



Malawi readiness assessment: delivering anticipatory social protection

Working Paper

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Climate change

Keywords:

Climate resilience, social protection, loss and damage, climate finance, climate change justice, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs), early warning systems

This is an extract from the IIED working paper 'Delivering anticipatory social protection: country readiness assessment'. The full paper includes complete analysis of eight countries and can be downloaded from www.iied.org/21896iied

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Introduction

Climate change poses severe and urgent risks, especially to vulnerable communities. Social protection programmes, which historically focused on poverty alleviation and basic services, are increasingly seen as vital tools for building climate resilience. Proactive, anticipatory measures in social protection can offer cost-effective resilience against climate shocks, reducing poverty, enhancing access to services, and preventing distress migration. These programmes contribute to long-term sustainable development by tackling multiple dimensions of vulnerability, from raising living standards and human development to empowering individuals and fostering economic growth.

However, despite potential, vulnerable countries grapple with challenges in delivering anticipatory and risk-responsive social protection. These challenges include ineffective targeting of beneficiaries due to limited data and poor information systems, inconsistent social protection coverage caused by resource limitations and policy gaps, sometimes resulting in programme duplication, underdeveloped early warning systems (EWSs) that lack comprehensive climate hazard coverage, particularly in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), inefficient decision making and delivery mechanisms, and difficulties in coordination among various stakeholders and sectors during crisis.

2

Anticipatory Social Protection Index for Resilience (ASPIRE) Tool

The ASPIRE diagnostic tool offers a multi-layered approach to evaluate a country's readiness and effectiveness in delivering anticipatory and shock-responsive social protection. It assesses the maturity, readiness and gaps within existing social protection programmes by considering diverse national contexts, which include varying climate risks, institutional capacities and policy frameworks. The tool assesses a country's policy domain, covering aspects such as policy objectives, innovation, risk definition, target specification and assistance types, which identify areas that require attention to enhance the anticipatory risk-responsiveness of social protection programmes. The ASPIRE tool assesses the systems domain, and covers aspects such as financial capacity, administrative capacity, fiscal space, infrastructure, technology and information systems, and institutional mechanisms. Overall, using the ASPIRE diagnostic tool can allow governments to identify gaps and challenges that impede the effective integration of anticipatory response in social protection programmes, including insurance-linked responses. Funding agencies can leverage ASPIRE's detailed analysis to allocate resources more effectively, focusing on the most urgent gaps and impactful opportunities. **More details about the ASPIRE tool and how it can be used can be found at www.iied.org/21901iied.**

The applicability and effectiveness of the ASPIRE tool has been rigorously tested through the analysis of eight countries: Malawi, Ghana, Senegal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Uganda, Ethiopia and India. These countries were selected to represent a diverse range of climate risk contexts. Within each country, three social protection programmes were further chosen for the assessment — representing different delivery mechanisms, such as public works, food and in-kind assistance, and cash transfers. By applying ASPIRE to these eight countries, the analysis offers valuable insights into how social protection programmes can be tailored to meet diverse climate risks and vulnerabilities. The end goal is to strengthen these countries against climate risks by enhancing their readiness, filling policy and system gaps, and facilitating the successful incorporation of insurance-linked anticipatory payout mechanisms. **The complete analysis of the 8 countries and 24 programmes can be found at www.iied.org/21896iied.**

3

Country analysis: Malawi

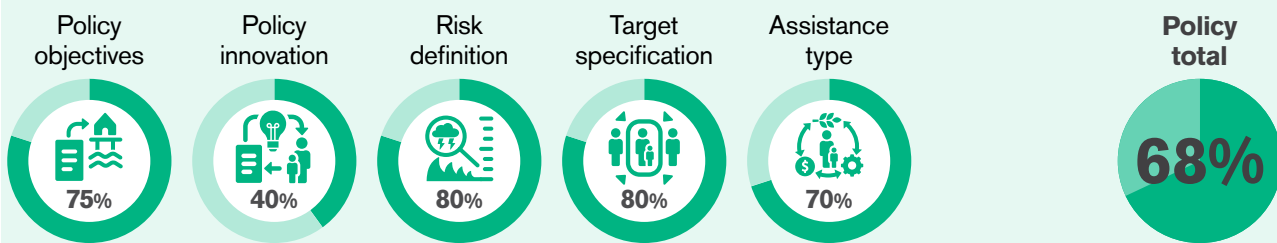
This document provides the full analysis of Malawi's social protection policies, systems and programmes in terms of their readiness in delivering anticipatory climate resilience, using ASPIRE tool. The secondary sources and evidence used for the review are listed in the Annex.



