



## Extracts from the Full Report: Assessment of Social Protection Programmes and Costing of Policy Options

### Programme Specific Report: School Feeding Programme

Arthur van de Meerendonk, Consultant

Nuno Cunha, ILO Technical Advisor on Social Security

Florian Juergens, Consultant



## 1 Objectives, policy and legal framework

*Malnutrition is a significant problem in Malawi with a large percentage of children suffering from various forms of malnourishment. Over the last decade the prevalence of underweight children has declined somewhat from 21 percent in 2006 to 14 percent in 2010. Stunting rates, however, remain highly elevated with 48 percent of children under the age of five (CU5) being stunted, giving Malawi the highest stunting rates in SADC (SADC, 2013).*

Wasting is less common with only four percent of CU5s experiencing wasting. However, seasonal wasting in the lean season is more common. The World Food Programme finds that almost “40 percent of children aged 6-59 months are either moderately or severely anaemic” (World Food Programme, 2014).

Malnutrition in Malawi is caused by a large number of factors including “health issues, such as TB, HIV/AIDS, diarrhoea, and respiratory infections, lack of knowledge about child care, poor diet, poor socio-economic status, and poor nutritional conditions of mothers” (ibid.). Undernourished children “at an early age predisposes children to higher morbidity and mortality risks” (World Food Programme, 2015). A large amount of studies have shown the disastrous effects malnutrition has on the development of physical and mental capabilities of children, as hunger and micronutrient deficiencies can cause irreversible damage to their growing brains and bodies (WFP, n.d.). Adequate feeding in the first years of a child’s life plays a key role in determining whether or not the child will be able to fulfil its full potential.

The World Food Programme’s *The Cost of Hunger in Malawi* (2015) report finds that:

*“Undernourished children are more likely to require medical care as a result of under nutrition-related diseases and deficiencies. This increases the burden on public social services and health costs incurred by the government and the affected families. Without proper care, underweight and wasting in children results in higher risk of mortality. During schooling years, stunted children are more likely to repeat grades and drop out of school, thus reducing their income-earning capability later in life. Furthermore, adults who were stunted as children are less likely to achieve their expected physical and cognitive development, thereby impacting on their productivity” (World Food Programme, 2015).*

Under-nutrition not only places severe costs on the individual but also the economy has a whole through lowered productivity and schooling of adults that experienced stunting in their childhoods. The abovementioned WFP study (2015) estimates that “almost 60 percent of the current working age population in Malawi suffered from stunting when they were children” (World Food Programme, 2015). On average, this population has received 1.5 years less schooling than those who did not experience growth retardation (ibid.). Current levels of malnourishment will have strong negative consequences for future growth. As the “country continues to urbanize, and an increasing number of people enter skilled labour, this loss in human capital will be reflected in reduced productive capacities of the population” (ibid.). Overall, the “total loss in productivity for 2012 represents 9.3 percent of Malawi’s GDP, largely due to reduced productivity associated with under nutrition related mortality” (ibid.).

Undernourished children often struggle to pay attention in class, further increasing the likelihood of a life in poverty. Education is key in reducing poverty and studies estimate that an extra year of schooling increases per capita income by 30% and individual earnings by 6 to 14% (Slaus & Jacobs, 2011). In addition to improving the health of children, a free and nutritious school meal acts as a magnet to get children into the classroom and improving children’s education by increasing school enrolment and attendance and decreasing drop-out rates (World Food Programme, 2014 a).

In recognition of the need to improve school enrolment and ensure that children are nourished enough to pay attention in class, the provision of free school meals to Malawian students is a key part of the NSSP. Free and daily school meals are provided by a number of stakeholders but mainly by either the

GoM, NGOs or the World Food Programme (ibid.). The WFP and Mary's Meals, a Scottish charity focusing on school feeding, are the biggest implementers of school feeding in Malawi. The overarching goal of all school feeding activities in Malawi is to improve childhood nutrition, increase children's ability to concentrate and learn in class, promote enrolment and regular attendance as well as to reduce drop-out rates.

The WFP is currently running a pilot in two districts called Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF), which links school feeding with local agricultural markets, providing a local and reliable outlet for smallholder farmers (World Food Programme, n.d. a). In addition, the WFP and the German financed Nutrition and Access to Primary Education (NAPE) programme aim to improve the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's (MoEST) capacity to target the most vulnerable schools and implement school feeding in an adequate and efficient manner. Both the WFP and Mary's Meals provide daily meals to all children in a targeted primary schools and in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres. During the lean season (October to January) the WFP provides girls and orphan boys in upper primary grades (standards 5-8) with a take home ration of 10 kg maize to disincentivize dropping-out. Moreover, schools are assisted with infrastructure support as well as the supply of utensils and stoves.

