



Evaluation of the Government of Malawi and UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation 2019 — 2023

EVALUATION BRIEF

This brief presents the Evaluation of the Government of Malawi and UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation 2019-2023 (henceforth, “the CP”). The Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) was commissioned and managed by UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) in collaboration with the UNICEF Malawi Country Office (MCO) and the Government of Malawi. The CPE was conducted by Universal Management Group Limited, an independent evaluation service provider.

The CPE had a dual purpose: (a) learning from the CP implementation to inform the next programme cycle (2024-2027); and (b) accountability of UNICEF Malawi for results to diverse stakeholders, including the UNICEF Executive Board, international donors, and the Government of Malawi.

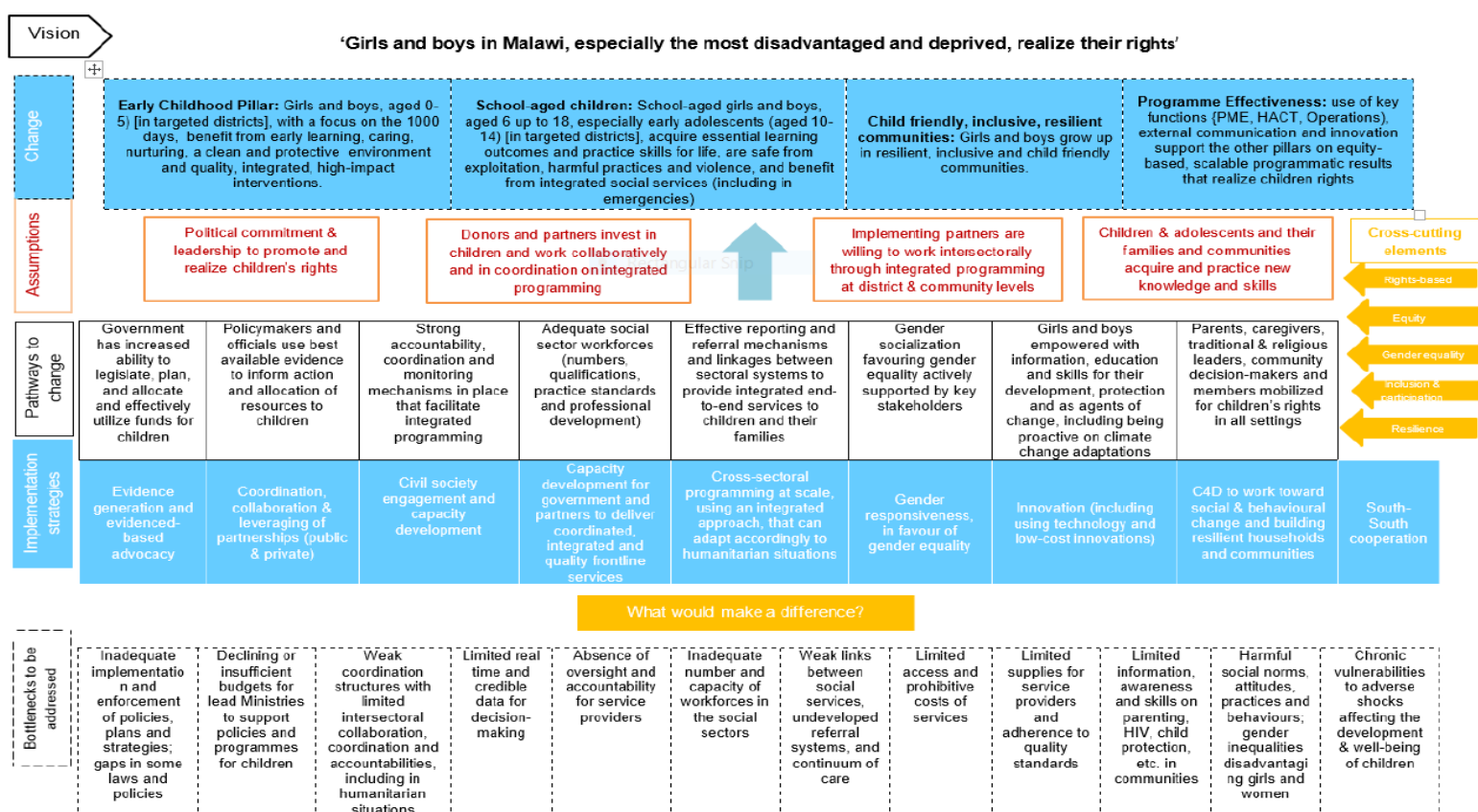
The CPE gives particular attention to the following areas: gender, equity, human rights, and inclusion; UNICEF’s positioning and strategic advantage in Malawi; the Pillar approach and its contribution to the CP results; the linkages among international, regional, national, and institutional strategies; the humanitarian-development nexus; the performance monitoring systems; public financing for children; innovation; youth empowerment and climate change.

