



Presented At the

**ALL-INCLUSIVE NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON SOCIAL
PROTECTION FINANCING WITH FOCUS ON DISABILITY,
HUMAN RIGHTS, OLDER PERSONS AND A PROGRESSIVE
LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

3rd June, 2026 – LIFESTYLE BOUTIQUE – LILONGWE

BACKGROUND

- ❑ The Civil Society Social Protection Network is a network championing social protection advocacy in Malawi.
- ❑ The Civil Society Social Protection Network (CSSPN) is a network of organizations that are committed to support in adding value to Malawi Government implementation of social protection interventions in an efficient and effective manner that improves the well-being of Malawian citizens and all people living in it through the promotion of transparency, participation and accountability. The Network was formed to fill the gap in social protection advocacy.

OVERVIEW AND CHALLENGES IN MALAWI'S SOCIAL PROTECTION LANDSCAPE

- ❑ Despite an overabundance of well-designed social protection policies and programs from the Government and large presence of government functionaries at all levels.
- ❑ Poverty remains a challenge, with 72% of the population living below the US \$2.15 international poverty line in 2023. The unemployment rate improved slightly from 6.8% in 2022 to 6.7% in 2023
- ❑ Further, the economic growth projected at 3.8% for 2025, is lower than the January 2024 projections understandably due to the negative impact of drought on agriculture, since Malawi is an agrarian economy.

EVIDENCE OF CURRENT PROBLEMS WITHIN SOCIAL PROTECTION

- ❑ In 2019, the International Labour Organization in conjunction with Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs commissioned a study on social accountability in social protection.
- ❑ Some of the key findings of the study were that there was weak social accountability mechanism, limited understanding of social protection at all levels, low political will as evidenced by weak governance mechanisms.
- ❑

**EVIDENCE OF
CURRENT
PROBLEMS WITHIN
SOCIAL
PROTECTION
.....CONT'D**

Several challenges include;

- ❑ Low coverage, inadequate awareness among beneficiaries and communities on their social protection rights
- ❑ Low advocacy and monitoring of social protection programs
- ❑ Limited civil society and social partners at national district and community levels participation in implementation of social protection programs and weak governance and administration systems
- ❑ Weak ownership of social protection programs both technically and financially which raises the question of sustainability.
- ❑ Malawi has no social protection law as compared to other countries such as Namibia and Kenya which have progressive laws.

LIMITED CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

- ❑ While the main responsibility for the provision of comprehensive social protection systems lies with the states, civil society organizations and social partners play an important contribution towards strengthening the design and implementation of effective social protection systems by governance and accountability in social protection systems as civil society organizations advocate for the rights and the empowerment of people.
- ❑ In Malawi, the national social protection program has been there for years, but CSOs have been systematically excluded, while funding and capacity building of CSOs by donors and development partners is far-fetched from reality.

DECLINING OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT AID

- ❑ New evidence shows that declining Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to Malawi, particularly a ~59% reduction in U.S. aid in 2025, is severely weakening social protection, food security, and health programs.
- ❑ This aid, once over \$350 million annually, supported 1.2 million people through public works, yet its withdrawal leaves the government struggling to fill funding gaps and risks increasing poverty levels.

KEY IMPACTS OF AID CUTS

- ❑ **Broad Reductions:** Beyond the U.S., OECD data indicates a broader decline in ODA to sub-Saharan Africa, with 26 of 34 Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members reducing support.
- ❑ **Economic Vulnerability:** The reduction in funding for projects (like those from the World Bank and other donors) has directly impacted food security, which is already precarious in rural areas.
- ❑ **Loss of Public Works:** Key social safety nets, such as Public Works Programmes (PWP) that assist over 1 million people, face operational uncertainty.

CONSEQUENCE AND OUTLOOK AFTER AID CUTS AND HOW IT AFFECTS SOCIAL PROTECTION

- **Increased Poverty:** The withdrawal of aid is expected to contribute to a higher poverty rate, with projections indicating a potential 2 percentage point increase in poverty levels.
- **Reduced Economic Output:** By 2030, Malawi's economy could be an estimated \$304 million smaller due to the cessation of this funding.
- **Fiscal Crisis:** Malawi's high dependence on donor aid for its national budget leaves it with limited capacity to sustain essential services, forcing a search for local solutions and improved agricultural productivity.
- **Long-Term Uncertainty:** OECD projections suggest that while some funding may return, future aid flows remain volatile and unpredictable, threatening the continuity of long-term development programs.