Implementers stress the "vital link between provision of food and attendance at school, and between good nutrition and educational performance" (Mary's Meals, n.d.). However, it is to be noted that current school feeding programmes primarily aim to improve enrolment and reduce drop-out rates and that under-nutrition has to be addressed during a child's infant years and before it enters the education system. The WFP states that the "first two years of life are a critical 'window of opportunity'. In this period it is possible to prevent the largely irreversible damage that follows early childhood under nutrition (World Food Programme, 2015 b). Harper et al (2003) also note that the effects of malnutrition in impairing cognitive development in the short window of early childhood are irreversible, and repercussions life-long (Harper et al, 2003).

While supporting school enrolment may be the primary objective of Mary's Meals' and the WFP's school feeding activities, both also provide nutritional assistance to pre-primary children. The WFP supported 93 Community Based Childcare Centres (CBCC) in 2014 and plans to progressively scale-up the programme to reach the 169 CBCCs by 2016 (World Food Programme, 2015 c). In addition, Mary's Meals supports 45 so-called Under Six Centres countrywide, reaching 6,569 children in June 2014 (Mary's Meals, n.d.).

Figure 1: A WFP supported school kitchen in Dedza



Table 1: Malawi school feeding programmes

Malawian school feeding programmes					
	Mary's Meals	World Food Programme	Home Grown School Feeding	Government of Malawi	NAPE
<b>Time-frame</b>	2010 - 2014	2012 - 2016	2012 - 2016	2014	20012 -2015
<b>Funding</b>	\$ 28 mil.	\$ 38.4 mil.	-	\$ 306,619	\$ 2.7 mil.
<b>No. of districts</b>	17	13	2 (soon 4)	10	23 (educational districts)
<b>No. of schools</b>	516	690	10 (soon 89)	80	40
<b>No. of students</b>	692,656	797,295	10,200	71,356	52,000 +

Source: Implementers

## 2 Eligibility criteria, programme design and coverage

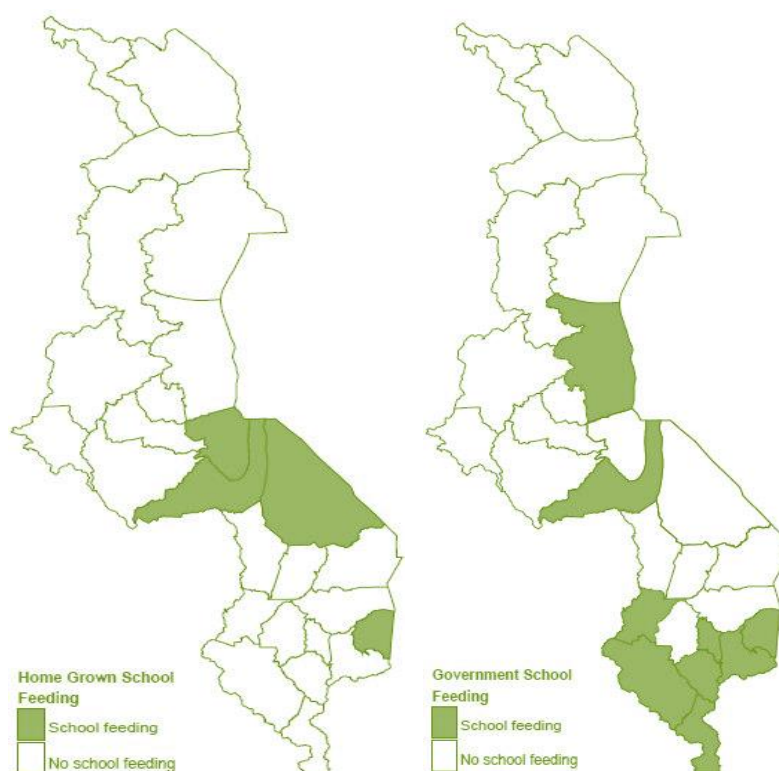
School feeding like most other Social Protection interventions in Malawi is not implemented centrally by the Government but rather consists of a number of programmes implemented by NGOs and development partners. This fragmented approach leads to a lack of harmonization in the implementation and delivery mechanisms, which could potentially reduce the efficiency of school meal provision. For instance, meals provided vary from one implementer to another. Mary's Meals provides Likuni Phala, a nutritious maize and peanut flower porridge (Mary' Meals, n.d.). In schools assisted by the WFP students receive 100 grams of 'supercereal', which is a fortified corn soya blend porridge (World Food Programme, 2014 a). Students in schools linked to local agricultural markets (HGSP) receive regionally available and nutritious food such as sweet potatoes, goat meat and mangoes (ibid.).