Malawi Country Programme

The CP aimed to contribute to the realization of children's rights in line with international conventions and standards. UNICEF has introduced the integrated life cycle Pillar approach to ensure that its work makes the greatest impact during key windows of opportunity in the lives of children. The CP pillars are: (a) early childhood development (0-5 years); (b) school-age children (6-18 years); and (c) child-friendly, inclusive, and resilient communities. To support the implementation of the CP, a cross-sectoral management structure applying the principle of Matrix Management was adopted. The CP was implemented across the three regions of Malawi.

The MCO developed a theory of change (ToC) for the CP and specific ToCs for each Pillar. Figure 1 describes the pathways through which CP results are expected to be achieved and the assumptions that determine success. The ToC identifies gender equality, equity, human rights, inclusion and participation, and resilience as cross-cutting themes that are incorporated into different aspects of the CP's work.

Figure 1: Malawi-UNICEF Country Programme Theory of Change



Source: UNICEF Malawi (2018). Early Childhood Pillar Strategy Note.



CPE METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team adopted the following complementary approaches for undertaking the CPE: Theory-Based Approach, Utilization-Focused Approach, Participatory Approach, Systems-based Approach, and Human-rights, Gender Equality and Equity-based Approach. The CPE structured its assessment around the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and orientation towards impact. The evaluation triangulated data and information from different lines of inquiry, including document review, key informant interviews, an online perception survey, and focus group discussions.

The evaluation assignment began in June 2022, with a field mission in all three regions of Malawi and in the five districts of Lilongwe, Chikwawa, Mangochi, Kasungu and Mzimba, from September 19 to 30, 2022. The data collection phase occurred at a time when many other evaluations were being conducted in Malawi, looking to collect data with many of the same stakeholders (examples: evaluation of UNDAF, WFP Malawi CSPE). However, the evaluation team was able to conduct most of the planned consultations. The field visits also coincided with the school holiday period in Malawi, which reduced participation of children, including adolescents.



FINDINGS

Relevance

The CP is closely aligned with the national development strategies and sectoral priorities of the Government of Malawi (GoM), the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF – 2019-2023), UNICEF global priorities, and with SDGs. Overall, the CP has been consistent with the needs of children, including adolescents, and young people in Malawi. However, programming to meet substantive needs of street connected children, children with disabilities (including those with albinism), and vulnerable boys has fallen short. The CP is highly recognized for being flexible, responsive, and adapting to contextual changes, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic and other successive emergencies.

The CP is human rights centred and has integrated gender, with some gender transformative interventions, though inconsistently. Inclusion is a key deliberate aspect of interventions such as social cash transfer, but specific vulnerabilities, including disabilities, are not robust in the design of pillar interventions. The CP included initiatives that aimed to involve adolescents and youth in development efforts, as well as climate change related interventions.

