lifecycle vulnerabilities are broken down as shown below in 6, it becomes clear that the objectives at each stage are very distinct:

Figure 6: The primary and secondary objectives of social protection at each lifecycle stage



Source: Authors

Box 1: Misconceptions clarified by an inclusive lifecycle approach

An inclusive approach based on the lifecycle vulnerabilities faced by individuals resolves several common misperceptions, including those related to:

1) "Graduation" – graduation, in the sense of graduation out of poverty and into sustainable employment or income generation is only an appropriate outcome at the end of certain lifecycle stages. The objective of social assistance to pregnant women, infants, children and older persons is not intended directly to graduate them in this sense: it is respectively to provide better nutrition, early childhood development, education and income security. Graduation is a relevant objective only for the working age, and – in some cases – to youth and persons with disabilities.

2) "Dependency" – again, this is only a concern where the objective is to evolve beneficiaries out of reliance on social protection, for example in the case of youth, where the objective is to make them employable, and of the working age, where the objective is to encourage them into decent work where they will be able to generate an income. The ability to be dependent on social protection is a positive outcome for infants, children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

3) "Exit strategy" – similarly, not all lifecycle social assistance has the same exit strategy. Pregnant women exit from a programme when they give birth, infants when they reach a defined age and schoolchildren when they leave school. Conversely, for older persons and persons with disabilities, the support should be lifelong; so, it is only for youth and the working age that programmes need to define more complex criteria for programme exit.

4) "Double-dipping" – where social assistance is based on individual vulnerabilities, there is no problem with a household receiving multiple benefits if it contains, for example, a pregnant woman, a child with disabilities and two older persons. It is only when benefits are rationed through poverty-targeting of households that there is likely to be resentment about the same household receiving more than one type of social assistance, while others receive none (as happens currently in some cases in Malawi).

5) "Categorical targeting" – it is important not to see social protection for different lifecycle stages as being a variant of, or an alternative to, poverty-targeting. The lifecycle approach is broader than

> just a form of targeting because it requires a recognition of the full range of interventions that are needed to address the different vulnerabilities at each lifecycle stage. The different objectives at each stage rather represent a policy choice of the vulnerabilities that need to be tackled. Only after those policy choices have been made is there then a subsequent decision about selection for a given programme: for example, focusing it on the poor (poverty-targeting), selecting particular geographic areas (geographical targeting), excluding the wealthy (affluence testing), or including everyone at that lifecycle stage (universal).

Of course, the boundaries between the different lifecycle stages are not as clear-cut as 8 implies, and the age ranges are for guidance only. There will still be several transversal programmes cutting across the lifecycle, such as health insurance; and it may be that some individual programmes can contribute to tackling vulnerabilities at more than a single lifecycle stage, such as the SCTP does now. There should be integrated, harmonised systems supporting interventions across the lifecycle, and there will be a continued need for strategic oversight of the system as a whole. But operationally, the common objectives at each different lifecycle stage can potentially help to generate more effective collaboration between a restricted number of key stakeholders and to leverage greater synergy between the complementary services that they deliver.

Adopting a lifecycle approach, as is proposed for the NSPS, requires a shift in focus from the household to the individual. In the design of social assistance programmes, policymakers can choose between targeting benefits to individuals or households. As rights holders, individuals of all ages are entitled to social protection to help them address the particular risks and vulnerabilities they can face throughout their lives. Households have no comparable rights or entitlements, and their composition changes rapidly and unpredictably: this is no doubt one of the reasons that the current targeting of social assistance programmes in Malawi is so challenging.

Household-level targeting also does not account for the intra-household distribution of income or wealth and can have negative implications for vulnerable persons within the household – in particular, those less likely to generate incomes. Such individuals – for example, women or persons with disabilities – may not be eligible for certain social protection schemes if they live in a household that is categorised as “non-poor”. Therefore, providing individual benefits, such as an old-age pension or disability benefit, maybe a more effective approach to avoiding exclusion.

With household benefits (which tend to be paid directly to the head of household), their impact on different members of the household may vary due to unequal sharing of resources between household members. Policymakers in some countries have recognised this risk and do not restrict the number of benefits a household can receive, as long as members fulfil eligibility criteria. As a result, the overall value of benefits received by a household is naturally aligned with the vulnerabilities of its household members. In general, individual benefits, paid for common lifecycle risks, avoid these pitfalls and are a much simpler way of designing a rights-based gender-responsive social security system.

