

**DFID HEALTH SYSTEMS RESOURCE CENTRE  
WORKSHOP ON MEETING THE HEALTH-RELATED  
NEEDS OF THE POOR**

**A Case Study on**

The Malawi Social Action Fund experience in scaling up local activities for the poor using civil society organisations

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# Chapter one

## 1.0 Introduction and background

This chapter briefly discusses the objectives of the paper, introduces the concept of social funds and provides the country profile with a context for the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) design and operations. It also introduces the MASAF concept and the context for the design of the Social Support Programme (SSP).

### 1.1 Rationale behind the paper

The purpose of this paper is to discuss MASAF experience in delivering interventions that include safety nets for the poor. It explores the involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) in implementing the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF), which is a tool to scale up or increase interventions for the poor. It also outlines lessons learnt and makes recommendations for improved collaboration in providing services for the poor. For Malawi, MASAF represents a major instrument to achieve the objectives of the poverty reduction policy. It is an innovative model for quick disbursement and direct financing of community level activities that are demand driven. These are implemented in a participatory manner on one hand and a safety net operation for mitigating and managing risks for vulnerable and marginalised groups on the other. For the CSOs, MASAF represents a capacity building mechanism and a way of scaling up activities for vulnerable groups.

This paper discusses the use of a social fund to deliver services to the poor by drawing lessons from the MASAF experience. It outlines CSO involvement in social fund activities, presents the advantages of involving CSOs in the design and implementation of interventions for the poor, highlights key success factors, discusses risks of involving CSOs in delivering interventions for the poor and looks at factors that should be taken into account in selecting individual CSO partners. It also makes recommendations for achieving improved collaboration.

### 1.2 Social Fund Concept

Social funds are quick disbursing instruments that enable direct financing of community-managed projects that meet a variety of urgent needs. These include


social and economic infrastructure rehabilitation and construction, nutritional programmes for mothers and infants, micro finance support and safety net interventions. The principles underpinning social funds are empowerment of the poor and vulnerable through capacity building, and effective participation in development management. Community participation in MASAF includes the management of project funds by communities through a project management committee that is democratically elected by community members. There are also robust implementation procedures, which are responsive to the changing environment, as well as inbuilt transparency and accountability mechanisms. The inclusion of flexibility as one of the design principles of MASAF helps the fund to better respond to the needs of the poor.

Several studies confirm that social funds are cost-effective because of low overheads and administrative costs, and because they generally provide infrastructure at much lower cost than public sector agencies. In terms of financial and public accountability, social funds also tend to outperform other development interventions. A study of the cost effectiveness of MASAF found that the costs of MASAF-funded projects were 28% lower than those funded by NGOs and other donors (EMC Jatula Associates, 2003)

However, if implemented in isolation social funds cannot meet the social and economic needs of the poor due to limited resource availability. In addition, social fund outreach to the poor can be compromised by poor targeting mechanisms, limited promotion, weak technical assistance and lack of financial incentives for CSOs to expand operations to poor areas. There is also a trade-off between rapid implementation of activities and building institutional and technical capacity. Particularly in poor areas, more time and technical assistance is required.