Coherence

The Pillar approach and the Matrix Management structure stand out as coherent due to their alignment with the key bottlenecks in addressing the needs of children in Malawi. The CP has made progress in implementing these change management approaches, which has improved internal programme coherence. However, they remain a work in progress and require regular review and adjustments until they are fully part of the Country Office's organizational culture.

The CP has well integrated UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) and UNICEF Gender Action Plan (GAP). UNICEF's interventions have been highly complementary to other interventions and programs under the UNSDCF, with strong evidence of complementarity with other UN Agencies, and to the efforts of the national government and other development partners.

However, working as one UN Team remains a challenge and joint coordination between UN Agencies in Malawi is far from optimal as there is still competition for funds between each other and the Agencies have procedures that vary between them.

Finally, as the UN Agency with a children rights mission, UNICEF is perceived to be strategically well positioned in Malawi, with a well-defined niche and a vast range of experience and expertise. It has a clear comparative advantage in capacity development and institutional strengthening, as well as having a strong network in Malawi, in particular with government institutions.

Effectiveness

The CP has generally made good progress towards achieving planned downstream results related to improved access to social services by children in Malawi, and upstream results related to systems and capacity strengthening.

However, the achievement of holistic results has been challenging due to factors such as insufficient funding and limited awareness of the Pillar approach by UNICEF's donor and government partners. There is evidence of effective cross-sectoral collaborations across pillars, but such collaborations are not equally and fully operational in all three pillars, which has slowed down provision of integrated children's services.

Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) activities have been effective in some areas to contribute to changes in social norms and behaviours of targeted individuals and communities, but less effective at transforming gender norms. SBC activities are perceived as receiving the least funding and generally of a short-term nature, which limits their contribution to programme results.

The CP has supported the introduction of promising innovations, with some concrete results in terms of responding to the humanitarian and development needs of children. However, the lack of a clear innovation governance framework and of long-term funding mechanisms limit the contribution of UNICEF's innovation work to

overall programme results.

The CP's monitoring system is adequate for planning and measuring progress towards Programme objectives and is also specific enough to capture pillar and output differences. However, inconsistency in generating and/or utilizing appropriately disaggregated data sometimes challenges the ability to underline the concrete contribution of gender, equity, and social inclusion approaches to pillar results.

The CP interventions have contributed to the empowerment of the Malawian youth, notably by strengthening the enabling environment for them, equipping them with civic competencies, as well as creating job opportunities through social innovation and entrepreneurship. The CP also made significant contributions in terms of building resilience to reduce the impacts of climate change. PF4C interventions were, to a large extent, able to deliver the planned outputs and contribute to the CP results. However, these interventions are contingent on institutional changes and reforms at all levels of government, which requires further time for their full potential to be realized.

The CP has not been able to apply the geographical convergence approach, to provide coordinated sectoral inputs in the same geographic locations. This approach has been challenging to implement due to factors such as lack of common understanding on the approach and the constant need to respond to emergencies.

The CP has been effective in supporting the GoM's responses to various emergencies, in particular the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other outbreaks (e.g., cholera), while ensuring continued access to basic services during emergencies. The CP has also contributed to improved emergency preparedness and resilience in Malawi, by strengthening the capacity of relevant stakeholders, including communities. Notwithstanding, efforts to apply the nexus approach at national level could be improved.

Efficiency

Overall, mobilizing adequate funding resources has

been a persistent challenge for the CP. Nevertheless, mobilized financial resources were generally appropriately allocated and used effectively in most interventions given the effective management approaches. There are areas for improvement, including timely delivery, overcoming bureaucracy, lack of equity and gender-targeting, and addressing high overhead costs. The staff complement of the Country Office has been optimal throughout, with required capacities in the relevant fields of the CP. The application of the Pillar approach and Matrix Management style has led to cost-effective use of human resources. However, the fact that the CP funding was largely mobilized sector wise has constrained efforts towards joint programming, thus limiting the cost-effectiveness of activities.

