



Joint Mid-Term Review of the UBALE and Njira Projects

USAID-funded Title II Development Food Assistance Projects in Malawi led and Catholic Relief Services (UBALE) and Project Concern International (PCI)

Award Numbers:

AID-FFP-A-14-00006 & AID-OAA-A-15-00019 (UBALE)

AID-FFP-A-15-00003 & AID-OAA-A-15-00018 (Njira)



Summary Report (JMTR Report, Volume I)

5 June 2017 (Final)



Acknowledgement

The members of the JMTR team would like to gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the staff of the UBALE and Njira Projects. Special thanks go to the staff from all of the consortium partners who went out of their way to provide logistical support to enable the team to implement an intensive schedule with a large number of reviewers and observers. We would also like to thank the technical and implementing staff from all of the partners for supporting the field work, participating in various events during the review, and providing insights while answering our multitudinous questions. Both projects were able to recruit translators for the exercise who performed admirably in helping team members understand the context and responses from participants. Innumerable project participants and beneficiaries have also provided useful responses to our questions and participated in stimulating discussions. Our gratitude goes out to them as well.

Hopefully we've listened well, our observations are grounded in reality, our assessment is accurate, and our recommendations are useful.

Sincerely,

Rupert Best, Independent Consultant
Aaron Chassy, Catholic Relief Services HQ
Amos Chigwenembe, Catholic Relief Services Malawi
Mike DeVries, Independent Consultant
Charlotte Germain-Aubrey, USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict
and Humanitarian Assistance HQ
Mary Pat Kieffer, Project Concern International HQ
Mark Kumbukani Black, CARE Malawi
Mike Manske, USAID Food for Peace HQ
Lucy Mungoni, USAID Malawi
Kllian Mutiro, USAID Food For Peace Southern Africa
Amy Sunseri, Project Concern International HQ
Marit Wilkerson, USAID Bureau of Food Security HQ

Cover pictures taken by Douglas La Rose

This report was made public by support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the Government of the United States of America

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
II. BACKGROUND FOR THE JMTR	4
A. Purpose of the JMTR	4
B. JMTR Team	5
C. JMTR Schedule and Process	5
III. HISTORY AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROJECTS	7
A. Factors Occurring at Project Start-up	7
B. Post-Start-up Issues	8
C. General Contextual Issues	8
IV. REVIEW OF THE UBALE PROJECT	9
A. Overview of the UBALE Project	9
B. Summary of Project Progress	10
C. Recommendations for the Remaining Life of UBALE	13
1. Theme A: Life-Changing Impact	13
2. Theme B: Governance	20
3. Theme C: Collaborative Learning and Action for Adaptive Management	23
4. Theme D: Cross-Purpose Integration	24
5. Theme E: Using Food Strategically	26
V. REVIEW OF THE NJIRA PROJECT	29
A. Overview of the Njira Project	29
B. Summary of Project Progress	31
C. Recommendations for the Remaining Life of Njira	33
1. Theme A: Sustainable Impact	33
2. Theme B: Program Quality	38
3. Theme C: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	44
4. Theme D: Implementation Systems	45
5. Theme E: Using Food Strategically	48
VI. JOINT LEARNING	50
VII. HIGHER LEVEL OBSERVATIONS	51
VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS	52
ANNEXES	
Annex A: JMTR Team Members	53
Annex B: Detailed Observations and Additional Recommendations for UBALE	54
Annex C: Detailed Observations and Additional recommendations for Njira	94

JMTR REPORT, VOLUME II, Contains the following:

Initial Scope of Work for the Malawi JMTR
Updated JMTR Protocol Describing Actual Process Used
Data Collection Tools
Data Collection Schedules
Persons Interviewed and Sites Visited
Final Workshop Plans for the Verification Workshops

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Goal, Purposes and Sub-Purposes for the UBALE Project	9
Table 2. Goal, Purposes and Sub-Purposes for the Njira Project	30

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACPC	Area Civil protection Committee (found at the TA level)
ADC	Area Development Committee (found at the TA Level)
ADDRMO	Assistant District Disaster Risk Management Officer
ANC	Ante-Natal Care
ANCC	Area Nutrition Coordinating Committee (found at the TA level)
CAHW	Community Animal Health Worker
CBM	Community-Based Management (for WASH)
CBDA	Community-Based Distribution Officer
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CCFLS	Community-led Complementary Feeding and Learning Sessions
CDF	Community Development Funds (USAID funds disbursed through the OAA)
CLAN	Community Leaders for Action on Nutrition (found at the GVH level)
CNFA	Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture
CoP	Chief of Party
CPC	Civil Protection Committee (found at the GVH, TA and District-levels)
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSB	Corn Soy Blend
DFAP	Development Food Assistance Program
DiNER	Diversity and Nutrition for Enhanced Resilience
DIP	Detailed Implementation Plan
DNCC	District Nutrition Coordinating Committee
DoDMA	Department of Disaster Management Affairs
EI	Emmanuel International
FFA	Food for Assets
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoM	Government of Malawi
GVH	Group Village Headman (the lowest GoM structure encompassing a number of villages)
HSA	Health Surveillance Assistant
IGA	Income-Generating Activity
IMCI	Integrated Management of Childhood Illness
IPTT	Indicator Performance Tracking Table
ITSH	Inland Transport Storage and Handling
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
JMTR	Joint Mid-Term Review
LGAP	Local Government Accountability and Performance
LoA	Life of Activity
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCHN	Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoAIWD	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development
MoGCDSW	Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare
MoH	Ministry of Health

MUSCCO	Malawi Union of Savings and Cooperatives
MVAC	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee
MWK	Malawi Kwacha
NASFAM	National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAA	Office of Acquisition and Assistance
ONSE	Organized Network of Services for Everyone's Health
PCI	Project Concern International
PLW	Pregnant and Lactating Women
PM	Project Manager
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
PM2A	Preventing Malnutrition in Children Under 2 Approach
PMU	Project Management Unit
PREP	Pipeline and Resource Estimate Proposal
PSP	Private Service Provider
PVCA	Participatory Vulnerability Capacity Assessment
PVO	Private Voluntary Organization
RMNCH	Reproductive Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
SANE	Strengthening Agriculture and Nutrition Extension Services
SBCC	Social and Behavioral Change Communications
SILC	Savings and Internal Lending Community
SMART	Skills for Marketing and Rural Transformation
TA	Traditional Authority (a GoM structure encompassing a number of GVHs)
TEEC	Tools for Enterprise and Education Consultants
ToC	Theory of Change
ToT	Training of Trainers
TWG	Technical Working Group
UBALE	United in Building and Advancing Life Expectations
VCPC	Village Civil Protection Committee (found at the GVH level)
VDC	Village Development Committee (found at the GVH level)
VNRMC	Village Natural Resource Management Committee (found at the GVH level)
VSLA	Village Savings and Lending Association
WALA	Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WE/VSL	Women's Empowerment/Village Savings and Lending

Joint Mid-Term Review (JMTR) of the UBALE and Njira Projects SUMMARY REPORT

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food for Peace (FFP) organized a Joint Mid-Term Review (JMTR) of the two USAID-funded Development Food Assistance Projects (DFAPs) in Malawi being implemented by consortia led by Catholic Relief Services and Project Concern International. The purpose of the JMTR was to formulate recommendations for the remaining lives of the two projects to increase effectiveness in achieving sustainable impact and increase efficiency in use of resources. The JMTR was planned and implemented over the period from mid-January through early May, 2017, with information gathering and analysis undertaken in Malawi from March 2 through April 7.

The JMTR found that both projects faced substantial challenges during the project start-up period beginning in late 2014, including late approval of funds from the USAID Office of Acquisitions and Assistance, significant demands on staff time for unexpected start-up workshops¹, and the occurrence of floods in 2015 and then rainfall shortages in 2015 and 2016 forcing the projects to provide emergency support. Despite the challenges, both projects have established solid foundations upon which to build in the remaining life of the projects.

UBALE Project Review. The United in Building and Advancing Life Expectations (UBALE²) Project is being implemented in 26 Traditional Authorities in the three districts of Nsanje, Chikwawa and Rural Blantyre by a consortium composed of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), CARE, the Chikwawa Catholic Diocese, the National Cooperative Business Association/CLUSA, the National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM) and Save the Children. With a goal to reduce chronic malnutrition and food insecurity while increasing resilience among vulnerable populations, the project has three purposes focused on increasing income, improving nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and children under two, and empowering communities to contribute to sustainable development. The targeted number of direct beneficiary households is 233,619 vulnerable households (approximately 1.2 million people), and the total cost for the project is estimated at US\$ 61,801,852.

The JMTR found that the UBALE Project is a well-managed project with few significant problems in implementation systems or partnerships. Relationships with government partners are strong, particularly at the District level on down to the frontlines. Significant group formation has been completed under all purposes, providing a strong platform on which to continue building for the next two years, and plans have been developed for rolling out various trainings that are still pending with these groups. Most notably, UBALE is pioneering an approach in a FFP-supported project that more deliberately strengthens government systems for delivery of project interventions.

In its remaining life, the UBALE Project should focus on five major themes, and the JMTR has formulated twenty high priority recommendations in support of these themes. One of these themes is to focus on *achieving life-changing impact* for a significant number of households.

¹ These were unexpected at the time of the design of UBALE and Njira so the first year implementation targets were not set in consideration of the time that would be needed for the workshops. These workshops are now standard practice for Title II projects.

² UBALE means "partnership" in Chichewa.

Under this theme, the JMTR has proposed eight recommendations starting with reviewing the project's Theory of Change and targeting strategies, identifying appropriate interventions for the highly vulnerable, intensifying capacity building across all purposes, enabling expanded farm business, broadening UBALE's work with the GoM health system, strengthening WASH interventions, expanding the focus on out-of-school youth, and maintaining staffing levels to be able to deepen capacity building across purposes.

Because the UBALE Project is working more closely with and through government structures, a great opportunity exists for the project to have significant impact on the supply of good governance by government, the practice of good governance by all groups and partners, and the demand for good governance by Malawians at all levels. **Governance** is a second theme for UBALE, and the JMTR has formulated four recommendations related to social accountability mechanisms, internal governance capacities and demand for good governance, gender champions, and public and private policy and practice.

The third theme for the UBALE project is entitled **collaborative learning and action for adaptive management** and refers to making the project's Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) systems more functional in providing information to decision-makers. Recommendations under this theme focus on the Consortium-Management Information Systems (C-MIS) and the capacities of partners to operationalize the MEAL systems.

The UBALE Project was designed to use an integrated, holistic approach to increase incomes, prevent child malnutrition, and strengthen community and household resilience; and all three of these sets of interventions are being implemented widely across the project area. The opportunity exists to implement a fully integrated approach, and the fourth theme for UBALE is to achieve better **cross-purpose integration** by identifying and implementing deliberate and thoughtful linkages across the three purposes in the project. The recommendations from the JMTR describe opportunities to integrate agriculture and nutrition and to integrate across all purposes in recognition of a new normal in Malawi of recurring dry spells and floods.

The fifth theme for UBALE is to step back and reevaluate the use of food, looking toward **using food more strategically** to achieve impact in the remaining life of the project. The JMTR has identified recommendations for both the use of food in the MCHN rations as well as for the use of food in food for assets projects.

Njira Project Review. The Njira³ Pathways to Sustainable Food Security Project is being implemented in 11 Traditional Authorities in the two districts of Balaka and Machinga by a consortium composed of Project Concern International (PCI), Emmanuel International, and Agriscan. With a goal to improve food security among vulnerable populations, the project has three purposes focused on increasing income, improving health and nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and children under five, and improving capacities to prepare for, manage and respond to shocks. The targeted number of direct beneficiaries is 244,248 vulnerable people (approximately 48,450 households), and the estimated total project cost is US\$ 39,367,384.

The JMTR found that the Njira Project is more aligned with a typical NGO-style of delivery in a FFP project, with significant frontline staff working directly with beneficiaries and intermediaries. Despite the challenges at the start of the project, a solid foundation has been established upon which to build in the remaining life of the project. In addition, the Njira Project

³ *Njira* means "footpath or way of achieving something" in Chichewa.

has developed strong relationships with government all the way up to the national level and has achieved effective cross-purpose integration at the front-lines. The project needs to think more systematically, however, about the sustainability of the impact that is being achieved; and given the extraordinarily wide array of activities being implemented, the project also needs to narrow its focus on interventions likely to have the greatest impact on the project goal.

In its remaining life, the Njira Project should focus on five major themes, and the JMTR has formulated twenty-one high priority recommendations in support of these themes. The first of these themes is to focus on *achieving sustainable impact*. The JMTR has proposed six recommendations covering the project's sustainability plan and exit strategies, governance interventions, local economic development plans, sustainability plans for water infrastructure, engagement with health community structures, and the sustainability of the Ubwino Centers.

The Njira Project has undertaken a very wide range of activities across the three purposes; but for many of these, the project has only been able to start the process of achieving impact. In the remaining two years, the focus should be on deepening the capacity building that is being done so that the behavioral change outcomes that result are firmly entrenched. Under this theme of *program quality*, the JMTR has proposed recommendations related to improving the quality of the distributions being done under Purpose 1, expanding farm business, strengthening social and behavioral change approaches for preventing child malnutrition, achieving true capacity building, strengthening key maternal and child health services provided by the GoM, strengthening the disaster response function of the civil protection committee structure, and strengthening the services of gender champions.

The third theme for the Njira Project focuses on the project's *Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning* (MEL) systems toward making them more functional in providing information to decision-makers. The one major recommendation under this theme is to focus on making the project's MEL system fully functional.

Even a well-designed project can fail if *implementation systems*⁴ are not functioning well, and the JMTR found that the Njira Project is being held back from effective and efficient implementation by some of its systems. Under this fourth theme for Njira, the JMTR has recommendations related to operational planning, procurement, commodity management, and human resource management.

The fifth theme for Njira is, like for UBALE, to step back and reevaluate the use of food toward *using food more strategically* to achieve impact. The JMTR has identified recommendations for both the use of food in the MCHN rations as well as the use of food in food for assets projects.

Joint Learning. The JMTR identified a number of areas in which the two projects can benefit significantly from the sharing of experience, lessons learned and best practices. These areas include finding ways to address the community expectations syndrome, finding ways to reduce the data demands on the M&E systems, sharing MCHN training curricula and manuals, sharing experience on good governance interventions and gender champions capacity building, sharing ideas on enhancing implementation systems, and sharing experience on ways for using food more strategically.

⁴ Implementation systems include the management systems used for planning, problem-solving & decision-making; partner roles, responsibilities and relationships; the mechanisms for ensuring integration across project components and complementarity with other development programs; and the resource management systems for money, commodities, staff and administrative support.

Higher Level Observations. The JMTR also identified a number of areas that go beyond the scope of either project to address completely but are important to be brought to the attention of USAID since they affect the ability of the two projects to maximize impact with efficient use of resources. These areas include a larger strategy to address the expectations syndrome, addressing the increasingly visible corruption, and capitalizing on potential synergies between Feed the Future (FtF) and FFP projects.

Both UBALE and Njira have established solid foundations upon which to build despite the contextual constraints they faced in the first two years. Each project has its own challenges for the next two years, but both projects have strong potential to be recognized as “great” projects if they are able to make adjustments as recommended by the JMTR.

II. BACKGROUND FOR THE JMTR

A. Purpose of the JMTR

The Malawi Joint Mid-Term Review was a formative evaluation exercise intended to review the progress of the UBALE and Njira Projects in producing planned outputs, to assess the intended and unintended effects of these outputs, and to examine the quality of various processes being used to implement the program *to formulate recommendations to be implemented in the remaining life of the two projects*. These recommendations are oriented around (a) scaling up effective interventions, (b) modifying interventions to improve effectiveness, (c) suspending interventions that are not effective enough relative to investment, (d) piloting new interventions relevant for targeted impact groups, (e) improving the effectiveness of implementation systems, or (f) improving efficiency in use of resources. The review process tailored and prioritized recommendations for each project and ensured as much as possible that they are implementable within the time frame remaining and with the resources available to the two projects.

Investigations during the JMTR focused on the following areas:

- Assessing the *overall strategy* of each project in terms of its relevance for addressing food insecurity with targeted impact groups, taking into account contextual changes that may have occurred since the projects began implementation.
- Assessing the quality of *project inputs, implementation and outputs* to identify factors that enhance or detract from the efficiency, quality, acceptability, and effectiveness of the activities’ implemented.
- Identifying *changes*⁵ (*intended and unintended outcomes*) associated with project activities and outputs, assess how well the observed changes support the theory of change and logic of the results frameworks, and identify factors (both internal and external) in the implementation or context that impede or promote the achievement of targeted results.
- Assessing the effectiveness of *coordination and collaboration* with external organizations that are critical to achieving the project goals and purposes.
- Assessing processes and use of *monitoring and evaluation* evidence for adjusting project strategies, as well as how the projects capture, document and disseminate knowledge generated by the project and seek out, test and adapt new ideas and approaches to enhance project effectiveness or efficiency.

⁵ These changes can occur at the individual, household, community and higher levels, including systemic changes.

- Determining the extent to which outcomes, systems, and services are designed and being implemented to continue after the project ends and assessing progress made on implementing *sustainability strategies*.
- Determining the effectiveness of each project in addressing the *cross-cutting themes* unique to each project.
- Reviewing *implementation systems*, including management systems, partner relations, commodity management systems, financial management systems, human resource management systems and materials management systems to identify recommendations for improving the effectiveness of implementation and/or the efficiency in use of project resources.

Volume II of the JMTR Report contains the JMTR Protocol which provides more detail on the purpose and objectives of the Malawi JMTR.

B. JMTR Team

The Malawi Joint Mid-Term Review was implemented by a team composed of representatives from different departments in USAID and representatives from the PVOs implementing each project, along with two independent consultants. The 10-person team that conducted the review of the UBALE Project included the two independent consultants, four USAID representatives, and four PVO representatives. The 9-person team that conducted the review of the Njira Project included the two independent consultants, four USAID representatives, and three PVO representatives. Seven persons, including the two independent consultants, three USAID representatives and two PVO representatives participated on both reviews. Annex A contains the list of team members on each review, and the JMTR Protocol in the JMTR Summary Report, Volume II, contains details on assigned responsibilities for each team member.

D. JMTR Schedule and Process

1. Schedules. The JMTR is being undertaken (some steps will occur after the completion of this report) in four phases:

- Phase 1: Evaluation Preparation (Mid-January through March 7)
- Phase 2 (in Malawi): Review of the UBALE Project (March 8 - 23)
- Phase 3 (in Malawi): Review of the Njira Project (March 24 - April 7)
- Phase 4: Evaluation Recommendations Finalization and Processing (April 10 - June 21)

Actual implementation schedules including the full schedule for the JMTR as well as field schedules for the reviews of each project are provided in the JMTR Summary Report, Volume II. Details on the various activities undertaken in each phase are also provided in Volume II.

2. Overview of the JMTR Process. The following steps were undertaken over the course of implementing the JMTR.

Step 1: The JMTR Protocol, including team member assignments and data collection tools were developed during the preparation phase.

Step 2: Available background documents, including project databases, were reviewed by JMTR Team Members to understand project strategies and identify achievements and challenges.

Step 3: Project orientations were provided to the JMTR Team by each project to clarify project strategies and finalize the identification of major types of participants that would need to be consulted as part of the review process.

Step 4: Qualitative methods, including key informant interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and activity observations, were used to gather information from a variety of sources at multiple levels.

- Interviews were held with available project stakeholders based in Lilongwe
- Interviews were held with project-level implementing staff and stakeholders for each project based in Blantyre for UBALE and Blantyre or Zomba for Njira.
- In each of the five districts in which either UBALE or Njira are implementing activities, interviews were held with implementing staff and district-level stakeholders.
- In selected Group Village Headman (GVH) locations, interviews or FGDs were held with project participants and community leaders.

Step 5: The information obtained from these sources was analyzed and major observations and preliminary recommendations formulated.

Step 6: These major observations and preliminary recommendations were presented to project staff (in separate workshops for each project) for verification and refinement to ensure that the observations reflected reality and the recommendations were relevant, realistic and achievable, given the resources and time available for each project.

Step 7: The JMTR Team reviewed the full list of recommendations to this point and, based on information from the Verification Workshop in Step 6 as well as on additional information from project management teams, formulated a priority list of recommendations organized around major themes for the remaining life of each project.

Step 8: The themes and priority list of recommendations were presented to the leadership of the organizations implementing each project for additional review and refinement.

Step 9: A summary of the themes and refined list of recommendations was presented to USAID stakeholders in Malawi.

Step 10 (This Report): A draft report summarizing the findings and recommendations from the JMTR has been developed.

Step 11 (mid-May): A JMTR Recommendations Finalization and Processing Workshop will be held in Malawi to review and finalize the recommendations and develop operational plans for addressing selected recommendations in the upcoming PREP.

Step 12 (Early June): The JMTR Summary Reports (Volume I and II) will be finalized.

Step 13 (Mid-June): Action Plans for operationalizing JMTR recommendations will be finalized and incorporated in each project's PREP.

3. JMTR Limitations. Following completion of the field work in Malawi, a survey was conducted with JMTR Team Members and each project's management team to identify limitations that affected the quality of the JMTR. A summary of the findings from this survey is provided in the JMTR Summary Report, Volume II. The main findings were that the time available in-country for information gathering and analysis was insufficient for (a) obtaining information from project stakeholders based in Lilongwe and (b) analyzing information and

preparing for the Verification Workshops and Stakeholder Debriefings. This process review summary has much additional information, however, intended to be useful for the design and implementation of future JMTRs.

III. HISTORY AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROJECTS

The JMTR team examined the history of the projects, particularly how they have evolved since inception and the critical features of the operating environment that have affected, positively or negatively, project implementation and the impact that has been achieved. The following major factors were identified by the JMTR.

A. Factors Occurring at Project Start-up

Both the UBALE and Njira Projects began implementation in late September of 2014, and both received resources from USAID FFP for 202e, ITSH and commodities and from the USAID Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OAA) for Community Development Funds (CDF). The latter represented the bulk of the funds available for project implementation, and a three-month delay occurred at the beginning of the project in the approval of the OAA funds. This not only retarded project start-up, but it also resulted in the loss of the first cropping season for both project's agricultural interventions.

Beginning shortly after project start-up, a number of start-up workshops were imposed on the two projects, including a USAID Financial Regulations Workshop, a "*Learning Through-out the Project Cycle: Guided Reflection at Start-up*" Workshop organized by TOPS, an initial Theory of Change and M&E Workshop organized by USAID/FFP & FANTA, a second M&E Workshop organized by TOPS, and a Commodity Management Workshop organized by TOPS. All of these were useful and are now a normal part of the start-up process for any Development Food Assistance Project (DFAP). For UBALE and Njira, however, these were unexpected and disrupted planned project activities. In addition, first year implementation targets had been set in the absence of these start-up events, so they were set higher than could be achieved with the loss of time that had to be devoted to the start-up workshops. The M&E Workshops were particular disruptive for UBALE since they resulted in a major overhaul of the Theory of Change (ToC) for the project, basically retro-fitting a FFP-style ToC on a project strategy that had been developed using a CRS ToC.

In January 2015, floods occurred in Southern Malawi, displacing over 150,000 people and damaging over 60,000 hectares of crops, significantly affecting many households targeted by UBALE or Njira. The flood impact was further exacerbated by rainfall shortages in February and March 2015, resulting in severe food shortages for 450,000 people. Both projects obtained additional resources from private sources, FFP or other donors to implement emergency response and recovery interventions⁶ for the better part of 2015.

In January 2016, the rains again failed across Malawi, attributed to El Niño, and the GoM declared a State of Disaster in April 2016. Both projects accelerated plans for making food available to affected households through maternal and child health and nutrition (MCHN) feeding or food-for-assets (FFA) activities, and both projects also obtained additional resources

⁶ Njira obtained OFDA support for FLORAS (Flood Response for Agriculture and Sanitation) and USAID Support for NERP (Njira Emergency Response Project)

to continue emergency and recovery interventions⁷. Thus, the first two years of project activities were focused on emergency response and recovery with the bulk of targeted households, rather than on the planned activities in the original proposals. Distributing food through MCHN feeding or FFA activities (an emergency response) was more critical at this time than inducing behavioral change and building community assets (the proposed development approach).