6 Implementation arrangement

The implementation of the strategy will adopt a multi-sectoral approach recognizing that social protection programmes and services involve various stakeholders including Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs); development partners; civil society; research institutions; academia; private sector; faith-based organizations and community structures. The multi-sector approach is intended to steer more holistic, complementary and harmonized support to the beneficiaries. As such the strategy will be implemented through the implementation framework described below which defines the institutional arrangement with clear mandates to delivery of social protection services in a coordinated manner. The Ministry responsible for Economic Planning and Decentralization as the policy holder will lead the implementation of the Policy through the Poverty Reduction and Social Protection Division, in collaboration with key stakeholders outlined below.

Table 2: List of Stakeholders and their roles

No.	Key stakeholder	Roles and responsibilities
1	Office of the President and Cabinet	a) overall guidance and direction in the implementation monitoring and review of the strategy
2	The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization	a) **P**rovide strategic leadership, coordination, capacity development and monitoring, financing/resource mobilization evaluation and evidence-based review of the strategy implementation. b) Ensure the functionality of Social Protection coordination structures at all levels. c) Initiating the formulation of Policies and legislation related to Social Protection in collaboration with stakeholders. d) Setting and disseminating minimum standards and guidelines for social protection programmes. e) Monitoring and supervising social protection programmes. f) Facilitating generation, documentation and dissemination of information, emerging issues and best practices on social protection to stakeholders. g) Enhancing systems integration and interoperability across all Social Protection interventions/programmes. h) Coordinating private sector and civil society participation in the provision of services to vulnerable groups and donor support. i) Harmonizing targeting criteria for cash and non-cash transfers
3	Ministry Gender, Social Welfare and Community Development	Social Welfare will oversee: a) Implement the Social Cash Transfer Programme. b) Mobilize additional resources donor contributions SCTP. c) Provide technical support and capacity building to Local Authorities implementing SCTP Community Development will facilitate: a) Provision of guidance and facilitate capacity development in managing Savings and Loan Groups. b) Community level mobilization for implementation of social protection interventions.

		c) Establishment of linkages with complimentary interventions. Gender will facilitate: a) Capacity building of stakeholders in gender mainstreaming and monitor gender and social inclusivity in Social Protection programmes and services. b) Introduction of gender transformative methodologies to improve relations in communities. c) Facilitate awareness raising on Gender Based Violence, reporting and prevention, and monitor gender-based violence. Disability and Elderly Affairs will facilitate: a) Ensure access to marketable vocational skills and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities b) Promote independent living for persons with disability. c) Advocate for rights, nutrition and health status of older persons.
4	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	a) Provide policy guidance on decentralization of social protection interventions. b) Oversee the implementation of decentralized social protection interventions at local level.
5	National Local Government Finance Committee	a) Implement Public Works programme. b) Perform Programme Management Unit (PMU) services for the Social Protection Multi-Donor Trust Fund. c) Provide fiduciary services for social protection interventions at local authority level. d) Implement Public Works programme. e) Perform PMU services for the Social Protection Multi-Donor Trust Fund. f) Provide fiduciary services for social protection interventions at local authority level.
6	Ministry of Finance	a) Mobilize and consistently allocate resources for social protection programmes. b) Ensure timely and accurate disbursement of funds. c) Facilitate technical assistance to stakeholders to enhance social protection programming.
7	Ministry of Health	a) Ensure that health care providers address the rights of vulnerable persons. b) Facilitate provision of tertiary and secondary level health care services. c) Offer policy guidance on health insurance.
8	Ministry of Agriculture .	a) Provide farming inputs, and agricultural extension services to vulnerable farming households. b) Facilitate market access for goods produced by vulnerable

		farming households. c) Ensure food security and diversification for enhanced nutrition of vulnerable households d) Promote optimal health and nutrition practices through Social Protection platforms
9	Department of Disaster Management Affairs	a) Facilitate mitigation of disaster risks proactive measures. b) Facilitate the reduction of disaster impacts on communities. c) Enhance preparedness for disaster response. d) Facilitate the provision of effective emergency assistance. e) Coordinate recovery efforts for affected communities.
10	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	a) Facilitate the implementation of School Feeding Programme. b) Coordinate implementation of education support programmes including bursary schemes
11	Ministry of Youth	b) a) Provide vocational, skills training and recreation facilities to youth Provide youth empowerment funds.
12	Ministry of Labour	a) Coordinate relevant social insurance schemes/matters. b) Facilitate the elimination of harmful child labour and the employment of young persons c) Enhance efforts to actualize the Decent Work Country Programme. d) Ensure adherence to International Standards on labour related social security. e) Ensure participation of social partners in development. f) Support extension of social security to the informal economy. g) Promote social dialogue and social partners participation in design and implementation of social protection policies and programmes
13	Ministry of Industrialization, Business, Trade and Tourism	a) Provide skills training to vulnerable groups in order to be engaged in small to medium size enterprises (SME). b) Support identified vulnerable groups with finances for SME. c) Create linkages to the national and international markets. d) Facilitate market access for goods produced by vulnerable SMEs
14	Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs	a) Provide technical expertise on legislation and review of laws related to Social Protection. b) Facilitate the domestication of international conventions and agreements related to social protection.
15	Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology	a) Promotion of Social Protection using an Information, Education and Communication strategy that will guide