Sustainability

The likelihood that the benefits of the CP continue after the end of the Programme is both variable and moderate. Some results may be sustainable over time (e.g., system for cold chain in place, knowledge, and capacity), but others require ongoing resources to ensure sustainability. While collectively the CP strategies have contributed to addressing capacity gaps at various levels (national and sub-national) and, as such, helped to ensure sustainability over time, implementation of interventions through NGO partners is perceived as less likely to foster government ownership and sustainability of results.

Orientation towards Impact

The CP has contributed to progress in children's rights at the strategic level in terms of strengthening the enabling environment (through a range of national strategies, systems frameworks, plans and programmes) and in so doing enhanced the capacity of the GoM and other duty bearers to realize children rights. Some interventions have already registered positive impacts on the living conditions of children at school and in their homes, as well as on women. However, potential impacts from other initiatives are likely to occur in the medium-to-long term. Some unintended negative impacts have been registered as well (e.g., tension amongst and within households as a result of cash transfer top-ups).



CONCLUSIONS

Relevance

The CP programming was highly aligned with the GoM's plans and policies and is perceived to have remained relevant (over time) with evolving priorities, despite major changes in the country and global context since 2019. The CP interventions provided responses to the most pressing needs of vulnerable children, including adolescents, in Malawi. In terms of integrating cross-cutting issues, the design of the CP is strong on human rights and gender components, but it is 'mixed' from an equity and inclusion perspective. Programming to meet substantive needs of children with albinism, street connected children, vulnerable boys, and children at risk of child marriage has fallen short.

Coherence

Generally, the CP is coherent internally and has integrated key UNICEF strategies and international commitments. The ambitious innovations launched during the CP, including the Pillar approach and the Matrix Management style, have been successfully rolled out and demonstrated their potential to achieve results. Externally, this CPE paints a positive picture of UNICEF strategic positioning in Malawi, given its comparative advantages in terms of upstream and downstream work. The CP's work has been highly complementary to the work of other partners, including other UN Agencies. However, there is a need to continue to maximize efforts in joint programming, delivering as one, alongside regularized, joint monitoring with other UN Agencies.

Effectiveness

The CP has had a positive performance and is on track towards achieving the targets of outcome and output-level indicators. Nevertheless, the optimal achievement of results at country level has generally been challenging due mostly to insufficient funding.

The WASH sector remains an area that needs to be prioritized, given its implications on other sectors such as health, nutrition, and education. Despite the significant increase in terms of birth registration, more work is needed to ensure data is entered in a timely way, and that people obtain birth certificates in a timely manner. The education sector has suffered from insufficient funding due, in part, to the re-focusing of donor priorities. The lack of robust integrated packages of interventions across the three pillars has limited the achievement of the desired results. This is largely associated with donor funding modalities which are still sector-driven, as well as the fact that the GoM is still organized in a sectoral, not child-centred manner.

Efficiency

Generally, mobilized financial resources were appropriately allocated and used effectively in most interventions given the effective management approaches implemented. Gender interventions benefited from the strategic allocation of resources due to the comprehensive articulation of gender action points for each pillar. Human resources have been adequate to implement the CP.

Sustainability

Overall, sustaining many of the CP results remains highly reliant on international development funding, and given changing donor priorities, their sustainability is questionable. A trend has been noted of bilateral donors having to reduce and re-focus priorities because of COVID-19. Gaps in consistency in funding can lead to successful pilot programs not being scaled up and/or terminated due to lack of resources, thus limiting the likelihood of being sustained.



Orientation towards Impact

The CP has enhanced the capacity of the GoM and other duty bearers to realize children's rights as well as created changes in living conditions of children at school and in their homes. However, many interventions implemented by the CP are only likely to register impacts in the medium-to-long term (e.g., SBC interventions addressing norms). It will be important for the negative unintended impacts of the CP interventions to be mitigated to ensure long-term impact over time.