B. Post-Start-up Issues

Following the M&E Workshops held in the first six months of implementation, both projects submitted revised M&E Plans. FFP advised both projects not to wait for approval of these plans but to proceed with setting up their M&E systems as per the revised plans, while the plans were reviewed for final approval. Final approval of these plans by FFP did not actually get done until January 2017, however. Despite the approval given by FFP to proceed with setting up M&E systems at start-up, the absence of the approved plan for an extended period held the project back from full implementation of the systems.

For FY 17, both projects submitted Pipeline and Resource Estimate Proposals (PREPs) as scheduled in June 2016, on the expectation that both FFP and OAA resources would be made available in October. The FFP resources were made available at the expected time, but the approval of the OAA (CDF) funds came in in January⁸, and the funds were not released until February 2017. As a result, the lead organizations for both projects had to front their own resources to keep the projects going as planned. This was particularly problematic for UBALE since it is much larger than Njira and has at least one implementing partner that does not have a resource base to cover cash flow breaks.

C. General Contextual Issues

The JMTR found two significant contextual issues that are affecting the ability of both projects to achieve sustainable impact. One of these is the high levels of expectations from communities (and from some government staff at lower levels relative to a Daily Stipend Allowance) for handouts from NGO projects. Multiple projects working in the same geographic areas are faced with competition for the attention of community participants and government counterparts, who usually choose to give more attention to the project that gives them more goods. Communities have also become more interested in finding out what "things" they can get from a project, such as food, seed, tools, and other equipment, rather than giving importance to the ideas that projects are beginning. This is particularly evident in Southern Malawi which has seen significant donor support over the last decade. The problem was further reinforced at the start-up of UBALE and Njira, since the first project activities seen by project participants were distribution activities implemented in response to the floods and crop failures in 2015 and 2016. Suggestions for addressing this are discussed in Section VII (Higher Level Observations).

A second contextual issue identified by the JMTR is the increasingly visible, unchecked corruption that has been occurring at the national level. The inability to hold persons

⁷ UBALE called forward pre-positioned food from Durban. Njira obtained USAID Support for the Emergency Food Security Response (EFSP) and OFDA Support for the Malawi Emergency Response in Tandem (MERIT)

⁸ It has been learned that, since the original approval of the CDF funds by the OAA happened in December, all subsequent approvals for the project would happen in December since the funding covered a year of operations. The projects were not aware of this when they developed their implementation plans for FY 17, however, so it appeared to them that the funds were delayed.

accountable for incidents like "cashgate"⁹ and "maizegate"¹⁰ have sent the message down to all levels that it is possible to get away with this sort of corruption. This has implications for development projects in general to be able to achieve long-term sustainable development through the most efficient use of donor resources. The lost resources from this corruption reduce the government's ability to provide good quality basic services. Because the services are critical to the needs of Malawians, however, NGOs with donor resources have stepped in to fill many of the gaps. Rather than building on and improving service delivery systems, donor resources are being used to maintain basic services.

IV. REVIEW OF THE UBALE PROJECT

A. Overview of the UBALE Project

Under the leadership of CRS, the UBALE Project is being implemented in 26 rural Traditional Authorities (284 Group Village Headmen clusters) in the three districts of Rural Blantyre, Chikwawa and Nsanje by a consortium composed of CRS, CARE, the Chikwawa Catholic Diocese, the National Cooperative Business Association/CLUSA International (NCBA CLUSA), the National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM), and Save the Children. Table 1 shows the current Goal, Purposes and Sub-Purposes for the project¹¹. The total number of direct beneficiary households targeted by the project is 233,619 vulnerable households (approximately 1.2 million people). At the time of the JMTR, the estimated total cost for the project was US\$ 61,801,852, including US\$ 40,000,000 in CDF funds, US\$ 3,998,800 in 202e funds, US\$ 4,078,150 in ITSH funds, US\$ 1,403,452 in cost share funds, US\$ 398,400 in FTF

Table 1. Goal, Purposes and Sub-Purposes for the UBALE Project

GOAL: Reduced chronic malnutrition and food insecurity, and increased resilience among vulnerable populations in Rural Blantyre, Chikwawa, and Nsanje Districts in Malawi.		
Purpose 1: Vulnerable households' income increased	Purpose 2: Nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of two improved	Purpose 3: Communities are empowered to contribute to their own sustainable development
Sub-Purpose 1.1 Farm management and business planning practices of vulnerable farming households improved	Sub-Purpose 2.1 GoM MCHN/WASH systems management practices are improved	Sub-Purpose 3.1 Improved governance, risk reduction and environmental practices
Sub-Purpose 1.2 Marketing club, cluster and association members' agricultural sales increased		Sub-Purpose 3.2 Community have productive assets
Sub-Purpose 1.3 Members of marketing clubs, clusters and associations increased use of sustainable financial services	Sub-Purpose 2.2 Targeted households adopt evidence-based behaviors that reduce the prevalence of malnutrition.	Sub-Purpose 3.3 Women participate in decision-making structures
Sub-Purpose 1.4 Selected individuals establish/strengthen businesses	Sub-Purpose 2.3 Women of reproductive age have improved agency	
Sub-Purpose 1.5 Joint decision-making at household-level improved		

⁹ "Cashgate" was first reported by the media in September 2013, and a government audit conducted in 2014 found that over \$32 million in government resources was misappropriated by senior government officials over a six month period in 2013.

¹⁰ "Maizegate" was first reported through leaked documents to the media in 2016, and a government commission of enquiry in January 2017 pointed to irregularities in a government maize procurement for the purchase of 100,000 tons of maize from Zambia.

¹¹ These differ substantially from the original proposal as a result of changes made following the M&E Workshop held at the beginning of the project.

funds from USAID Malawi and US\$ 11,923,050 as the estimated cargo & freight cost for 10,600 MT of commodities distributed over the LoA in Food for Assets activities and conditional supplemental rations for pregnant or lactating women and children under two.

Across the three purposes, the UBALE Project is implementing a wide array of interventions. The JMTR Protocol in Volume II provides a fairly complete listing of the major outputs and types of participants under each purpose. Annex B summarizes the main observations from the JMTR on each of these outputs and activities.

Cutting across the three purposes, the UBALE Project has four major cross-cutting themes, including governance, gender, promoting resilience to climate change, and targeting of youth. Annex B also contains the main observations from the JMTR on these themes.

UBALE is being implemented by six consortium-level partners. CRS is the lead agency responsible for overall programmatic and financial oversight. CRS also manages the commodity pipeline, program-level knowledge management systems, technical support for implementation in Chikwawa District by the Chikwawa Diocese, and technical leadership for Purposes 1 (Income) and 2 (MCHN). CARE implements UBALE in Nsanje District and provides overall technical leadership on Purpose 3 (Community Resilience) and gender. The Chikwawa Diocese is responsible for implementation in Chikwawa District with technical support from CRS, and Save the Children is responsible for implementation in Rural Blantyre District. NASFAM provides technical support for the formation and capacity building of marketing associations, and NCBA CLUSA oversees development of UBALE's agri-business strategy and provides technical support to NASFAM.

B. Summary of Project Progress

The JMTR found that the UBALE Project is a well-managed project with few significant problems in implementation systems or partnerships. While implementation has been hindered by major contextual factors as described above, UBALE has succeeded in establishing a solid foundation upon which to build in its final years. Relationships with government partners are strong, particularly at the District level on down to the frontlines. Because the UBALE project headquarters is based in Blantyre, however, the project is somewhat less engaged with national-level government partners. Significant group formation has been completed under all purposes, providing a strong platform on which to continue building for the next two years, and plans have been developed for rolling out various trainings that are still pending with these groups.

Most notably, UBALE is pioneering an approach in a FFP-supported project that more deliberately strengthens government systems for delivery of project interventions. Rather than just keeping government partners informed, seeking approvals from them when necessary, and engaging government staff as trainers or in project monitoring visits, the UBALE Project works through existing government structures to deliver project activities. This includes building capacities and working through the various GoM extension workers, lead farmers identified by the GoM and their associated follow-on farmers, various GoM health service providers and committees, and the range of committees established by the GoM for community development planning, emergency preparedness and response, and natural resource management and promotion. The project clearly sees the risk in being able to achieve large targets using government structures and processes, but the potential for sustaining impact beyond 2019 is much greater.

Following are the major achievements so far in the life of UBALE. The list provided below is not exhaustive. More achievements are reported in the sections describing the priority recommendations and in the more detailed information provided in Annex B.

Project-level Achievements

- The visibility and credibility of project partners has been increased through support to and delivery through government (Agriculture, Community Development, Health and Disaster Risk Management Departments), private (NASFAM and financial institutions, such as the Malawi Union of Savings and Credit Cooperatives) and local civil society organizations.
- There has been good ‘blending’ of UBALE staff with government field officers (many community groups couldn’t quite distinguish between project and government field officers)

Purpose 1: Income

- UBALE is strengthening NASFAM capacity nationally, through support to their strategy review.
- An innovative concept – the triangular cooperative model - has been developed for linking smallholder farmers and related marketing businesses to affordable credit.
- The establishment of business development service providers in rural areas where these services are absent is being piloted by the project, supported by a local consulting company (Tools for Enterprise and Education Consultants)
- The Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC) groups, and associated Private Service Providers (PSPs), approach is being enthusiastically adopted by members with immediate benefits.
- SILC PSP networks have been formed and are showing initiative in seeking GoM registration as NGOs
- The household financial education intervention is showing early benefits in terms of improved household dynamics.
- Diverse seed that is considered of high quality is being diffused through main and winter season Diversity and Nutrition for Enhanced Resilience (DiNER) fairs.
- The output targets for marketing clubs have been met and exceeded, and second tier market clusters are also operational.
- One season of experience has been completed with collective sales of sesame, pigeon peas and groundnuts with varying results.
- UBALE represents the first explicit roll-out of the SMART skills concept in a FFP project, and E-learning courses are appreciated by District partner staff.
- The focus on and demonstration of conservation agriculture with trees is enthusiastically acclaimed by many farmers.

Purpose 2: MCHN

- Care Groups and supporting structures that did not exist before the project (Nutrition Coordinating Committees at various levels and Community Leaders for Action on Nutrition groups at the area and GVH levels) have been established with effective level of coverage across the districts.
- UBALE's work to date with district level nutrition actors is greatly appreciated by the GoM and has led to improvements in supervision and coordination of nutrition activities within districts.
- Notable and widespread adoption of the first Care Group module lessons was witnessed at the household level, especially with WASH activities, including latrines and latrine modifications and tippy taps.
- Capacity building of water point committees (WPCs) on Community-Based Management for WASH training sessions are being conducted by government extension workers with most WPCs maintaining a sanitary environment around their water points, mobilizing small amounts of resources for operations and maintenance, and carrying out basic maintenance of their handpumps.
- Community-led Complementary Feeding and Learning Sessions (CCFLS) activities and corresponding nutrition fairs are well appreciated by beneficiaries who claim they had never considered modifying complementary foods prior to this activity
- The ratio of cluster leaders (lead mothers) to beneficiaries appears adequate and has achieved impressive scale.
- Care Group participants describe UBALE as having greatest effect on hygiene and sanitation and a perceived reduction in the numbers of acutely malnourished children due to rations.

Purpose 3: Community Empowerment

- New Village Civil Protection Committees (VCPCs) facilitated by Area Civil Protection Committees (ACPCs) have been formed where they do not exist, and existing VCPCs where they exist but are dysfunctional have been revamped.
- Significant capacity building of ACPCs and VCPCs has been achieved on Disaster Risk Management
- A Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment (PCVA) process has been completed in all GVHs, including mapping of hazards
- Early warning and response materials (rain gauges, whistles, gum boots and a bicycle) have been distributed to VCPCs
- DRM Plans have been developed in all GVHs describing local hazards and short-term and long-term plans for addressing these
- Organizational functionality assessments have been conducted for VCPCs and ACPCs to assess organizational performance
- Significant capacity building of Area Natural Resource Management Committees (ANRMCs) and Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMCs) has

been completed on natural resource management, functions of ANRMC and VNRMC and watershed development practices.

- Seed, polybags and tools have been distributed with training on tree nursery management to VNRMCs.
- Support has been provided for a number of Food for Assets Activities

River Bank Protection (98 sites at the time of the JMTR)– Seedlings, nursery and planting of trees along river banks or on gullies higher in the catchment

Watershed Management (60 sites)– Water catchment depressions, check dams in gullies, trees or vetiver grass on contours, and/or rock bunds on contours.

Dams or Dykes (20 sites) – Rehabilitating small-scale dams or dykes and/or building water point structures for livestock or irrigation water

Latrines in Evacuation Centers, Health Posts or Schools (39 sites) – Pit latrines in locations identified as evacuation centers, health posts, or schools

C. Recommendations for the Remaining Life of UBALE

The sections which follow describe the priority recommendations that emerged from the review of the UBALE Project. These have been clustered around a number of major themes upon which the project is encouraged to focus between now and its completion. The major observations supporting each recommendation are presented, and more detail on these observations as well as additional recommendations that did not make the priority list are provided in Annex B, which contains a more complete perspective on how the recommendations emerged.

1. Theme: Life-Changing Impact. All development projects seek to achieve impact in improving livelihoods and enhancing resilience among targeted populations. FFP Projects have the special task within the USAID portfolio of targeting highly food insecure or highly vulnerable households¹². Achieving sustainable impact on households like this often involves creating life-changing impact. Examples of life-changing impact include enabling poor farmers to have access to irrigation that they did not have before the project, enabling daily wage laborers to gain sustained access to productive land so that they become less dependent on wage labor opportunities, enabling vulnerable SILC group members to firmly establish new IGAs that provide a steady source of income, enabling children who would have become stunted without the project to start their lives in the absence of chronic malnutrition, or enabling extremely vulnerable households to absorb and recover from shocks without direct project assistance because sustained systems for supporting them to do so have been strengthened. FFP projects are expected to target highly vulnerable households¹³ and most are able to achieve life-changing impact for significant numbers of these.

Across the UBALE Project in the next two and a half years, the focus should be on achieving life-changing impact for a significant number of households. The foundation has been set for this to happen, but the project has been overly focused on delivery of target numbers. At the end of the day, UBALE may have fully met training targets and delivered the food that has been

¹² FFP Projects do not generally target the "safety net poor", who are at the very lowest end of the poverty continuum. The highly vulnerable that are targeted are the class of very poor just above the safety net poor.

¹³ The argument was made by the project that in highly vulnerable contexts like Southern Malawi, most households should be considered highly vulnerable. That argument, however, sidesteps the real interest of FFP to enable at least a significant number of the most vulnerable in any context to escape food insecurity and poverty.

called forward, but real capacity building may not have been achieved. It is not enough to assume that if a participant has attended a training workshop that he or she will have fully acquired the skills and knowledge that will enable them to achieve sustained food security. Coaching, mentoring and other forms of accompaniment need to be implemented with participants and intermediaries to ensure that true capacity building has been attained. At the end of the day, if a significant number of lives have not been positively changed by UBALE, the \$60 million investment in the project will not have been considered a success. By the end of the UBALE Project, significant numbers of targeted impact groups, especially highly vulnerable households, should have notably improved lives, and there should be some very good life-changing impact stories. Following are nine recommendations in support of this theme.

RECOMMENDATION U1: Theory of Change

Observations. Globally, CRS designs projects around a conceptual framework entitled the Pathway to Prosperity. This approach defines a trajectory in which a vulnerable household goes through three main stages: RECOVER, a stage in which a vulnerable household has infrequent market engagement; BUILD, a stage where a vulnerable household has occasional engagement with the market with capabilities for rebounding in the event of experiencing a shock; and lastly, the GROW stage where a household becomes more entrepreneurial with consistent market engagement. The UBALE Project's Theory of Change (ToC) should articulate how interventions are phased, targeted and layered to enable the household to graduate from one stage to the next consistent with this framework.

The JMTR observed that the current ToC was retrofitted onto the awarded proposal, following protracted discussions and trainings conducted by FFP, and there has not been a major review of the ToC since implementation commenced. The ToC is supposed to be tailored around the specific impact groups that have been targeted by the project, but the JMTR observed that UBALE has not really developed a consistent definition for its targeted impact groups, corresponding to the stages in the ToC. Discussions with village leaders and community groups showed inconsistencies in the definition of targeted impact groups, with some communities having a “let's all benefit” approach to selecting beneficiaries for the different interventions. UBALE is also targeting a broad spectrum of beneficiaries, including some that may not really fit within the USAID FFP definition of poor and vulnerable.

A number of assumptions underlying the ToC also appear no longer valid, especially assumptions on the capacities of government to provide the necessary services and conditions critical for achieving project outcomes. This is especially important given the diminishing government financial capacities to provide services and the corruption that is becoming more visible. Examples of other assumptions that require review include assumptions on banks and MFIs providing appropriate farmer-friendly products, willingness and ability of beneficiaries to pay for PSP services, assumptions related to frequency of droughts, assumption on market forces effectively taking over and making the systems sustainable, among others.

Recommendation. UBALE should conduct a ToC Review workshop as part of the next planning process and review the targeting mechanisms for the project to ensure alignment with the ToC. Impact groups, consistent with the stages defined in the Pathway to Prosperity, should be clearly defined, with special attention on those for whom life changing impact can be achieved by UBALE. The causal pathways, underlying assumptions and intervention packages should be reviewed to identify the basket of interventions that are necessary to trigger change from one

stage to the other in the Pathway to Prosperity. For assumptions in the ToC that are outdated or no longer valid, alternative strategies should be developed. Based on the ToC review, the project should identify possible additional research and learning needs.

RECOMMENDATION U2: Products & Services for the Very Poor

Observations. Of the 134,000 households which are targeted beneficiaries of the agriculture and livelihoods activities under Purpose 1 in the UBALE project, 31,000 are expected to be very poor households that receive direct asset transfers in the form of vouchers that they can exchange for seed at DiNER fairs. Other interventions that these households may be participating in include SILC, Care Groups, sessions with Lead Farmers, and Food for Assets projects. Of these interventions, only SILC and possibly the sessions with Lead Farmers are activities that will continue after UBALE finishes. It is also unclear to what extent a purely agriculturally-based livelihood strategy is the most appropriate for all households of this population segment. It was observed that some households rely on piecework (*ganyu*) as a major source of income, and there are others that receive remittances from family members that have migrated to neighboring countries to work. The question therefore is ‘is the present package of products and services provided to very poor households appropriate and adequate to move them along a pathway to prosperity and enhance their resilience to shocks’?

Recommendation. The UBALE project should clarify the package of products and services directed at very poor households that are already within the scope of UBALE and ensure that the 31,000 targeted very poor households are not left "floating" at the close of UBALE. The project should categorize the livelihood strategies of focal populations, identifying at least those that are smallholder farming households, those that are dependent on *ganyu* and those that are dependent on other risky livelihoods strategies such as charcoal production. The project's database of registration information can be used to determine the present delivery of products and services to those different categories, and analysis of this information can determine if very poor households are being excluded or have needs that are incompletely met. The UBALE intervention package should be adjusted to have significant impact on the very poor households. Participation in DiNER fairs and short-term FFA projects are not likely to achieve life-changing for any of these people, so the project will need to incorporate additional products and services to make sure that the targeted 31,000 very poor households achieve long-term, sustained benefit as a result of the project.

RECOMMENDATION U3: More Focused Training and Follow-up

Observations. In both design and implementation, UBALE complements and strengthens the existing governmental and private systems for cascade learning to community actors and groups. For the most part, the JMTR found that targeted beneficiaries connect regularly with government extension services and community service-providers such as Lead Farmers, extension workers, and PSP's. Additionally, UBALE is supporting the incipient use of innovative methods for learning and dissemination of learning, including Digital Green videos and Farmer Learning Centers. All of this sets a strong foundation for sustained learning that can continue well past the lifetime of UBALE.

However, the JMTR also identified some challenges in the field which ranged across all of UBALE's interventions that rely on learning. The training provided by UBALE through government staff was sometimes perceived as either disjointed (many subjects with little connection) or irregular (months between related trainings) by community service-providers and

leaders. Some Care Group Promoters were chosen without proper qualifications, which affected their ability to complete reports, understand module messaging, and engage women in true behavior change. There was minimal to no follow-up on whether or not messages were delivered from community leaders to the community according to standards¹⁴. Interviews with various groups during the JMTR revealed some recurring serious misconceptions, such as the link between FFA activities and climate change. These misconceptions, which likely have their origins from sources outside of UBALE, are nevertheless reinforced indirectly by the project when the misconceptions are not corrected during the training and through follow-up after the training. Targeted beneficiaries also expressed the need for consistent messaging, regular training that could take a variety of forms, and the need for critical physical materials.

Recommendation. In the next two years, UBALE should re-focus training efforts on a smaller number of topics with more intensive follow-up to ensure that learning occurs. Learning modules critical to life-changing impact and integration, for example, those related to climate change, resource mobilization, and expanding business, should be rolled out as soon as possible. All other training that will not contribute to life-changing impact or facilitate cross-purpose integration should be discontinued, and targeted beneficiary groups should be monitored for retention while the community service-providers are mentored. Some recommended activities include (a) conducting post-training and certification monitoring through quarterly quality-checks, (b) implementing rapid surveys on retention of 2015-2016 learning using statistical sampling techniques, (c) tailoring follow-up support to groups based on an assessment of their retention, (d) including modules for adult learning in all UBALE training both to train the trainers well and for trainers to teach well in practice, and (e) enhancing support on work-planning and transportation for field-level staff to mentor lead volunteers, service providers and decision-making committees.

RECOMMENDATION U4: Enabling Bigger Business

Observations. Purpose 1 in UBALE has two complementary strategies for enabling targeted households to generate more income. One strategy is to empower households that have at least some resources to produce consistent marketable agricultural surpluses. The other strategy is to empower households who are looking for profitable micro or small business opportunities to earn more cash through access to capital from SILC. UBALE has built the foundation for both strategies. Through its partnership with NASFAM, UBALE supports the formation of marketing clubs, clusters of marketing clubs, and eventually marketing associations as third level apex organization. The project will also pilot an alternative marketing business model. The model will link existing agricultural production and marketing cooperatives with a Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO), as a means of providing affordable credit to farmers and marketing businesses. SILC PSPs are valued and respected by communities, and the formation of SILC PSP Networks will foster SILC growth, ensure quality service provision, meet demand within a given area, and sustain service provision over time. UBALE is also piloting the establishment of a cadre of 10 Business PSPs in Blantyre District, whose initial clients will be members of mature SILC groups whose existing businesses need to grow or who are ready to initiate new businesses. The rapid growth of marketing clubs and SILC poses a series of challenges, the most important

¹⁴ It is worth noting that, under CRS's global definition of capacity building, training without accompaniment (i.e., follow-up) is just training; it's not actually capacity building. Accompaniment includes fairly labor-intensive efforts at coaching, mentoring and on-the-job training to ensure training participants apply their newly acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes in their work environments.

of which is the need to focus and ensure quality service provision to a manageable number of businesses.

Recommendation. To capitalize on the foundation that UBALE has established, the project should focus on and strengthen activities to enable bigger business at local levels. This will require the development and roll-out of business training modules and the formation of Business PSPs within calendar year 2017, targeting SILC members who are also marketing club members. The project should also strengthen SILC PSPs within calendar year 2017 by focusing on high-performing PSPs and more mature businesses that can provide impetus to the PSP model. The PSP Networks should be registered with the GoM and connected with contacts and funding for seed investment. UBALE should develop and test the “triangular cooperative model” approach by affixing ‘go/no-go’ milestones to ensure feasibility and rolling out sensitization and buy-in campaigns for clients and key stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION U5: Working with the GoM Health System

Observations. An essential aspect of community health in Malawi is the provision of promotion, diagnosis, treatment and referral services by Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) as the front line workers. The new draft National Community Health Strategy prioritizes the revitalization and expansion of community health structures and the strengthening of Community Health Worker and HSA cadres.

UBALE has identified key gaps in MCHN service delivery that need to be addressed, including the late start of antenatal care (ANC) and low utilization of MCHN health services, inadequate uptake of facility delivery and early child health services, as well as early marriage and child bearing. Within the project districts, there are large gaps in linking health needs of communities to health facilities, poor referrals and weak linkages. Most children only have access to Community-Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (C-IMCI) through HSAs, and immunization levels are as low as 50% in some GVHs. In addition, 29 percent of adolescents age 15-19 in Malawi have begun childbearing, contributing to the cycle of poverty and malnutrition.