		how the population will learn about Social Protection and respective programmes. b) Share and coordinate information to electronic and print media. c) Undertake education and information sessions at district and community levels.
16	Department of Nutrition	a) Provide oversight, strategic leadership, Policy direction and monitoring on matters of nutrition in social protection programmes. b) Provide policy guidance on nutrition- sensitive social protection. c) Spearhead the mainstreaming of nutrition in social protection programmes for improved nutrition outcomes among the poverty-stricken households and vulnerable populations.
17	District, Town, Municipal and City Councils	a) Facilitate the implementation of participatory local development. b) Implement resilient livelihoods interventions through tailored packages based on individual, household, and community needs. c) Ensure transparency and accountability of social protection coordination structures at local level. d) The council level social protection coordination structures will collaborate with community-level local government structures to oversee the targeting and implementation of social protection interventions. e) Ensure the functionality of harmonized Grievance Redress Mechanism structures.
18	Malawi Parliament	a) Enact laws and legislation that support social protection programs
19	Development partners	a) Provide technical and financial support to social protection programming. b) Engage in Policy dialogue.
20	Non-Governmental Organizations, Faith Based Organizations and Civil Society Organizations	a) Complement the Government's efforts through the provision of social protection programmes. b) Support programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. c) Undertake advocacy, community mobilization and sensitization exercises. d) Promote accountability and research and Policy dialogue. e) Advocate for the rights and mobilization of resources for vulnerable groups
21	Academia and Research Institutions	a) Conduct research and evaluation to inform policy design and implementation.

		b) Provide evidence-based recommendations to policy makers. c) Develop innovative solutions to social protection challenges. d) Build capacity and train professionals in social protection. e) Disseminate knowledge and best practices through publications and conferences.
22	Private Sector	a) Partner Government in implementing social protection programmes. b) Initiate and implement corporate social responsibility targeted at social protection programmes.

7 Implementation plan

The NSPS, led by PRSP in Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Decentralization, will be supported by a separate implementation plan to operationalize the strategy priority areas and policy statements contained in the Policy to achieve the overall goal and objectives, and by implementing the strategies and actions in line with the MIP-1.

The detailed implementation plan and cost estimates will be developed once the Strategy has been accepted and formally adopted by the Government. This will be a high-priority activity that should be completed within three months after Strategy approval. However, the strategy anticipates some risks and natural disasters which cause untold suffering among vulnerable populations. The strategy will encourage mitigation strategies to save life. The section below describes potential risks and risk management and critical success factors.

7.1 Risks and Mitigation Measures

Table 3 below summarises the key risks and associated mitigation measures.

Table 3 - Risks and mitigation measures

Risks	Risk level (H/M/L)	Mitigating measures
Government funding fails to increase sufficiently for development partners to feel there is a genuine prospect of sustainability	High	Strong policy dialogue with the Government coupled with an increasing political significance of the programme. Consider funding arrangements, where development partners match an agreed decreasing proportion of total costs, with contributions by the Government increasing correspondingly. Help the Government to explore innovative extra sources of funding for social support, such as a restoration of the earlier "safety net tax" on fuel; a national lottery or others.
Corruption, diversion of funds, "false beneficiaries"	Medium	The design of an Internal Control System and a whistleblowing policy together with the grievance redress procedures guarantee accountability and transparency.
Overloading of the SCTP as the flagship component of the NSSP	Medium	Development partners should continue to offer technical support to key stakeholders to ensure that the Government has the means and the capacity to manage an expanded SCTP. Reorient SCTP towards simple lifecycle vulnerabilities to demonstrate the simpler management requirements of the more intuitive lifecycle approach.
Government staff capacity is	Medium	Ensure that the action is implemented in a way that stimulates full Government