Districts and schools are target based on a number of criteria ensuring that the most vulnerable children receive daily school feeding. The WFP and Mary's Meals target districts and schools based on food insecurity, indicators of childhood malnutrition and data from Malawi's Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC). Vulnerabilities are determined by measures such as food insecurity, poverty rates, gender disparities in schooling, education outcomes and under-nutrition (World Food Programme, 2014 a). The GoM targets districts and schools based on 1) food insecurity, 2) enrolment and attendance, 3) school performance in standardized tests and 4) accessibility of the school. Once a school has been targeted all students benefit from a daily meals.

### 3 Geographical coverage

Figure 2: Malawian school feeding programmes





Source: Implementers

School feeding is not implemented nationwide and while there are districts especially in the southern and central regions where more than one implementer operates, there are as many districts without any activities. It is to be kept in mind that the maps above (Figure 2) merely show in which districts the implementers run school feeding programmes and it is not implied that all schools in green districts are covered.

In 2013, there were 5,561 primary and 1,190 secondary schools operated either privately or by the GoM (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2013). All implementers together reach a total of 1,336 schools, meaning that 24 % percent of the 5,561 Malawian schools are covered by one of the school meal programmes. According to the WFP approximately 25 percent of all primary schoolchildren in Malawi receive school meals (World Food Programme, 2014).

## 4 Financing and expenditure

School feeding, as most Malawian social protection, is overwhelmingly donor financed. There is no common budgetary mechanism and each implementer fund their own activities. The WFP and Mary's Meals are the biggest implementers and therefore contribute most to school meals financing. It is noteworthy that the GoM implements school feeding independently from the donor community in 80 schools and school feeding is the only prioritized programme in the NSSP, which the Malawian government contributes substantial funding to.

The 2013 budget contribution to SHNHA (School Health, Nutrition, HIV and AIDS) was MK 200 million. Out of this, at least 60% (MK 120 million) was mandated to go to the school meals programme and both towards monitoring and the actual purchase of foodstuffs (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2014).

**Table 2: Financing of the Malawian school feeding programme**

Financing of the Malawian school feeding programme		
Contributor	Time-frame	Budget
GoM	2012	\$ 306,619
WFP	2012-16	\$ 19 mil.
Mary's Meals	2010-14	\$ 28 mil.
NAPE	2012-15	\$ 2.7 mil.
<i>Source: implementers</i>		

## 5 Programme Impact

Mary's Meals, citing a number of studies<sup>1</sup> argues that there are well-established links between school feeding and pupil attendance. The NGO's school feeding programme is based on the recognition that the "most fundamental barrier to overcome in childhood education is the barrier which prevents enrolment or initial attendance" (Mary's Meals, n.d.). School feeding therefore claimed to be "probably the single most effective tool to draw poor children to school and keep them there" (ibid.). Studies show that the main obstacles to girls' education are most effectively overcome by enabling families' to meet their immediate needs (Miller & Del Rosso, 1999). Providing school meals is an in-kind benefit that lowers a family's food expenditure, makes it easier to fulfil its immediate needs and thus facilitates school enrolment. School feeding programmes "transfer resources implicitly or explicitly to poor households of the value of the food provided, therefore offsetting the costs of sending the child to school" (Burbano & Gelli, 2009)

A Peruvian study (Cueto et al, 2000) found that school meals have a variety of beneficial impacts, such as "positive effects [...] on haemoglobin, drop-out rates and attendance" (Mary's Meals, n.d.). Moock et al (1986) argue the following:

*"If the economic benefits of improving nutritional status can be legitimately calculated to include the higher productivity of a more educated adult population [...] as well as the treatment savings from a better nourished, less disease-prone child population, it may turn out that an investment in child nutrition is one of the best investments a developing country can make" (Moock et al, 1986).*

In 2007, 4,000 primary schools receiving WFP assistance in 32 sub-Saharan Africa countries were surveyed and school feeding was found to have significant positive effects on school participation (Mary's Meals, n.d.). After years of research there is now "robust evidence that school feeding can support learning in the classroom by relieving short-term hunger and reducing micronutrient deficiencies" (Bundy et al, 2009). Interventions such as school feeding are "widely supported by research as mitigating drop-out rates, improving attendance, and diminishing gender disparity" and are expected to contribute to reducing poverty and food insecurity (Adelman et al, 2009).