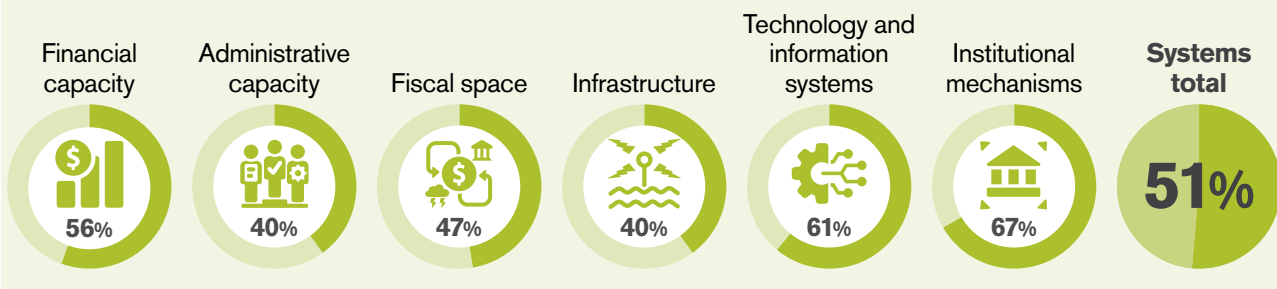
MALAWI SCORE CARD

POLICY AND SYSTEMS

Policy

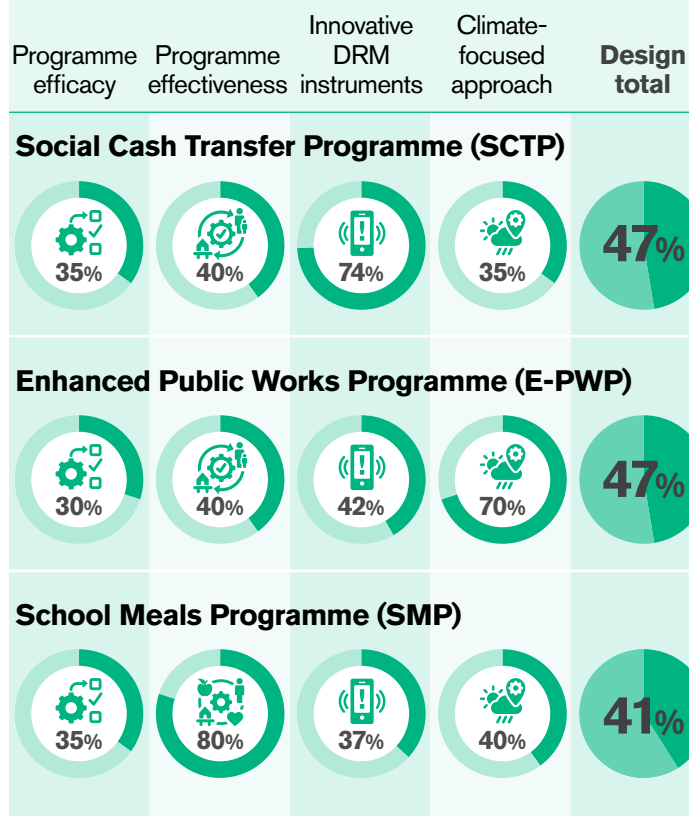


Systems

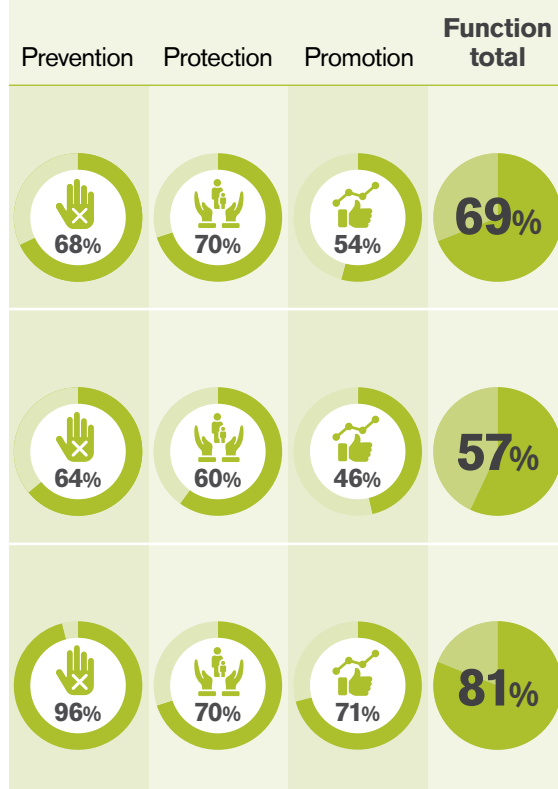


PROGRAMMES

Design



Function





Policy framework

Policy objectives

POLICY OBJECTIVES	
The country's social protection policy has a clear vision, goals and objectives	4
The policy explicitly mentions building resilience to climate shocks as an objective	4
The policy prioritises anticipatory response to climate shocks (ie preparedness and proactive measures to mitigate impacts)	4
The country uses systematic policy planning cycle mechanisms to manage the design and delivery of social protection programmes	3

Clear vision, goal and objectives: The Malawi National Social Support Policy II (MNSSP II) aims to provide timely, predictable and adequate support to poor and vulnerable households throughout their lifecycle. It represents a shift towards an integrated and multilayered social protection system, promoting the development of resilient livelihoods and effective linkages to the humanitarian sector.

The policy acknowledges the right to social security and prohibits discrimination, aligning with constitutional provisions and international treaties on human rights. It promotes the progressive realisation of human rights and the reduction of extreme poverty and vulnerability for marginalised groups. However, it does not explicitly guarantee the right to social support or assured level of support against risks for vulnerable groups.

Efficient targeting and coordination among social support programmes are key principles of the policy. It recognises the changing needs of poor and vulnerable people throughout their lives and during shocks, emphasising the importance of coordination and collaboration among programmes to provide consumption support and build resilient livelihoods. The policy also acknowledges the challenges of targeting in the event of disasters and shocks, emphasising the targeting of public works programmes (PWP) in affected and vulnerable areas for disaster response and post-disaster reconstruction. The creation of a Unified Beneficiary Register (UBR) has been recognised as a positive step towards improving targeting approaches.

The policy highlights the need for accountability, transparency, and the establishment of grievance and appeals mechanisms in programme selection.

The policy aims to avoid creating a culture of dependency among target populations and encourages their active engagement in livelihood

opportunities. It aligns with other policies such as the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (MGDS III) and the National Resilience Strategy, emphasising the importance of social support in building resilience, reducing chronic poverty and ensuring better alignment between development and humanitarian interventions. The policy recognises the significance of the agricultural sector in improving food security and emphasises the need to break the cycle of recurring shocks and disasters.

Overall, the MNSSP II policy in Malawi seeks to provide social support, enhance resilience, and promote coordination and collaboration among various programmes to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups.

Building resilience: The MNSSP II aims to build resilience against climate shocks, recognising the country's vulnerability to variations in climate and frequent shocks. The shock-sensitive social protection pillar provides additional assistance during shocks and ensures the continuity of regular activities. The Climate-Smart Enhanced Public Works Programme (CS-PWP) pilot is being implemented in ten district councils to enhance climate resilience. The Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP) does not have a specific climate resilience component. The Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) PWP, implemented through community-based targeting, underwent changes in participant selection and shifted towards environmental activities. The CS-PWP focuses on making the programme climate-smart and includes integrated watershed management and sustainable livelihood activities. Technical assistance and training in sustainable livelihoods are provided through strategic linkages to the Community Savings and Investment Promotion Program.

Anticipatory response: The MNSSP II prioritises preparedness and anticipatory response to shocks, aiming to build long-term resilience and coordination among departments. The UBR facilitates targeted responses during shocks. The SCTP incorporates measures for seasonal and temporary expansion to address increased needs. The PWP focuses on environmental activities related to climate resilience but lacks specific preparedness elements. Participation in the PWP has second-order benefits that help households prepare for shocks, such as increased productivity. Efforts have been made to develop EWSs for floods, but there is no direct link between national and community-based systems. The existing shock sensitivity and management information systems were utilised during COVID-19 responses. Limited institutionalisation of anticipatory response elements is a challenge due to dependence on external funding.