UBALE’s approach in using Care Groups with pregnant and lactating women and women with children less than 2 years of age provides an excellent platform to address the health needs of this target group. The Care Group curricula, however, does not currently extend beyond the four Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) modules that focus on nutrition. In addition, the capacity of the project to support Lead Mothers to move beyond providing messages to engaging with beneficiaries for accompaniment on behavior change is limited by weak support from the government structures overseeing the Care Groups. These structures include the CLAN, the ACLAN, the District Nutrition Coordinating Committee (DNCC), the Area Nutrition Coordinating Committee (ANCC), and the Village Nutrition Coordinating Committee (VNCC) and the limited availability of UBALE staff to perform those functions at the required scale. Specifically, several CLANs interviewed saw their primarily role as overseeing MCHN ration distributions for UBALE.

Recommendation. UBALE should engage with the Ministry of Health as the new strategy is rolled out to strengthen and support the community health structures outlined in the draft national strategy. The project should strengthen the training and mentorship of Health Promoters and finds ways to strengthen its current linkages to the HSAs. Linking UBALE’s community reach through the Care Groups with the HSA capacity could develop better referral and support mechanisms at the community level. UBALE can also create demand for essential MCHN

services, build community knowledge and help families engage with the health system through expanding the modules used by Care Groups to cover community health issues and management of common childhood illnesses in partnership with the MOH and HSAs. Specifically, UBALE should add a C-IMCI module into the Care Group curriculum, incorporating HSAs as potential support structures. The Njira Project is currently developing this module, and UBALE can gain from collaborating more closely to avoid lengthy development time. While the DREAMS¹⁵ initiative is scaling up its curriculum for adolescent girls, UBALE could also collaborate closely with the initiative to ensure that pregnant adolescents are engaged with the Care Group structure and get the community support that they need for a successful pregnancy and parenting.

RECOMMENDATION U6: Beyond Community-Based Management in WASH

Observations. The WASH component of UBALE project was designed on the assumption that there would be other players in the target districts that would be making available a package of hardware for water supply services and sanitation in the UBALE communities. This assumption justified UBALE to focus on the software through community-based management training sessions. The JMTR observed that the project has realized considerable gains and success on the software side, but the assumption on hardware being available is flawed. UBALE has adjusted its strategy to look more deliberately at WPCs raising funds for operations and maintenance, but this is having limited success. In the communities visited during the JMTR, water point committees have not been able to raise enough funds. Some communities indicated that their quarterly collection was as low as MwK 4,000. None of the community water point committees that were interviewed indicated that they had a viable resource mobilization strategy for their community water point fund. Inadequate funds for operations and maintenance will lead to breakdowns and longer downtime of community water systems. It was further noted that not all communities and health facilities had access to safe drinking water sources.

There were also notably poor water point structures (aprons and drainage systems) which seemed not to be a priority to WPCs despite being important to water point sanitation and drinking water quality. The WASH Education module of the Care Groups has increased the adoption of latrine use at household level; however, the pit latrines observed were of poor quality. In most cases, they did not have enough light and were very tight and unfriendly for pregnant mothers and children. The latrines were also not environmentally unfriendly, as their surfaces were constructed of tree logs. While this represents an opportunity for sanitation entrepreneurs, the project has not facilitated the linking of communities to sanitation marketers who could produce and sell different types of sanitation and hygiene products and services. TA-level structures like TA-wide borehole user associations and Open-Defecation-Free Task Forces exist and are active in supporting communities in WASH activities.

Recommendation. UBALE needs to go beyond Community-Based Management training for sustaining impact from its WASH interventions. The period for CBM trainings sessions needs to be extended beyond September 2017 to ensure that the messages and practices being promoted are adopted. The project should also encourage establishment of a broader support structure for WASH, including, for example, TA-level Borehole User Associations and Borehole Banks to ensure sustainability of activities beyond project life. UBALE should also expand support for

¹⁵ DREAMS is a PEPFAR-funded initiative to reduce HIV-infections among adolescent girls with the goal to help girls develop into Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe women

health facilities beyond just latrine construction, particularly to rehabilitating dysfunctional water supply systems.

RECOMMENDATION U7: Life-Changing Impact for Youth

Observations. UBALE has made a commitment to "target largely out-of-school youth aged 14-24 as current and future parents, leaders and decision-makers"¹⁶ as a cross-cutting theme, and the project has engaged youth in a number of ways. Youth Clubs, for example, have been involved in Theatre for Development activities to promote socially sensitive messages on gender and women's empowerment. The enthusiasm that these clubs have shown for planning and organizing performances clearly demonstrates that youth can be called upon to serve as volunteers for public service.

Most groups with whom the project is working have youth members or members who have been designated as youth representatives, but many of these structures are government structures and youth participation in leadership positions or even speaking up in meetings is limited by cultural factors.

Although UBALE is committed to targeting youth, the project's M&E systems are not yet generating information on how these targeted youth are participating in the project. Overall, the JMTR feels that the project is not going far enough to engage youth in the ways envisioned in the original project strategy. Youth represent both an increasingly vulnerable group, given the fragmentation of land and their inability to access non-farm occupations, as well as a significant opportunity as change-makers for development.

Recommendation. The UBALE Project should give more deliberate attention to targeting youth, especially out-of-school youth likely to have limited access to land, and building their capacities for entrepreneurship, civic participation and public service. CRS should bring its strong technical capacity from CRS HQ for building capacities of youth on effective vocational or life skills capacities that can be introduced without substantial cost in the remaining life of UBALE.

RECOMMENDATION U8: Staffing Levels

Observations. UBALE as a whole has experienced limited problems with regard to human resource management, including limited recruitment problems and low staff turnover. The JMTR learned, however, that beginning in year three and continuing through year four, plans are in place to scale back on project staff levels, especially at the frontlines. The major justification for these changes was that front line staff were hired to form groups and carry out trainings; and as most of this work has been accomplished, the staff are now regarded as superfluous. Many of the JMTR team members across all three purposes, however, observed limitations among project participants in actually understanding the messages that were being promoted in the trainings and in practicing the behavioral changes that were being promoted. The project has assumed that if a targeted participant has attended a training, then she or he should be trained and able to practice the behavioral change that is being sought, but that is not often the case. Training needs to be followed up with accompaniment and mentoring.

Recommendation. UBALE should maintain staffing levels wherever additional accompaniment is required to ensure that messages are understood and the behavioral change that is being promoted is adopted. Job descriptions will need to be shifted for frontline staff to carry out more

¹⁶ UBALE Technical Application, page 14.

supervision and accompaniment, and these staff will also likely require capacity strengthening in these areas.

2. Theme: Governance. The UBALE Project has made a notable step forward in working more closely with and through government structures and has developed strong working relationships with government partners in the project areas. The project is also working with a wide range of groups at the community-level. This represents a great opportunity to have true impact on the supply of good governance by government, the practice of good governance by all UBALE groups and partners, and the demand for good governance by all Malawians. This includes both governance in government and internal governance with participating groups and NGOs engaged in the project. The project should work with government partners to demonstrate more transparency and accountability in the services that they provide. The project can also work with both government and civil society to build demand for more transparency and accountability in the services that they receive. This approach will support other efforts to address the increasingly visible corruption that is occurring in Malawi.

Every staff position in the UBALE project has an opportunity to promote good governance by integrating it into their capacity building approaches. By the end of the project, all staff should be highly conversant on governance, all participants should be empowered to demand good governance, and all intermediaries and partners should be practicing the principles of good governance. Following are four recommendations in support of this theme.

RECOMMENDATION U9: Social Accountability Mechanisms

Observations. UBALE made a strategic choice to focus on only certain local governance functions, consistent with FFP's expectations and resource envelope. What the JMTR observed was that these functions (planning, M&E, and soon to be rolled out, resource mobilization), while critical, were insufficient to improve good governance at all levels in general and to assure districts' downward accountability to citizens.

A new project, the Local Government Accountability and Performance (LGAP) Project has just begun implementation in Malawi and will continue into 2021. A key feature of this project is to improve the government accountability system by strengthening existing mechanism, such as community score cards and service management committees, while introducing new accountability tools, including public service charters and social audits.

Recommendation. In collaboration with LGAP, UBALE should explore additional social accountability mechanisms to the score cards already being promoted. Public expenditure tracking surveys, public service performance contracts, and citizen parliaments are social accountability tools. They are by no means substitutes for statutory accountability mechanisms, but introducing their usage in UBALE will at least provide communities and Village and Area Development Committees (VDCs/ADCs) with another lever for demanding accountability from district-level elected and appointed officials.

- **Public expenditure tracking surveys:** Community-based organizations (CBOs), VDCs/ADCs and citizens can use these surveys to track the resources spent on local development projects and to monitor outputs to verify that they were produced at or under budget and meet government standards. This tool "follows the money" to identify leakage points typically where corruption occurs.

- Service performance contracts: Based on an indigenous practice found in Rwanda, a service performance contract includes a public ceremony at which local officials commit to improving service delivery and specifically to reaching mutually agreed upon benchmarks, process, and quality standards.
- Citizen parliaments: In this approach, a District Chair, Commissioner or Traditional Authority would convene a meeting of district-level officials so that citizens can directly demand accountabilities from them. The convening local leader would then request the responsible district-level official(s) to respond in detail to questions on accountability or transparency around a specific issue and commit to any follow up actions to “cure” the issue.

RECOMMENDATION U10: Internal Governance Capacities and Demand for Good Governance

Observations. CBOs and private sector groups are the entry points for integrating good governance in UBALE. They can also serve as incubators for civic participation, generating demand for improved service delivery while holding local governance structures accountable for supplying it. Currently, none of these groups consistently coordinate with VDC/ADCs, which is a missed opportunity and further erodes the latter’s credibility as platforms for local governance.

CBOs and private sector groups will only be as effective as their capacities to engage local governance structures. For them to do so with credibility, they must first strengthen their capacity to manage their internal governance more transparently, accountably and democratically. This will produce two important benefits. First, democratic management is *good* management, and it will improve their capacity to better serve their members’ interests. Second, this improved effectiveness will give them credibility to demand that local governance structures, e.g., VDC/ADCs, district councils, and others, do the same.

Recommendation. To assist CBOs and private sector groups, UBALE should extend the package of good governance capacity building under Purpose 3 to include the expanded set of social accountability tools described above to CBOs and private sector groups so that they can better engage the VDC/ADC on issues covered by Purpose 1 and Purpose 2. To do this in the most strategic manner given the limited lifetime remaining in the project, UBALE should identify “lead” GVHs or TAs where it can apply this approach for integrating good governance more systematically across all three purposes and scale up once other GVH/TA respond positively to the anticipated demonstration effects.

RECOMMENDATION U11: Gender Champions

Observations. UBALE is making satisfactory progress on implementing gender interventions across the project. Implementing staff, stakeholders and volunteers have been trained on gender messaging and integration in the communities. Community structures, including VDCs, ADCs and Youth Clubs have been trained on gender, and gender champions have been selected through a community-driven processes following a set of recommended criteria. The use of youth clubs and a Theater for Development approach in disseminating gender messages was found to be very effective. Anecdotal evidence collected during the JMTR indicated that there is progress toward joint decision-making at the household level, increased participation of women in leadership positions in groups, and a reduction in gender-based violence.

Despite this progress, some major challenges remain. Not all gender champions have been selected, and it is getting late in the project life to ensure that they will be able to sustainably

fulfill their functions after the project ends. Some user materials for gender champions still need to be developed, and documentation and analysis of case studies completed. Transportation for gender champions was cited as the major challenge in all the districts. The JMTR also observed that the gender coordinators will work up to one year before the end of the project, while Gender and Sustainability Field Officers who are the frontline staff will work through to the end of the project.

Recommendation. To move beyond gender responsiveness to gender transformation, UBALE should redouble efforts to engage gender champions and to promote gender integration in target communities. Going forward, training should focus on those gender champions who have already been selected but who have yet to be trained. In addition, UBALE should extend gender integration within all project groups in villages where there are no gender champions.

To broaden sensitization, UBALE should reach out to all geographic areas with gender messages regardless of how remote they might be, adapting the core messages to the specific context. Similarly, to ensure sustainability, UBALE should extend Gender Coordinators to the end of the project while developing sustainability and exit strategies starting now with government at all levels (VDC, ADC and District). Finally, UBALE should identify and start documenting longitudinal (multi-year) case studies and most significant change stories now as part of a more general effort to adopt complexity-aware monitoring and evaluation.

RECOMMENDATION U12: Public and Private Policy and Development Practice.

Observations. Together the UBALE partners have a total of over 30 years' experience in food security programming in Malawi. Over the last 10 years, they have built credibility with national and local government, private sector and civil society organizations. They are recognized as *bone fide* players in agricultural and rural development. With this track record, the UBALE partners are in a position to transition from a role of development facilitators and service providers to one in which they play a proactive role in influencing public and private development policy and practice. UBALE's explicit alignment with GoM policies and delivery through government, private sector and civil society organizations provides the ideal platform from which to initiate this transition.

Recommendation. Working in unison, the consortium partners should use UBALE as a platform to initiate change processes by influencing public and private policy and development practice. The suggested focus is climate smart agricultural extension and advisory services. An explicit influence agenda in this focus area would build on the strengthened relationship with the District Agricultural Development Offices (DADO) and the National Farmers National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM), innovations in and farmers' enthusiasm for climate smart and conservation agriculture practices and watershed management, and CRS' partnership with the USAID-funded Strengthening Agriculture and Nutrition Extension Services (SANE) Project.

To begin, UBALE should undertake a contextual analysis to identify and select an influence goal that is technically sound and politically feasible. Next, UBALE should map stakeholder and power relations that will support or constrain achievement of the goal. The resulting influence plan would include (a) steps for strengthening alliances with like-minded stakeholders, (b) assessment and identification of gaps in critical technical competencies to be filled, (c) alignment of learning agenda research to support achievement of the influence goal, and (d) a strategy to

communicate evidence-based results to targeted audiences, combining audience-specific messaging with empirical evidence.

3. Theme: Collaborative Learning and Action for Adaptive Management. The UBALE Project has had the benefit of being able to build on the MEAL system developed in the WALA Project. That system, however, has been overwhelmed by the number of performance indicators that have been adopted by the project. Efforts have been made to reduce the indicators, but the system is still only able to generate basic information for reporting purposes. The UBALE MEAL system is not yet working to make information available to decision-makers. Within the next six months, the MEAL system should be made fully functional so that it enables decision-makers to focus the UBALE strategy on achieving the greatest sustainable impact. By the end of 2017, decision-makers will use information from the MEAL system to make decisions on project strategy and operations to maximize impact and efficiently use resources in doing so. This theme has two priority recommendations related to getting the MEAL system to become fully functional and building capacities of project partners to be able to use the information generated by the system for project decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION U13: C-MIS

Observations. UBALE's MEAL system is anchored on the Consortium-Management Information System (C-MIS), a database and information management system, the framework for which was originally designed in the WALA Project. The JMTR observed that the development of the C-MIS for UBALE is not yet completed, severely limiting possibilities for making greater use of the data being collected. Delayed design, finalization and roll out of data collection forms including actual participant registration have hindered the development of the C-MIS. The user interface of C-MIS, including the structure of reports, has yet to be finalized, so program staff do not have access to information generated by C-MIS.

The JMTR observed that project partners are currently accessing C-MIS from the data entry end, exposing the database to possible errors. This is worsened when partners do not update the scripts sent to them in time, and the data base becomes incompatible for merging new data. The JMTR also observed that some partners are still using old training forms that no longer comply with the new forms being used for the data base, and they have to transfer the information into the new format before entering it into the data base. At the current pace, the finalization of the data base will likely not be completed until the end of the 2017 calendar year in being able to provide information for decision-makers.

Recommendation. UBALE should focus immediate, concerted attention on C-MIS system functioning by hiring a highly-qualified consultant to assist with the development and finalization of the data base. The development of all forms required for data collection and entry should be finalized, and program staff/ sector leads should be engaged to obtain report requirements to enable and facilitate the development of the user interface.

RECOMMENDATION U14: Capacities of Partners for MEAL

Observations. The UBALE MEAL system is currently structured primarily for data collection, entry and reporting to the donor. This is more visible at the partner level where the skills mix and orientation is skewed toward meeting donor reporting requirements, rather than toward analyzing data to obtain information useful for project decision-makers. Partners need to transition from just focusing on data collection and entry to generating knowledge that will be used by decision-

makers to inform programmatic decisions. The JMTR found that UBALE is a complex project, with more than 120 indicators for which data has to be collected. This has placed an immense burden on partners for data collection and entry. Recent recruitment of data entry clerks by partners has reduced the backlog on data entry; however, backlogs still exist.

UBALE has a Knowledge Management and Learning (KML) strategy. The JMTR observed, however, that the strategy is silent on how partners can operationalize it to also promote knowledge management and learning at the partner level. Given current partner capacities, skewed more toward reporting, data collection and entry, it will be difficult to have partners operationalize the KML strategy and conduct more analysis without reinforcement with a MEAL Officer to drive the KML agenda.

The JMTR also observed that partner participation in the research being conducted under UBALE has largely been limited to facilitating community access and data collection. Even for the annual beneficiary survey meant to collect information for some outcome indicators, the partners' roles were limited to facilitating data collection, and the annual beneficiary survey data and report have not yet been shared with partners.

Recommendation. UBALE should give more attention to building capacities of partners to operationalize the KML strategy and generate knowledge for decision-makers. Partners should hire an additional MEAL Officer to take the lead in coordinating data analysis as well as to lead the operationalization on KML at the partner level. Partners should become more involved in the research and annual surveys, not just serving as facilitators of data collection, but as stakeholders that can contribute toward the design, implementation and analysis of data generated from the research and annual beneficiary surveys. The quarterly technical working group meetings, which are an excellent platform, should be given increased scope to focus more on data analysis and knowledge generation, while also continuing to address operational issues.

4. Theme: Cross-Purpose Integration. Evaluations have shown that the greatest life-changing impacts are achieved in FFP projects that have successfully integrated interventions across multiple purposes, i.e., a single household has members benefitting from farm production and marketing interventions, from rural finance interventions, from maternal and child health and nutrition interventions, and from resilience interventions. UBALE was designed to use an integrated approach to increase incomes, prevent child malnutrition and strengthen community and household resilience; and, all three of these sets of interventions are being implemented widely across the project area. The opportunity exists to implement a fully integrated approach, but the JMTR found that the UBALE interventions are siloed, with not enough deliberate, thoughtful linkages across the three purposes. By the end of the project, a greater number of beneficiaries will be benefitting from multiple interventions as a result of more deliberate coordination between and complementarity across the three purposes. Following are two recommendations in support of this theme.

RECOMMENDATION U15: Integration of Agriculture and Nutrition

Observations. Across the purposes, especially Purpose 1 and Purpose 2, UBALE is designed to address the links between nutrition and agriculture from multiple angles in order to improve nutrition outcomes such as child dietary diversity, women's dietary diversity and ultimately nutritional status. Several approaches within the MCHN component include efforts to increase dietary diversity and consumption of nutrient dense foods, especially via CCFLS, DiNER fairs, and promotion of local recipes at food distributions. In addition, within the Care Group module,

mothers are encouraged to develop kitchen gardens during the dry season. Moreover, promotion of nutrient-rich crops is being done under Purpose 1. Activities such as DiNER Fairs are meant to improve access to diverse, nutritious foods include income-generating and nutrient-rich crops, some of which are dual purpose such as pigeon peas. Bio-fortified crops such as orange-fleshed sweet potato and NUA¹⁷ beans are also being promoted, although they are more expensive than their local counterparts. In addition, household decision making activities are meant to support access and utilization of diverse, nutrient dense foods.

Many of the attempts to link agriculture/income with improved nutrition are limited to date within the UBALE project, despite the efforts cited above. There is not a direct effort by the project to link MCHN beneficiaries with Purpose 1 activities, apart from some that have benefited from seeds during DiNER fairs and a limited number of women participating in MCHN activities who have voluntarily become members of SILC groups. Within Purpose 2, kitchen gardens are limited in size and scope, and the project has not considered whether the gardens are set up to have the intended impact. Questions that have not been addressed include: are the gardens productive enough to have any impact on the intake of micronutrients in the target groups and are they being done during the time of year when dietary diversity is the lowest and these food groups are too expensive on the market? There were also several reports of inadequate knowledge, tools and inputs to support gardening. The majority of beneficiaries (not solely the very poor) reported difficulties accessing more expensive foods that the project is promoting via Care Group SBCC and CCFLS activities. Therefore, both income and production for consumption pathways need to be revisited for the last two and half years of the project. In particular, the project needs to ensure that the poorest households and especially the 1,000 day beneficiaries within these households are directly benefitting from the foods that are most difficult to access.

Recommendation. UBALE should implement a process to design and implement necessary components of agriculture-nutrition pathways to ensure that 1,000 day beneficiaries have improved access to diverse diet through improved linkages with farming activities under Purpose 1. The messaging/training should be tailored for SILC groups with MCHN beneficiaries to save and invest in diverse diets, *no matter the weather or time of year*, and the project should ensure that a higher percentage of MCHN participants are engaged in new DiNER Fairs. UBALE should expand engagement with seed dealers that are selling seed for bio-fortified crops. The SBCC strategy in the project across both income and MCHN purposes should begin shifting focus away from maize primarily to maize *paired* with nutritious, diverse foods.

RECOMMENDATION U16: The New Normal in Malawi

Observations. UBALE has successfully promoted community appreciation, and hopefully adoption, for certain climate-smart activities, namely conservation agriculture plus trees. Demonstration plots, according to the JMTR's perception, were highly visible and frequent. Seeds distributed through or under UBALE were perceived by the communities as high-quality and useful for both income and nutrition.

Despite these achievements, UBALE staff and interventions betrayed a worrying lack of understanding of how regularly occurring climatic shocks (e.g., El Niño), environmental degradation, and deepening climate change (e.g., late onset of growing season, increasing

¹⁷ NUA beans are varieties that have been developed at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture which are bio-fortified effective for addressing iron and zinc micronutrient deficiencies

temperatures throughout the year) will continue to affect all parts of UBALE. A common understanding in the communities is that “If there’s not a drought, there’s a flood. If there’s not a flood, there’s a drought.” The current limited portfolio of options within UBALE’s climate-smart agriculture and resilience interventions are insufficient to address that new normal in Southern Malawi. Additionally, communities betrayed a dangerous misunderstanding of how their actions bring about positive change in their landscapes, e.g., “If we plant trees, the dry spells will end.” This misconception has been cultivated through messages in schools and campaigns by government to push people to plant more trees, but UBALE needs to work on rectifying this misconception. Lastly, there was little to no acknowledgement of how degradation and climate change affect MCHN activities (human diseases, access to medical stations, sanitation needs, and water quality).

Recommendation. UBALE staff should stop assuming that next year will be a good year and instead start refining training and messaging to treat recurrent droughts and floods as normal. Training should be refocused on growing, harvesting, storing and/or budgeting throughout prolonged lean periods, involving groups across all Purposes. The demonstration plots should be adapted so that they are actually climate-*change*-smart with a focus on enabling productivity of diverse crops. Deliberate linkages should be created with seed multiplication groups to grow drought-resistant, nutritious and marketable crops, gardens, and trees across all groups. UBALE should revise the communications, training messages, and manuals for clear, targeted messaging on climate change, clearly targeting the mistaken understanding that “if we plant more trees, the dry spells will end”. The project should also monitor and analyze weather-related actions/reactions of groups across purposes to assess current and changing coping strategies.

5. Theme: Using Food Strategically. The distribution of food, especially in the southern Malawian context, reinforces expectations for handouts by NGOs. Food distributions also divert the attention of beneficiaries away from the messages being promoted by the project. The JMTR found innumerable times that when beneficiaries were queried on what they found most beneficial about UBALE, one of the first responses was the food that had been provided. And, when asked about what UBALE could do differently in the remainder of its life, respondents in many cases cited more food or different kinds of food.

Also, despite the BEST analyses conducted during the design of the project indicating that the proposed distributed food would not likely have significant impact on local markets, distributed food nearly always has impact on local markets and local market development. Under these conditions, UBALE needs to use food more strategically, avoiding distributions that do not have the intended impact and/or reinforce the community expectations syndrome. There are examples from other projects in which vouchers have been used to make food available while also minimizing market impact and even supporting market development. It is also a good time to step back and reevaluate whether it is better to provide food or cash as compensation for work done by targeted impact groups on community asset development. It is recognized that there are limitations to changes that can be made on the use of food in UBALE. Nevertheless, by the end of the project, UBALE will have evolved as much as possible toward using food more strategically so that the food distributed through the project will have its desired impact on nutrition and the construction of community assets while also contributing to development objectives. Following are four recommendations in support of this theme.

