



Community Development and Resilience Section's work in Local Governance & Decentralization

UNICEF MALAWI COUNTRY OFFICE

Background

The wellbeing of children and adolescents is often determined by local government decisions and capacity to deliver services. Following the decentralization process that began in 1998 in Malawi, local councils, together with private sector and other stakeholders, play a crucial role in ensuring access to goods and basic services, including for the most marginalized communities. In Malawi, this role of district councils is increasingly recognized. Many of the SDGs targets are directly or indirectly related to the work of local councils. SDG 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable – highlights the importance of local solutions and a bottom-up approach for achieving the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III is also developed on

the premise that local district councils will play a crucial role in achieving the set objectives. There is a lot of emphasis on the importance of respecting, supporting and strengthening local leadership and capacity to achieve the set goals.

The Community Development Resilience section is working on integrating the humanitarian-development nexus to programming. The CDR section is made up of three units that include C4D, Local Governance and Decentralization, and Emergency all working towards building resilient, inclusive and child-friendly communities. Through CDR Section, UNICEF is implementing Programmes at national and at district level, building on existing decentralized delivery platforms (both formal and informal).

UNICEF is supporting decentralized structures at district and sub-district levels to respond to the strategic and practical needs of children and their communities. Over the past year, UNICEF has been working collaboratively with the Ministry of Local Government to enhance local councils programming around COVID-19 response as well as regular programming.

Work done so far

The Local Governance and Decentralization unit, under the Community Development and Resilience section, has been working with the Ministry of Local Government, DoDMA, councils and other stakeholders to enhance programming at local level



Local Governance Dashboard for COVID-19 Programming

Our work on COVID (with the MoLG) has focused much on enhancing coordination, real-time data collection and reporting for the local government system. UNICEF worked with the MoLG to develop a smartphone reporting tool (dashboard) that has been used by all 35 councils to enhance reporting. UNICEF donated smartphones to MoLG and provides data bundles on a monthly basis to support the dashboard. The dashboard has enabled local governments to report on availability of human, financial and material resources, availability of infrastructure, tests conducted, among other issues. The dashboard has done a lot in reducing the information gaps, enhance coordination between the central ministry, councils and other stakeholders including DoDMA.



Local Governance Coordination Cluster

UNICEF has been supporting the Ministry of Local Government in coordinating the local government system's programming for COVID-19. Our role has been co-chairing the meetings. The governance cluster brings together all councils, other players that include LGAP and coordinators of other clusters.

This cluster has been helpful in enhancing coordination between the councils and all other stakeholders

Through the cluster, key program gaps have been identified and addressed. Some of the gaps identified include lack of community engagement activities on COVID.



Humanitarian Field Monitoring Tool (HFM)

The Humanitarian Field Monitoring (HFM) tool was developed to enhance feedback between the communities and duty bearers, accountability and COVID information dissemination. It is a tool that has promoted greater engagement between the communities and those responsible for program development and implementation as across all the sectors. The tool uses smartphone applications and can identify the actual position (geo-location) from where a respondent is sending information. This has helped the duty-bearers to tailor interventions and address the actual needs of the identified communities. The use of smartphones has enabled the creation of district WhatsApp groups to enhance information dissemination. The HFM has also helped in enhancing accountability at district level by ensuring that communities can evaluate service delivery and hold duty bearers accountable.

To enhance functionality of the HFM and Local Governance dashboards, UNICEF donated a total of 90 smartphones, monthly data bundles and capacity building of the smartphone recipients.



Support towards District Development Planning – Chikwawa and Nsanje Districts

UNICEF is supporting Chikwawa and Nsanje district councils to improve development planning processes, and enhance the participation of adolescents, youths and women. In Chikwawa, the support has been towards all processes leading to the council having a DDP.

As UNICEF, our interest is on working with the councils in the establishment of child friendly communities that put the child at the center of its programming, beginning with the planning phase. The DDP will help the council in resource mobilization and coordination of district partners.

The process of engagement with children, adolescents and women in the development planning processes will provide a basis for their meaningful participation in the development and governance processes at local government level.

In Nsanje, UNICEF partnered with UNDP and LGAP to support the DDP process. UNICEF will, however, support the dissemination processes of the DDP for both districts. This process will involve reaching out to communities (including adolescents and youths) to raise awareness and understanding of the programs that the councils will be implementing and be able to hold duty-bearers accountable for this.



Capacity building of Community Structures (ADCs, AECs and VDCs)

Participation is a crucial means for children, adolescents and the wider communities to negotiate and advocate for the realization of their rights. This could be in the form of shaping local plans and budgets or providing direct feedback on the delivery of local goods and services. Child, adolescent and community participation can lead to better local services, more responsive local policies and plans and more effective use of local budgets to support local priorities.

To achieve better results, the capacity of community structures such as village development, area development and area executive committees, to understand and support implementation of programs is of great importance. UNICEF is supporting the capacity building of these community structures to enhance their understanding of CR and child-friendly development programming.



Reviewing of the Decentralization Policy

Within a wider engagement in support of improved service delivery through a more efficient, effective and sustainable decentralization system, UNICEF is supporting the review of the National Decentralization Policy. This, together with the review of the Local Government Act and of the PFM Act, will provide an updated, comprehensive and functional framework for the reforms and investments necessary for Malawi's decentralized systems to thrive and deliver.