Systematic planning cycle: The development of MNSSP II involved evidence-based policymaking processes, including stakeholder-driven reviews and consultations. Modifications were made based on evaluations and effectiveness assessments. Mechanisms for policy review and monitoring exist, such as designated departments and Technical Working Groups. Limited evidence suggests that Technical Working Groups have been effective in promoting coordination. Evaluations have been conducted on the institutional arrangements under MNSSP I. An independent evaluation was commissioned in 2021 to support the refinement of the MNSSP II coordination mechanism. Recommendations from these evaluations focused on areas such as consumption support, resilient livelihoods, shock-responsiveness and systems strengthening. However, it is unclear to what extent these recommendations have been incorporated into the current policy. Challenges persist in ensuring meaningful interventions, functional coordination structures and incorporation of evaluation recommendations.

Policy innovation

POLICY INNOVATION

Rights-based regulatory provisions are given for the social protection of vulnerable communities	1
The policy offers portable benefits for migrant populations	2
The policy emphasises universal access to a range of benefits by vulnerable communities	4
The policy acknowledges community, CSO, NGO and private sector engagement in social protection interventions	1

Rights-based entitlement: The policy adopts a lifecycle approach to vulnerability and focuses on consumption support, resilient livelihoods and shock-sensitive social protection. The MNSSP II policy also acknowledges the need to address poverty and increase support for the very poor. However, the coverage of vulnerable populations remains limited, with a low percentage receiving non-contributory cash benefits. Communication and awareness strategies need improvement to ensure clear understanding among potential beneficiaries. Evaluation findings indicate positive impacts of cash transfer programmes on food security and wellbeing. However, there is a need for greater access to social protection for vulnerable communities, as evidenced by low coverage rates. Overall, there is room for improvement in rights awareness, information dissemination and accessibility of social protection programmes.

Portability of benefits: The MNSSP II policy acknowledges the importance of portability of benefits and mentions the need for timely, harmonised and reliable support for the poor and vulnerable. However, there is no explicit mention of portability in the design of the three major programmes (SCTP, PWP and School Meal Programme (SMP)). Some trials were conducted in select areas to test harmonised systems for cash transfers, but these trials had limited participation due to technological difficulties and targeting restrictions. The trials highlighted the need for harmonisation and integration of support systems to achieve systemic efficiency gains. The UBR was used in a trial to pre-fill beneficiary lists for the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) humanitarian response, which improved coordination and saved time. However, there is a need to create a digitised MVAC database to enhance interoperability and avoid operational challenges in future efforts. Overall, there is room for expanding the e-payment strategy and architecture in Malawi to ensure greater coverage and efficiency in delivering portable benefits.

Universal access: The MNSSP II policy aims to ensure universal access to a range of benefits for vulnerable communities. The mid-term review of MNSSP II highlights the expansion of the SCTP to all 28 districts, achieving full national coverage. However, budget constraints limit the possibility of higher transfer values for consumption support. The coverage of the PWP has increased but remains lower than during MASAF IV, while the SMP has experienced considerable growth but still only reaches half of primary school learners. Concerns have been raised about inclusion and exclusion errors in SCTP targeting methodologies, particularly for underrepresented groups such as under fives and pregnant/lactating women. There are discussions about a potential shift to categorical targeting, and piloting this approach in at least one district alongside the use of technology to reduce targeting errors.

Stakeholder engagement: The policy acknowledges the engagement of community-based organisations (CBOs), nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and civil society organisations (CSOs) in social protection interventions. The National Social Welfare Policy of Malawi recognises the complementary role of NGOs in social welfare services, including advocacy, resource mobilisation and awareness-generation. The guiding principles of MNSSP II also mention engagement with NGOs and private agencies to improve accountability and transparency in procurement and technical support. However, the mid-term review of MNSSP II highlights that the involvement of NGOs and CBOs is mostly limited to operational-level activities, and there is little engagement of local governments in oversight and

monitoring of social protection programmes. Private sector involvement, particularly in digital payment solutions, has been limited, with evidence indicating a lack of preparedness and investment in efficient electronic payments.

Private sector organisations in the country mainly operate as facilitators or platforms, and microfinance institutions rely on donor support. The mechanism for lean season top-ups in the SCTP relies on ad hoc resource mobilisation from development partners and agencies, with room for enhancing collaborative arrangements.

Social audits and data sharing in the public domain are limited in practice. The mid-term review of MNSSP II identifies limited progress in applying the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, but there are efforts to review the M&E indicators and develop guidelines for subnational data collection. Recommendations include reviewing the M&E framework, providing technical support at subnational levels and generating biannual progress reports.

Risk definition

RISK DEFINITION	
The policy identifies types of risk that the most vulnerable communities face	4
The policy clearly defines trigger points for hazard events (eg anticipated drought based on rainfall data) that may activate the anticipatory social protection	4
The policy sets out contingency plans for social protection measures to come into force when trigger points for hazardous events are reached	4

Definition of risk to most vulnerable: The policy identifies various types of risks faced by the most vulnerable communities in Malawi, including agricultural vulnerability, economic shocks, social vulnerability, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, demographic vulnerability and lifecycle vulnerability.

Definition of trigger points: The policy of MNSSP II includes provisions for anticipatory social protection in response to hazard events. It acknowledges the importance of shock-sensitive design and planning to reduce the need for emergency responses. The policy emphasises the use of triggers, such as drought based on rainfall data, to activate anticipatory actions by the government. There is also a focus on preparedness for predictable seasonal needs and the inclusion of highly vulnerable and hazard-prone districts in the shock-sensitive system.

Contingency plans for trigger points: The implementation of anticipatory response is primarily evident in the SCTP. The SCTP provides seasonal top-ups to enrolled beneficiaries during the lean season to help them cope with food shortages. It includes vertical (improving the programme benefits) and horizontal (covering more beneficiaries or areas) expansions to address increased needs during this period. Ongoing pilots funded by the World Bank and supported by the United Nations aim to increase the SCTP's early response to dry spells and test the use of triggers to release financing for pre-approved interventions.

However, reviews of Malawi's social protection policy and programmes indicate challenges in the dissemination of climate and weather warnings, with random triggers and potential politicisation of disaster declarations. There is a need to test and expand the national social protection system to effectively respond to rapid-onset and large-scale disasters.

Overall, the policy outlines plans for anticipatory social protection measures, and their implementation is observed in the SCTP and ongoing pilot programmes. However, further improvements are needed in the EWS and coordination to ensure effective responses to hazards.

Target specification

TARGET SPECIFICATION	
The policy identifies the groups of households or individuals that are most at risk of being affected by shocks or crises, and should be targeted for assistance	4
The policy recognises diversity of vulnerability (eg women, children, elderly people, displaced people, etc.)	4
The policy specifies who is eligible for assistance from social protection programmes	5
Targeting criteria are transparent, fair and based on objective indicators defining vulnerability	3

Identifies households or individuals most at risk: The policy of MNSSP II acknowledges the vulnerability of various groups and emphasises a gendered approach in social protection programmes. It recognises the need to facilitate the participation of women, elderly, children and marginalised groups. The policy aims to reduce extreme poverty and include economically and socially marginalised individuals. There is no specific mention of displaced and migrant communities in the policy. Nonetheless, the SCTP has mechanisms to address distress movements during the lean agricultural season by providing top-ups to registered beneficiaries and temporary horizontal expansion to those not registered.