RECOMMENDATION U17: Food as an Incentive for Care Groups

Observations. Malawi's Care Group guidelines call for the groups to reach pregnant and lactating women, and parents of children under five years of age. In UBALE, the project has directly linked the receipt of MCHN commodities during the hungry season to the beneficiary household CG participation. Unfortunately, this has led to Care Group mothers halting their participation in activities once their child reaches the age of two. Beneficiaries report that this direct linkage of Care Groups to receipt of food rations has created tension within the community. In addition, this linkage seems to have led to the CLANs in some communities seeing their role as ensuring distribution of the rations, rather than promotion, advocacy and support for the Care Groups.

Recommendation. To ensure that Care Group activities may continue after the project, UBALE should perform some additional community mobilization efforts and improve communications more explicitly to clarify that Care Group membership includes parents of children under 5. Despite the PM2A technical reference materials¹⁸, UBALE should delink the conditionality of rations to participation in Care Groups. The Njira Project has not experienced this issue to date, therefore the UBALE MCHN team could potentially benefit from a specific discussion with the Njira MCHN team to explore the best method to modify and improve upon both conditionalities and communications related to participation in Care Groups.

RECOMMENDATION U18: MCHN Rations

Observations. CRS and partners are following a *quasi*-prevention of malnutrition in children under 2 approach (PM2A). While PM2A includes multiple components (see the FFP technical reference in the footnote), CRS' strategy includes targeting pregnant and lactating (PLW) and children 6-23 months only during the lean season with vitamin A enriched vegetable oil and corn-soy blend plus. CRS decided not to provide other household members with a protective ration to avoid sharing of the specialized foods within the household, since it was expected that the WFP Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) distribution (including primarily maize and pulses) would cover the needs of the most food insecure households. The JMTR appreciated that CRS wanted to avoid providing households with too much food.

During interviews with beneficiaries as well as project staff within all three districts, the JMTR MCHN team quickly learned that the rations are shared and are consumed within one or two weeks. As a preventative approach, provision of rations during the hungry season may have some impact on preventing any spikes in acute malnutrition, but there is no available evidence¹⁹ to show that providing CSB+ and vegetable oil to PLW and children 6-23 months over the lean season will lead to significant reductions in stunting. Moreover, the approach is difficult to transition when the project ends, as UBALE is not yet adequately linking MCHN, 1,000 day

¹⁸ Title II Technical Reference Materials – TRM-01: PM2A: A Food Assisted Approach, Revised November, FANTA-2, 2010. Available at:

https://www.fantaproject.org/sites/default/files/resources/TRM_PM2A_RevisedNov2010_ENGLISH.pdf

¹⁹ The Office of FFP is currently considering revising the preventative ration approach. FFP is in the process of examining existing evidence while creating its own. Two studies commissioned by the Office of Food for Peace through FANTA were carried out by IFPRI in Guatemala and Burundi. Preliminary results showed that specialized, fortified rations (CSB+ and fortified vegetable oil) are not effective in reducing stunting unless provided for the entire period from conception until the child reaches 23 months (a total of up to 32 months per mother-child pair), and only if the rations are accompanied by a household ration. Ration sizes in both contexts were much larger than in UBALE.

households to improved access to nutrient dense, diverse foods, as described above, nor is UBALE attempting to support access to local fortified blended complementary foods such as *Likuni Phala*.

Recommendation. The JMTR team is reluctant to recommend that UBALE increase ration sizes for multiple reasons, including the existence of the MVAC program, the likelihood that this would further encourage the dependency syndrome in Southern Malawi, and FFP itself is encouraging its partners to explore alternative options for the preventative ration approach. Given the concerns raised regarding sustainable impact after UBALE ends and limited linkages created between agriculture, income and nutrition to date (see recommendation U15), the JMTR recommends that the project do additional market analysis to determine whether cash or vouchers are appropriate for the final years of the project. Vouchers, for example, can be used to purchase foods (pigeon peas, NUA beans, orange-fleshed sweet potato, ground nuts and others) that are promoted through Purpose 1 activities. The JMTR does recommend scaling back on the planned work with community-based child care centers, as they are largely perceived as non-functional and do not target infants or young children under the age of two.

RECOMMENDATION U19: Food in Food for Assets (FFA) Projects

Observations. In 2016 after two years of poor harvest for targeted beneficiaries, UBALE accelerated plans for implementing FFA projects in order to make food available for needy households. The design of the projects at that time was less important than making food available, and some of the easiest projects to organize and implement involved planting trees. As a result, the project has implemented a relatively large number of river bank stabilization projects (over 43% of all FFA projects) involving primarily tree-planting. The JMTR found relatively low survival rates on the trees planted in these projects, and even more seedlings were washed out by subsequent floods before they were large enough to have any effect on bank stabilization. The end result is that, as a community asset building intervention, these river bank protection projects have had limited impact. The JMTR also observed, however, that watershed development activities that are building contour bunds, gully checks, and water catchment trenches are appreciated by participants, and participants would rather use the food for assets resources to support more watershed development or water harvesting structures such as dams.

The JMTR observed that the types of FFA projects “selected” by the VCPCs/VNRMCS/ VDCs is tacitly driven by the project, even though project staff are encouraged not to tell communities what they should do. The list of Food for Assets project for UBALE contains very few projects outside of watershed development, river bank protection, a few dams, and latrine construction at health posts or evacuation centers. During initial sensitization meetings in communities early in the life of UBALE, staff were certainly asked by communities what types projects would be supported with Food for Assets, and community committees do not feel like they can propose alternative activities for FFAs. This results in less ownership in the FFA implemented, as well as minimizes the possibility for UBALE to invest in opportunities in each community to build a community asset unique for that community.

Recommendation. UBALE should shift the use of food in FFA projects to activities that produce a sustainable community asset that will generate at least some immediate returns to participants as well as provide long-term benefits. This means reducing the use of food for river bank protection tree planting, which does not generate immediate returns. This is not to say that tree planting should be discouraged. The project should still advocate for tree planting as part of

watershed development. In addition, floods should be viewed not only as disasters that need to be mitigated but also as opportunities for catching and storing water, especially those smaller-scale local floods that provide an opportunity for water catchment. UBALE should identify a good hydrologist or civil engineer to advise on small-scale water harvesting, irrigation and flood mitigation structures appropriate for FFA, that are environmentally-friendly and compliant with USAID regulations. The project should also work with community committees to empower them to identify local opportunities for community asset building. It will take more time to do so, but the projects that will be undertaken will be owned by the community and recognized as a valuable community asset. By the end of the life of UBALE, the project will have piloted some of these projects.

RECOMMENDATION U20: Food or Cash in FFA Projects

Observations. In 2015 and 2016, households in the project areas suffered significant food shortages and market prices for staples were high. It made sense then for UBALE to make distributed food available to these households through FFA, since food was not readily available to them at reasonable cost. Given the large amounts of food that have been distributed not only by UBALE but by WFP and other projects, there is concern that commercial suppliers who had been working in markets in the project area are shifting their marketing strategies to other locations where there is more demand and they can sell their product. When the food distributions are completed, it is not clear whether they will return to the markets in the project areas, especially if they have found more profitable locations elsewhere.

The food made available in UBALE was clearly designed to be a “wage” for the work done on a community asset. If food is available in the market, then cash is easier to manage, although not without its challenges. Making cash available to FFA participants will be less disruptive on commercial markets. This moderate demand may even strengthen local commercial markets, and these must be as functional as possible after the project ends so that food continues to be available in markets.

Recommendation. In order to promote market development, UBALE should consider shifting more of the compensation provided for FFA participants to cash this year and next if food is available in the markets. Given that food for FFA will already have been called forward by the time the next PREP gets submitted, there is a limit to how much change can be made by the project on this cash versus food question. Also, because UBALE is a FFP project and the new norm in the Malawian context is periodic drought, the project cannot fully eliminate all food. FFP projects must have the capacity to quickly surge if need arises. However, in its remaining life, UBALE should consider expanding the pilot activities being undertaken by CRS²⁰.

V. REVIEW OF THE NJIRA PROJECT

A. Overview of the Njira Project

Project Concern International (PCI), in collaboration with Emmanuel International and Agricare, is implementing the Njira Project in 11 Traditional Authorities (84 Group Village Headman clusters) in the two districts of Balaka and Machinga. Table 2 shows the current Goal, Purposes

²⁰ Regrettably, the JMTR only learned of these pilots during the Stakeholder Debriefing and did not have time to observe or interview participants.

and Sub-Purposes for the project²¹. The total number of direct beneficiaries targeted by the project is 244,248 persons. At the time of the JMTR, the estimated total cost for the project was estimated at US\$ 39,367,384, including US\$ 20,000,000 in CDF funds, US\$ 4,950,193 in 202e funds, US\$ 2,151,191 in ITSH funds, US\$ 6,000,000 in cost share contributions, and US\$ 6,266,000 as the estimated cargo/freight cost for 4,593 MT of commodities expected to be distributed over the life of the project in Food for Assets activities and conditional supplemental rations for pregnant or lactating women, children under two and their families.

The Njira Project is implementing a wide array of interventions across the three purposes. The JMTR Protocol provided in Volume II of the JMTR Report provides a fairly complete listing of the major outputs and types of participants under each purpose, and Annex C to this report summarizes the main observations from the JMTR on each of these outputs and activities.

Cutting across the three purposes, the Njira Project has three major cross-cutting themes, including gender equity, governance, and environmental management. Annex C also contains the main observations from the JMTR on these themes.

Table 2. Goal, Purposes and Sub-Purposes for the Njira Project

GOAL: To improve food insecurity among vulnerable populations in Balaka and Machinga Districts in Malawi		
Purpose 1: Increased income	Purpose 2: Improved health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating women and children under five	Purpose 3: Improved capacity to prepare for, manage and respond to shocks
Sub-Purpose 1.1 Increased sustainable and nutrition-friendly agricultural production	Sub-Purpose 2.1 Improved nutrition and health practices	Sub-Purpose 3.1 Improved community and household assets for disaster mitigation
Sub-Purpose 1.2 Increased agricultural and non-agricultural Sales	Sub-Purpose 2.2 Increased utilization of reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health prevention and treatment services	Sub-Purpose 3.2 Improved institutional support for disaster risk management structures at all levels
	Sub-Purpose 2.3 Increased utilization of hygiene, sanitation and water facilities	Sub-Purpose 3.3 Enhanced community empowerment in managing disasters

PCI is the lead agency responsible for overall program management, technical leadership, and financial oversight for the project. In addition, PCI also manages the commodity pipeline, program-level knowledge management systems, and implementation in Balaka District. Emmanuel International implements Njira in Machinga District, and Agricane is responsible for developing and implementing conservation agriculture and irrigation interventions in both districts.

The Njira Project also has a number of technical partners, including the Department of Disaster and Management Affairs (DoDMA), Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA) for agribusiness interventions, Total Land Care on conservation agriculture and fuel efficient stoves, Sun Mountain International for environmental and climate change-related interventions, Watershed Organization Trust for watershed management interventions, Village Outreach for health advice by phone/SMS, and Kusamala In for permaculture interventions.

²¹ These differ slightly from the original proposal as a result of changes made following the M&E Workshop held at the beginning of the project.

B. Summary of Project Progress

Like UBALE, implementation of the original Njira project strategy was hindered by major contextual factors including the late approval of CDF funds, the unplanned start-up training events, and the floods and drought that occurred during the first two years of the project. Nevertheless, the project has succeeded in laying a foundation upon which to build in the next two years. In addition, the Njira Project has developed strong relationships with government all the way up to the national level and has achieved effective cross-purpose integration at the frontlines. Njira's delivery model is much more aligned with the typical NGO style of delivery in a Title II Project, with significant frontline staff working directly with participants and beneficiaries. Because of this, the project needs to think much more systematically about the sustainability of the impact that is being achieved. Also, Njira is implementing a very wide range of activities, especially under Purpose 1. Given the time remaining in the life of the project, it may be difficult for the project to achieve quality standards across all of these activities. The JMTR also found that some of the systems being used to implement the project are constraining the project from realizing its full potential.

Following are the major achievements so far in the life of the Njira Project. The list provided below is not exhaustive. More achievements are reported in the sections describing the priority recommendations and in the more detailed information provided in Annex C.

Project-Level Achievements

- The project has enabled women to participate at relatively high levels across community groups, including in leadership positions.
- As a result of the project, there is broader acceptance of women's right to participation and increased awareness among men of the value of joint household duties and decision-making.
- The project has tested a model for using integrated Dynamic Teams for implementing project activities at the frontlines, facilitating a more holistic, cross-purpose strategy.
- Through linkages to a specialized environmental monitoring partner, the project has effectively addressed environmental compliance and climate change adaptation needs across all purposes.

Purpose 1: Income

- The project is implementing an explicit strategy to support agricultural and non-agricultural income generation, which acknowledges that not all targeted households will be able to sustain their livelihoods through agriculture alone.
- WE/VSL approach is being enthusiastically adopted by members with immediate benefits to families, strengthening of household dynamics, and building resilience among female-headed households.
- Targets for marketing groups and TA marketing committees have been met and the target for clubs has been exceeded.
- One season of experience has been completed with collective sales of pigeon peas and cowpeas, although with varying results.

- Thirteen fully operational irrigation sites have been established that provide Water User Association members with immediate benefits.
- Farm families and lead volunteers are exhibiting enthusiasm and solid knowledge on conservation agriculture, drought-tolerant crops, livestock disease management, permaculture gardens, cook stoves, nutrition, agroforestry, watershed management, seed multiplication, irrigation, farming as a business, Women's Empowerment, and basic budgeting.

Purpose 2: MCHN

- MCHN beneficiaries are obtaining benefits beyond Purpose 2, with the majority of MCHN neighbor women and lead mothers describing benefits from other activities in Purpose 1 and Purpose 3, including WE/VSL, seeds, livestock and others.
- The pace of roll out of MCHN modules has been impressive to date, and communities feel the messages promoted in the WASH module will leave lasting effects.
- Community-led complementary feeding and learning sessions are highly appreciated by communities who feel the use of more diverse foods for child feeding will continue once project ends.
- Njira has wisely instructed neighbor women that care group participation is intended for all children under five, and they remain engaged in these activities after the rations "end" when the child reaches age two.
- The ratio of cluster leaders (lead mothers) to beneficiaries appears adequate and has achieved impressive scale, although more supervision is needed to improve quality before the project ends.
- Care Group participants describe Njira as having greatest effect on hygiene and sanitation.
- The project has improved access to and management of WASH facilities, e.g., by the end of quarter two FY 17, 21 out of 66 communities had been declared as open defecation free areas and 437 out of 900 water point committees had been trained in community based management.
- The project partnered with the Government of Malawi in addressing the cholera outbreak in Machinga and distributed 4000 leaflets on cholera prevention and management as well as distributing 4800 sachets of chlorine-based PUR²² water treatment chemicals.

Purpose 3: Preparing for and Responding to Shocks

- Significant capacity building has been completed with the Civil Protection Committee structure through training on selected modules from the DoDMA DRM Training Manual.
- Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Assessments (PCVAs) have been implemented with VCPCs, and DRM Plans and Contingency Plans have been developed at the GVH and TA levels.

²² PUR is a powder form Purifier of Water product

- The project has completed early warning systems training, provided rain gauges, provided river gauges, and provided of drums, whistles, megaphones and cell phones to VCPCs.
- Financial support has been provided for development of district disaster contingency plans.
- Support has been provided for the following FFA projects:
 - Watershed Development* (28) – Contour trenches, check dams, stone bunds, water absorption trenches, gully plugs, planting of trees or vetiver grass, and management of the natural regeneration of trees
 - Afforestation* (24) – Seedlings, nursery and planting of trees on communal land
 - Road rehabilitation* (13) – Side brushing, basic drainage (camber & checks), planting of trees or grass, and filling in pot holes
 - Irrigation Protection* (12) – Planting of trees around newly constructed irrigation systems
 - River Bank Stabilization* (9) – Dredging of stream beds, raising banks, planting of trees or grass along stream beds to stabilize banks
 - Dam construction* (5) – Construction of dams in or near stream beds to capture and store water for irrigation
- Starting in Project Year 2, the project conducted monthly rapid food security assessments to monitor recovery from El Niño...these will move to quarterly assessments during the dry season.
- Ten watershed development sites have been completed, encompassing 680 hectares.
- VNRMCs have been trained and provided with nursery materials for tree nursery management
- All CPC committees have been trained on good governance and gender.
- Geo-reference maps at the GVH-level have been developed using the Dynamic Research-Informed System for Managing Risk (D-RISK).
- DRM simulations have been implemented in selected GVHs.
- Strong links have been forged with the local government structures and village leaders on gender with GoM Community Development Agents co-facilitating gender trainings and good involvement of the ADC and VDC structures in gender capacity building

C. Recommendations for the Remaining Life of Njira

The sections which follow describe the priority recommendations that emerged from the review of the Njira Project. These have been clustered around a number of major themes upon which the project is encouraged to focus between now and its completion. The major observations supporting each recommendation are provided in the sections which follow. More detail on these observations as well as additional recommendations that did not make the priority list are provided in Annex C which contains a more complete perspective on how the recommendations emerged.

1. Theme: Sustainable Impact. In the next two years, the focus across the project should be on systematically thinking about what is required to sustain the impact being achieved by the

project after the project ends. The JMTR found that most project staff can talk about a vision for what the project is supposed to achieve by 2019, but few can answer the question about what will people see in five years' time from the Njira Project. This is particularly critical for a project like Njira which is using the more typical NGO-style delivery model with significant frontline staff who are working extensively with participants now but who will not be available to continue this support after the project ends. At the end of the day, Njira may have met most of the LoA obligations made in terms of training and delivery of food, but if the outcomes that result are not sustained beyond the project life, then the project will not be considered a success. Following are six recommendations in support of this theme.

RECOMMENDATION N1: Sustainability Vision & Plan

Observations. The Njira Project is working with a wide range of participant groups and intermediaries to achieve sustained impact. The JMTR found that the project has made progress in strengthening relations with district-level governments, and the relationships are cordial and provide a base upon which to build. The project has also established or strengthened many rural groups or 'institutions'. Some have the potential to sustain themselves beyond the life of the project, but the JMTR found that the sense of identity and commitment for *all* groups set up or strengthened by Njira was not as strong as required to ensure that the groups continue to function after the project ends. Many groups are still dependent on project staff for planning and motivation. As mentioned, the JMTR found it difficult to find a consistent vision among project implementing staff for how the impact being generated by project activities is expected to be sustained after the project ends.

The JMTR also observed some external factors that will challenge the project in trying to ensure the sustainability of the impact being achieved. These include the increasing problems with governance and accountability, resulting in increased corruption and reduced capacities of government to provide or sustain basic services. NASFAM, the major partner for sustaining the impact being achieved in agricultural marketing, is developing a new strategy and facing a possible restructuring, potentially affecting the ability of the organization to sustain the impact being achieved by Njira. There is also a trend to place greater demands on village savings and lending groups, including Njira's WE/VSL groups, which may result in over-regulation by government or management demands exceeding the management capacities for these groups.

The sustainability plan and exit strategies that were submitted with the original proposal for Njira have not been reviewed since the proposal was developed. It is critical that Njira develop a coherent vision and plan now for ensuring the sustainability of project impact.

Recommendation. At the beginning of the next planning cycle, a visioning/analysis/planning exercise should be conducted around the question of what specific sustainable impact does the Njira Project intend to achieve. This exercise should begin with a discussion around what it means to "think sustainability". Great projects are continuously thinking about sustainability and how every activity that the project does can be done in ways to promote sustainable impact.

In this exercise, specific sustainability objectives should be developed, for example, around what the various types of volunteers, committees and other groups engaged by the project are expected to be doing after the project ends to sustain the impact generated by the project. These objectives should reflect:

- a) The *attitudes and behaviors* of beneficiaries and intermediaries that Njira wants to be sustained after the project ends. This may require more rigorous behavioral change surveys and analysis to assess the level of indirect benefits and adoption in 2017 that will direct adjustments for year four and wrap-up in year five.
- b) The *services, systems and structures* that Njira has supported or created which are intended to continue once Njira finishes. This entails involving and holding semi-annual reviews with government counterparts, NASFAM, and other permanent stakeholders to strengthen or establish buy-in and continued support, including financial support.

Once the sustainability objectives have been identified, these should be analyzed to identify constraints and opportunities that will affect whether the objectives will be realized. PCI has its own resource guide on the concept of enhancing the potential for sustainable impact, and recent FFP projects are using a guide developed by FANTA III²³ for analyzing potential sustainability, both of which can be used for reference. The DIP for the coming year should include activities that capitalize on opportunities or address threats identified in the sustainability analysis.

RECOMMENDATION N2: Governance

Observations: Njira recognizes the critical importance of good governance for empowerment of the groups and committees it has formed, and group empowerment is critical to ensuring their sustainability once the project closes. The project recently filled the Governance Coordinator position, and the project is well-positioned now to move forward with building the capacities of all groups and committees in the project to be able to practice themselves and demand transparency and accountability from service providers. Of the many groups or committees that Njira has created or is seeking to strengthen, the project has made the most progress with the WE/VSL which is recognized as a model for how to integrate the principles of good governance into the creation of new rural institutions. There are also incipient signs in other structures established by the project, but more needs to be done to ensure that good governance practices are firmly established.

Recommendation. Njira should reinforce with all staff the importance of governance skills in achieving the project goal and provide staff with orientation and training on how they should play a role in this process. The project should then ensure early integration of the governance skills training and follow-up in all instances where Njira is creating or strengthening structures (groups, committees, and clusters) that are intended to last beyond the life of the project. Cases where the project sees early and positive success in good governance should be identified and analyzed to learn from these and apply the learning in planning of subsequent activities. The project should also conduct periodic assessments on the understanding and practice of the target recipients on good governance, providing follow-up mentoring or refresher training where necessary.

RECOMMENDATION N3: Local Economic Development Plans

Observations. Njira's strategy under Purpose 1 explicitly addresses agricultural and non-agricultural income generation opportunities for rural households. Furthermore, PCI and EI have a track record in food security-related interventions in Balaka and Machinga Districts. These

²³"Sustaining Development: A Synthesis of Results from a Four-Country Study of Sustainability and Exit Strategies among Development Food Assistance Projects", Beatrice Lorge Rogers and Jennifer Coates, FANTA III, December 2015

provide the basis from which to strengthen local economic planning and implementation processes. The elements that come together to support this idea include:

- Njira's selection of locally adapted and contextually relevant crops and livestock, along with production strategies such as irrigation and watershed development
- Solid foundation of cohesive savings and lending groups at village level
- Governance structures in place at marketing club, group and TA level with support from NASFAM
- Participation in the USAID-funded Local Government Accountability and Performance (LGAP) program where projects such as Njira are being approached to implement the project at sub-District levels.

The observed obstacles that this approach will address include:

- Njira's multiple activities in space and time, with an apparent short-term vision focused on a reduced number of agricultural products and a yet-to be established portfolio of micro- and small non-agricultural businesses
- Concentration of business activities in a few agricultural products that expose households to market risk due to price fluctuations or crop failures caused by unpredictable climate change consequences
- Presence of many development actors with weak incentives to integrate and cooperate

Recommendation. The Njira Project should develop stakeholder-owned and driven, customized and actionable local economic development plans at the TA level that link contextual community needs and drivers, TA competitive advantages and business opportunities. Over the next two years, Njira should develop the concept of an actionable local economic development plan at the TA level and test the concept with key stakeholders in two TAs. This test should involve (a) conducting a rapid livelihoods assessment to categorize and prioritize population segments, (b) specification of the TA's assets that represent a competitive advantage, (c) identification of market opportunities for prioritized population segments, and (d) business analysis of the most attractive options and formulation of a TA business development strategy.

RECOMMENDATION N4: Sustainability Plan for Water Infrastructure

Observations. The JMTR observed that Water Point Committees and area mechanics were trained and are able to work together. As a result, the down time of borehole pumps has been reduced to less than 48 hours, which is very good, although only minor breakdowns have occurred to date. The Water Point Committees have been trained on fund-raising, but for the committees visited by the JMTR, only around 80% had collected funds, and the amount collected was no more than MWK 10,000 (less than US\$ 15). With such small amounts, none of the borehole committees will be able to finance a major repair of the borehole within 48 hours of a pump breakdown. Also, all of the water points that were visited during the JMTR had either an incomplete operation and maintenance plan or no plan at all. The lack of this plan has affected some operations of the committees, including fundraising for the cost of maintenance.