Cross-cutting Issues

The CP was designed with the deliberate purpose of promoting children's rights (including adolescents) across all its pillars and promoting gender equality. In both

development and humanitarian contexts, the CP has achieved good gender results, though grey areas remain. Inclusion intervention results are inconsistently addressed although consciousness of the issue of disability is starting to increase. Equity-related results are generally hard to discern from most of the results. The CP has achieved results in terms of youth empowerment, but contributions have not necessarily been made based on a clear definition of the role of UNICEF in promoting the youth development agenda in Malawi. The CP has been responsive to climate change issues, with a results framework which included climate specific indicators, thus influencing achievement of results in this area.



LESSONS LEARNED

The following lessons learned about the CP performance in Malawi are considered as transferable to other country programmes in Malawi and in other contexts.

Implementing a Life Cycle Approach (LCA) in a Country Programme involves complex processes and requires important changes (in people's mindsets and organizational systems, structures, and practices) both within the implementing organization and external partners. These changes must happen before the LCA can influence change in results for children.

Close partnerships and coordination are strong success factors for a development cooperation program. Evidence from this CPE shows that the CP's performance banked on engagement with various actors at central and district levels.

Piloting innovative approaches is a necessary condition for identifying good practices in a particular context, their scaling up is a sufficient condition to bring about lasting changes in the situation of children at the societal level.

In a country where communities are repeatedly hit by different shocks, short-term and reactive emergency responses can save lives, but their longer-term development effects are limited. These can only occur when emergency and humanitarian actions are included as part of the overall planning, as these will always be a key part of the Country Programme.

For geographical convergence to produce the results expected, it needs to be mainstreamed within the Country Office, as well as understood, and adhered to by all stakeholders concerned, internally and externally. Moreover, the approach should become the key guiding principle in programming, documented, and with details of its implementation.

Deliberately and consistently implementing gender transformative and socially inclusive programming at scale, as well as institutionalizing it in workflows, is what will ensure sustainable and comprehensive programming that 'leaves no one behind'.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented below include two categories: (a) strategic recommendations, focused on enhancing the strategic positioning of UNICEF, both internally and externally, ensuring that the next CP creates a greater value for Malawi, and (b) operational recommendations, focused on institutional and implementation mechanisms necessary to achieve strategic recommendations.

Strategic Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Prioritization with Equity Focus

WHAT? The next Country Programme of Cooperation should **prioritize programmatic areas, initiatives, and geographies, with a strong equity focus**. Prioritization should be based on UNICEF’s comparative advantages in Malawi, the potential risks in the global and national programming environment, as well as continuity of key results achieved in the in the Country Programme 2019-2023.

WHO? UNICEF Malawi and the Government of Malawi

HOW?

- Prioritization exercise conducted in close coordination and consultation with the GoM, stakeholders and donors.
- Analysis of available financing resources, ensuring that the planned results are achievable, taking into account macro-economic conditions, donor commitments, and including a partnerships strategy - including UN - based on UNICEF comparative advantages.
- Focus on interventions that advance cross-pillar, working in carefully selected geographic areas to maximize programmatic, lifecycle and geographic convergence gains.
- Base the CP on general equity principles and proper child deprivation analysis (e.g., using UNICEF’s Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis methodology), ensuring that the CP is clearer and more direct about equity dimensions (including the conceptualization of ‘the most vulnerable children’).
- Results framework with disaggregated indicators for convergence life cycle strategies, with focus on Persons with Disability and gender equality.