Policy identifies diversity of vulnerability: The policy of MNSSP II recognises the heterogeneity of vulnerability and acknowledges the specific needs of various groups such as women, children and the elderly within the vulnerable households.

Eligibility defined: The policy of MNSSP II focuses on the vulnerability of those at risk of poverty and disaster. It identifies various types of vulnerabilities faced by people in Malawi. The SCTP can be considered nearly universal. The coverage of the PWP and SMP has shown growth but still has limitations.

Targeting criteria transparent, fair and objective: The policy emphasises transparent, fair and objective targeting criteria for social protection programmes. The MVAC conducts annual assessments to determine food and nutrition security status using the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. This classification helps identify districts and populations in need of support. The MVAC assessments are used to target programmes such as the SMP. However, challenges such as exclusion of ultra-poor households, sensitivity to climate-related shocks, and limitations in delivery systems have been identified. The expansion of beneficiary coverage during shocks is constrained by fiscal limitations and dependence on external resources. The current targeting approach of the SCTP leaves behind vulnerable populations in some of the poorest districts, leading to notable inequalities. There have been suggestions for adopting a catchment approach and repeat targeting for better results. So, while the policy demonstrates good intentions, there are gaps in implementation and impacts on vulnerable groups.

Assistance type

ASSISTANCE TYPE

The policy explicitly sets out the types of assistance provided through social protection programmes (ie income support, food assistance, healthcare, etc.)	4
The assistance specified is comprehensive (ie livelihood support, health, food, shelter, education etc.), depending on local context	3

Assistance through anticipatory support: The policy outlines the types of assistance provided through social protection programmes, including income support, food assistance and healthcare. The SCTP offers additional cash transfers as top-ups during the lean season to enrolled beneficiaries. This helps them withstand recurring shocks, and a temporary expansion of the programme is organised each year to address the increased needs of affected populations. The programme has also demonstrated its flexibility during

the COVID-19 pandemic through the implementation of the Urban Cash Transfer Initiative. The exact nature, magnitude and duration of support are determined through needs assessments and cost-effectiveness considerations. The policy emphasises the importance of promoting resilience and preparing for shocks through poverty reduction, household coping capacities, livelihood diversification and coordinated interventions.




Assistance provided is comprehensive: The policy ensures comprehensive assistance by providing various forms of support, such as livelihood support, health services, food assistance, shelter and education, depending on the local context. It aims to cover multiple thematic areas to create a comprehensive safety net for vulnerable families during crises. The major social protection programmes in Malawi, including the SCTP, PWP and SMP, reflect this approach by offering a mix of cash transfers, employment opportunities and school feeding programmes to support households in withstanding shocks. The policy emphasises the importance of recovery efforts to help affected people bounce back better. Additionally, there are mechanisms in place to anticipate and respond to shocks, such as releasing funds for water, sanitation and hygiene during dry spells and providing livelihood support through the anticipatory action framework.

The UBR serves as a social registry, enabling households to access multiple programmes through a single platform. The UBR has been successful in terms of data quality. However, there are concerns that as the UBR's coverage expands, there may be a shift towards prioritising registration over accurately identifying and assisting the most vulnerable households. While the UBR serves as an example of coordination efforts, it faces challenges in procedures and recertification.



Systems framework

Administrative capacity and fiscal space

 FINANCIAL CAPACITY	
Country income category	1
Economic dependency index	4
 ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY	
Government effectiveness index	2
Corruption perception index	2
 FISCAL SPACE	
Spending on social assistance programmes as a % of GDP	2
Special allocation of contingency funds for anticipatory risk financing	2
The country has access to extra-budgetary resources, including international financial institutions and donor organisations	3
Policies incorporate the use of private sector financing (such as green bonds, resilience bonds, etc.)	2
The country integrates and uses disaster risk financing instruments (eg crop insurance, health insurance, contingent credit, catastrophe insurance, reinsurance, catastrophe bonds, etc.)	1

Financial capacity: The country's income category is low; the economic dependency index is 2.7 based on INFORM. The spending on social protection as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) is 1.49.

Administrative capacity: The government effectiveness index is 6.5 and the corruption perception index is 6.6 as per INFORM.

Contingency funds for anticipatory risk financing: Anticipatory risk financing mechanisms for social protection programmes in Malawi are not well established or evident. The country relies heavily on external donor support to finance its social protection programmes, with limited domestic contributions. There is a lack of evidence or strong examples of anticipatory risk financing being used to respond to predetermined needs or integrate with humanitarian responses. Malawi mainly relies on ex-post humanitarian appeals after disasters, rather than having a scalable mechanism or financial instruments for risk management.

However, there have been some pilot efforts in the SCTP to provide top-ups and temporary inclusion of unregistered beneficiaries during lean seasons.

These initiatives have mobilised resources through coordination between development partners and the government. The potential for integrating SCTP top-ups with other relief and transfers during lean seasons has been recognised as an area for increased efficiency.

There is a growing interest among UN agencies in Malawi to explore the learning from pilot projects related to anticipatory action, including their suitability for the African Risk Capacity's insurance work and the World Bank's Global Risk Financing Facility. Recently efforts have been made, in collaboration with the World Bank, to use contingency funds for payouts in less severe drought years and explore the use of risk transfer instruments for larger-scale droughts in more areas. However, these initiatives are still in their early stages.

Overall, while the policy may have the intent to create flexible financing mechanisms for shocks and disasters and establish a national institutional framework for financing, the actual implementation of anticipatory risk financing structures and mechanisms in Malawi's social protection programmes is limited.

Access to other sources of finance: The majority of social protection programmes in Malawi, such as the SCTP, PWP, SMP and the Village Savings and Loans programme, are funded by off-budget donor resources. Only the SCTP and PWP receive some funds from the government. Approximately 93% of on-budget funding for social protection in 2019/20 came from donors, with the SCTP accounting for the majority of this funding. Data on off-budget funding for social protection programmes, excluding the SCTP, are limited.

The funding of the SCTP in Malawi is heavily dependent on donors, with the government contributing only a small percentage of the funding. Different donors provide funding for different districts, leading to fragmentation and challenges in terms of programme efficiency, effectiveness and transparency. Efforts are underway by the Joint SDG Fund to support an integrated financing mechanism for social protection programmes, particularly focusing on the SCTP. The aim is to improve coordination and ensure a more sustainable financing approach.