The JMTR also observed that there is still a great need for new water points as most of the boreholes are currently serving more than the 250 people, exceeding the recommended government standard for water point service. Njira has not put in place strategies that would help communities to raise enough funds or submit proposals to government or other sources for drilling new wells or rehabilitating existing boreholes that are in poor condition.

Recommendation. The Njira Project should facilitate the development of a long-term sustainability plan for the water points. The project should follow the Malawi Government approach on setting up the minimum amount of borehole maintenance fund, and this should be the target for all the committees with which Njira is working. Njira should also facilitate establishment of a broader support structure, including a borehole user association and/or link to village savings and loans groups²⁴. This would allow the committees to generate interest as well as reduce the risk of keeping huge sums of money at home. The project should also work with other NGOs that can provide technical and financial support in rehabilitation and construction of new water points. This would increase the number of water points, ultimately targeting continuous access to safe water at a minimum of 20L per person per day within 30 minutes walking distance.

RECOMMENDATION N5: Engagement with Health Community Structures

Observations. Njira engages well with the GoM Health Surveillance Assistants in the community. They reported participating in the trainings with the Health Promoters on the Care Group modules, using the referral forms provided by Njira to track beneficiaries attending health facilities and working on growth monitoring and CCFLS with Njira. Njira has very good relationships with the MOH teams in both districts, although both would like to have more communication and collaboration. The MOH is also launching a new national community health strategy, which describes the national goals and methodologies that will be supported.

Recommendation. The JMTR recommends that the Njira team take this opportunity to engage with the Ministry of Health as the new strategy is rolled out, to strengthen and support the community health structures outlined in the draft national strategy, supporting the MOH specifically to strengthen Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (RMNCH) activities with Community Health Workers and Health Surveillance Assistants at the community level (and contributing to Community Health Teams if this is what is finalized in the strategy). The Njira Project has planned to work with VNCCs and CLANs, but the strategy is not very clear as to how and this ambiguity needs to be addressed. In all cases, the project should "think sustainability" as it works with these different structures.

RECOMMENDATION N6: Ubwino Centers

Observations. The Njira Project is establishing Ubwino Centers at the GVH level to function as a meeting venue for community meetings as well as an information center for a variety of useful information for community residents. While the long-term vision for these centers needs to be fleshed out by the project (as part of Recommendation N1), the JMTR recognizes the potential that they have to serve the community after the project ends. Most of the Ubwino Centers already have management committees to manage the facility and provide guidance to community people stopping by the center. The JMTR also learned that some communities constructed their own Ubwino Centers with no project support, indicating a strong sense of ownership in the centers.

The JMTR also observed some gaps, however, that threaten the sustainability of the centers. Making good information available in the centers is critical to their usefulness to the community.

²⁴ Enabling WPCs to deposit funds with VSLAs should be done in ways that do not affect the normal operations of the VSLAs. One way to do this is to allow WPCs to purchase shares, perhaps increasing the number of shares that a group can purchase, and treating the WPC "member" like any other member of the VSLA.

At the moment, the bulk of the information that is available is primarily project-driven information generated through various exercises conducted under the different project purposes. Many Ubwino Centers are not enclosed and open to the elements, requiring materials that are displayed to be regularly removed and only put out when an event is scheduled. The Ubwino Center management committees have also not been supported to develop and implement plans for obtaining useful information from other sources outside of the Njira Project. Although the JMTR found some evidence of use of the Ubwino Centers by other projects or government service providers, the management committees have also not been encouraged nor trained to market their facility for use by others.

Increasing the demand for the Ubwino Center by community residents and by other organizations is also essential to ensuring the sustainability of the facility. The JMTR observed that there are no special days or other activities outside of the Njira project for community members who do not belong to different Njira project groups to come and learn, and no other Ubwino services are provided outside of the building in most of the communities.

Some concerns also arose around the inclusivity of the Ubwino Centers. The high levels of illiteracy among women in rural areas, for example, limit their access to learning from the centers since they can only benefit if someone is explaining the messages to them. In larger communities, the Ubwino Center can be located some distance from villages in the GVH which makes it difficult for people in these villages to learn from the Ubwino Center.

Recommendation. One of the sustainability objectives to be developed under Recommendation N1 should reflect a vision for what the Ubwino Center should be doing after the project ends in order to sustain the impact being achieved by the project. Some of the activities likely to emerge from an analysis around this sustainability objective will be to build the capacities of the management committees for the centers to seek out useful information from Njira and elsewhere, covering a full range of topics not only promoted by Njira, but also by other projects and government departments. The committees should also explore ways to introduce other Ubwino services as desired by the community, such as demonstrations for community learning, good toilets with hand washing facilities, or football and netball pitches to encourage more engagement with the local community. One important service to target specifically is to facilitate adult education, especially for women, in Ubwino Centers.

2. Theme: Program Quality. The Njira Project has undertaken a wide range of activities, but for many of these, the project has only been able to start the process of achieving impact. In the remaining two years, the focus should be on achieving high quality standards on selected activities likely to have the greatest impact in achieving the project goal. This will require implementing a systematic process to make decisions on what to continue and what to discontinue over the next two years. It will also require deepening the capacity building that is being done so that the behavioral change outcomes that result are firmly entrenched. By the time Njira is completed, the project will have focused on fewer types of activities and intensified the interaction with targeted participants. Following are eight recommendations in support of this theme.

RECOMMENDATION N7: Theory of Change

Observations. Tailoring interventions to match the specific needs of defined impact groups has been implied as the core of the strategy for the Njira Project. A ToC supporting the design of such a strategy requires clearly defining the targeted impact groups, defining their needs,

opportunities and challenges, and identifying specific interventions to address these. Ultimately, these interventions should combine empowerment and access strategies that are tailored to meet the specific needs and opportunities for identified target groups. Overall, the JMTR found limited evidence of tailored pathways in the Njira Project. Impact groups are not being clearly defined, and there were inconsistencies in the application of the targeting criteria across villages in the same district and across districts. While the majority of beneficiaries being targeted are poor and vulnerable, there is a significant proportion of middle and better off households benefiting from Njira interventions as direct beneficiaries. In some villages, the very poor and vulnerable and the middle to better-off are all receiving the same basket of interventions, bringing into question the tailoring of interventions to meet target group specific needs and challenges.

The JMTR also observed that a number of assumptions that were made in the ToC are no longer valid and require review. Examples include assumptions on the availability of Ministry of Health (MoH) resources, the availability of information, skills, services and resources in the context related to climate smart agriculture, the availability of quality health and nutrition services, and the availability of small livestock, especially male goats, non-local chickens and pigeons.

Njira is implementing a research agenda meant to generate knowledge to meet its learning needs. The JMTR found that the research agenda is not fully informed by learning needs related to the ToC causal pathways and assumptions. Research should be designed to obtain data to identify pathways that are contributing the most to the desired impact and those that are having marginal or no contribution at all toward outcomes. A ToC review will provide an opportunity to develop a demand-driven research agenda as well as reflect on whether, as currently designed, the interventions are at the right depth to produce the desired effects.

Recommendation. Njira should conduct a ToC review as part of the next planning cycle. This process should start with clearly defining targeted impact groups, focusing on highly vulnerable groups for which life changing impact can be achieved by the project, and then defining causal pathways that will enable them to achieve the project's goal. The assumptions behind the ToC should be reviewed for relevance, and alternative implementation strategies should be developed for assumptions that are no longer valid. The project's current set of activities/interventions should be reviewed in light of these pathways with a view to reducing the number of interventions, focusing on those likely to produce the greatest impact for each identified target impact group. Village leaders and project implementing staff who are central to the targeting of beneficiaries will need to be trained/reoriented to support the selection of households conforming with the revised definition of targeted impact groups that is developed.

RECOMMENDATION N8: Distributions under Purpose 1

Observations. Njira is using a pass-on model to facilitate the diffusion of seed and livestock provided to participants. The approach is understood and appreciated by the communities, and both Community Animal Health Workers and groups seem motivated to pass on benefits to others, particularly to the highly vulnerable. However, the distribution system has faced considerable setbacks, and some of the intended impacts are not yet happening. Pigeons, for example, are not being consumed for quick nutrition needs because of the imperative to multiply them for pass-on. The JMTR heard pervasive disappointment from livestock groups, seed multiplication groups, CAWHs, and others who had not received distributions as promised, either in timing or in quantity, or had experienced significant gaps between training and receipt

of distributions. The significant variability in success by communities in multiplying their seeds or livestock, while understandable, raised concerns about how well learning is happening within the focal groups. Additionally, there was a feeling of being stretched thin on the part of frontline field staff in training and distribution for cookstoves and permaculture gardens, in particular. The JMTR would also like to highlight the fact that development evidence points to low sustainability of pass-on models beyond the second cycle and very poor, inconsistent adoption of cookstoves across sub-Saharan Africa.

Recommendation. Njira should deliver fully on promised distributions, significantly scale back planned 2017 distributions where possible, and stop distributions after 2017. The project should focus delivery of distribution for those groups/individuals who were disappointed in 2016 and offer refresher training for these groups/individuals. Frontline staff should also be encouraged to make an effort to reconnect with disappointed volunteers and groups to rebuild trust. A gradual exit plan should be developed and implemented in which Njira provides technical assistance only, phasing out distribution after 2017, but still assuring communities of technical support. Njira should no longer implement capacity building or trainings dedicated solely to cookstoves, but the project should continue to promote fuel-efficient messaging in focal groups, including aligning with lessons learned and resources from other USAID projects. Finally, the permaculture gardens approach should be retailored so that trainings are part of normal Care Group activities.

RECOMMENDATION N9: Growing Business

Observations. Purpose 1 has an explicit business orientation which is manifested through (a) the establishment of WE/VSL groups that are the foundation for progressing along a ‘wealth generation pathway’ aimed at wealth creation through agricultural and non-agricultural micro- and small businesses and (b) the formation of marketing clubs, marketing groups and marketing committees for the collective sale of prioritized agricultural crops and livestock, following the NASFAM model. The JMTR team observed that the WE/VSL approach is a model for good governance. Women participate actively and freely with overall positive consequences for intra-household relationships. District government and village leaders value the WE/VSL approach for its impact on households dynamics and resilience, and the WE/VSL members are making incipient investments in micro- and small income generating businesses.

The establishment of a marketing structure is also filling a critical farmer need and desire. It has generated high – but often unrealistic – expectations for better prices for farmers. The roll-out of business training and mentoring for the structure has been delayed, and the practice of good governance at each level is incipient.

Livestock play a critical role in the local economy. Livestock fairs are appreciated and pass-on groups, if successful after the first round, have assets and knowledge. However, the JMTR did not find any clear sustainability plans for these events, although government staff did express interest in having livestock fairs continue.

There is an ambiguity about the actual and future use of fee-paid service providers. CAHWs, a trusted and knowledgeable resource, presently are not being paid by clients for their services. There is concern within Njira over the fee-for-service approach to be used by the WE/VSL Investment Advisors (IA) compared to the free service provided by community agents. The local NGO, Chinas, is scheduled to start supporting marketing groups for a fee from 2018 onwards.

Recommendation. Njira should prioritize the roll-out of the business skills training curriculum and implement a schedule for periodic mentoring of pass-on groups, community agents, marketing clubs, clusters and committees and WE/VSL originated enterprises. Priority actions include (a) inclusion of governance-related skills with the roll-out of business skills training for market clubs, groups and committees, (b) formulation of a clear Njira policy on and support for fee-for-service payment for market and business support to groups, and (c) examination of the feasibility of putting Livestock and Seed Fairs on a commercial footing, with support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Irrigation Development, as part of developing a sustainability objective for these events.

RECOMMENDATION N10: Social and Behavioral Change for Preventing Malnutrition

Observations. The pace of the roll out of Njira's Care Group modules has been impressive to date, and communities feel that the WASH module will leave lasting effects beyond the project's end. However, the focus of Care Groups is largely on promoting messages in groups. Individual caregivers have so far received very little individual counseling and mentoring. Household visits are primarily being done when the lead mother collects data or if the neighbor woman is absent from the Care Group group messaging session. During the field visits in Balaka, the JMTR uncovered one example where sessions were done in groups of over 90 people, without any smaller group or individual sessions.

The JMTR also found that the Care Group "messages" are not sequenced according to the human life cycle. For example, when the mother enters the Care Group, she is not necessarily provided with information regarding safe motherhood or diet during pregnancy.

Rural Malawians live in collective societies and decision making for child care and feeding goes well beyond the individual mother, so strong community mobilization and gender activities are needed to address socio-cultural determinants of behaviors to produce changes in social norms. To date, these activities are slow to roll out and the community mobilization strategy is unclear to project staff, including, for example, the work with CLANs/VNCCs. The work with Father Groups has shown promise, but these are still at a relatively small scale, and the approach has not yet been tailored. The Father Group modules are identical to those being utilized by lead mothers. At this point, it is unclear what the added value of Father Groups will be, although Father Groups are an Njira innovation which could potentially be scaled up via the government of Malawi Care Group model.

The CCFLS are another platform that could be better utilized to provide more tailored counseling to mothers of children who have poor growth. These also offer potential to better link malnourished children to health services for those children who are not gaining weight due to illness, often one of the main causes of poor growth.

Recommendation. The JMTR recommends that Njira focus more on the quality of Care Group activities, recognizing that messaging is not enough to lead to sustained behavior change. Greater attention is needed to improve counseling and negotiation for mothers who are experiencing problems with child feeding and caregiving. The project should strengthen promoters' and lead mothers' capacities toward providing greater assistance in these areas. Njira should consider enlisting an SBCC expert who can dedicate time to capacity strengthening for counseling and accompaniment. To address social norms and other determinants of key behaviors which could have the greatest impact on reducing malnutrition, the project should further elaborate its community mobilization activities, including development and

implementation of a strategy to work with community leaders and influential groups. These groups will include both Care Group support structures (CLANs and VNCCs, as per the GoM model) and greater inclusion of fathers and grandmothers into Care Group activities.

RECOMMENDATION N11: Ensuring True Learning under Purpose 1

Observations. Njira has rolled out an admirable array of learning modules and trainings within Purpose 1 that are aligned with GoM standards and exhibit a strong awareness and use of basic adult learning principles. Beneficiaries and lead volunteers exhibited enthusiasm for and a solid knowledge of many technical areas as a result of these extensive trainings. The JMTR observed some significant issues, however, resulting from mismatched timing between a learning event and the ability to implement the learning, for example, with livestock training and then significantly delayed livestock distribution. Technical staff expressed frustration at delays in the rolling out of ToT trainings and the consequences for their continued field level trainings. In addition, the JMTR observed that while government staff exhibited support for Njira via attendance in the field at trainings, GoM staff did not exhibit a strong sense of ownership with input into the design or implementation of activities. They reported that the trainings belonged to Njira just as some trained lead volunteers perceived themselves as belonging to Njira, not connected to their government contacts.

Recommendation. Njira should use the remaining time to ensure that true learning occurs among project participants and a stronger sense of ownership in the project is cultivated with government stakeholders. The project should monitor and analyze learning by participants and intermediaries via quick surveys on learning retention. Refresher training and mentoring on past trainings should be provided where retention is identified as low. The project should only roll out new trainings on climate change adaptation across all purposes and on business development. To cultivate stronger ownership by government stakeholders, the project should engage GoM field-level staff and NASFAM via work planning sessions in curriculum design and mentoring strategy development.

RECOMMENDATION N12: Reproductive Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Services

Observations. As part of the strategy to improve maternal and child health and nutrition, Njira sought to understand supply-side challenges in health care facilities in Balaka and Machinga. After carrying out health care facility assessments of RMNCH service availability and staff capacity, the project conducted gap-filling trainings on specific issues for facility staff, HSAs and Community-Based Distribution Officer (CBDAs). Given that a new USAID health project (ONSE²⁵) is starting up in these districts, further capacity building of facility staff will not have to be done through Njira.

The recent DHS reports that 29 percent of adolescents age 15-19 in Malawi have begun childbearing, contributing to the cycle of poverty and malnutrition. Staff in Nutrition Rehabilitation Units noted that young mothers made up a significant portion of their clients with severely and acutely malnourished children. Stakeholders and beneficiaries strongly urged the project to do more on family planning in the community, especially for young women and men.

Recommendation. The RMNCH focus for Njira should shift to the community level. The project should continue rolling out the maternal and newborn care modules, as well as the IMCI

²⁵ Organized Network of Services for Everyone's Health

module. Njira should also consider introducing a family planning module for Care Groups and Father Groups, with strong involvement of the HSAs who are entrusted to lead this work at the community level. Finally, the project should find ways to improve access for adolescents and others to services provided by HSAs and CBDAs.

RECOMMENDATION N13 Civil Protection Committees

Observations. A major function of the Civil Protection Committee structure is to assess and report on the scale of disasters that occur and to support the emergency response to address these disasters. The JMTR found that Village Civil Protection Committees based at the GVH level are doing a pretty good job with identifying, assessing and reporting on disasters that occur in their jurisdiction. The Area Civil Protection Committees which are based at the TA level are also verifying and reporting on emergencies, usually in a timely way. The JMTR also found, however, that not much is happening on the emergency response function, except in the case of very large disasters, for which resources are mobilized from NGOs and donors. VCPCs, in fact, rarely hear back on the decisions made on their assessment reports, and sometimes the response received when it does come does not match the needs of the people affected by the emergency nor the recommended response from the VCPC and ACPC. This lack of feedback and inappropriate response makes some VCPCs wonder whether they are doing their work properly and in some cases whether it is even worth the effort to do an assessment. The few VCPCs that had either heard verification that their report had been received at the District-level or actually received an appropriate emergency response, appreciated the recognition and were more motivated to continue assessing and reporting on disasters.

A second observation is that the Njira logical framework and IPTT are not very well-defined under Sub-Purpose 3.3 for Enhanced Community Empowerment in Managing Disasters. While there are three Immediate Outcomes that have been defined under this sub-purpose, there are no outputs specified to indicate how the outcomes are expected to be achieved by the project.

Recommendation. For the remaining two years of Njira, the project should focus on making the assessment/response function of the Civil Protection Committee structure fully functional, which is basically Sub-Purpose 3.3 in the Njira strategy. One step in this process is to monitor the performance of the Civil Protection Committee system more rigorously by working with the Assistant District Disaster Risk Management Officer (ADDRMO) in each district to set up a monitoring system to track the processing of reports from VCPCs and the responses made. Then, to reinforce the role of VCPCs and ACPCs, Njira should pilot an activity in which funds from the project are made available to support small-scale emergency responses identified by VCPCs. These funds would only be used to support smaller disaster responses, such as windstorms or fires, which are below the threshold for the ADDRMO and District Civil Protection Committee to make an appeal. The purpose of providing these funds is to motivate and build the capacities of the VCPCs to be able to fulfill their complete function from assessment through response effectively. The purpose is not to provide emergency assistance. The project should "think sustainability" in implementing this pilot by working with DoDMA to develop a plan for managing the funds and to advocate with the national DODMA for the government to sustain the funds after the project ends. If the national DODMA is not interested, then the project should not undertake the pilot since it will be unsustainable. Finally, the logical framework and IPTT should be updated under Sub-Purpose 3.3 to include outputs related to building the capacities of the Civil Protection Committee structure to manage disasters. Two outputs to include are the monitoring system and the small-scale emergency response pilot.

RECOMMENDATION N14: Gender Champions

Observations. The Njira gender strategy has charted a path for training and dispatching volunteer gender champions (male champions and “model couples”) across the two districts. The JMTR team found that the process used to select the champions has been applied consistently, that champions have a good understanding of their role and core messages, and that the champions are coordinating effectively with village leaders. However, gaps remain.

In Balaka, there have been some delays in selecting and training the male champions, and the “model couples” had not yet been selected at the time of the JMTR. Across both districts, the JMTR team found that the champions lack materials in Chichewa and need resources and further skills-building to help them conduct awareness-raising activities. The champions interviewed in Balaka also complained of having to cover large geographic areas without transport. There was also inconsistency in terms of whether the male champions had formed informal peer groups (networks) to support their work, and where this is occurring, it was unclear whether these efforts were an intended project strategy or merely based on personal initiative. Furthermore, the JMTR team received mixed information about the extent to which the gender champions are collaborating with the village gender committees that are championed by the government under the Department of Community Development.

Recommendation. To ensure volunteer retention across the life of the project and that the approach ultimately contributes to long-term shifts in gender norms, the Njira Project should deepen its engagement with the existing gender champions. The project should provide supportive supervision, materials in Chichewa, and visual aids to champions. Review and reflection meetings should be organized at the TA level to analyze what is working and what is not working. To relieve the burden of champions having to cover large geographic areas in isolation, the project should strengthen the links between champions and village gender committees and build the skills of champions to expand their membership and cascade messages.

Njira should design men-specific approaches and materials (e.g. on involved fatherhood) using a peer-to-peer model that is informed by an understanding of the social-determinants of behavior and facilitate cross-pollination of messages with fathers and other groups. Finally, the project should consider recruiting a highly experienced gender advisor at the PMU level to ensure technical excellence and coordination across the two districts.

3. Theme: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL). As with UBALE, the MEL system that was put in place at the start of the Njira Project has been overwhelmed by the volume of information required to monitor over a hundred performance indicators. Efforts have been made to reduce the indicators, but the system is still only able to generate basic information for reporting purposes, and the system is not working to make information available to decision-makers. In line with the themes to achieve sustainable impact and improve program quality, the MEL system should be made more functional to provide information to decision-makers to focus the Njira strategy where the greatest impact can be achieved. The research agenda should also focus on questions associated with clarifying or verifying assumptions in the project’s Theory of Change. By the end of the project, decision-makers will be using information from these two sources to make decisions on project strategy and operations to maximize impact and efficiently use resources in doing so. The JMTR has one large recommendation in support of this theme.

RECOMMENDATION N15: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning from G-PATH

Observations. The Njira MEL system is centered around G-PATH, a database and information management system. The commodities component of the system has been completed and is fully functional. It is the monitoring, evaluation and learning function of the system that is still incomplete, with monitoring data not readily available for analysis to generate information required by decision makers for informed and evidence-based decision making. A number of observations explain this situation.

Project implementation commenced before the MEL system had been developed, and MEL has been playing catch-up with programs, which has proved difficult. The design and roll out, for example, of data collection forms and registration for WE/VSL, Agribusiness, Livestock and Irrigation groups is still to be completed. Data collection and entry has also been overwhelming for the MEL team, which is largely only focusing on data collection and entry to enable donor reporting. Very minimal analysis of data to inform programmatic decisions is currently being conducted by the MEL team. The recent hiring of additional data entry clerks has helped reduce the backlog on data entry.

G-PATH requires large bandwidth for data entry to be conducted online, and offline capabilities for G-PATH are currently limited, although Njira is working to develop these capabilities. The power, internet and technology nexus in rural Malawi has essentially made it very difficult for data entry to be conducted online, resulting in multiple entries and duplication in G-PATH.

Data quality is also a concern. Volunteers play a critical role in the collection of data, but they generally have very low literacy levels and are not remunerated or provided with an incentive. Volunteers and project frontline staff have also not received adequate training on each of the data collection forms being used. As a result, a significant number of forms submitted are incomplete and contain errors. Additional training and translation of the tools into Chichewa has improved the situation, but the overall data quality still requires improvement. The data flow checks and balances are also not being rigorously followed, resulting in forms being submitted to the MEL team without having been checked by Project Coordinators at the field level.

Recommendation. Njira needs to finalize development of the MEL system to ensure that it can generate information required by decision makers as well as for reporting. The development of G-PATH should be finalized, and for that to happen, all outstanding tools and registration of groups should be completed. The offline capability of G-PATH should be developed as a matter of urgency to enable MEL to function, and current efforts on developing this capacity should be accelerated. Duplicates and errors in the G-PATH system should be eliminated, and a data quality assessment involving the USAID Mission and the FFP regional Office should be commissioned once all the tools have been rolled out and the G-PATH finalized.