## 1.3 Country Profile

Table 1

THE WORLD BANK GROUP		A World Free of Poverty		
		HOME		
<b>Malawi Data Profile</b>				
<b>Click on the indicator to view a definition</b>				
	1997	2000	2001	
<b>People</b>				
Population, total	9.7 million	10.3 million	10.5 million	
Population growth (annual %)	2.2	2.1	2.0	
National poverty rate (% of population)	..	..	..	
Life expectancy (years)	40.7	38.8	38.2	
Fertility rate (births per woman)	6.4	6.3	6.2	
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	126.6	117.0	114.0	
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 children)	..	188.0	183.0	
Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	..	55.6	..	
Child malnutrition, weight for age (% of under 5)	..	25.0	..	
Child immunization, measles (% of under 12 mos)	87.0	83.0	82.0	
Prevalence of HIV (female, % ages 15-24)	..	..	14.9	
Illiteracy total (% age 15 and above)	42.4	39.9	39.0	
Illiteracy female (% of age 15 and above)	56.7	53.5	52.4	
Primary completion rate, total (% age group)	..	..	..	
Primary completion rate, female (% age group)	..	..	..	
Net primary enrollment (% relevant age group)	..	100.6	..	
Net secondary enrollment (% relevant age group)	..	24.9	..	
<b>Environment</b>				
Surface area (sq. km)	118.5 thousand	118.5 thousand	118.5 thousand	
Forests (1,000 sq. km)	..	26,010.0	..	
Deforestation (average annual % 1990-2000)	..	2.4	..	
Water use (% of total resources)	..	1,668.0	..	
CO2 emissions (metric tons per capita)	0.1	..	..	
Access to improved water source (% of total pop.)	..	57.0	..	
Access to improved sanitation (% of urban pop.)	..	96.0	..	
<b>Economy</b>				
GNI, Atlas method (current US\$)	2.1 billion	1.7 billion	1.7 billion	
GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$)	220.0	170.0	160.0	
GDP (current \$)	2.5 billion	1.7 billion	1.7 billion	
GDP growth (annual %)	3.8	1.7	-1.5	
GDP implicit price deflator (annual % growth)	7.8	25.2	26.1	
Value added in agriculture (% of GDP)	33.7	36.5	34.0	
Value added in industry (% of GDP)	18.8	17.4	17.9	
Value added in services (% of GDP)	47.5	46.0	48.1	
Exports of goods and services (% of GDP)	22.5	26.4	26.0	
Imports of goods and services (% of GDP)	35.3	38.5	38.0	
Gross capital formation (% of GDP)	12.2	12.5	10.9	
Current revenue, excluding grants (% of GDP)	..	..	..	
Overall budget balance, including grants (% of GDP)	..	..	..	
<b>Technology and infrastructure</b>				
Fixed lines and mobile telephones (per 1,000 people)	4.4	9.1	10.6	
Telephone average cost of local call (US\$ per three minutes)	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Personal computers (per 1,000 people)	..	1.2	1.3	
Internet users	500.0	15,000.0	20,000.0	
Paved roads (% of total)	19.0	..	..	
Aircraft departures	3,600.0	4,800.0	4,700.0	
<b>Trade and finance</b>				
Trade in goods as a share of GDP (%)	52.0	54.1	49.2	
Trade in goods as a share of goods GDP (%)	90.6	93.5	87.6	
High-technology exports (% of manufactured exports)	..	..	..	
Net barter terms of trade (1995=100)	111.5	94.0	..	
Foreign direct investment, net inflows in reporting country	22.1 million	45.0 million	58.4 million	

#### 1.4 MASAF CONCEPT

The Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) was conceived and established as a poverty alleviation instrument within the Poverty Alleviation Policy (PAP) Framework of the Government of Malawi in July 1995. One of the principle tenets of the Policy Framework is that "poverty Alleviation should not be seen as charity, but a process through which the poor are empowered to improve their plight and contribute to national development." MASAF has enshrined this principle by choosing process and empowerment as key operative terms that underpin its philosophy and strategy.

MASAF represents a radical change of emphasis in development approaches in Malawi and remains a key element of the Malawi Government poverty alleviation programme. MASAF offers a truly bottom up approach by enabling communities to take charge of their development in a practical way. Communities choose their own project, elect a committee to run the project and handle project funds. Communities are also required to plan and implement the maintenance of the project.

The Government of Malawi has so far obtained two credits from the World Bank to finance the MASAF. The first credit amounting to US\$56 million was obtained in May 1996 while the second credit of US\$66 million was obtained in February 1999. Due to the success of the two phases and the overwhelming demand, which is a reflection of poverty in the country, the Malawi Government has now decided to prepare a new MASAF programme.