Recommendation 2 – Programme Management

- WHAT?** Build on the achievements and progress of the life cycle Pillar approach and Matrix Management structure and **advance these approaches** with the objective of improving programme coherence and demonstrating results.
- WHO?** Deputy Representative – Programmes, Pillar and Section Chiefs)
- HOW?**
- Further clarification and streamlining of pillar and Matrix Management-related roles and responsibilities, levels of authority, Task Teams, and mechanisms for accountability.
 - Educating partners (notably government and donors) about, and/or advocating for, their alignment with the life cycle Pillar approach.
 - Continue to ensure office-wide shared understanding of these innovative initiatives and concepts as well as what is expected from each other, staff as well as managers.
 - Identify, implement, and scale-up packages of holistic and cross-pillar interventions, actively engaging Task Teams, and harnessing CP investments in innovations and research.
 - Ensure inclusion of sex- and age-disaggregated, disability, and gender equality data

Recommendation 3 – Geographical Convergence

- WHAT?** Reconsider the focus on geographical convergence in the next Country Programme of Cooperation. Geographical convergence should be intimately linked with the life cycle Pillar approach to reinforce each other to accelerate results for vulnerable children.
- WHO?** MCO Management (Representative, Deputy Representatives, Pillar and Section Chiefs), Government of Malawi (relevant line ministries)
- HOW?**
- Clearly define (in a document) what the geographical approach means, how it will be implemented and what it is expected to achieve.
 - Engage with stakeholders (internal and external) on the geographical approach, to create a shared understanding (and buy-in of the approach).
 - Geographical targeting to avoid spreading the CP resources too thinly, albeit with thorough assessment of associated risks, especially the risk for UNICEF to lose donor resources.
 - Implement cross-pillar interventions together in the same geographical or administrative areas (districts/traditional authorities), providing a holistic perspective to interventions and the needs of children.
 - Strengthen the Office capacity to improve decentralized planning and maintain quality service delivery.
 - Minimize transaction costs for UNICEF and government agencies as well as for communities and target groups.
 - Adapt monitoring system to assess whether the geographical approach actually delivers upon its expectations, in terms of results for children and women.

Operational Recommendations

Recommendation 4 – Innovation

- WHAT?** Consolidate UNICEF Malawi's innovation work and ensure a **governance framework** that helps to continuously respond to practical needs for innovation across the Programme.
- WHO?** MCO Management (Deputy Representative – Programmes, Pillar and Section Chiefs; Innovation Specialist/manager); ESARO innovation experts
- HOW?**
- Expedite approval/ adoption of the (pending) Innovation Strategy.
 - Reinforcement of the innovation unit with strong leadership capacity and resource.
 - Adopt an integrated framework to guide investment in innovations that address the biggest bottlenecks that CP Pillars and other components are facing.
 - Establish an internal institutional architecture that promotes and supports innovation across the Pillars and helps to tap into (and mobilize finances from) local and global innovation systems and partnerships.
 - Leverage ESARO's experience, drawing on lessons from models and practices currently being used in other UNICEF ESARO Country Offices.

Recommendation 5 – Responding to Emergencies

- WHAT?** UNICEF Malawi should continue providing critical support for the Malawian government responses to emergencies (e.g., health and nutrition-related emergencies, climate change shocks such as floods and drought), while ensuring **integration of emergency and humanitarian actions** into its overall planning through an enriched NEXUS-based approach.
- WHO?** MCO Management (Representative, Deputy Representatives, Pillar and Section Chiefs, Emergency Specialists), Government of Malawi (Department of Disaster Management Affairs)
- HOW?**
- Prepare for likely ("next") humanitarian crisis, in particular climate (flood and drought) -related emergencies through increased efforts aimed at enhancing resilience in vulnerable communities.
 - Support planning and preparedness activities for disaster risk reduction (DRR).
 - Identify core NEXUS indicators to measure effectiveness of approaches.
 - Ensure exit strategies are developed alongside interventions.
 - Support planning for disability inclusive emergency preparedness, resilience, response, and recovery.
 - Strengthen the application of the CCCs as a programming framework to address implementation gaps, including in relation to disability inclusion during emergencies.