4. Theme: Implementation Systems. Implementation systems for projects like Njira include the management systems used to develop strategic and operational plans, to identify and solve implementation problems, and to make and communicate decisions; partner roles, responsibilities and relationships; the mechanisms for ensuring integration across project components and complementarity with other development programs; and the resource management systems for money, commodities, staff and administrative support. Even a well-designed project can fail if implementation systems are not made as efficient and effective as possible, and the JMTR found that the Njira Project is being held back from effective and

efficient implementation by some of its systems. Following are four recommendations in support of this theme.

RECOMMENDATION N16: Operational Planning

Observations. The JMTR found the DIP to be complete and sufficiently detailed, with significant participation of staff in its development. However, there appears to be not enough joint planning across purposes, which is quite critical since the project uses integrated teams of frontline staff. More importantly, operational planning is being affected too often by new activities that disrupt implementation of the DIP. The JMTR heard numerous reports of planned activities having to be disrupted because frontline staff are diverted to other unplanned activities, sometimes related to MEL. The JMTR also heard from the frontlines that the project often brings too many activities at once across all purposes, causing confusion on the ground due to multiple supervisory relations (see Recommendation N19).

Recommendation. In the upcoming planning cycle for the next PREP, the Njira DIP planning process should be more inclusive of views from the frontlines, be more realistic, achievable and coordinated across purposes so that frontlines do not feel overwhelmed by the demands placed on them. The DIP should be made as complete as possible in planning activities so that new demands do not disrupt implementation.

RECOMMENDATION N17: Procurement

Observations. Njira takes its responsibility for appropriate use of US government funds very seriously and has established tight systems to ensure compliance with USAID requirements. The JMTR observed that, while Njira is working as hard as possible to become fully compliant, significant procurement has been delayed longer than normal for a FFP project. The systems have recently been adjusted to try to reduce delays in project implementation due to procurement, but the district teams still voiced concerns during the JMTR that there were challenges remaining. Specifically, the Machinga District partner, Emmanuel International, reported their perception that safeguards and policies are too restrictive and sometimes not enforced in a standardized manner across both implementing partners.

Recommendation. Njira needs to continue working to streamline procurement systems while continuing to comply with USAID regulations. The project should conduct an exercise to review procurement issues with district teams, involving all project partners affected by procurement, to identify constraints and discuss ways to address the constraints, to ensure that project implementation is not held back by delayed procurement and partners are treated equitably relative to procurement.

RECOMMENDATION N18: Commodity Management

Observations. While the commodity management system for Njira is fully functional, the JMTR observed a number of challenges with commodity management that are constraining the project. The lack of a warehouse for Machinga has created challenges with distribution planning as the commodities have to be transported from Balaka a day before the distribution. The trucks are parked at a police station overnight increasing the risk of commodity losses to theft. The transporter at times uses one large truck to ferry commodities from Balaka, creating the need to offload commodities into smaller trucks destined for the food distribution points. Such additional activities delay the arrival of commodities at the food distribution points, resulting in

beneficiaries waiting longer at distribution points, and returns from the distributions must be sent back to Balaka creating an extra cost.

While the commodity inventory module of G-PATH seems fully functional, there are challenges with errors and duplicates that make distribution planning a challenge. Some beneficiaries are turned away at distribution points when they are fully eligible and registered in the system. Capturing distribution attendance in the system is also a challenge given limited internet access, and this affects the timely reconciliation of recipient status reports required for monthly Commodity Status Reports and quarterly QWICR²⁶ reports.

Njira has accumulated an estimated two metric tons of CSB, a result mainly of challenges related to scooping accuracy. However, recent recruitment of Commodity Distributors has improved management of distribution at each site. These Distributors will require training and mentoring to improve their management of distributions at the site.

The JMTR also observed that the project has no formal post distribution monitoring to establish the performance of the food security indicators.

Recommendation. Njira should strengthen commodity distribution management by establishing a warehouse in Machinga for better distribution management and removing duplication and registration errors in G-PATH to improve distribution efficiencies. The project should also provide training and mentoring to recently recruited Food Distributors to increase overall management at food distribution sites as well as scooping accuracy. Finally, the MEL system should be expanded to undertake post distribution monitoring to measure performance of food security indicators on beneficiary households.

RECOMMENDATION N19: Human Resource Management

Observations. Njira has a total of 207 staff, with 84 in Balaka District, 96 in Machinga District and 27 at the PMU level in Zomba. These staffing levels appear relatively balanced, although Balaka has a smaller project footprint but more frontline staff (52 facilitators) than Machinga (40 facilitators). Upon further review of the organigram, there appear to be several challenges. At the district level, the project manager (PM) position has too many direct reports²⁷, which is unmanageable and has a negative impact on implementation. More important, at the frontline levels, many of the facilitators have two or more supervisors, a situation which leads to confusion and frustration, while also adversely affecting implementation. One facilitator stated that “each advisor would like his or her work to be number one, but it is a big challenge for all of us to do all activities at the same time.”

The JMTR also observed that staff turnover has been high, particularly in the PMU and in Balaka District. PCI senior management has made improvements in recruitment and retention over the last year, including adjusting salaries to reflect the existing NGO labor market for similar positions and regular visits from Blantyre human resources personnel. Several obstacles remain, however, and turnover remains a problem. Staff overwhelmingly described lingering concerns, which surfaced even during non-HR related meetings between JMTR team members and project staff. Recruitment announcements for positions are not always tailored to the position. For example, the project continues to recruit RMNCH facilitators who are also responsible for WASH and nutrition. At the time of the JMTR, there were nine vacancies in the

²⁶ Quarterly Web Interfaced Commodity Reporting

²⁷ In Balaka, for instance, the PM has 15 direct reports.

project, which was viewed as “low” by senior management. The high turnover has meant that supervisors have to spend additional time to get new staff up to speed especially on technical areas. Strikingly, many staff clearly expressed to the JMTR team that they do not feel that their jobs are secure. Those with one year contracts do not feel optimistic their contract will be renewed, and they begin to look for alternative work. Low staff morale was clearly observed by the JMTR.

Recommendation. Substantial improvements are needed in the human resource management systems for Njira to improve staff morale and reduce staff turnover. The staffing structure should be revised so that the number of direct reports to the PM and the number of supervisors for frontline facilitators are reduced. Current job descriptions should be revised to better reflect the responsibilities of the positions and to streamline reporting relationships. The project should also consider giving facilitators more specific technical responsibilities and create a “team leader” position at the coordinator level. The Human Resource recruitment policies should be harmonized across districts. The project can undertake a simple analysis of whether current salaries reflect experience and qualifications, making adjustments as needed. Moving forward, position announcements for recruitment should reflect the job at hand and should be more tailored, e.g. WASH, nutrition, RMNCH – not just “RMNCH facilitator.” Finally, Njira should review and re-vamp performance management systems, with an eye to giving staff better peace of mind that their jobs are not in jeopardy. Linked to retention, all supervisors will need to regularly implement mid-year performance reviews, including coaching and mentoring plans with supervisees.

5. Theme: Using Food Strategically. The distribution of food, especially in the southern Malawian context, reinforces expectations for handouts by NGOs. Food distributions also divert the attention of beneficiaries away from the messages being promoted by the project. As with UBALE, the JMTR found that when beneficiaries were queried on what they found most beneficial about Njira, the food that had been provided was often mentioned; and when asked about what Njira could do differently in the remainder of its life, respondents in many cases cited more food or different kinds of food.

Distributed food nearly always has impact on local markets and local market development, usually forcing the private sector to move their marketing to other locations where demand still exists at prices that cover their costs. This occurs even for commodity substitutes in projects that are not distributing staple commodities found in local markets. Under these conditions, Njira needs to use food more strategically, avoiding distributions that do not have the intended impact and/or reinforce the community expectations syndrome. There are examples from other projects in which vouchers have been used to make food available while also minimizing market impact and even supporting market development. It is also a good time to step back and reevaluate whether it is better to provide food or cash as compensation for work done by targeted impact groups on community asset development.

It is recognized that there are limitations to changes that can be made on the use of food in Njira since most food planned for the project has either already arrived in-country or will be called forward shortly. Nevertheless, by the end of the project, Njira should still explore alternatives as much as possible toward using food more strategically, so that the food that is being distributed through the project will have its desired impact on nutrition and the construction of community assets while also contributing to development objectives. Following are two recommendations in support of this theme.

RECOMMENDATION N20: MCHN Rations

Observations. Njira is largely following PM2A ration guidelines with regard to provision of fortified rations to Pregnant and Lactating Women and children 6-23 months and provision of household rations to other family members. However, an important percentage of households have also received MVAC rations (including maize and beans). In these instances, households have receiving nearly all of their daily kcal needs for a household of five people. Provision of this food for long periods of time over several years also has negative market consequences, adversely affecting what some of the Njira agricultural activities hope to accomplish. In addition, it is unclear to the JMTR how a household *graduates* from a Care Group – what becomes of the household once the rations end?

Many Njira neighbor women beneficiaries have described problems with receiving rations as intended, with some reporting having only benefitted one or two times over the past two years despite being eligible to receive monthly rations. The project has ambitiously doubled the original targets for Care Groups, but MCHN ration beneficiary targets do not appear to have maintained the same pace. These factors have made the JMTR team question the coverage of the rations at a population level to have substantial impact. Strikingly, discrepancies at the village level of beneficiaries who have not received rations have led to reports of verbal abuse toward Lead Mothers in some communities, which completely undermines their role and ability to continue their Care Group activities beyond the end of the project.

Do No Harm: Hypervitaminosis

Through cost share, PCI provides multivitamins to over 700 pregnant women, over 700 lactating women, and over 5000 children age 1-5. This is in addition to Njira providing Vitamin A fortified vegetable oil and fortified CSB+. The project is also providing resources to the MoH to support child health days where Vitamin A is distributed.

Compiled together, the JMTR is concerned with hypervitaminosis, especially for children. Vitamin A itself can be toxic and lead to liver damage, and women who are pregnant should not take high doses of vitamin A, as this can lead to birth defects. In children under the age of two, the amount of Vitamin A being made available in the Njira Project appears to be roughly twice the upper limit of the Recommended Daily Intake. More rigorous analysis is required to ensure that the project is not causing hypervitaminosis. Until this has been completed, the project should discontinue the distribution of multivitamins during the months in which CSB+ and Vitamin A fortified Vegetable Oil are distributed to these target groups. The multivitamins are not adding value to the project during the months of distribution, since they are providing micronutrients that are already available in the FFP commodities.

Recommendation. Given the challenges to date and sustainability concerns raised by the JMTR, Njira should alter its food assistance approach to transition away from in-kind food. If possible, household rations should be stopped for year four and, similar to the recommendation to UBALE, Njira should perform a market assessment to determine whether cash or vouchers are appropriate for the final years of the project. Vouchers, for example, can be used to purchase foods that are promoted through the project agricultural activities, as well as foods promoted during CCFLS sessions²⁸ that are especially difficult for households to purchase during specific times of the year.

²⁸ Similar to UBALE, the reviewers found that some of the foods promoted in CCFLS recipes are not easily affordable to most neighbor women, especially proteins (eggs, fish), pulses (soya), and vegetable oil. CCFLS is also

RECOMMENDATION U21: Food or Cash in FFA Projects

Observations. In 2015 and 2016, households in the project areas suffered significant food shortages, and market prices for staples were high. It made sense then for Njira to make distributed food available to these households through FFA, since food was not readily available to them at reasonable cost. Given the large amounts of food that have been distributed not only by Njira but by WFP and other projects, there is concern that commercial suppliers who had been working in markets in the project area are shifting their marketing strategies to other locations where there is more demand and they can sell their product. When the food distributions are completed, it's not clear whether they will return to the markets in the project areas, especially if they have found more profitable locations elsewhere.

The food made available in Njira was clearly designed to be a “wage” for the work done on a community asset. If food is available in the market, then cash is easier to manage, although not without its challenges. Making cash available to FFA participants will also be less disruptive on commercial markets. This moderate demand by project participants may even strengthen local commercial markets, and these must be as functional as possible after the project ends so that food continues to be available.

Recommendation. In order to promote market development, Njira should consider shifting more of the compensation provided for FFA participants to cash this year and next if food is available in the markets. Given that food for FFA will already have been called forward by the time the next PREP gets submitted, there is a limit to how much change can be made by the project on this cash versus food question. Also, because Njira is a FFP project and the new norm in the Malawian context is periodic drought, the project cannot fully eliminate all food. FFP projects must have the capacity to quickly surge if need arises. However, in its remaining life, Njira should look for an opportunity to pilot an alternative strategy to the FFA approach currently being implemented.

VI. JOINT LEARNING

The JMTR identified a number of areas in which the two projects can improve effectiveness or efficiency in the remaining two and half years by sharing lessons learned and good practices with each other. Key areas are listed below.

- Both projects face the same contextual constraints related to community expectations, and each can benefit from the other's efforts to implement activities in ways that reduce expectations while continuing to achieve impact. .
- The M&E systems for both projects are being overwhelmed with the amount of data required to report or produce estimates for over one hundred performance indicators in each project. While the M&E systems are different, both projects will be seeking ways to reduce the demands on the systems and should share good ideas for doing so.
- Each project could benefit from the sharing of MCHN training curricula and training manuals. If the UBALE Project chooses, for example, to add a Community-based Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (C-IMCI) module (Recommendation U-6), lengthy development of the module could be curtailed by looking at what Njira is already developing.

promoting the use of imported USAID commodities for use in the recipes, which is not sustainable and should be discontinued.

- Both projects have been advised to broaden the support structures for WASH (Recommendations U7 and N4). The sharing of experience, lessons learned and good practices between the two projects will accelerate progress in this area.
- The demand for and practice of good governance is important to both projects. UBALE is a bit ahead in implementing strategies for good governance, and Njira can learn from UBALE's experiences.
- Both projects are implementing strategies related to gender champions and each can benefit from the other's experiences and lessons learned.
- While PCI has made adjustments in its implementing systems for Njira to become more efficient and effective in delivering the project, there are benefits to be gained from consulting with CRS who have much more extensive experience implementing consortium FFP projects in Malawi.
- Both projects have been advised to look for ways to use food more strategically. Each can benefit from the other's efforts to do this.

The two projects should look for ways to share ideas and experience within the existing meeting structures. The JMTR does not want to suggest a new set of meetings to facilitate this cross-sharing. One existing mechanism is to use the technical working group structures that both projects utilize. Technical representatives from one project can join the technical working group of the other project at some point during a regularly scheduled meeting to share and discuss problems, good practices and lessons learned.

VII. HIGHER LEVEL OBSERVATIONS

The JMTR identified a number of areas that go beyond the scope of either project to address but are important to be brought to the attention of USAID since they affect the ability of the two projects to maximize impact with efficient use of resources. One of these is the spread of the expectations syndrome in Southern Malawi. This expectations syndrome is difficult for a single project to address, and a coordinated effort needs to be made by the GoM, implementing agencies and donors to reduce the unconditional handouts that projects have become accustomed to giving, and all projects should seek ways to provide support to beneficiaries that does not reinforce the expectations syndrome. The MVAC sponsored food distributions that are just now finishing, for example, have had significant impact on raising expectations that food should be provided, even when it is not needed.

A second contextual factor that affects both projects is the increasingly visible corruption at the national levels. The ability of government officials to get away with diverting government resources sends messages to lower levels that it is okay to do so. Then, because the government resources are depleted by corruption and services are critical to the needs of vulnerable people, donor resources are used by NGOs to fill gaps in government services, further reinforcing the idea that it is okay to divert government resources. Addressing this problem will require a combination of working at the top end with the GoM addressing corruption and at the frontlines with projects like UBALE and Njira building demand for transparency and accountability

The USAID Malawi development portfolio includes projects under Feed the Future (FTF) which promote agricultural development and projects under FFP which address food insecurity for vulnerable rural households, most of whom are dependent on the agricultural sector. The FTF Projects generally target geographic areas that have good agricultural development potential and participants who have asset endowments that allow them to expand their roles in value chain

development. The FFP Projects, on the other hand, generally target more vulnerable areas with higher proportions of chronically food insecure households. The two areas and targeted impact groups often do not coincide. In Malawi, for example, the UBALE Project is not working in geographic areas targeted by FTF, while the Njira Project, on the other hand, does overlap, in part, with the targeted zone for FTF. The JMTR noted that even where there was geographic overlap, however, the projects on the ground remained relatively isolated from each other, with FFP frontline staff barely knowledgeable about FTF projects.

The significant exception to this isolation as observed by the JMTR, however, revolved around a specific value chain: orange-fleshed sweet potato (OFSP). The research being supported by the FTF projects around OFSP was used in developing multiplication plots and sourcing varieties by the FFP projects. The projects in the two programs shared the same partner, the International Potato Center, which likely facilitated the linkages, once the decision was made to focus on the common value chain.

Despite the lack of geographic overlap, there are opportunities for creating synergies between the FTF and FFP initiatives. The FFP projects are focused primarily on household and community-level capacity building, increasing productivity and building links to markets, mostly the "push" side of the Push-Pull Model being used in agricultural development strategies. This household productivity has to be set in the context of one or more value chains extending from input supply through production and marketing along various channels including local consumption, national consumption and exportation. Value chain development is normally the focus of FTF investments, to expand channels and open up new opportunities for engagement of targeted impact groups in the value chains. This is more of the "pull" side of the Push-Pull Strategy. At a practical level for Malawi, the following actions would facilitate greater synergies between FTF and FFP:

- The value chains targeted by FTF should continue to include at least some that are appropriate for the smallholders targeted in FFP projects.
- Groups of smallholders, especially marketing groups, and marketing brokers like the PSPs in UBALE participating in FFP projects should be linked to value chain intermediaries participating in the FTF projects.
- Where employment opportunities for youth are growing as a result of FTF investments, linkages should be facilitated between youth from highly vulnerable households targeted by FFP projects to these employment opportunities.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite common constraints faced in the first two years of implementation, both UBALE and Njira have established sound foundations upon which to build in their remaining lives. Each project has its own challenges, but both projects have strong potential to be recognized as "great" projects. The recommendations proposed by the JMTR have been identified with that motivation, i.e., to enable both projects to be recognized as "great" by the time they have been completed.

ANNEX A: JMTR Team Members

Team Member	Organization	Responsibilities
<i>UBALE REVIEW TEAM</i>		
Mike DeVries	Independent	JMTR Team Leader, Purpose 3, Management, Partnership and Finance
Rupert Best	Independent	Purpose 1 (Team Leader), Integration & Complementarity
Marit Wilkerson	USAID Bureau of Food Security HQ	Purpose 1
Mike Manske	USAID Food for Peace HQ	Purpose 2 (Team Leader) and Human Resources
Mary Pat Kieffer	PCI HQ	Purpose 2 and Administrative Support
Amos Chigwenembe	CRS Malawi	P2 WASH
Killiam Mutiro	USAID Food for Peace Southern Africa	Theory of Change, Targeting, Collaborative Learning & Action, Youth Targeting, and Commodities
Mark Kumbukani Black	CARE Malawi	Purpose 3 and Gender
Aaron Chassy	CRS HQ	Purpose 3 and Governance
Charlotte Germain-Aubrey	USAID Bureau of Democracy, Conflict & Humanitarian Assistance HQ	Environment
<i>NJIRA REVIEW TEAM</i>		
Mike DeVries	Independent	JMTR Team Leader, Purpose 3, Management, Partnership and Finance
Rupert Best	Independent	Purpose 1 (Team Leader), Integration & Complementarity, and Governance
Marit Wilkerson	USAID Bureau of Food Security HQ	Purpose 1 and Environment
Mike Manske	USAID Food for Peace HQ	Purpose 2 (Team Leader) and Human Resources
Mary Pat Kieffer	PCI HQ	Purpose 2 and Administrative Support
Lucy Mungoni	USAID Malawi	P2 WASH
Killiam Mutiro	USAID Food for Peace Southern Africa	Theory of Change, Targeting, Collaborative Learning & Action, and Commodities
Mark Kumbukani Black	CARE Malawi	Purpose 3 and Gender
Amy Sunseri	PCI HQ	Purpose 3 and Gender

ANNEX B. Detailed Observations and Additional Recommendations for UBALE

The following sections provide more detail from the JMTR on the project approaches that were observed, the key observations, and recommendations, including recommendations that did not make the priority list presented in the main text of the report.

Purpose 1 Income

This Annex summarizes the most salient achievements and challenges observed by the JMTR team, which provided the basis for formulating the principal and secondary recommendations for Purpose 1. Purpose 1 aims to increase the incomes of vulnerable households through 5 inter-related Sub-Purposes described in the Box below.

The review was undertaken by gathering information from project participants, implementing staff, program managers, and key informants connected to the project. Recommendations are formulated with a view to:

- (1) scaling up interventions that are proving to be effective in achieving outputs and outcomes
- (2) modifying interventions to improve effectiveness in achieving outputs and outcomes
- (3) piloting new interventions that are relevant and useful for achieving outputs and outcomes
- (4) suspending interventions that are not proving to be effective in achieving outputs or outcomes
- (5) improving the efficiency in the use of resources.

Purpose 1 Vulnerable households increase incomes
Sub-Purpose 1.1: Farm management and business planning practices of vulnerable farming households improved
Sub-Purpose 1.2: Marketing club, cluster and association members' agricultural sales increased
Sub-Purpose 1.3: Members of marketing clubs, clusters and associations increased use of sustainable financial services
Sub-Purpose 1.4: Selected individuals establish/strengthen businesses
Sub-Purpose 1.5: Joint decision making at

Purpose 1 targeting. The HH targeted by the agriculture and markets livelihoods activities of Purpose 1 fall principally within the very poor and poor population segments and some within the middle segment (as defined by the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee, MVAC, which uses the Household Economy Approach to assess livelihoods).²⁹ Of the 248,200 HH reached by UBALE, a total of 146,000 HH are covered by agricultural and marketing activities. Figure B-2 shows how the total of 146,000 HH are divided between agricultural production and market interventions.

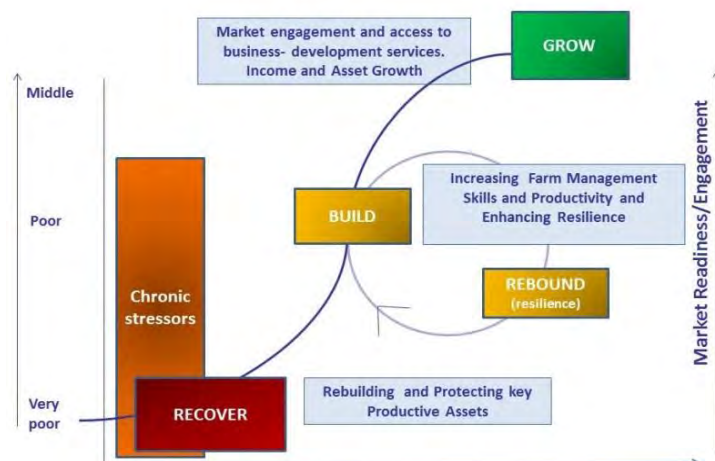


Figure B-1. Pathway to Prosperity

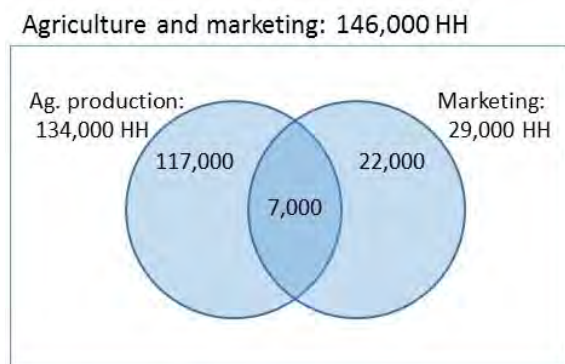


Figure B-2. Number of HH that receive agriculture and marketing interventions

MCHN, WASH and DRM	Poor - Middle (Grow)
	Marketing Lead Farmer Services SMART Skills
	Very Poor - Poor (Build)
	Lead Farmer Services Smart Skills Marketing
	Very Poor (Recover)
	FFA DiNER vouchers Lead Farmer Services SMART Skills

Figure B-3. Intervention package by Wealth Group

UBALE uses CRS’ Pathway to Prosperity framework to segment HH by their asset endowment. Interventions are selected, sequenced and layered with the purpose of transitioning HH from recover to build, and from build to grow (Figure B-1).

The package of interventions by wealth group and Pathway to Prosperity segment are shown in Figure 3.³⁰

In the Recover segment, 31,000 very poor HH benefit from direct asset transfers by working on Food for Asset (FFA) projects and receiving vouchers that they can exchange for seed at DiNER Fairs.³¹ This represents 21%

²⁹ UBALE Realigned Project Narrative. October 2016.