## **Chapter Two**

### **2.0 Scaling up of MASAF**

The scale-up of MASAF activities has had economic, physical and institutional dimensions.

#### **2.1 Economic scale up**

Economic scale-up has entailed broadening the financial resource base for implementation of pro-poor economic interventions. During the initial phase, MASAF was funded by the World Bank, the Government of Malawi and the participating communities. The second phase of MASAF saw an increase in sources of funding, including the establishment of a DFID funded MASAF public works programme called Improved Livelihood through Public Works (IL TPWP). The implementation of the project was sub-contracted to Care Malawi. In addition, sound financial management and accountability processes qualified MASAF for additional financial resources from the Government of Malawi to implement Relief Cash for Work to mitigate the effects of the 2000 drought. Lastly, UNAIDS provided programme acceleration funds to build the capacity of MASAF staff in responding to HIV/AIDS challenges.

#### **2.2 Physical Scale up**

This has entailed an increased quantity and range of interventions as a result of the enlarged funding portfolio, to respond to the changing needs of the poor communities, and to bridge existing gaps.

##### **2.2.1 Social Support Projects**

A midterm review in 1998 revealed that MASAF was not substantially addressing the needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups, and that vulnerability was being compounded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In order to better address the issues highlighted by the review, a new component of MASAF was created called the Sponsored Sub Projects (SSP).

Consultation with CSOs assisted MASAF to define target groups and the CSO and project eligibility criteria for funding. Target groups include orphans, street children, the aged, those infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS, and people with disabilities. The funding criteria include audited accounts, community ties, a consistent track record and sound management structure. The SSP component is a safety net operation designed to reduce vulnerability and assist the disadvantaged to manage and /or cope with risk. The strategy is to strengthen indigenous survival mechanisms to enable vulnerable groups to cope with

increased risk. To this end, US\$500,000 was allocated to pilot the idea of reaching vulnerable and marginalised groups through sponsoring agencies that had experience and expertise in the areas of concern. Twelve non-governmental organisations were funded to implement activities that would benefit vulnerable group members and their families. Activities piloted included skills training (vocational and life), nutrition programmes, economic empowerment, early childhood development, home-based care for orphans and the chronically ill and public awareness and attitude change activities.

Unlike the other MASAF funded components, Information, Education and Communication (IEC) was deliberately kept at a low level. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, issues of vulnerability are sensitive in nature, hence there is a need for specialised skills and expertise in the preparation and delivery of messages. Secondly, there is a need to test and fine-tune procedures and systems before raising expectations.

Initial efforts in the pilot areas proved successful in building partnerships and networks, and in establishing organisational structures and arrangements in pilot focal communities. This resulted in overwhelming demand for similar services from elsewhere, leading to the scale-up of activities.

An estimated 1.5 million disadvantaged and marginalised people have benefited from the Social Support Programme. The overwhelming demand for orphan care assistance led to rapid expansion of this aspect of the programme from the pilot phase. This demand arose out of the debilitating effects of HIV/AIDS that have left children of all ages, in rural and peri-urban areas, bereft of parental or social support. Many of these, in desperation, have turned to the streets, supporting themselves through crime and prostitution. Others have found shelter and support – though often meager – through family, or help through the efforts of community and faith based groups operating on 'shoestring' budgets run by untrained, though dedicated volunteers.

Caring for orphans cuts across a spectrum of activities. Skill training, income generation, nutrition, food security focused agricultural activities, and early child care are all needed to meet orphan needs for food, shelter and vocational education and training. Beneficiary testimonies reveal much about the importance of these activities to participants.

## Orphan Care -testimonies

Margaret Alfred is an orphan with the Chisomo Orphan Group in Malawi's Central Region. *"My dream is to learn one of the trade skills to enable me to support my sisters and brothers,"* says Margret who is learning tailoring skills. She is one of fifty learning various skills. The Orphan Care Group received financial assistance totaling MK554,646.68 from MASAF through SSP. The money was spent on tools and materials for skills training. Margaret's dream of supporting her family finds echoes in the village of Ntonya in Southern Malawi.