POLICY FRAGMENTATION

- ❑ Malawi has a vast array of policies that are related closely and in one way or another to social protection these include; Malawi Vision 2063, National Resilience Strategy, National Job Creation Strategy, The National Pensions Act, (CAP 55:02), National Employment and Labour Policy (NELP), and the National Education Policy amongst many others.
- ❑ Unfortunately, there is no clear policy coordination or implementation mechanism to ensure social protection programs make a transformative impact. The saying that Malawi has many great policies but implementation is a challenge can also be manifested and a clear mechanism or a policy coordination platform can help cut off or address policy fragmentation.

WEAK OR UNCLEAR GRIEVANCE REDRESS MECHANISMS

- ❑ While the national social protection program in Malawi claims to have a robust grievance redress mechanism, its independence is still questionable.
- ❑ A Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) in social protection programs is a formal, structured system allowing beneficiaries and stakeholders to submit complaints, feedback, or queries regarding program design, implementation, or services.
- ❑ These systems ensure accountability, transparency, and accessibility, often utilizing digital tools like toll-free numbers, SMS, or apps, alongside community-based committees

**WEAK OR UNCLEAR
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- ❑ Mostly, in most communities' beneficiaries lack awareness on how they can lodge complaints and present grievances, while reports from such processes are not well diagnosed, while civil society participation is almost non-existent.

PRODUCTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMING - INTEGRATING JOBS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH

- ❑ To enhance the impact, sustainability, and inclusiveness of social protection in Malawi, there is a critical need to strengthen integration of social protection programs with employment and livelihood interventions.
- ❑ Moving beyond short-term relief, programs such as the Social Cash Transfer Program initiatives should be deliberately linked to productive inclusion pathways, including skills development, access to finance, entrepreneurship support, and Labour market opportunities.
- ❑ This integrated approach will enable beneficiaries especially youth, women, persons with disabilities, and older persons with capacity to work to transition from dependency to economic self-reliance and resilience, while simultaneously stimulating local economic activity and contributing to national development

MALAWI NEEDS A SOCIAL PROTECTION LAW URGENTLY

- ❑ Malawi as compared to other countries in the region has lagged behind for years, since the pilot of social cash transfer program in 2006, for 20 years, the country has been running social protection programs without a clear legal framework.
- ❑ Countries such as Kenya and Namibia have enacted clear laws to guide and safeguard social protection. In essence, a national social protection law establishes a legal framework for public and private initiatives—such as social assistance, insurance, and welfare services—to reduce poverty, protect vulnerable populations against livelihood risks, and ensure income security across the life cycle.
- ❑ As Malawi prepares to formulate a law, it has to be all-inclusive and take a human rights-based approach.

SOCIAL PROTECTION, HUMAN RIGHTS & INTERNATIONAL LAW

- ❑ Social security, or social protection, is the protection that a society provides to individuals and households to ensure access to health care and guarantee income security throughout their lives.
- ❑ This covers various life contingencies, such as sickness, unemployment, maternity, old age, disability, employment injury, or the loss of the main income earner. Social security systems are composed of a variety of mechanisms providing cash or in-kind benefits, including goods and services.
- ❑ The provision of high-quality public services is also a key element of social security systems in ensuring essential health care and basic income security. *ILO Definition*

ENCOMPASSING DISABILITY RIGHTS IN SOCIAL PROTECTION

- ❑ Persons with disability in Malawi usually struggle with lack of access to social security programs, such as FISP and even social cash transfers due to a combination of accessibility factors and the way some of the social protection programs are designed.
- ❑ The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability and Optional Protocol on persons recognizes the valued existing and potential contributions made by persons with disabilities to the overall well-being and diversity of their communities, and that the promotion of the full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of their human rights and fundamental freedoms

SAFEGUARDING SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR OLDER PERSONS

- ❑ Older persons also deserve social security, the steady increase of the older age group in the country's population has economic, social, political and cultural implications on the Malawi society. Economically, it will have an impact on economic growth, savings, investment and consumption, labour markets, pensions, taxation and intergenerational transfers.
- ❑ Yet, older persons are struggling with the availability of food in households which is erratic resulting into poor consumption patterns and insufficient nutrient intake.
- ❑ Older persons enter old age after a lifetime of poverty and without any formal social security system in Malawi.