Recommendation 6 – Youth Empowerment

- WHAT?** UNICEF Malawi should **continue paying particular attention to youth empowerment** as a cross-cutting dimension and **clearly define the role of UNICEF Malawi**, based on its comparative advantages.
- WHO?** MCO Management (Representative, Deputy Representatives, Pillar and Section Chiefs); Government of Malawi (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture); UN Agencies; UN Resident Coordinator
- HOW?**
- Define the role of UNICEF in promoting the youth development agenda in close consultation with the GoM in the next CPD and ensure that there is clarity in identification UNICEF's comparative advantage.
 - Advance UNICEF-supported National Youth Policy and Youth Investment Plan developed by the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture supporting the Government to move to using appropriate instruments and mechanisms to bridge an important gap in the public policy cycle.
 - Continue and reinforce support to initiatives that provide young people with employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, such as ADDA, the youth innovation challenge (under Generation Unlimited).
 - Mobilize Youth population to educate communities for environmental awareness and action and gender equality.

Recommendation 7 – Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion

- WHAT?** Build on the gains made by sustaining and **strengthening the institutionalization of gender, as well as disability inclusion**, to ensure alignment of the Country Programme with the agenda of the new UNICEF Gender Policy and GAP III, as well as UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022-2030.
- WHO?** MCO Management (Deputy Representative – Programmes, Gender Specialist, Pillar and Section Chiefs)
- HOW?**
- Implement findings of the Gender Programmatic Review to provide strategic direction on transformative programming.
 - Prioritize girls' leadership and agency, including by strengthening 'gender and technology' approaches as an emerging area of global interest to UNICEF.
 - Move from the merely gender responsive approach of GAP II to GAP III's focus on expanding gender transformative approaches throughout all UNICEF programming, as well as in institutional policies, partnerships, and capacities.
 - Redefine the SCTP programming to focus more robustly on gender transformative cash transfer programming as guided by the UNICEF global indicator on gender transformative and gender responsive social protection.¹
 - Invest much more in gender evidence generation so that in addition to quantitative data, qualitative data disaggregated by gender and inclusion/equity variables is produced.

¹UNICEF Gender Responsive

Social Protection Background Paper, 2021.

- Establish targets and develop interventions to contribute to transforming community knowledge, attitudes, and practices, while identifying community “process champions”.
- Prioritize girls’ leadership and agency and gender transformative cash transfer.
- Strengthen the next gender equality strategy for UNICEF Malawi by broadening the scope of this strategy (as well as the ‘gender’ position/portfolio) to visibly cover ‘equity and inclusion’ for more comprehensive promotion and protection of child rights.
- Beyond collecting sex disaggregated data, strengthen the CP results framework with indicators on children (including adolescents) with multiple vulnerabilities (e.g., children with disabilities, street children, ultra-poor) across all pillars.
- Integrate the principles of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in CP strategies and consistently disaggregate disability data by sex and type of disability, in line with UNICEF DIPAS 2022-2030.

Recommendation 8 – Alignment with Decentralization Policy

- WHAT?** Consider further investing in and developing MCO capacity to greater **align with the Government of Malawi’s decentralization policy.**
- WHO?** MCO Management (Deputy Representative – Programmes, Pillar and Section Chiefs)
- HOW?**
- Align MCO CP with and support the GoM devolution process. The processes of planning, coordinating, and monitoring at decentralized level following the Pillar approach require intensive and ongoing support at the field level.
 - Facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration at decentralized level, and to be nimble in supporting both development and humanitarian interventions.
 - Investment in and development of the MCO capacity for planning and monitoring of the CP interventions at decentralized level.
 - Analyse required competences and capacity gaps, and decide accordingly, taking lessons from best practices in other UNICEF COs throughout the region (and beyond), while keeping in mind UNICEF Malawi’s available resources.
 - Engage government and other strategic partners in discussions to appreciate the suggestion on direct funding to district councils.

This brief is based on the final report of the *Evaluation of the Government of Malawi and UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation 2019-2023*, which can be downloaded from www.unicef.org/evaluation/reports#/. This brief aims to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between UNICEF and its partners. The contents of the evaluation reports and briefs do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF.

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