In Southern Malawi the impact of HIV/AIDS in Ntonya Village has increased the Ntonya Orphan Group's determination to aid orphan headed families in 11 villages. For eighteen-year-old Regina Ottoman, a beneficiary with only Standard 4 education, the opportunity to acquire tailoring skills has kindled her hopes of supporting her mother, who is disabled and her sisters. *"I hope I 'll be able to get a job in a big clothing company so that I can help my mother and siblings,"* says Regina, one of approximately 10,000 orphans in the 11 villages.

Although orphans predominate, SSP projects are also targeted at other groups. In the Mzimba District of Northern Malawi, for example, the Kamfulu Disabled Persons Skills and Vocational Training Club has made a significant difference to the lives of the disabled and the community at large. Suzgo Nyirenda, who is deaf and dumb, acquired tinsmiths skills through the vocational school which he says has changed his life. No longer reliant on begging or handouts, he is among many who are now able to earn a living and to stay above the poverty line. The elderly also benefit from SSP. In Ntchisi, in the Central Region the Chikondi group was formed in 1998. Like many of the community based organisations (CBOs) its staff was untrained and its resources meagre. Despite this, they persevered to ease the plight of the elderly living in poverty who stayed in "dilapidated houses, without food or clothes". With the inception of MASAFs SSP

the group were able to obtain funds to rear goats. This income generating activity has enabled them to provide for 50 elderly people. Under SSP, income generating activities are many and varied. Dairy farming, chicken and goat rearing, mushroom and fish farming, knitting and tinsmithing are but a few of the sustainable activities catering for various groups.

### 2.3 Institutional scale up

The contribution of MASAF to the decentralisation process has been in the form of support to the de-concentration of central government rather than to the devolution of central government authority to local levels (1). In Malawi, the Decentralisation Policy was introduced in 1998, although implementation of elected bodies did not begin until 2000. MASAF's role in decentralisation was defined in the context of strengthening the work of District Executive Committees (DECs) made up of central government employees working in the districts supervised by central ministry agencies.

MASAF has evolved from a community-oriented forum of organisations that largely bypassed local government to a form of local development that empowers communities and helps strengthen the local institutional framework. MASAF 1 and 2, operated largely without formalised linkages with local governments. Most working arrangements that existed between the MASAF staff and the district staff were ad-hoc coordination with the District Assembly. In the case of community sub-projects, MASAF funds are channeled directly through the communities (bypassing districts), which manage and account for them through their project committees. In MASAF 3, more concerted efforts are made to build local government capacity and to assist in establishing institutional frameworks that promote local development and accountability.

A capacity building ladder supports the progressive scaling up of local government and CSO capacity through an incentive system. This enables district administrations and CSOs to receive more funding and more responsibility as they:

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note \_\_\_\_\_ (1) De-concentration refers here to the representation of central line ministries at the local level where most of the administrative, political and financial decision-making remains at the centre. Devolution refers to transferring administrative, political and financial authority to local government levels, where elected bodies may or may not have jurisdiction over these local government representatives. Devolution is typically carried out as part of a public sector reform process, with central governments in the driver's seat. Essentially, SIFs do not engage in these top-down public sector reform processes. In recent years, however, SIFs have accumulated significant

experience with preparing the ground for the devolution process, through strengthening capacities of local government, establishing efficient local development mechanisms and strengthening the accountability links between communities and local government, as is the case in Malawi and Zambia.