Overall, while Malawi has access to extra-budgetary resources through international financial institutions and donor organisations, the government's direct funding contribution to social protection programmes remains limited, and reliance on donor funding is significant.

Private sector finance: There is limited evidence of the adoption of private sector financing in Malawi. However, recently efforts supported by the World Bank have been initiated to explore the use of disaster risk financing (DRF) for developing an adaptive social

protection mechanism. The Social Support for Resilient Livelihoods Project (SSRLP), in collaboration with the Malawian government, aims to use the SCTP as a scalable mechanism to provide assistance during droughts.

As part of this initiative, a contingency fund is being utilised to cover regular funding needs during less severe drought years when only a small number of districts are affected. Additionally, a risk transfer instrument is being considered to cover the cost of larger-scale assistance when a greater number of districts are impacted. The funding support and risk transfer premium for this initiative are provided by the Global Shield Financing Facility.

A small pilot of risk insurance was implemented in three districts in 2021–2022, covering 74,000 people, and expanded to six districts in 2022–2023. Insurance payouts were triggered by late onset of rain, cyclones and the adverse impacts of external factors on livelihoods. The cost of transfers was covered by the SSRLP contingency fund, and digital means were used for payouts. While these efforts are promising, it is still too early to determine their effectiveness in the local context of Malawi.

The government is in the process of finalising the procurement of an insurance product linked to the primary trigger of the scalable mechanism; this is expected to be implemented from the 2023/2024 season. This risk transfer component will be crucial as more districts become part of the programme. It is worth noting that this insurance product is the first of its kind directly supporting a risk model for social protection in the African region, but it also presents challenges in terms of procurement.

Integration of DRF instruments: There is limited evidence of the integration and use of DRF instruments in Malawi's social protection programmes. Currently, the main instrument for dealing with disasters in Malawi is ex-post humanitarian appeals after the figures from the MVAC are produced. A coherent financing system of risk management with a set of financial instruments is lacking to address different magnitudes of risks.

However, there have been recent efforts to explore the use of DRF in Malawi. Contingency funds have been used in less severe drought years for payouts in a smaller number of districts. Consideration is being given to exploring the use of risk transfer instruments for large-scale droughts. UN agencies in the country are interested in learning from these initiatives and their potential integration into a shock-responsive social protection system.

Infrastructure, technology and information systems

INFRASTRUCTURE	
Communication index	2
Physical connectivity	2
TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS	
A national database/social registry exists	2
Climate-smart information systems are used for different purposes including for social protection	2
Early warning systems for major climate hazards are available	2
Early warning systems are applied in social protection programmes	3
Artificial intelligence (AI), risk modelling, etc. are used to implement the programmes	1
Platforms for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of social protection entitlements are used (eg mobile-based payment)	1

Infrastructure: The communication index of the country is 7.7 and the physical connectivity is 7.5 according to INFORM

National database/social registry: The UBR is a social registry that serves as a national database in Malawi. It was established in 2016 to improve and harmonise targeting processes for social support programmes.

The roll out of the UBR in ten districts enrolled nearly 800,000 households, covering approximately 4 million people. Plans are underway to expand the registration targets to 100% of households in the ten districts. The UBR primarily supports the SCTP and PWP, but there is potential for its expansion to other programmes such as the Village Loan and Saving Programme, microfinance, nutrition, farm subsidy and humanitarian assistance.

Community-based targeting and the proxy means test are used for registration and validation, but there is a need to ensure that the focus remains on targeting the vulnerable.

The policy aims to develop a harmonised system of beneficiary identification and targeting using the UBR to enhance responses during shocks. The UBR has been effective in pre-populating beneficiary lists for the MVAC humanitarian response, saving time and improving coordination among partners. However, there is a need for individual programmes to have their own databases

or routine management information systems (MIS) for monitoring and coordination. The lack of plans for an MVAC database/MIS risks making future efforts on shock-responsive social protection more cumbersome and costly. There is a need for ensuring interoperability by designing a digitised MVAC database that integrates with the UBR.

Climate-smart information system: MNSSP II acknowledges the importance of integrating shock-sensitive social protection design and planning to reduce the need for emergency and humanitarian responses. The policy emphasises the use of climate-smart information systems and measurable triggers in EWSs to support preparedness, responsiveness and recovery. Reviews highlight that while there are efforts to integrate climate-smart information systems and anticipatory action in social protection programmes, there is room for further improvement in terms of coordination, early warning dissemination and response to different types of shocks.

Availability and application of EWSs and AI: EWSs are employed in social protection programmes in Malawi. Reviews highlight challenges in the dissemination of climate and weather warnings, with random triggers and politicisation of disaster declarations. The limited access to data hampers the development of triggers and risk modelling for anticipatory action. The absence of publicly available forecasts and the high turnover in relevant government agencies pose challenges. Efforts have been made to use available data, supplemented with observational components, to strengthen the trigger mechanisms.

Efforts for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in delivery: The Covid-19 Urban Cash Initiative (CUCI) attempted to leverage IT-enabled platforms for the identification and delivery of transfers. Mobile networks were used instead of banks due to the proximity of urban beneficiaries to mobile agents. However, there were delays related to mobile money payments, validation of phone numbers and compliance with Know Your Customer requirements. Additionally, cybersecurity risks emerged as scammers collected and misused private data through fake SMS messages during the CUCI registration process. These experiences highlight the challenges associated with increased digital service provision and the need for robust security measures.

Institutional mechanisms

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS	
Bodies and mechanisms exist for social policy coordination across ministries and departments	2
Bodies and mechanisms exist for multistakeholder engagement at the grassroots level	2

Cross-ministry/department coordination:

The MNSSP II aims to strengthen governance and coordination systems and processes for social protection delivery. However, a mid-term review of MNSSP II in 2022 indicated that progress has been mixed. Technical working groups for each pillar are yet to be operationalised, and coordinated planning is suboptimal. The Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, specifically the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper division, has taken on a significant coordination role. Due to limited resources at its disposal for such coordination, essential information does not reach higher-level authorities for strategic discussions, and lower-level structures lack comprehensive guidance.

In a recent pilot on developing trigger mechanisms for anticipatory action, UN agencies and partner agencies coordinated their efforts. The team worked together to build a crisis timeline, identify ideal windows of action and link them to triggers. By combining existing predictive triggers with observational triggers, they were able to determine the response time required for cash and livelihood transfers to mitigate shocks. This collaborative approach minimised risks and leveraged programmatic logic for effective actions.