insufficient at all levels		participation and accountability. Leverage opportunities of e-payment systems to reduce the administrative burden on district staff. Provide capacity-building and coherent staff development opportunities at all levels.
Climate-related shocks divert development partner funding to emergency response, and away from longer-term social support interventions	Medium	Strongly make the case that shock-responsive social protection is the best way to build resilience and mitigate against future shocks. Use humanitarian and development funding to build such systems proactively, rather than on reactive emergency response. Support coordination amongst development partners on resilience and social protection interventions.
Lack of capacity in gender and disability, or of expertise in how to effectively mainstream gender and disability in national social protection and resilience programmes	Medium	Include gender and disability disaggregated data and analysis, gender and disability sensitive approach training, and gender and disability responsive planning and budgeting of NSPS

7.2 Critical Success Factors

Among the critical success factors are that:

- The Government continues to give high priority to the NSPS and is prepared to contribute an increasing share of the funding to allow the expansion of its component programmes, in particular the lifecycle interventions under the SCTP.
- Full acceptance of the concept of shock-responsive social protection and the need for its integration with disaster response; and a clear commitment by development partners to prioritise this approach in emergency response.
- The Government will continue to embrace the need to move towards a lifecycle approach to social protection.
- A cadre of Government staff responsible for management and oversight of the NSPS reform is in place and has time to focus on implementation of the Strategy.

8 Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL)

8.1 Current situation

The design of MNSSP II was accompanied by the elaboration of a comprehensive results framework and guidance for the collection, processing and dissemination of evidence. However, the operationalisation of this has been very limited. Whilst reporting has continued to take place at an individual programme and project level, the ambition of the results framework set out under the MNSSP II was to harmonise such reporting systems and to come up with a sector-wide reporting mechanism that would replace fragmented systems.

The lack of progress in operationalising the framework has held back learning and accountability within the social protection sector. The MTR of the MNSSP II (2021) notes that:

> *"As the lifeblood of any oversight, coordination, learning and accountability system, it has meant that key structures have not availed of the necessary evidence upon which to provide guidance, consider policy options and take decisions… In the absence of a common system using standard indicators and related metrics, sector stakeholders are at risk of only having a partial view of what is going on. This is especially so at the district level which often finds itself as a bystander in the M&E process acting as an agent for data collection only and thereafter for onward transmission to the national level."*

In recognition of this, the Government commissioned a review of the MNSSP II indicator framework, which concluded in November 2021 and proposes a revised set of guidelines for district-level data collection, processing and onward dissemination to higher levels. This provides a key opportunity to drive forward the operationalisation of the MEAL system for the NSPS. The expectation is that this strategy will facilitate development and implementation of a comprehensive and standardised MEAL system that will be operationalised across all programmes and projects, contributes to enhancing the effectiveness of the social protection sector in Malawi and provides a strong basis for an evidence-based policy approach. The MEAL will represent a set of procedures that will guide information flows between stakeholders at different operational and management levels to support decision-making and learning and to reinforce accountability. The MEAL system will track changes at (a) strategic level – where monitoring results will be used to inform policy, (b) output level, where monitoring results will be used to improve performance and (c) research and learning – where the results will be used for in-depth learning and knowledge generation.

To establish such a system, the following steps will be undertaken:

- Within the first year after approval of the NSPS and based on the Implementation Plan which will be developed (see section 6), the Government will **design an implementable MEAL framework**. This should draw on the recommendations of the MNSSP II indicator framework, with guidance on data collection, analysis, and dissemination at all levels. This should be accompanied by a road map including necessary capacity-strengthening support.
- **Establish clear two-way reporting channels with districts**. As noted in the MTR of the MNSSP II, districts have suggested that any MEL system for the sector needs to be linked to the district council's own MIS to ensure data feeds its internal planning and budgeting processes while facilitating accountabilities to elected leaders.
- Ensure that the necessary incentives are established for individual programmes and projects, with their pre-existing systems and reporting requirements, to **align with a centralised system for MEAL**. The shift to a lifecycle framing of social protection and the coordination of the proliferation of social protection implementers under clear and unified lifecycle-based objectives (as elaborated in Chapter 5) is likely to support this alignment.

8.2 Review of the Strategy

It will be important for the Government to lead stakeholder-driven reviews to identify the achievements and challenges faced implementing the NSPS 2025-2030 and feed this into the strengthening of future social protection strategies. It should assess the performance of the social protection enabling environment, systems and programmes against strategic outcomes and outputs. The review should evaluate the performance of the social protection system as a whole in terms of design, implementation, financing and MEAL.