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# Gain the ability to facilitate community access to funding;

# Achieve the capacity to facilitate participatory identification processes, monitor and evaluate community projects for the benefit of vulnerable groups and account for project funds (level 2);

# Adopt a District Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy and are able to show that community-based projects reach those targeted by the strategy, and acquire proven design and financial management skills;

# Show continued satisfactory performance in all phases of the community project cycle;

The capacity building ladder reflects a new and phased approach to developing local government and CSO capacity. This approach helps ensure that the expectations of both communities and central government regarding the capacity at district level are realistic. The phased approach also provides an opportunity to build checks and balances into the capacity development process. It facilitates adequate monitoring and evaluation of how capacities are being developed and how they are applied.

MASAF has played an important role in decentralising financial management. Since its inception, beneficiary communities are handling community project funds through their project committees or CSOs. Taking responsibility for project funds has encouraged careful use of resources among communities. It has also enhanced their self-confidence and reduced their sense of dependency. MASAF has demonstrated that communities have the capacity to independently manage financial resources. This has translated into confidence on the part of government that CSOs are able to manage project funds if sufficiently transparent rules are put in place-addressing fiduciary issues, technical backstopping from government and so on.

## **Chapter Three**

### **3.0 Success factors, Achievements challenges and solutions**

#### **3. 1 Success factors**

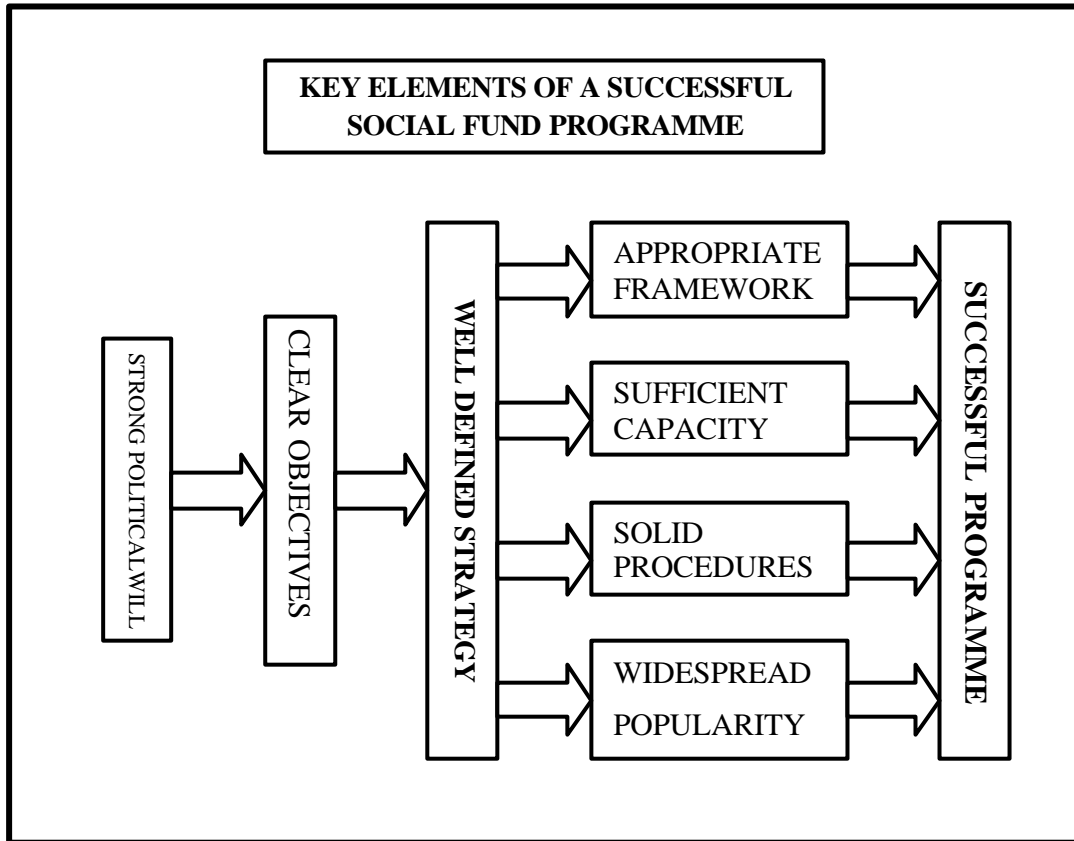
The success of MASAF is attributable to a number of factors, including strong political will and a well defined strategy with clear objectives. These factors fed into the design of an appropriate framework for delivering MASAF, which consists of simple but clear rules, procedures and systems.