It is evident that while bodies and mechanisms for coordination exist, their active functioning and effectiveness in social policy coordination and technical integration require further attention.

Multistakeholder engagement in delivery:

MNSSP II includes plans to establish harmonised coordination and implementation structures at both the district and community levels. These structures are intended to serve as 'one-stop shops' for referrals, information support and other sectoral programmes. However, a recent mid-term review of MNSSP highlighted coordination challenges at the subnational level. While there has been some capacity building at the district level, these mechanisms have not yet fully fulfilled their intended role. Overcoming these operational and budgetary hurdles is necessary to enable these structures to effectively carry out their mandates. So, while bodies and mechanisms exist for harmonised action among different departments at the grassroots level, they are not active.

Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP)

The SCTP in Malawi provides regular cash transfers to vulnerable households. It targets ultra-poor and labour-constrained households, aiming to alleviate poverty, improve livelihoods and enhance social wellbeing.



Programme design features

The SCTP in Malawi has undergone significant developments and improvements. Two ongoing anticipatory action pilots aim to enhance the SCTP's early response to dry spells and test the use of triggers to release financing for pre-approved interventions. The scalable mechanism of the SCTP follows a dual trigger approach based on rainfall indexes and evidence review. The implementation of the scalable mechanism in selected districts has resulted in cash transfers to eligible households affected by drought and compounding shocks. The long-term goal is to make the scalable mechanism nationwide.

Efforts have been made to model the expected cost of the mechanism and match financial instruments to provide funding efficiently. A contingency fund within the Social Support and Resilient Livelihoods Project (SSRLP) has been utilised for regular funding needs, while a risk transfer instrument covers the cost of larger scale-ups. The SCTP aims to increase communities' resilience through cash "plus" activities and linkages to social services, such as nutrition and education, to support families in graduating out of extreme poverty.

The expansion of the SCTP includes seasonal top-ups during the lean season and temporary inclusion of additional beneficiaries to address increased needs. Beneficiary selection is done through a community-based approach, and eligibility is verified using a proxy means test. However, there are challenges in achieving nationwide coverage and effectively targeting ultra-poor households. Geographical targeting is not implemented, and the focus on labour-constrained households has limitations. Efforts are being made to leverage IT-enabled platforms for identification and delivery of transfers, but these have encountered delays and cybersecurity risks. The SCTP is aligned with the government's disaster risk financing strategy and aims to ensure timely and reliable payments to beneficiaries through innovative electronic delivery mechanisms. The harmonised e-payment solution is being tested and will enhance cost-efficiency, reliability, timeliness and financial inclusion.

While the SCTP has made progress in addressing poverty and vulnerability, there is a need for further improvements in coverage, targeting and leveraging technology for effective implementation.



Programme functions

Prevention: The prevention measures of the SCTP include the implementation of a contingency fund and a parametric risk transfer mechanism. The contingency fund, located within the SSRLP, provides regular funding to participants in response to less severe and more frequent droughts. The parametric risk transfer product acts as insurance and covers the cost of larger scale-ups during severe droughts. These measures enable the SCTP to have an early response to shocks and enhance its ability to prevent and mitigate the impacts of droughts and other crises. Although no evidence from the programme review is available, the SCTP helps prevent extreme poverty by providing regular cash transfers to vulnerable households. This support can enable beneficiaries to meet their basic needs, access essential services and mitigate their risk of falling into deeper poverty. By providing financial resources to vulnerable households, the SCTP also helps ensure that children have access to nutrition, healthcare and education, which can prevent the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

Protection: The SCTP plays a crucial role in providing protection to vulnerable households. Through the programme, over 1.3 million people receive monthly cash transfers, which help them meet their basic needs and enhance their resilience. The transfers aim to improve food and nutrition security, promote health and wellbeing and increase access to education. By addressing immediate needs and providing regular support, the SCTP offers a safety net to beneficiaries from the impacts of poverty, food insecurity and economic shocks, offering a cushion to help them cope with challenging circumstances. The programme specifically targets the most vulnerable populations, and by focusing on these groups, provides a protective measure for those who are at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Promotion: In terms of promotional functions, the SCTP focuses on unconditional cash transfers as a means to reduce poverty and vulnerability. The programme seeks to enhance the wellbeing, food security and educational prospects of its recipients. It strives to empower ultra-poor and labour-constrained households by providing them with the resources needed to enhance their livelihoods and build resilience. While the SCTP primarily focuses on cash transfers, it does not currently incorporate specific interventions for livelihood diversification, entrepreneurship development or labour mobility and migration.

Community members are actively involved identifying eligible households through a proxy means test, ensuring transparency and community participation. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and accountability within the communities served by the SCTP.



MALAWI: PROGRAMMES

Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP)

PROGRAMME DESIGN		Total: 47%	PROGRAMME FUNCTION		Total: 69%
PROGRAMME EFFICACY			PREVENTION		
Coverage	1		The programme offers anticipatory support	4	
Benefit incidence	4		The programme offers services to protect health, livelihoods and incomes before crises hit	4	
Benefit adequacy	1		The programme encourages community-level advance planning and interventions (eg evacuation planning)	2	
Average per capital transfer	1		The programme offers subsidised health, food or education before crises hit	1	
PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS			The programme offers skills training, capacity building or awareness generation to prepare crisis response	1	
Benefit cost ratio	4		The programme supports individual or community-level asset creation (eg cyclone shelters) to protect from future crises	4	
INNOVATIVE DRM INSTRUMENTS			The programme promotes awareness, particularly among marginalised people, to achieve their representation in decision-making processes	3	
The programme uses early warning systems to provide anticipatory support to target groups	3		PROTECTION		
The programme uses anticipatory risk financing instruments such as contingency funds, catastrophe bonds, parametric insurance, weather derivatives, etc.	3		The programme offers cash transfer, food aid or livelihood support during a crisis	4	
The programme adopts a layers of risk approach (ie assessing the probability and severity of risks) that reflects a continuum from frequent but less damaging events through to rare but catastrophic disasters and then manages this risk through a variety of instruments	3		The programme offers rapid additional humanitarian support to tide communities over a crisis	4	
The programme uses a national database/registry for its operations	4		The programme supports access to health facilities or relief assistance (eg food, water) after a crisis	1	
The programme uses platforms that enhance delivery efficiency and effectiveness of delivery (eg mobile-based payments)	1		The programme provides income-earning opportunities through public works programmes or protection against livelihood loss or non-economic loss and damage (NELD) through insurance or other compensatory mechanisms	4	
CLIMATE-FOCUSED APPROACH			The programme offers waiver/relaxation/subsidy benefits to target populations in the event of climate hazards	1	
The programme maps geographical areas, livelihood groups, social groups, etc. that are vulnerable to climate change impacts and uses these different dimensions of vulnerability to plan scaling up and resource allocation	3		PROMOTION		
The programme undertakes environmental conservation and restoration of degraded landscapes (eg biodiversity conservation) to help protect natural resource-based livelihoods	1		The programme offers support for livelihood diversification	2	
The programme undertakes interventions on improving water management (eg rehabilitating water bodies) that can lead to water security for domestic and agriculture purposes	1		The programme supports improved income opportunities via building entrepreneurial skills, access to higher education or community/individual asset creation	2	
The programme undertakes interventions that lead to climate-proofing of physical infrastructure (eg roads, bridges, etc.)	1		The programme promotes new livelihood opportunities	3	
The programme envisages constructing community-based disaster risk reduction assets (eg storm shelters)	1		The programme implements planned labour mobility, migration and placement interventions	1	
			The programme improves access to markets, natural resources, government departments, financial inclusion, community infrastructure, etc.	1	
			The programme encourages target populations to participate in decision-making processes	4	