It is recommended that the Government undertakes a Mid-Term Review in 2027/28 at the halfway point of the NSPS 2025-2030. At the end of the 5 years covered by the NSPS 2025-2030, a final review of the implementation of the NSPS should be conducted.

Bibliography

Barret, S., and Kidd, S. (2015). The design and management of cash transfer programmes: An overview. KfW Development Bank.

Berhanie, E., Gebregziabher, D., Berihu, H. (2019) Intimate partner violence during pregnancy and adverse birth outcomes: A case-control study - reproductive health, BioMed Central.

Bessa, M.M.M., Drezett, J., Rolim, M. and de Abreu, L. C. (2014) Violence against women during pregnancy: Systematized Revision, Reprodução & Climatério.

Government of Malawi. (1994). The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi.

Government of Malawi. (2000). Employment Act 2000, No.6 of 2000. International Labour Organization.

Government of Malawi. (2018). National Resilience Strategy (2018-2030), Breaking the Cycle of Food Insecurity in Malawi. Department of Disaster Management Affairs.

Government of Malawi. (2020). Malawi Vision 2063: An Inclusively Wealthy and Self-reliant Nation. National Planning Commission, Lilongwe, Malawi.

Government of Malawi. (2021a). The Malawi 2063 First 10-Year Implementation Plan (MIP-1) 2021-2030. National Planning Commission, Lilongwe, Malawi.

Government of Malawi. (2021b). Employment (Amendment) Act, 2021 (Act No.17 of 2021). International Labour Organization.

Government of Malawi (2021c). Operational Guidelines for Information Linkages and Referrals among MNSSP II programmes in Malawi – Summary Note EP&D March 2021.

Government of Malawi. (2022). Mid-Term Review of the Malawi National Social Support Programme II 2018-2021. Policy Brief.

Government of Malawi. (2023a). Disaster Risk Management Bill.

Government of Malawi. (2023c). UBR Strategy 2022-2026.

Government of Malawi (2023d). Support the roll-out of the harmonised e-payment solution for the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP) in Malawi: Process evaluation report (May – November 2022).

Government of Malawi (2023e). Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection Operational Framework. (2023-2026)

Government of Malawi and UNDESA (2017). Ageing in sub-Saharan Africa: Multiple Indicator Survey on Ageing (MISA) in Malawi.

Government of Malawi and UNICEF (2022). Malawi Education Fact Sheets: 2022, MICS-EAGLE

HelpAge International. (2019). Malawi Gender Policy Brief.

HelpAge International, Transfer Project and MANEPO. (2018). Impacts of Malawi's Social Cash Transfer on Older People and their Households.

Holmes, R., Scott, L., Both, N., and Chinsinga, B. (2018). Strengthening Institutional Coordination of Social Protection in Malawi: An Analysis of Coordination, Structures and Options, Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

Land, A. and Mokoka, D. (2023). Capacity Needs Assessment Report.

National Statistical Office. (2017). Malawi Demographic and Health Survey 2015-16. National Statistical Office Zomba, Malawi.

National Statistical Office. (2020). Fifth Integrated Household Survey 2019-20. https://doi.org/10.48529/yqn3-zv74

Oppong et al. (2022). Malawi Gender Assessment (English). Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

Samati, M. (2021) Gender-based violence in primary schools: Malawi.

Save the Children. (2020). Analysis of child-sensitive social protection in Malawi: Analysis and recommendations.

Transform. (2017). Legal Frameworks for Rights-Based Social Protection Floors - Manual for a Leadership and Transformation Curriculum on Building and Managing Social Protection Floors in Africa. Social Protection.

UNCDF. (2017). Payments Road Map, a Five-Year Plan to Digitize Government Payments in Malawi. Mobile Money for the Poor.

UNICEF. (2020). Addressing Lifecycle Vulnerabilities of Beneficiaries in the Malawi Social Cash Transfer Programme. UNICEF Office of Research.

Wetzel, E.C., Tembo, T., Abrams, E.J., Mazenga, A., Chianti, M.J., Ahmed, S., Yu, X., Kim, M.H. (2021) The relationship between intimate partner violence and HIV outcomes among pregnant women living with HIV in Malawi, Malawi medical journal: the journal of Medical Association of Malawi.

World Bank. (June 2022). Malawi Poverty Assessment Report.

World Economic Forum. (2022). The Global Gender Gap Report 2022.