³⁰ The SMART skills are a set of 5 skills that farmers need to successfully engage with markets. The skills are: Group management, Natural resource management, Financial management, Marketing and Innovation.

³¹ UBALE Application Narrative. April 2014.

of Purpose 1 HH. They also have access to Lead Farmers services and SMART Skills components.

Purpose 1 priority products

The agricultural products that UBALE has prioritized in its interventions are the following:

- For food
 - Maize, OFSP, NUA beans, vegetables, fruit
- For income and food
 - Pigeon peas, sesame, cowpeas, soyabean
 - Maize, vegetables
 - Processed products, e.g. fritters (*mandazi*)
- Products being explored for income
 - Small livestock (poultry, goats, pigs)
 - Cotton, rice

Observations about project organization for Purpose 1

Figure 4 shows the main components of the organization for the delivery of Purpose 1 outputs and outcomes.

In the Project Management Unit (PMU), an Ag/Marketing Technical Lead leads and coordinates 4 specialist areas: i) Climate Smart Agriculture, ii) SMART Skills, iii) Marketing and iv) Agribusiness Capacity Strengthening. NASFAM and CLUSA are the UBALE partners that provide the Coordinator and Advisor for the latter two areas respectively.³² The Agribusiness Capacity Strengthening Advisor and his team provides technical guidance and support across the three other areas.

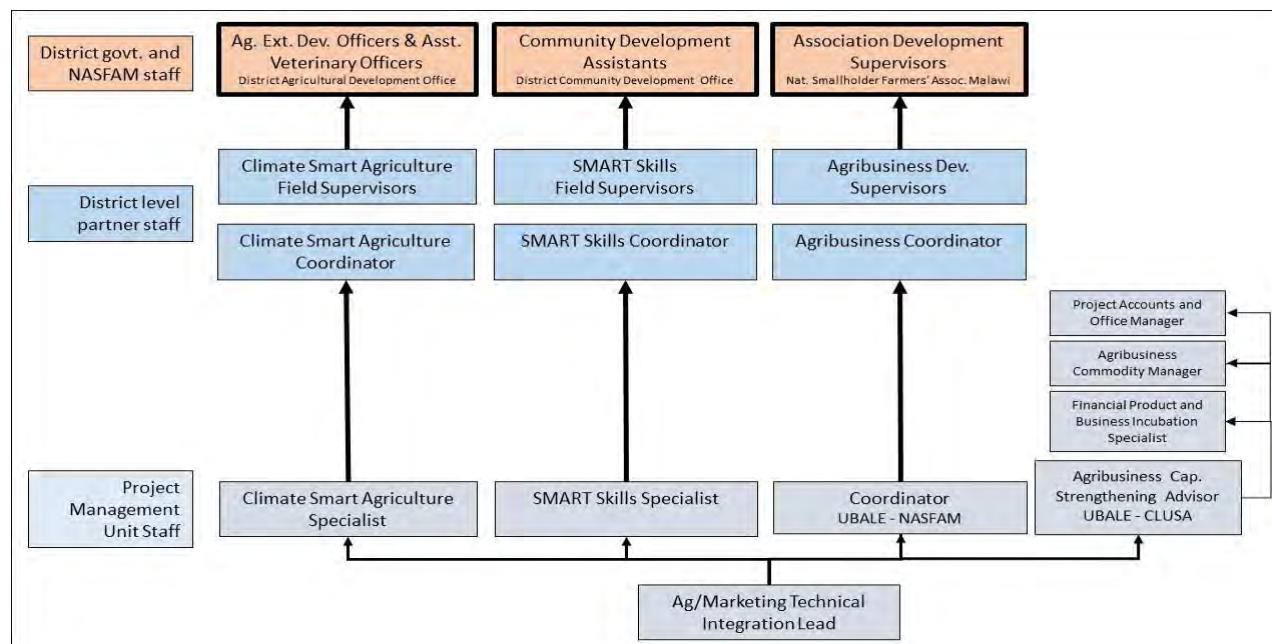


Figure B-4. UBALE Ag./Marketing support structure (the light blue and grey boxes)

³² NASFAM: National Smallholders’ Association of Malawi; CLUSA: Cooperative League of the USA.

This PMU team provides the technical support for UBALE's three field partners, one in each District: Save the Children in Blantyre Rural, CADECOM in Chickwawa and CARE in Nsanje. The District partner teams mirror the PMU structure, with one coordinator and several Field Supervisors for each technical area. The Field Supervisors work with and support their field counterparts from the District Agricultural Development Office (DADO), the District Community Development Office (DCDO) and NASFAM. This support structure, in light blue and grey boxes) will cease to exist when UBALE finishes.

It should be noted that the SMART Skills are used in the following manner:

Natural Resource Management and Innovation skills are rolled out through the Climate Smart Agriculture technical area, the Financial skills are rolled out through the SMART Skills technical area, and Marketing skills and Group Organization skills are rolled out through the Agribusiness technical area.

Figure 5 illustrates the UBALE ag./market service delivery model. The diagram shows how the three technical areas (Climate Smart Agriculture, SMART Skills and Agribusiness) play out in the field. Elements of note are:

- The Lead Farmers and Paravet model builds on and strengthens the existing Ministry of Agriculture extension system. Lead Farmers are volunteers and Paravets are fee-for-service providers.
- DiNER Fairs are not permanent and the recent winter fairs are the last scheduled.
- SILC private service providers (PSP) and SILC Networks were first introduced under the WALA project.
- The Marketing PSP is an UBALE innovation. The model marketing club – marketing cluster – marketing associations is the NASFAM model. NASFAM was not established in the three Districts before UBALE.
- The concept of a Business Consulting House with associated Business Consultants is an UBALE innovation. They are shown dotted as these are in the process of establishment in each District. The consultants will provide services to SILC groups and individual member businesses on demand. They will also market their services among other small- or medium-sized enterprises in their areas of influence.
- Crops and livestock farmer HH receive services from Lead Farmers. Some of these HH are members of SILC groups, some of them are members of Marketing clubs. Soon it will be possible to track the number of different UBALE products and services each HH receives.
- Some very poor HHs are members of SILC groups. HH in this segment receive vouchers can exchange for seed and participate in Food for Assets projects.

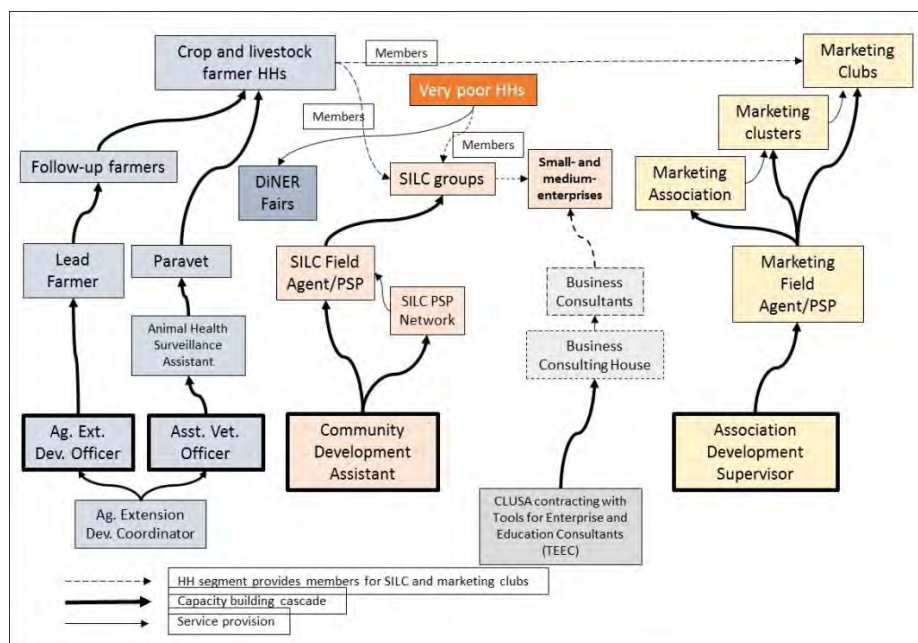


Figure B-5. UBALE Ag./Market development model

Table B-1 shows the UBALE agriculture and marketing targets and level of achievement at the time of the JMTR.

	LoP Target	Achieved at time of JMTR
Crop and livestock farmer HH	103,000	
Very poor HHs	31,000	
Lead Farmers		
Paravets	150	
SILC	4,500	2,976
SILC PSP	160	98
SILC PSP District Networks	3	2
SILC PSP sub-Networks		11
Business Consulting Houses	3	0
Business Consultants	30	0
Marketing PSP	103	185
Marketing clubs	2,645	3,206
Marketing clusters	538	306
Marketing associations	16	0

Table B-1. UBALE Ag./Marketing targets and achievement

Observations and secondary recommendations by Sub-purpose

Sub-Purpose 1.1. Farm management and business planning practices of vulnerable farming households improved

Observations

Strong government buy-in and ownership. Almost all the government representatives we spoke with expressed a strong sense of ownership of UBALE, almost viewing it as an extension

of their own work rather than as an outside entity. Beneficiaries were vocal about the strong partnership between government and UBALE staff.

Conservation agriculture with trees accepted. All Lead Farmers were technically knowledgeable about conservation agriculture with trees and could tout the benefits thereof. They felt strongly that the paired technique and the flexibility within the approach, e.g. manure of their own design, furrows or not, various tree species, etc., had already and/or would improve productivity of multiple crops considerably. We also observed that when asked about other climate-smart techniques/technologies, beneficiaries did not demonstrate awareness or understanding of other techniques that could help them adapt to increased droughts, later onset of rains, erratic rainfall, and worsening floods, much less keep them producing throughout the rainy season.

Community agents (Lead Farmers, paravets, PSPs) motivated. All the community agents, when questioned about their motivation, declared their intention to keep serving as a volunteer agent even without benefits because they wanted to improve their community. They also expressed their desire to be compensated in some way for their many hours of service by their community though not all felt comfortable asking for that (if they were not already being paid). They instead would wish for UBALE's assistance.

Trainings abound. We heard about many trainings on a wide variety of topics that ranged from technically specific to life skills. Beneficiaries did not always express a strong awareness of the linkages between these trainings. All beneficiaries desired more trainings on a more regular basis and in a variety of formats, particularly inter-community (peer) learning opportunities.

Pervasive and prevalent climate concerns. Every single group, from Lead Farmers to SILC groups, mentioned some iteration of the idea that "if there isn't a drought, there's a flood and if there isn't a flood, there's a drought." UBALE staff repeatedly talked about the setbacks they had had not just in project implementation but also in success of their CSA demo plots due to the harsh years of 2015 and 2016. There was continual hope that a normal year would put the project and its impacts back on track.

Multi-purpose, female-oriented SILC groups established. UBALE appeared to have done a very good job in establishing SILC groups that were particularly female-friendly. These SILC groups could detail a wide variety of trainings from UBALE and/or their PSPs. Investing in immediate household improvements and food as well as seasonal small businesses was the most commonly cited sign of success to them. Across several groups, we estimated that 80-90% of loans and savings accrued throughout the year or at the buy-out were spent on short-term investments (also including seed, fertilizer, and occasionally farm labour). More established SILC groups (which had started before UBALE) expressed a feeling of being stuck in a cyclical pattern and/or a desire to invest collectively in bigger business.

Seed (and nutrition) diversity uncertain. Lead Farmers, seed multiplication groups, and DiNER Fair recipients all desired maize, improved varieties and more of them, above all else. Lead Farmers and seed multiplication groups expressed their frustration at both ill-timed seed handouts from UBALE and far too little seed, often desiring 10 kg of maize seed and larger quantities of vegetable seed, respectively. Some DiNER Fair recipients knew about nutritious recipes and foods but not all. There was little to no mention of deliberate spatial or temporal diversity of plantings throughout their plots/communities or throughout the year.

DiNER Fairs popular but sustainability uncertain. All beneficiaries who had heard, much less participated, in DiNER Fairs expressed their support for them to continue. They appreciated being able to “purchase” seed directly from vendors and have a choice, in the quality and the type. However, we also observed that there appeared to be little investment in ensuring that these DiNER Fairs could continue past the life of UBALE, either supported by the government or by the community.

Seed multiplication groups’ potential impact unclear. Seed multiplication groups are often still struggling to multiply their focal seeds. The exception were the groups that focused on tree crops. While the seed multiplication groups were designed to be part of the nutrition strategy across Purposes, we observed little awareness from the groups that their service was meant to help with nutrition. (We did not meet with any groups focused on NUA Beans or OFSP.) They also did not express any substantial understanding/intention of continuing their work past UBALE as they depend on UBALE for critical handouts (seed, plastic tubing, etc.).

Learning Centers hold great potential. The one Learning Center we were able to visit was very popular with both the beneficiaries and the government worker. The popularity appeared to stem from both the coming together of farmers from multiple communities and the ownership of experimentation.

Stakeholder panels’ role unclear. From our observations, we could not determine the exact extent of the role and subsequent impact of the stakeholder panels. The few panel members we could talk to appreciate the opportunity to learn about the variety of projects in their shared areas but anything beyond that awareness was unclear.

Linkage with input and seed suppliers not fully formed. While the input and seed suppliers, particularly the latter, we spoke to were either supportive or enthused about UBALE and their role within it, they also expressed that UBALE operations was not always conducive to the private sector (e.g., pricing and contractual inflexibility and timing). When we asked beneficiaries if they knew more than one or two (or any) input/seed suppliers, they responded in the negative. There also did not seem to be a link between seed multiplication groups and Lead Farmers with the private sector that UBALE works with.

Non-overlapping beneficiaries. For almost every group or individual interviewed, we took a quick poll on overlap of group membership and/or training within P1 and across the Purposes. Overall, less than 50% of those interviewed were part of more than one type of UBALE intervention or type of training. The exception sometimes was SILC group members who were not uncommonly part of Care Groups and who had received nutrition training.

Handouts wanted. When asked the open-ended question of “what else would you like us to know,” almost every group or individual interviewed answered with a litany of requests, from more seed to gum boots to wheelbarrows to start-up capital to fertilizer.

Conclusions and secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.1.

The interventions in this sub-purpose have fed into and helped build a strong foundation for long-term sustainability of UBALE’s interventions, including trainings and demonstrations, technical capacity of community agents, and government support. The opportunity now for UBALE is to ensure that those investments bear fruit, i.e. that learning did take place, that groups will maintain past 2019, and that multiple changes within individuals, households, and communities will improve life in multiple ways.

In addition to the primary agricultural and marketing recommendations in the main JMTR Report (see Recommendations **U2, U3, U15 and U16** copied in the Section below), secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.1 are:

- (1) Explore models, supported by government, private sector and/or community leadership, for **DiNER Fair derivatives** that are desired by the community and do not have to be supported by NGOs entirely.
- (2) Increase emphasis within UBALE staff on building up **Farmer Learning Centers** with a focus on using those to encourage climate change adaptation and resiliency.
- (3) Continue fostering, through mentoring and technical assistance, the internal **motivations of lead community volunteers and agents**, particularly younger ones. They could be the changemakers within the community.
- (4) **Phase out handouts** of any type as soon as possible and instead build up expectations around technical assistance.
- (5) Hone the focus of UBALE's emphasis on **stakeholder panels** so that time and effort on this is well-spent and directly tying into UBALE's field-level work.
- (6) Focus efforts as well on the **seed multiplication groups** so that they achieve the desired impact and/or fulfil the demands of the communities so that they will exist past the time UBALE ceases to prop them up.
- (7) **Conservation agriculture plus trees** is just one technology within the approach of climate-smart agriculture. Other technologies should be taught with a focus on enabling farmers to continue growing productive, nutritious crops in the dry season and/or storing enough to last through the dry season. CSA is about a portfolio of options that enable needed adaptation while still maintaining or increasing productivity. These options (technologies or interventions) can include non-farm-based adaptations as well as improving assets such as critical market roads that often get washed out or teaching about critical decision points for financial safety nets depending on seasonal forecasts.
- (8) **Bring private service entities** (input dealers and buyers of agricultural products) in more to multiply UBALE's interventions so that private service individuals start to form and strengthen relationships with communities independent of UBALE.

Sub-Purpose 1.2: Marketing club, cluster and association members' agricultural sales increased

Observations

Overwhelming response. "The response from the community was overwhelming" (UBALE PMU staff member) to the process of establishing marketing clubs, with the number formed and registered exceeding the project's target by 21% (see Table 1). With 8-15 clubs forming a cluster, the number of clusters is likely to be lower than the life of project target. The 16 associations, one per Extension Programming Area (EPA), are in the process of being formed.

Functioning governance structures. All clubs and clusters with whom we talked showed understanding of good governance principles, could concisely relate why they had formed their club and what activities the members undertake together. Field Agents do face challenges with respect to low attendance at their sessions. In one instance, a Field Agent commented 'they (the

members) do not understand the objectives but they are getting better. I feel they look down on me because of my age’.

Positive about collective marketing despite low prices. Focus Group Discussions with market club members revealed satisfaction with the progress that has been made in their endeavours to collectively market their agricultural products. This is encouraging since several clubs did not realize the prices that they expected for their produce. For example, pigeon pea fetched over MKW 1000/kg in 2015. In 2016 prices dropped to MKW 380/kg early in the harvest season to as low as kw 250/kg later in the year. Farmers price expectations ranged from 500 – 800 MKW/kg.

Ability to calculate costs of production. In all clubs visited, the members said that they did not know how to calculate their costs of production and manifested that this is something that need to know. Information from one Market Field Agent revealed that the agents were trained on gross margins calculations in April 2016 but she ‘has difficulty with doing these calculations’. Business Models and Business Plans are also ‘very hard’.

Unanimous demand for more training. Clubs requested more training and often said that they had not received any training. After probing, it seems that members do not associate what they learn from the Field Agent, who is a local person, as ‘training’. This corroborated by a statement by a cluster committee member ‘we need training by someone more knowledgeable than *(the name of their field agent)*’. Some Field Agents said that visits from supervisors are irregular others reported frequent support from their respective supervisor.

Adult education techniques and didactic materials. In none of the meetings with market clubs and cluster committees was there evidence of the didactic materials used in training and mentoring. Visits to the homes of Field Agents did not reveal any either. Field agents said that they take notes at training sessions but do not have materials to share with clubs or cluster committees. They do claim to have and use flip chart paper and marker pens to relay their messages.

Making production more competitive. Figure 1 above shows that of the 29,000 HH that are targeted to receive market-related services, only 7,000 HH of these are due to receive agricultural production interventions. It was difficult to establish how members of market clubs, who already number over 30,000, receive or will receive crop-specific training and technical assistance to improve competitiveness (i.e., through practices that reduce production costs, increase productivity, the use of seed of buyer preferred varieties that fetch higher prices, etc.). We learnt that while AEDOs are generalists, Lead Farmers specialize in areas such as Crops, Livestock, Irrigation, Land Resources or Nutrition. This means that a local Lead Farmer may not have the expertise required to improve, let’s say, sesame production. The same can be said for pigeon pea, groundnut and soybean.³³

Fee-for-service model and incentives. As mentioned above, farmers are unable yet to calculate whether they are making a profit or a loss. This is a critical step for the success of the Marketing PSP model. Farmer clusters and their associated clubs will lose the incentive of paying for the services of the Marketing PSPs if they are unable to gauge the benefits and believe that they will be unable to absorb the cost of the fee charged. In this sense, it is important to prepare simple

³³ UBALE has recognized the lack of appropriate training material on sesame production and has produced a booklet to fill this gap. Information on pigeon pea, groundnut and soybean is apparently available.

yearly business plans at the cluster level for the crop(s) that will be sold collectively. These business plans must be communicated to all members.

Competing with the ‘hand-out culture’. The UBALE policy of restricted and targeted subsidies for assets provided to participants in Purpose 1 is the correct one for a market-oriented approach that seeks to promote profitable businesses. However, partner staff and those executing the project on the ground run up against ‘competition’ from within the project and from peer development agencies acting in the same Districts who continue to distribute a wide range of assets in the communities.

Substantial changes into what appear to project staff as internal contradictions (e.g. locally recruited volunteers that receive a monthly stipend, the provision of T-shirts to some and not others, bicycles given to some and not others, etc.) will be difficult to accommodate at this stage of the project. With respect to different peer organization practices, we understand that this is an issue that has been discussed in different forums (e.g. the Stakeholder Panels and other District, TA and VGH level instances) but with little confidence that the situation will be resolved in the short-term.

Small livestock value chains. An initial impression is that UBALE’s marketing interventions are skewed towards crops, without much attention to the opportunities for improvements in trading of livestock, either locally or to urban centers. This despite the importance of small livestock for poor households’ livelihood resilience. The recently completed value chain study on chickens, goats and pigs is welcomed. The question for the PMU is ‘should UBALE prioritize opening this line of work at this stage in the project’s execution?’.

Drivers of the local economy. In some UBALE areas, cotton and rice are the agricultural drivers of the local economy, providing cash incomes for farmers and job opportunities for farm workers. The legume crops that UBALE is targeting are likely more appropriate crops for less well-off farmers. A deeper understanding of the role that crops such as cotton and rice play in the local economy, in terms of on- and off-farm income generating opportunities for the poorer members of the community, would help place UBALE’s interventions in the perspective of the overall agricultural development of an area.

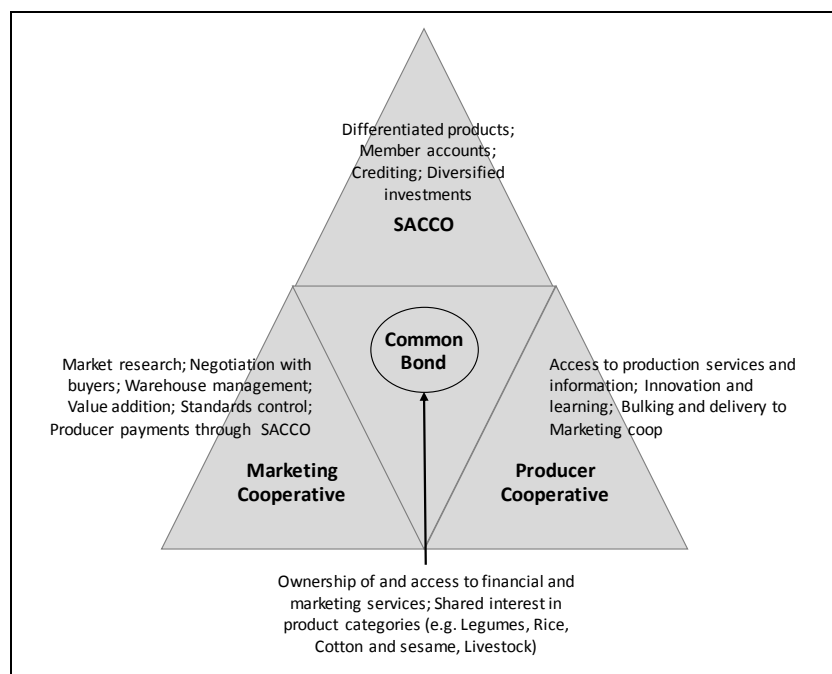
Strengthening NASFAM. The JMTR commends UBALE for its support to the development of NASFAM’s strategic plan. The plan seeks to set NASFAM on a course that will increase for farmers the value of being a member and make it less dependent on external donor support. Surprisingly, this support was not recognized by the NASFAM management staff interviewed by the JMTR team in Lilongwe. They did however manifest that, as a technical partner, NASFAM-HQ has had little influence on strategic planning in UBALE and that the project is not very well-integrated with the rest of NASFAM programming.

Conclusions and secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.2.

The marketing component is undoubtedly fulfilling a previously unmet need of poor farmers who are looking to improve their agricultural livelihoods. The undertaking is a large one in terms of reach, magnified by the fact that for many farmers this is their first experience of collective marketing to commercial buyers. UBALE PMU and partner staff face a significant challenge in the next two years as they seek to consolidate the solid foundations that have been laid.