Enhanced Public Works Programme (E-PWP)

This programme combines public works projects with conditional cash transfers. It provides temporary employment opportunities to individuals from vulnerable households while linking the cash transfers to specific conditions such as children's school attendance and health check-ups.



Programme design features

The E-PWP focuses on integrated watershed management, including activities such as land resource conservation, afforestation, natural regeneration and sustainable livelihoods. Efforts are being made to improve coordination and efficiency, including the use of digitised databases and interoperability with the UBR. The UBR-supported PWP implementation has shown good performance in terms of data quality and enrolment of households in the pilot phase. Plans are in place to expand coverage to all districts, although there are concerns about prioritising registration of all households over targeting the most vulnerable. The E-PWP does not include scope for meaningful participation of target populations in decision-making processes. Addressing these aspects can enhance the programme's protective measures and ensure better support for vulnerable households. The E-PWP incorporates disaster risk reduction measures in its design and implementation. This includes activities such as land and water management, erosion control, reforestation and infrastructure reinforcement that enhance community resilience against natural disasters and climate-related risks. However, there is no evidence of the use of EWSs in the programme design.

Although progress has been made under the programme, there are still challenges to address in terms of coordination, targeting the most vulnerable, incorporating anticipatory measures and addressing climate-related risks. Continued efforts and adjustments are necessary to enhance the effectiveness and resilience of the programme.



Programme functions

Prevention: No evidence of any anticipatory risk financing mechanism was found in the E-PWP, but it helps prevent poverty by providing temporary employment and income to vulnerable individuals and communities. The programme contributes to construction of public infrastructure. While there was no evidence from the review of the programme, improved infrastructure can enhance economic productivity, access to services and overall community resilience by facilitating transportation, trade and access to essential services.

Protection: The E-PWP focuses on providing cash or in-kind support to ultra-poor and poor households through public works employment. It aims to create valuable assets that reduce poverty and contribute to programme cost-effectiveness. The E-PWP acts as a social safety net for vulnerable populations by providing temporary employment and income support. By targeting individuals and communities facing economic hardships, the programme offers protection against extreme poverty, food insecurity and other socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

Promotion: While the E-PWP does not specifically include livelihood diversification support programmes or provision of skills training, the Livelihood and Skill Development component under the MASAF aims to provide support systems for the graduation of PWP and social cash transfer beneficiaries. This component focuses on fostering a resilient enterprise model that enhances innovations, collective skills, networking and bonding of social capital among enterprising members. Additionally, integrating public works programmes with climate-smart agriculture practices has shown positive outcomes, including improved productivity and welfare benefits for farmers. Promoting skills development and considering additional support for livelihood diversification could further strengthen the programme's promotion of sustainable and resilient livelihoods.

Incorporating anticipatory measures, enhancing coordination, targeting and resilience, as well as addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations, are important considerations to enhance the effective implementation and impact of the programme.



MALAWI: PROGRAMMES

PROGRAMME DESIGN		Total: 47%	PROGRAMME FUNCTION		Total: 57%
PROGRAMME EFFICACY			PREVENTION		
Coverage	1		The programme offers anticipatory support	4	
Benefit incidence	3		The programme offers services to protect health, livelihoods and incomes before crises hit	3	
Benefit adequacy	1		The programme encourages community-level advance planning and interventions (eg evacuation planning)	2	
Average per capital transfer	1		The programme offers subsidised health, food or education before crises hit	1	
PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS			The programme offers skills training, capacity building or awareness generation to prepare crisis response	1	
Benefit cost ratio	3		The programme supports individual or community-level asset creation (eg cyclone shelters) to protect from future crises	4	
INNOVATIVE DRM INSTRUMENTS			The programme promotes awareness, particularly among marginalised people, to achieve their representation in decision making processes	3	
The programme uses early warning systems to provide anticipatory support to target groups	1		PROTECTION		
The programme uses anticipatory risk financing instruments such as contingency funds, catastrophe bonds, parametric insurance, weather derivatives, etc.	1		The programme offers cash transfer, food aid or livelihood support during a crisis	1	
The programme adopts a layers of risk approach (ie assessing the probability and severity of risks) that reflects a continuum from frequent but less damaging events through to rare but catastrophic disasters and then manages this risk through a variety of instruments	1		The programme offers rapid additional humanitarian support to tide communities over a crisis	4	
The programme uses a national database/registry for its operations	4		The programme supports access to health facilities or relief assistance (eg food, water) after a crisis	2	
The programme uses platforms that enhance delivery efficiency and effectiveness of delivery (eg mobile-based payments)	1		The programme provides income-earning opportunities through public works programmes or protection against livelihood loss or non-economic loss and damage (NELD) through insurance or other compensatory mechanisms	4	
CLIMATE-FOCUSED APPROACH			The programme offers waiver/relaxation/subsidy benefits to target populations in the event of climate hazards	1	
The programme maps geographical areas, livelihood groups, social groups, etc., which are vulnerable to climate change impacts and uses these different dimensions of vulnerability to plan scaling up and resource allocation	1		PROMOTION		
The programme undertakes environmental conservation and restoration of degraded landscapes (eg biodiversity conservation) to help protect natural resource-based livelihoods	4		The programme offers support for livelihood diversification	1	
The programme undertakes interventions on improving water management (eg rehabilitating water bodies) that can lead to water security for domestic and agriculture purposes	4		The programme supports improved income opportunities via building entrepreneurial skills, access to higher education or community/individual asset creation	1	
The programme undertakes interventions that lead to climate-proofing of physical infrastructure (eg roads, bridges, etc.)	4		The programme promotes new livelihood opportunities	2	
The programme envisages constructing community-based disaster risk reduction assets (eg storm shelters)	1		The programme implements planned labour mobility, migration and placement interventions	1	
			The programme improves access to markets, natural resources, government departments, financial inclusion, community infrastructure, etc.	4	
			The programme encourages target populations to participate in decision-making processes	2	

School Meals Programme (SMP)

The SMP is a collaborative effort between the World Food Program and the Malawi government. It provides free, nutritious meals to school children, aiming to improve attendance, nutrition and educational outcomes, particularly in vulnerable communities.