The Malawian rural population overwhelmingly works in the agricultural sector and therefore school participation rates tend to follow a seasonal pattern as "rural school children may end up working in the fields at harvest time - or in the dry season they will have to walk the cattle to distant pastures, rather than attend school" (Burbano & Gelli, 2009). Studies indicates that "erratic attendance patterns increase in Malawi during the harvest months of May, June and July and then again during the lean season January and February" (ibid.). Children miss school in order to help their parents harvest and girls often stay at home to look after their younger siblings (ibid.). Seasonal fluctuation in school participation illustrate both the "impact of the agricultural cycle on school attendance and the effects of food insecurity"

<sup>1</sup> Cueto, 2000; Gulliford, 2002; Kent et al, 1997; Miller Del Rosso, 1999; Rogers et al, 2002

(ibid.). The most significant decline of attendance rates tend to be found in rural areas during the lean season (ibid.).

While the difference between high and low attendance months across primary grades was small (2-5%), the 'seasonality gap' was "significantly smaller in schools with school feeding, particularly for girls in the higher grades" (ibid.). The biggest differences was found in higher grades, which indicates that the take-home rations provide extra incentives to stay in school. Evidence thus suggest that school feeding and especially take-home rations are an effective tool to increase enrolment and discourage dropping-out in the Malawian context of food insecurity and seasonal agriculture (ibid.).

The WFP finds based on selected school visits that the "school meal attracts children who are otherwise reluctant to attend, or whose parents may not value education" (World Food Programme 2015 b). In addition, "school officials state that because of the meal provided children are more energetic and attentive, healthier, and able to remain at school after classes for play and social interaction" (ibid.).

## 6 Implementation Challenges

Providing school meals on a countrywide and near-universal level is a complex logistical undertaking and all implementers experience a number of challenges. The biggest challenge in implementing school feeding according to the GoM is the timely procurement and delivery of the foodstuffs. The corn-soy blend is purchased on the central level by the MoEST and then distributed to the districts. However, not all targeted schools receive the procured school meals. While the MoEST has earmarked funding for 80 schools, it is unable guarantee the delivery of foodstuffs to the targeted schools. A significant number of the 80 schools do not receive any support despite being targeted. The MoEST lacks monitoring and evaluation systems to adequately address the problem of unserved schools and is currently unable to verify the extent to which schools actually receive the promised support. Recognizing this, the MoEST considers the introduction of an effective monitoring and evaluation system to address the lack of oversight to be of critical importance (Office of President and Cabinet, 2014).

The ongoing implementation difficulties have serious consequences for the sustainability of Malawian school feeding. Over the last years the MoEST has, reportedly due to procurement problems, repeatedly underspend their school feeding budget and as a consequence funding to the programme has subsequently decreased considerably. In 2012, school feeding got MK 500 million allocated. This decreased further to MK 200 million the following year and in 2014 the budget allocation is expected to be even smaller (ibid.).

The WFP also faces challenges implementing school feeding, mostly with respect to meeting beneficiaries and tonnage targets. While in 2012 and 2013, beneficiary targets were exceeded, tonnage target were not met in either year. This was primarily due to "problems with transporters, shipment delays, and limited funding" (World Food Programme, 2014). Resource shortfalls likewise caused the Take Home Rations (THR) component and feeding in Early Childhood Development Centres (ECD) to miss 2012 and 2013 beneficiary targets. The Home Grown School Meals (HGSM) pilot also reached fewer schools than planned and "schools experienced delays receiving funds due government bureaucratic delays" (ibid.)



**Table 3: Implementation challenges of school feeding in Malawi**

Implementation challenges of school feeding in Malawi
Limited investment and low budgetary allocation by government and donors
Weak coordination mechanisms especially at district level
Standard M&E system not yet able to track key programme indicators
Some schools lack other complementary interventions e.g. WASH facilities
Inadequate participation of community members in key activities e.g. construction
Staff changes and movements affecting quality of the programme e.g. transfer of teachers trained to handle school feeding activities
<i>Source: World Food Programme (2014 a)</i>

The Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programme is designed to create local markets for school meals by serving local farm produce to school children and theoretically should “inject a significant amount of resources into the economy” (Burbano & Gelli, 2009). However, seasonality and local availability of the required quality and quantity of foodstuffs pose substantial challenges to the programme (ibid). During the lean season when food is scarce large purchase of food may increase market prices further with potentially negative effects on local communities. Also, harvest failures may affect the “stability of the food supply to the schools leaving thousands of children without morning meals” (ibid.). Strategies need to be developed to combine regional and international purchases to guarantee stable food supply and avoid adverse effects on the local food market (ibid.)