In order to deliver through the framework, MASAF recruitment procedures were stringent to ensure employment of quality members of staff. Members of staff are on contract, with annual performance assessments before renewal of contracts. A code of ethics has also been developed to guide staff conduct. In addition, MASAF has invested a lot in capacity building at all levels of implementation. For the community, the main emphasis has been on building project management, leadership, financial management and basic maintenance skills. For civil society organisations, capacity building has focused on financial management, project appraisal and risk management.

MASAF also uses stringent criteria to assess partners in implementation. In addition, strict financial criteria guard against misappropriation and ensure that funds reach intended beneficiaries.

Comprehensive IEC campaigns are another tool used to raise awareness, clarify issues and report back to stakeholders. IEC has been used in MASAF as an accountability and transparency mechanism. It has facilitated attitude change and development of trust among different partners.

Table 2 below summarises the MASAF success factors



### **3.2 Achievements**

Implementing community development interventions following the principles of a social fund design has been demonstrated to have good prospects for sustainable development. This is particularly due to the collaborative nature of social funds, and their ability to galvanise commitment from key stakeholders, including the beneficiaries themselves and the public sector or government agencies concerned. Through this collaborative and de-centralised approach, MASAF has been able to transform attitudes and behaviours, successfully encouraging communities to take charge of their own development. Through direct financing, MASAF has demonstrated that, given the right orientation and technical support, communities are able to manage project implementation, which includes procurement, financial accounting and monitoring of construction works. MASAF believes that for development to be meaningful, people must be given the opportunity to express their choices within an enabling environment. This includes a clear demonstration on the part of the government and private sector to make available the financial resources and technical support that poor communities need to implement projects such as those in MASAF.

The development of a comprehensive IEC programme has created better working relationships between stakeholders by fostering an improved understanding of roles and procedures in the MASAF approach. This has led to a build-up of trust between various stakeholders, and in some cases a shift from relationships that are adversarial to those characterised by mutual respect.

As a participatory project, MASAF looks at social development as a learning and transformation process in which people engage in an exchange of knowledge and information. This process encourages reflection and helps communities to make informed choices on actions needed to fulfill communally defined developmental goals. The outcomes of the first Beneficiary Assessment, other qualitative reports and our monitoring of general public sentiments expressed in public meetings or print media, show that MASAF has not only become identified with common aspirations, but has also provided a unifying and motivating force for development activities amongst communities, irrespective of different political persuasions.

MASAF is both a philosophy and a strategy. Its operational principles of direct financing and independent sub-project management have meant that the programme has avoided the paternalistic approach which has characterised some development projects in the country. As a result, MASAF has had an impact beyond immediate project outcomes and has become something of a movement for community development.

Through MASAF, communities have not only been challenged to exercise choice and manage public resources on their own and account for the same, but have

can now influence and demand accountability from those in public offices. This influence has been so evident that some politicians have complained that the Project Management Committees are actually too powerful.

On human development and social capital formation, MASAF can claim to have created – and continues to create – a cadre of enlightened people in society who have the ability to articulate the concerns of their communities and represent others in accessing public or external development assistance. The exposure of project management committees to the challenges of direct procurement of skilled labour and project materials, and mobilising and managing participation and partnerships with other civil society and political actors, and traditional leaders has yielded tremendous benefits in terms of community development in Malawi. In the absence of local government structures and a functioning decentralisation policy, MASAF has been a catalyst for change. It has not only facilitated community infrastructural investments but has also created an institutional structure which the ongoing decentralisation efforts in the country cannot afford to ignore.