Programme design features

The SMP operates within the framework of the MNSSP and the National Education Sector Plan. The SMP aims to improve food security and assist households affected by food insecurity, particularly in chronically food-insecure districts in southern rural areas. The programme also supports vulnerable districts in central Malawi. While the objective is universal coverage of primary schools, resource scarcity and capacity constraints limit the programme's roll out.

The World Food Program (WFP) has collaborated with the government to develop a web-based application for the national social registry, facilitating the targeting of food-insecure households for various interventions.

There is no evidence of the SMP incorporating measurable triggers or an anticipatory risk financing mechanism. School meals programmes can play a role in disaster risk management by providing a safety net for vulnerable children during and after emergencies. The programme could include design features that allow it to serve as a platform for anticipatory response mechanisms by pre-identifying vulnerable schools or communities and establishing contingency plans for ensuring continued meal provision during crises. This can include having emergency food stocks, mobilising local resources or collaborating with disaster management agencies to coordinate response efforts.



Programme functions

Prevention: The SMP does not show evidence of implementing insurance-linked anticipatory support services or health products. However, the programme has constructed over 2,200 school kitchens, storerooms and feeding shelters through WFP coordination and provides regular meals to children, which can help prevent malnutrition and related health issues. Adequate nutrition supports children's growth, development and overall wellbeing, reducing the risk of preventable diseases and improving their ability to thrive. By ensuring children have access to regular meals, the SMP promotes school attendance and reduces absenteeism due to hunger. Regular school attendance contributes to educational progress, which is a crucial factor in preventing long-term poverty and vulnerability.

Protection: Under the SMP, Take Home Rations are provided to eligible students during the academic year and lean season. However, Take Home Rations are conditional on an 80% attendance rate each month. The programme also focuses on providing daily nutrition meals to reduce short-term hunger and improve attention span in class, as well as supporting early childhood development through daily porridge in targeted Early Childhood Development centres. The SMP thus acts as a social safety net for vulnerable children helping to protect them from hunger and food insecurity.

Promotion: The SMP promotes education by removing a barrier to school attendance — hunger. By providing meals, the programme creates an enabling environment that supports children's learning, cognitive development and overall educational outcomes. The programme also promotes the health and wellbeing of children.

The SMP promotes the use of locally produced food commodities for homegrown school feeding, aiming to enhance production and productivity capacities of smallholder farmers. Farmer organisations and cooperatives are trained and linked to schools to supply diversified, locally produced food. The programme also stimulates local agriculture and economies through the procurement of food from small-scale producers, contributing to strengthening local food systems.



MALAWI: PROGRAMMES

PROGRAMME DESIGN		Total: 41%	PROGRAMME FUNCTION		Total: 81%
PROGRAMME EFFICACY			PREVENTION		
Coverage	1		The programme offers anticipatory support	4	
Benefit incidence	4		The programme offers services to protect health, livelihoods and incomes before crises hit	4	
Benefit adequacy	1		The programme encourages community-level advance planning and interventions (eg evacuation planning)	4	
Average per capital transfer	1		The programme offers subsidised health, food or education before crises hit	4	
PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS			The programme offers skills training, capacity building or awareness generation to prepare crisis response	3	
Benefit cost ratio	4		The programme supports individual or community-level asset creation (eg cyclone shelters) to protect from future crises	4	
INNOVATIVE DRM INSTRUMENTS			The programme promotes awareness, particularly among marginalised people, to achieve their representation in decision-making processes	4	
The programme uses early warning systems to provide anticipatory support to target groups	1		PROTECTION		
The programme uses anticipatory risk financing instruments such as contingency funds, catastrophe bonds, parametric insurance, weather derivatives, etc.	1		The programme offers cash transfer, food aid or livelihood support during a crisis	4	
The programme adopts a layers of risk approach (ie assessing the probability and severity of risks) that reflects a continuum from frequent but less damaging events through to rare but catastrophic disasters and then manages this risk through a variety of instruments	1		The programme offers rapid additional humanitarian support to tide communities over a crisis	4	
The programme uses a national database/registry for its operations	3		The programme supports access to health facilities or relief assistance (eg food, water) after a crisis	4	
The programme uses platforms that enhance delivery efficiency and effectiveness of delivery (eg mobile-based payments)	1		The programme provides income-earning opportunities through public works programmes or protection against livelihood loss or non-economic loss and damage (NELD) through insurance or other compensatory mechanisms	1	
CLIMATE-FOCUSED APPROACH			The programme offers waiver/relaxation/subsidy benefits to target populations in the event of climate hazards	1	
The programme maps geographical areas, livelihood groups, social groups, etc., which are vulnerable to climate change impacts and uses these different dimensions of vulnerability to plan scaling up and resource allocation	4		PROMOTION		
The programme undertakes environmental conservation and restoration of degraded landscapes (eg biodiversity conservation) to help protect natural resource-based livelihoods	1		The programme offers support for livelihood diversification	1	
The programme undertakes interventions on improving water management (eg rehabilitating water bodies) that can lead to water security for domestic and agriculture purposes	1		The programme supports improved income opportunities via building entrepreneurial skills, access to higher education or community/individual asset creation	3	
The programme undertakes interventions that lead to climate-proofing of physical infrastructure (eg roads, bridges, etc.)	1		The programme promotes new livelihood opportunities	4	
The programme envisages constructing community-based disaster risk reduction assets (eg storm shelters)	1		The programme implements planned labour mobility, migration and placement interventions	1	
			The programme improves access to markets, natural resources, government departments, financial inclusion, community infrastructure, etc.	4	
			The programme encourages target populations to participate in decision-making processes	4	

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This document presents the country analysis of Malawi and is an extract from the IIED working paper ‘Delivering anticipatory social protection: country readiness assessment’, which uses the ASPIRE tool to evaluate the readiness and effectiveness of social protection systems in eight countries, identifying gaps and opportunities to improve anticipatory measures and climate resilience. The research provides actionable recommendations for enhancing these systems to not only respond but also proactively adapt to climate-related risks, thereby fostering resilience among vulnerable populations.

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