CHILDREN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

- ❑ Malnutrition amongst children in Malawi is on the rise. According to UNICEF, child malnutrition in 2025 reached a critical level due to severe food insecurity, with a 23% increase in Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) admissions and an 86% surge in Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) cases between January and August. Approximately 33.2% of children under five are stunted.
- ❑ Over 4 million people face high levels of acute food insecurity, exacerbated by droughts and high food prices, driving up malnutrition rates.
- ❑ At the same time, children are mostly excluded from cash transfers as **child-sensitive cash transfers are not available**

Key recommendation 1:

- ❑ Despite notable progress in policy development, Malawi still lacks a comprehensive legal framework for social protection, which continues to undermine system coherence, sustainability, and accountability. The recently adopted National Social Protection Policy (2024–2029) provides an important strategic framework to guide the design, coordination, and implementation of interventions across the lifecycle. There is a need to urgently develop a social protection legal framework in Malawi which will help to safeguard the right to social security for Malawi population across the life cycle- including children, youths , working age, older persons, persons with disability . Progressive implementation of the legal framework will contribute to strengthen the social protection system and will ensure people are protected adequately

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Key recommendation 2:

- ❑ In light of Malawi's demographic transition-there is an urgent need to strengthen and expand the social insurance system to ensure adequate and reliable income security. Comprehensive social security reforms, including extending coverage beyond the formal sector, and designing inclusive contribution mechanisms that capture workers in the informal economy are required. Expanding social insurance will also play a critical role in mobilizing sustainable domestic resources for social protection through social security contributions, thereby reducing overreliance on external funding.

Key recommendation 3:

❑ To enhance the impact, sustainability, and inclusiveness of social there is a critical need to strengthen integration of social protection programmes with employment and livelihood interventions. Social Cash Transfer Programme initiatives should be deliberately linked to productive inclusion pathways, including skills development, access to finance, entrepreneurship support, and Labour market opportunities. This integrated approach will capacitate beneficiaries to to transition from dependency to economic self-reliance and resilience, while simultaneously stimulating local economic activity and contributing to national development

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Key recommendation 4:

- ❑ The increasing food insecurity due to climate shocks needs to be addressed by swiftly reforming FISP, political pressure around the program has led to loss and wastage of resources which could be avoided by having a better design of the program. While FISP is a vital social security program, reforming it could combat hunger by adopting value for money and efficiency principles.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendation 5

- ❑ Malawi's children are being affected by hunger and malnutrition, there is a need to urgently to ring-fence the school meals program in the national budget and ensure that children learn with better nutrition. Additionally, the national children's commission needs a social protection focal point and ensure social security program within the commission is taken as a high priority issue. There is a need for an investment case by Government to be developed to ensure at all cost children are protected from climate related economic shocks and poverty.**

Key Recommendation 6

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ Malawi government to implement the policies that extend the social protection to refugees and asylum seekers, ensuring they receive benefits and assistance as part of their integration into the Malawian society, and promote transparency in the social protection system to ensure that all refugees can access the benefits they are entitled to, addressing any barriers they may face, these measures can help to improve the social protection landscape for refugees in Malawi, ensuring they receive the necessary support and assistance.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Recommendation 7

Considering the role played by the civil society, social protection is a huge development issue that requires a strong civil society, hence there is a need of a civil society social protection fund to be set up within the national social protection program. The fund will enable networks such as CSSPN to lead to strengthen capacity of CSOs across Malawi and ensure civil society participates meaningfully and effectively, rather than the current cosmetic and ineffective approach.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a small, round, woven basket. The basket is covered in intricate beadwork, featuring a prominent rainbow pattern with horizontal bands of red, orange, yellow, and blue beads. The person holding the basket is wearing a vibrant, patterned garment with geometric shapes in red, yellow, green, and black. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

THANK YOU

ZIKOMO!