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.\* In the Participatory Process Review Case Study of MASAF by OEDCM (unpublished, September 1999) this aspect is acknowledged as follows: "Giving communities control over sub-project finances and contracting is a major departure from the way most Bank-supported projects - and indeed most donor-supported projects - are implemented,"

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Women, who traditionally have not been prominent in public life in Malawi, have begun to take front-line roles in administration and business enterprise. From the outset, MASAF took affirmative action to encourage communities to include women in project management committees. This included a stipulation that PMCs must have at least 40% female representation. This was also included as an appraisal criterion. This was one of the ways of ensuring the involvement of women in decision-making. Women are now holding key positions in the PMCs such as chairperson, secretary and treasurer.

### **3.3 CHALLENGES**

#### **3.3.1 Design Limitation**

The biggest challenge that MASAF is facing is a consequence of its own popular appeal and national coverage. This has resulted in a level of demand for MASAF projects that exceeds current capacity. It has also meant that the capacity of existing staff has been stretched. Furthermore, the community demand-driven

principle did not initially cater for social groups that could not mobilise or organise themselves to access MASAF funding. Hence the second phase of the project introduced the new Social Support Projects (SSP) component to target vulnerable and marginalised groups.

This demand for SSP continues to grow. This is attributable to a number of factors, including the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which has had far-reaching impact on all segments of society, weak institutional structures to effectively implement interventions targeted at vulnerable groups and declining economic performance, which has resulted in deprivation, inaccessibility of social and economic services and increasing pressure on performing systems. MASAF has responded to this challenge by increasing budget allocation to SSP.

### **3.3.2 Inadequate sector support**

There have been a range of problems at different levels across the different sectors. The most common problems have been the lack of standard intervention designs, constraints imposed by sectoral norms and inadequate supervision capacity. For instance, because of sector-specific stipulations, the health sector receives only 4% of funding as compared education, which receives 60%.  
*[editor's comment: unclear – does this refer to central government funding?]*

### **3.3.3 Operational Requirements**

Low literacy levels can affect implementation. There is need for Project Management Committee members to be literate and numerate. At the same time, they need to be trustworthy and dedicated individuals. In order to overcome inadequacies in accounting and bookkeeping skills, MASAF increased training for committee members from an initial 3 day period to 5 days. Justification procedures are also being moved from a system of documentation of receipts to one based largely on quality control and physical verification. It is nonetheless impressive that financial accountability is at 98%.

To boost transparency and accountability, participation in training has been broadened to include village heads. This checks the elitist tendency that has emerged among committee members in some cases. There have been instances where PMC members have isolated themselves and avoided reporting to the wider community, thereby causing suspicion and consequently affecting participation levels in the projects.

### **3.3.4 Externalities**

Difficulties that beneficiary communities and project committees have to contend with range from unfaithful contractors through to unscrupulous businesspersons

or suppliers. Using community participation as a mode of procurement entails project committees engaging in negotiations and bargaining with contractors and suppliers of goods and materials for the projects. There have been instances where contractors have not performed to standard or have defaulted on payments to their workers, who have then ended up demanding payment from the PMCs. To avoid such situations, the procedure has been changed so that once contractors are identified, they are included in the pre-implementation training programme for one day to expose them to MASAF procedures and contractual requirements.

Suppliers who have defrauded projects or have supplied poor quality goods are excluded from further selection, and unscrupulous traders are blacklisted.

### **3.3.5 Challenges specific to CSOs**

#### **3.3.5.1 Weak Institutional Structures**

Various capacity problems have affected operations. The first is the capacity of CSOs to account for funds and manage interventions in a transparent way to ensure benefits reach intended beneficiaries. There is a need for capacity building at two levels to address this issue. Capacity building at the beneficiary level will enable better monitoring of activities and create greater accountability. Capacity building is also crucial at the level of implementation to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of services.