The MoEST seems to have little capacity in implementing the school feeding programme as indicated by the fact that it is currently unable to guarantee the targeted schools actually receive the foodstuffs procured on the central level. Neither is the Ministry currently able to monitor school feeding activities on a countrywide scale. Capacity building measures are urgently needed before the GoM can fully or partially take over implementation from the WFP and Mary’s Meals (Office of President and Cabinet, 2014).

## 7 Recommendations

- Government capacity to oversee, monitor and coordinate social protection is currently limited. Efforts should be undertaken to support Government’s capacity and ownership over social protection in Malawi. This should include an analysis of fiscal space and financing modalities to increase Government’s contribution to social protection expenditure.
- Malawi’s social protection system currently lacks integrated MIS and M&E systems. Developing such systems would be an important step towards improving the coordination and harmonization of the country’s social protection system.
- Currently there is little exploitation of linkages between programmes and between programmes and complementary services, such as agriculture, health, and education. It would be important to develop a detailed strategy on linkages to ensure that vulnerable Malawians who are enrolled in programmes also benefit from other important services or received additional support. Linkages to other programmes can provide important support for households to graduate out of poverty.
- Currently the county’s social protection programme (MNSSP) is not well aligned with the broader system of social protection, namely the MVAC humanitarian response. It is recommended that stakeholders identify ways to improve the harmonization of the ‘regular’ social protection interventions with the MVAC to improve impacts and exploit synergies.
- Complex targeting criteria, the prevalence of community targeting, widespread and deep poverty with a very flat income distribution, and strict cut-off points all contribute to inefficient poverty

targeting outcomes, as observed in a number of evaluations. It is recommended to re-visit the targeting approaches of MNSSP programmes, as well as the FISP. In the long-term, Malawi may consider more categorical transfers that could be better suited to the country's widespread and mostly uniform poverty.

- The current transfer share of the SCT relative to pre-transfer incomes is 23 percent, which is slightly above the crucial threshold of 20 percent that transfers need to be effective. For all programmes there is a strong need to remain attentive to the real value of the transfers over time in order to safeguard programmes' effectiveness.
- In the short to medium term we strongly recommend to extend the coverage of the current NSSP programmes, in particular the Social Cash Transfer, the School Feeding Programme and the Village Savings and Loans programmes.
- School Meals can play an important role in increasing enrolment, reducing drop-out rates, and improving the nutritional wellbeing of school children. Especially in Malawi's context of lean seasons and high drop-out rates, School Meals are a key tool of social protection and should be extended beyond the currently targeted districts and schools.

## 8 References

- Adelman, Sara; Gilligan, Daniel and Lehrer, Kim (2008). How Effective are Food for Education Programs? A Critical Assessment of the Evidence from Developing Countries. IFPRI
- Burbano, Carmen & Gelli, Aulo (2009), School Feeding, seasonality and schooling outcomes: A case study from Malawi
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2013). Education statistics 2013. Ministry of Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Department of Education Planning. Education Management Information System (EMIS)
- Harper, Caroline; Marcus, Rachel; Moore, Karen (2003). Enduring Poverty and the Conditions of Childhood: Lifecourse and Intergenerational Poverty Transmissions. World Development. Volume 31, Issue 3, March 2003. Chronic Poverty and Development Policy
- Miller, Candace; Tsoka, Maxton; Reichert, Kathryn (2008). Impact Evaluation Report External Evaluation of the Mchinji Social Cash Transfer Pilot
- Mary's Meals (n.d.). Frequently Asked Questions. Mary's Meals in Malawi. <http://www.marysmeals.org.uk/about/how-marys-meals-works/>
- Office of President and Cabinet (2014). Conversations with Cacious Phiri, school heal and nutrition expert.
- World Food Programme (2015). The cost of hunger in Malawi. Implications on National Development and Vision 2020. The Social and Economic Impact of Child Undernutrition in Malawi
- World Food Programme (n.d.). School meals. <https://www.wfp.org/school-meals>

Contact information

Luca Pellerano

Technical Advisor on Social Security

Building National Floors of Social Protection in Southern Africa

International Labour Organization (ILO)

[pellerano@ilo.org](mailto:pellerano@ilo.org)

Florian Juergens

Social Protection Consultant

[juergensf@iloquest.org](mailto:juergensf@iloquest.org)