The second capacity issue is the number of CSOs available to deliver interventions. There are few CSOs who focus specifically on vulnerability. Others have started working in this field because of newly available resources for work on vulnerability. MASAF has therefore developed stringent criteria to ensure selection of partners with the capacity to deliver vulnerability interventions effectively. This raises the issue of distribution of PIAs. Most of the well known NGOs/CBOs and faith based organisations are operating in urban centres. It is rare to find such institutions in rural areas where these services are most needed. MASAF has responded to this challenge by facilitating registration of small and unrecognised groups of volunteers working on vulnerability in rural areas. MASAF has also promoted networking as part of capacity building.

The third issue pertaining to capacity is the often limited ability of government ministries to supervise and monitor the project implementation process. Capacity in this area, as well as limited resources to implement interventions. To address this problem, MASAF has conducted some skills training within ministries. In addition MASAF has made resources available for supervision. [of staff??]

#### **3.3.5.2 Targeting**

In a country where 65% of the population is poor and 28% is described as ultra poor, it not easy to come up with targeting criteria that avoids serious inclusion and exclusion errors. MASAF defined vulnerability and its indicators in conjunction with beneficiaries. This has been a base for developing the selection criteria.

### 3.3.5.2 Monitoring

Developing monitoring indicators that would check the impact of consumables was particularly challenging. For example, it is difficult to monitor the feeding of orphans or children with malnutrition. MASAF tackled this problem by using participatory monitoring, whereby the community is able to monitor using after entitlements and frequency of occurrence as indicators.

## 3.3 LESSONS

The major lesson from the MASAF experience is that the social fund model, based on the principle of community driven development, can be a cost-effective and an efficient way of providing immediate public infrastructure and services. More importantly, it engenders the development of human potential much needed for creating self-reliant communities. Due to the success of this model, the MASAF strategy and experience has become a benchmark for community development in Malawi. Below are some of the specific lessons:

(i) Political support is imperative in the launching of any social fund. MASAF was no exception. A great deal of political will and support was invested in MASAF even before its official launch, and MASAF was promoted at the highest level. At rural and urban political rallies, the MASAF idea was endorsed and explained by the President, Ministers and Members of Parliament. "MASAF is your project" communities were told, reinforcing the idea of ownership. Political endorsement provided a strong complement to the formal IEC campaign conducted by MASAF. Political support also took on other forms. The decision that MASAF would operate as a semi-autonomous body outside the civil service structure reflected the political will and desire to make MASAF a success. As the study will show, political backing for MASAF, or indeed, any other social fund has many faces. Among these, practical support on the ground at the Ministry or District level is crucial for implementation. Where this has been lacking, it has posed some of the greatest challenges. For example, Government commitment to increasing budgetary provisions to provide staffing or financial resources has been inconsistent and at times unresponsive to MASAF objectives.

(ii) Community empowerment is the backbone of community driven projects (Wilshal 2003). The bottom-up approach taken by MASAF required a project framework that withstood undue top down influence and ensured transparency and accountability. Many lessons have been learnt in respect to empowering the communities involved. Flexibility has been both a lesson and a tool in moving

implementation forward and ensuring that all opinions were considered. Complaints by communities, for example, that the first tranche of project monies were inadequate to procurement needs led to a refinement of rigid procedures, and a balance was struck between accountability and the rate of implementation.

**(iii)** An enabling policy environment that ensures maximum recurrent budgetary support and political will to grant public resources directly to ordinary citizens is imperative.

(iv) There is a need to build on existing cultural values and indigenous institutional strengths to ensure that participation is legitimised and guaranteed. The use of traditional leaders has proved to be very effective in the case of MASAF as the entry point to communities.

(v) The institutional and management structure of the social fund agency requires a significant measure of autonomy. This must be determined and negotiated between the Government and the Bank to ensure that project management is responsive to the practical realities of a people-centred development process.

(vi) By directing development management into the hands of communities it is critical that operating principles and information about them is shared and valued by all that have a stake in the process.