In addition to the primary agricultural and marketing recommendations in the main JMTR Report (see Recommendations U2, U3, U4 and U12 copied in the Section below), secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.2 are:

- (1) Identify what **factors lead to successful club-cluster-association performance** and support those factors in the follow-up actions to strengthen the marketing model. The emphasis should be on quality of service delivery to associations and clusters rather than the achievement of full coverage. This may require taking hard decisions about continuing intensive support to those club-cluster-association that are performing poorly.
- (2) Ensure that strengthening the marketing model **balances skills** in marketing and business development with skills of members in crop-specific production technologies and practices, group organization and governance, financial management and innovation. It is the combination of these skills that will lead to more equitable and competitive inclusion of smallholder farmers in the respective value chains.
- (3) Detect opportunities to improve the **competitiveness of crops or livestock products that drive the local economy** in certain areas (e.g., rice, cotton, livestock products) and bring significant benefits for poor farmers and farm workers. If appropriate and resources permit, design and deliver interventions for these value chains that will complement the work on the prioritized legume crop value chains.
- (4) Maintain a full awareness of the internal dynamics within NASFAM about its future strategic directions. Enhance **interaction between UBALE and NASFAM** senior management should there be a feeling, at any time, of misunderstandings about UBALE's support and NASFAM's role in



Sub-Purpose 1.3: Members of marketing clubs, clusters and associations increased use of sustainable financial services

Observations

Cracking the financial services nut. Almost without exception, SILC and marketing club members mentioned access to affordable loans as an area that requires support. Presently, high interest rates and the unavailability of products that fit the needs of farmers from formal financial sector are the barriers that impede progress in this area. The formal sector bank sector continues

to be reticent in changing practices to engage with smallholder farmers. In addition, their demand on the resources of development projects such as UBALE to facilitate engagement are not sustainable.³⁴

An alternative model for financing poor farmers. Given the barriers to engaging the formal financial sector, UBALE is conceptualizing an alternative arrangement that links NASFAM's member-based marketing model with the Malawi Union of Savings and Credit Cooperatives (MUSCCO) member-driven financial services model. This arrangement is based on a cooperative model (in contrast to the association model currently promoted by NASFAM³⁵). The arrangement has three components (see Figure left): i) a production cooperative integrated by existing marketing clubs and first-order coops with a total of up to 600 members, ii) a second-order marketing cooperative that deals with warehousing, value adding post-production handling and processing and in line with specific market demands and marketing, and iii) a Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO), with the aim of providing farmers access to affordable financial products. This arrangement is currently known as the NCBA CLUSA Triangular Model of Cooperatives for Malawi.

Two concerns mentioned during the verification workshop about this proposal are a) the negative perception that many in the agriculture sector have of coops, which in the past have been manipulated for political purposes and b) the perception that SILC and their members would be absorbed in the SACCO, rather than maintaining their identity as SILC, with subsequent loss of the social capital, human capital and financial capital gains that members accrue through the SILC approach.

Crop and climate insurance. UBALE has made a significant effort to engage insurance companies in examining opportunities to reduce risk of loss by making crop and climate insurance available to smallholder producers. Climate risk insurance for poultry producers is the economic activity that is most advanced in terms of becoming a reality.

During the JMTR's focus group discussions with marketing clubs and interviews with Marketing Field Agents, the issue of insurance did not arise as a felt need. To pursue the issue, the project will need to continue sensitizing cluster committees and their respective associations when they are formed the pros and cons of taking out insurance, and the return on the investment should a loss occur and claim be necessary.

Conclusions and secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.3.

Access to affordable credit for smallholders continues to be a hard nut to crack. The Triangular Cooperative Model, which is based in part on experiences in Malawi and other countries is an idea worthy of development.

In addition to the primary agricultural and marketing recommendations in the main JMTR Report (see Recommendations U4 and U12 copied in the Section below), secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.3 are:

³⁴ Incomplete information was provided to the JMTR team by a consultant to Total Land Care (TLC) about a scheme that TLC has negotiated with two Malawian banks to provide credit to organized farmers, which is backed by a guarantee provided by USAID. The consultants contact details have been given to James Akai for follow-up as necessary.

³⁵ The JMTR team were informed that the Malawian Government is contemplating moving away from the association model to a cooperative model for organizing smallholder farmers.

- (1) Fully develop the **Triangular Cooperative Model** concept and test the concept with stakeholders. Ensure that the concerns of internal and external stakeholders are addressed. Document examples of cases where different components of the model have been successfully implemented and make explicit what checks and balances need to be in place to ensure this success. Make clear what concrete outputs and outcomes can be expected during the life of UBALE and how the process might be continued once UBALE terminates. The model is an innovation for Southern Malawi that will require adaptation to the specific circumstances of the region. Attached as an Annex to this review of Purpose 1 are points that UBALE should consider as it pursues the development of the model in the context of an innovation process.
- (2) Continue to collect information on, observe and examine cases where the formal financial sector is providing or has provided credit to smallholder farmers and against which the Triangular Cooperative Model can be compared.

Sub-Purpose 1.4: Selected individuals establish/strengthen businesses

Observations

Local business service providers. UBALE's study on the presence of businesses that provide advice and training on enterprise development in the three Districts revealed that there were no 'fit-for-purpose' providers of these types of services. The decision was therefore taken to establish a Consulting House, one per District, where a cadre of 10 consultants will work together to meet the demand for these services. SILC members who wish to grow an existing business or wish to initiate a new business are considered the primary 'customers' for these services.

In collaboration with Tools for Enterprise and Educations Consultants (TEEC), UBALE recently held the Training of Trainers workshop for PMU and partner staff who will subsequently train rigorously selected candidates for the business service consulting positions. 8 out of the 10 candidates selected are presently either SILC or Market PSPs. The scheme will be piloted in Blantyre Rural. A general excitement was sensed from PMU and partner staff that attended the workshop and the relevance of the approach for meeting the needs of SILC members.

Conclusions and secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.4.

The Consulting House model is an innovative approach for Southern Malawi and perhaps for the whole of Malawi. The JMTR team is fully supportive of this endeavour. In addition to the primary agricultural and marketing recommendations in the main JMTR Report (see Recommendations U4 and U12 copied in the Section below), secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.4 are:

- (1) The Consulting House concept should follow the steps of an innovation process (see Annex attached to this review), as recommended for the Triangular Cooperative Model above. The time remaining in UBALE will allow for at least one full year of pilot testing the approach, during which time real costs, income and profits of the business can be assessed, and changes introduced based on the outcomes. One of the products of the investment in this area should be a feasibility study, so that other development programs have the necessary information to introduce and implement the concept in their projects.

- (2) Make realistic plans for how the Consulting Houses' teams of consultants themselves will have access to support and mentoring once UBALE concludes.

Sub-Purpose 1.5: Joint decision making at household-level improved

Observations

SILC group members more empowered. Female SILC group members repeatedly and consistently expressed greater confidence in their ability to make short-term decisions about their children, their home, small businesses, and their farm independently or in partnership with their husbands. They often did point out that certain decisions, namely second wives/girlfriends, hired labour, and family size, were still up to the man (though a few groups differed on this). They felt that their husbands supported their ability to make money and subsequently respected their authority to make decisions on that money jointly.

Impact outside of SILC groups uncertain. Most household-decision making training and thus learning is within SILC groups. UBALE staff expressed concern that this might mean that learning/internalization in SILC group member husbands might not be as deep as desired. Since there was often little overlap in SILC group membership with Lead Farmers, paravets, and Purpose 3 groups, we also do not know the extent of learning/internalization about joint decision-making outside of the SILC groups within the communities.

Conclusions and secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.5.

Considerable progress has been made within this sub-purpose and many women and some men are expressing consideration for and appreciation of gender equity and genuine shared decision-making at the household level. UBALE can build upon these successes by ensuring that the messaging and even some of the trainings are also conveyed to a broader audience outside the SILC groups.

Secondary recommendations include:

- (1) Identifying any trouble spots (weak retention or recurring issues with household decision-making equity) within SILC groups and then set up mentoring or agile training to SILC group members *and* their spouses
- (2) Mentoring or setting up agile training sessions for critical decision-making UBALE groups as determined by the Theory of Change.

Annex to JMTR Review of Purpose 1. Agriculture and Marketing

Considerations on innovation processes

“Innovation is not about hiring an Einstein or creating a slogan. Everybody is capable of it, and the first sign that it is happening is when people work together, excited because they want to be there, focused on finding a solution to a challenge they all understand”

Tim Smit, creator of the Eden Project <http://www.edenproject.com>

Innovation is the successful **commercial or non-commercial** exploitation of an idea. A creative idea or an invention is **not** an innovation if it is **not** used by a wide number of persons.

There are two forms of innovation:

1. **Incremental innovation:** the improvement of existing products, processes or services

2. **Radical – or breakthrough – innovation:** the development of products, processes or services that do not exist

Both forms of innovation require understanding the needs and wants of customers or clients and the development of novel and imaginative solutions to these needs and wants.

An innovation process, or innovation pipeline, consists of three phases:

1. A **Design** phase, in which an idea is created and converted into a tangible product or service. In this phase the market potential of the product or service is assessed.
2. A **Develop** phase, in which a prototype product or service is pilot tested in the field for technical, social and environmental soundness; if appropriate a test market is undertaken.
3. A **Delivery** phase, in which the product or service is launched and delivery channels and relationships with customers are established.

The Table below shows the typical activities that are undertaken in each phase and the competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes) of the team members that are working on the innovation.

Different combinations of competencies are required at each phase of the innovation process. In general, team members involved in leading and participating in the process through the three phases needs to exhibit the following attitudes:

- A disposition to take risks and adapt to changing circumstances
- The acceptance of a certain level ambiguity and uncertainty in the design and develop phases
- A passion for seeing an idea to its conclusion
- The ability to motivate this passion in others

The time taken for each phase will depend on whether the innovation is incremental or radical, the relative complexity of the idea or invention, and the availability of resources to move through the phases.

Typical activities undertaken and competencies required during the innovation process

	Design Phase	Develop Phase	Deliver Phase
Typical activities undertaken in each phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define aims and objectives - Generate product ideas from within and source ideas from outside the agency - Collect technical and demand information from secondary sources - Screen ideas against technical and demand criteria - Develop the product concept - Collect demand information by testing the product concept with potential users - Plan and budget the Develop phase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a prototype of the product - Train staff in application of the product - Test the prototype in a field pilot project and adjust to improve performance - Test the product with selected users and monitor outcomes - Assess technical, social, environmental and financial viability - Evaluate and communicate results of pilot project to stakeholders - Develop the Business Model and an associated Business Plan, including a budget for the Deliver phase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a marketing and communications plan for the product - Develop promotional materials and activities - Finalize the product - Set up distribution channel(s) if required - Engage and establish relations with users (customers) - Provide 'Help Desk' for resolving user queries - Monitor user perceptions and adjust as needed - Evaluate and communicate outcomes of user experience to stakeholders
Typical knowledge, skills and attitudes required in each phase	<p>Knowledge: Scientific and technical knowledge and experience relevant to proposed product (subject matter expertise); socio-economics.</p> <p>Skills: research processes; survey design and data collection and analysis.</p> <p>Attitudes: Creativity; passion and a desire to excel; ability to motivate passion in others; leadership; ability to work in a team and establish productive relationships with key partners and potential users.</p>	<p>Knowledge: As for the Design phase plus marketing and communications; delivery of advisory and extension services; monitoring and evaluation</p> <p>Skills: As for the Design Phase, plus for profit and not-for-profit business planning processes; adult education; learning processes and communication.</p> <p>Attitudes: As for the design phase plus the ability to listen; tact and sensitivity to local socio-cultural norms and behaviors.</p>	<p>Knowledge: As for the Design phase</p> <p>Skills: As for the Design Phase plus the ability to make good judgments and quick decisions based on information provided by the monitoring activities.</p> <p>Attitudes: As for the design phase plus credibility, transparency and persuasiveness in the presence of and communicating with decision-makers.</p>

Purpose 2 MCHN

Under this component (see log frame for purpose 2 below), the UBALE Project uses a Care Group Approach to reach over the LoA a total of 124,000 households with a pregnant or lactating woman and children 6-23 months. UBALE plans to distribute conditional supplementary food rations to a total of 158,800 mother-child pairs, including those targeted for participation in Care Groups. Other key activities under purpose 2, investigated by the JMTR include: support to GoM structures to implement the CG model (DNCC, ANCC, VNCC, ACLAN and CLAN), grandmother groups, promotion of homestead gardens; community-led complementary feeding and learning sessions (CCFLS); and food processing and preservations sessions and nutrition fairs. Importantly, purpose 2 has a major focus of implementing the

Government of Malawi Care Group approach working through the GoM, including linkages to governance activities. Additional Purpose 2 activities had not begun or were at very small scale during the JMTR visit, including: training of CBCCs on Baby WASH and ENA, development of adolescent curriculum, and training of health care providers and HSAs on youth friendly health services.

Social and Behavior Change: There has been a fairly slow roll out of modules to date due to massive scale and limited staff in year 1. For example, the project is just beginning to deliver messages on nutrition for pregnant women (module 2) in most TAs. Community mobilization and social change are essential components of good SBC programming, but have been neglected in UBALE. To lead to sustainable change, the project needs to move beyond inter-personal communication (flip chart messaging) targeting improved knowledge of pregnant women and mothers. Community mobilization, although emphasized in the technical application, appears limited to date due to the stated focus on establishing groups in the first two years of the project. Some of these groups, notable CLANs, VNCCs and other less formal groups can play a more prominent role in community mobilization. Formed 7 months ago, grandparent groups are currently at small scale and the groups that the review team met with lack formal training, materials and accompaniment. In terms of recommendations for SBC, the UBALE behavior change strategy should include further emphasis on community mobilization, including a mobilization strategy.

Finally, the Community Based Child Care Centers (CBCC)³⁶ activities have not been rolled out to date. CBCCs are not focused on under 2s and also currently have limited reach and functionality in UBALE districts. The review team recommends that the CBCC activities be halted, and resources shifted towards strengthening and scaling up community mobilization and grandmother group activities.

Improved Agency of Women of Reproductive Age: As of year 3, few activities have begun at present apart from life skills training of youth, so the review team was not able to examine these deeply. Household decision making activities and pre-conception health needed to be addressed when CG started, not two years down the road, as noted in the WALA final evaluation. Upon visiting the nutrition rehabilitation units in UBALE district hospitals, the review team learned of reports that very young women are some of the most common caregivers with SAM children. The team learned that gender is not being addressed as well as it could be via Care Group activities, as the focus is on the individual mother and gender activities have been separated out in the form of other activities such as Gender Champions. To illustrate the point, one promoter observed in Mlilima TA stated during a Care Group meeting with 7 Cluster Leaders: *“It is important for the man to eat well in the household so when he has sex with the woman, the baby will be healthy.”* The team recommends that UBALE create a rapid scale up plan for *Improved Agency* activities associated with this sub-purpose.

Purpose 2: Nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of two improved

Sub-Purpose 2.1 GoM MCHN/WASH systems management practices are improved

Sub-Purpose 2.2 Targeted households adopt evidence-based behaviors that reduce the prevalence of malnutrition.

Sub-Purpose 2.3 Women of reproductive age have improved agency

³⁶ The JMTR team was unable to visit a CBCC despite requests to do so.

Purpose 3 Community Empowerment

Table B-2 shows the outputs, outcomes, and sub-purposes under Purpose 3 in the UBALE Project as indicated in the project's IPTT.

Table B-2. Outputs, Outcomes, and Sub-Purposes for Purpose 3 in the UBALE Project

PURPOSE 3: Communities are empowered to contribute to their own sustainable development.		
Sub-Purpose 3.1: Improved governance, risk reduction and environmental practices		
Immediate Outcome 3.1.1: Plans to improve governance, reduce risk and enhance environment within structures (ACPC, VCPC, ADC, VDC, NRM Committees and Youth Clubs) developed		
Output: Training and support	Output: Functionality assessments	Output: Participatory Vulnerability Capacity Assessments
Sub-Purpose 3.2: Communities have productive assets		
Immediate Outcome 3.2.1 Community members participate in the rehabilitation/creation of community assets	Immediate Outcome 3.2.2 Committees have maintenance Plans	
Output: FFA proposals	Output: Asset maintenance committees trained	
Sub-Purpose 3.3: Women participate in decision-making structures		
Immediate Outcome 3.3.1 Community members and leaders support women's participation in decision making structures	Immediate Outcome 3.3.2 Women empowered to speak publicly	
Outputs: Youth Club members, Gender Champions and Community leaders trained	Output: Community dialogues	

In the field, the JMTR found the following activities being implemented.

- Capacity building of Area Civil Protection Committees (ACPCs) and Village Civil Protection Committees (VCPCs)
 - Training of ACPCs on DRM
 - Formation of new VCPCs facilitated by ACPCs where they do not exist
 - Revamping of existing VCPCs where they exist but are dysfunctional
 - Training of VCPCs by ACPCs on Disaster Risk Management (DRM)
 - Implementation of a Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment (PCVA), including mapping of hazards
 - Distribution of early warning and response materials (rain gauges, whistles, gum boots and a bicycle)
 - Development of a DRM Plan describing local hazards and short-term and long-term plans for addressing these
 - Development of proposals for UBALE Food for Assets activities
 - Implementation of functionality assessments for VCPCs and ACPCs
- Capacity building of Area Natural Resource Management Committees (ANRMCs) and Village Natural resource Management Committees (VNRMCs)
 - Training of ANRMCs on natural resource management and functions of ANRMC and VNRMC
 - Formation and Training of VNRMC by ANRMC on natural resource management including watershed development practices
 - Creation of a natural resource map of the village in some areas
 - Development of proposals for UBALE Food for Assets activities

- Provision of seed, polybags and tools with training on tree nursery management
- Capacity building of Village Development Committees (VDCs), Area Development Committees (ADCs), and Youth Clubs on good governance, environmental protection and participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- Capacity building of District Executive Committee (DEC) Sub-Committees on good governance and disaster risk reduction.
- Distribution of early warning monitoring and reporting toolkits to VCPCs and NRM Committees
- Facilitation of Participatory Vulnerability Capacity Assessments
- Use of Food for Assets for construction or rehabilitation of:
 - *River Bank Protection (98 sites)* – Seedlings, nursery and planting of trees along river banks or on gullies higher in the catchment
 - *Watershed Management (60 sites)* – Water catchment depressions in furrows, check dams in gullies, trees or vetiver grass on contours, and/or rock bunds on contours.
 - *Dams or Dykes (20 sites)* – Rehabilitating small-scale dams or dykes and/or building water point structures for livestock or irrigation water
 - *Latrines in Evacuation Centers, Health Posts or schools (39 sites)* – Pit latrines in health posts, schools or near locations identified as evacuation centers
- Promotion of women's participation in decision-making
- Capacity building of Youth Club members, Gender Champions, and community leaders on gender equity and a Theatre for Development (TfD) approach.

JMTR Observations. The JMTR observed that UBALE has taking a strong step forward in working more closely with government under Purpose 3. The project approach is to work with the District-level committees, e.g., the District Civil Protection Committee (DCPC) and the Assistant District Disaster Risk Management Officer (ADDRMO) to train Area-level committees such as the Area Civil Protection Committee (ACPC) and then to work with the ACPCs to train the GVH-level Village Civil Protection Committees (VCPCs). This is the approach that the GoM uses and UBALE is basically providing assistance to government structures to be able to perform their functions more effectively. UBALE is also working with district authorities to set targets on the number of VCPCs and VNRMCs to support in the district. All in all, this reflects very close collaboration with the GoM, closer than usual for a FFP project. The project is not entirely supporting government implementation plans, however, since UBALE has made commitments to the donor to achieve certain (and relatively) targets on outputs. The driving force for planning trainings and FFA proposal development are still the UBALE targets, and UBALE sets targets each year, makes plans and then works to engage government counterparts in implementing plans.

The government committees at the area level who are key to providing support to the village level committees under UBALE are composed of government staff who already have full-time jobs. The ACPC and the ANRMC are committees, not departments. A government department would have staff dedicated to its function. Additional human or financial resources have not been allocated by government to the committees to enable them to function. Ambitious implementation plans are difficult to achieve in this type of structure, and the targets for UBALE have been set relatively high for this type of delivery model. Presumably, this is a function of trying to be competitive during the proposal submission process, but also because the experience of the UBALE partners is more on NGO delivery models which can achieve high output targets,

with the challenge of making the outcomes sustainable however. The target numbers for training and FFA projects in UBALE have been set based on an NGO-delivery model, although the three front-line staff in each district to implement them under Purpose 3 is limited. The targets are very high relative to what the government committees are able to do effectively with the resources that they have. As a result, UBALE is significantly behind in implementing plans for training committees at the village level. While the delays resulting from the first two years of diverted attention to flood/drought recovery contributed to this, it is also a function of trying to deliver the project deliberately through government structures.

RECOMMENDATION: Output Targets under Purpose 3

The UBALE targets should be made more realistic and achievable in terms of accomplishing true capacity building. This means doing more follow-up and mentoring after training has been provided. In the UBALE approach which is working with the GoM structures to deliver the project, there are limits to how much follow-up and mentoring that can be provided. In the coming planning periods, the project should work more closely with the GoM to develop joint implementation plans that factor in government capacities. The project should also raise this issue with the GoM that the area and district-level committees are under-resourced with both human resources and finance, and explore options for addressing this problem with them.

The primary function of the Civil Protection Committee structure is to (1) advise communities on how to prepare for and mitigate disasters, (2) assess and report on the scale of disasters that occur, and (3) support the emergency response when it occurs. The JMTR found that the VCPC's are doing a pretty good job with the first two elements. The ACPCs are also verifying and reporting on emergencies, usually in a timely way. But, not much is happening on the third element, except in the case of very large disasters, for which resources are mobilized from NGOs and donors. VCPCs, for example, rarely hear back on the decisions made on their assessment reports, and sometimes the response received when it does come does not match the needs of the people affected by the emergency or the recommended response from the VCPC and ACPC.

Districts have Disaster Contingency Plans oriented around the most common disasters including floods, drought, high winds, crop pests and human disease outbreaks, and have set thresholds for different types of responses. A response to an emergency affecting less than 10 households is generally considered the responsibility of the community under the coordination of the VCPC. The JMTR found that all of VCPCs that were interviewed are mobilizing resources to be able to meet this need. UBALE has not yet begun implementation of the resource mobilization training, however, so the only source of resources found are contributions made by VCPC members. This means that the resources are very limited, and most VCPCs responded that the purpose of the funds is more to assist VCPC members than to assist the community at large. In discussions held during the JMTR with ACPCs and VCPCs, other types of resource mobilization were discussed. One interesting idea that emerged was for VCPCs to mobilize resources more widely in the community around the concept of households providing a small amount to the VCPC when cash is available at harvest as sort of an insurance premium on the assurance that if a disaster affects the households, the VCPC will use these resources to provide support. The

ACPCs and VCPCs involved in these discussions indicated that the primary constraint to implementing this was to build the confidence in the community that these funds will be available when a disaster occurs. They said that most households would certainly be willing to pay this premium if it was small, only required when they had cash and they were confident that they would see some benefit from this investment in terms of assistance when the household has been affected by a disaster.

A response to an emergency affecting more than 10 households up to a certain level³⁷ 10 and 50 is the responsibility of the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA). For a response to an emergency affecting more than 50 households, the DCPC will organize a meeting of stakeholders and solicit external support for a response. The JMTR noted that ACPCs and VCPCs are generally not aware of these details, a transparency in governance issue that should be addressed.

UBALE is providing support for a wide array of FFA activities. The JMTR observed that depending on capacities in a specific community, the preparation of proposals is being done by any one or combination of the VDC, VCPC or ANRMC. The types of FFA projects “selected” by VCPCs/VNRMCs/VDCs is at least tacitly driven by the project, even though project staff are purposely trying to avoid directing communities. Nevertheless, UBALE needed to get food out to households in 2016 and certainly during initial sensitization meetings for Purpose 3, community residents were asking questions about what the project will support and staff felt compelled to respond on the types of FFA projects that the project would consider. A number of VCPCs and ANRMCs interviewed during the JMTR seemed surprised to know that they could propose other types of FFA projects, and up to then, had not felt like they could propose alternative activities for FFAs.

RECOMMENDATION: Small-Scale Emergency Response Fund Pilot

In order to build the capacities of the Civil Protection Committee structure to be able to respond effectively to small-scale emergencies that are not appropriate for a major appeal for external emergency resources, UBALE may want to pilot an activity in which funds are made available to support small-scale emergency responses identified by VCPCs. This would be for emergencies that affect relatively small numbers of households, such as those affected by windstorms or fires, for example, below the threshold 50 households. Implementation of this pilot will build the capacities of the structure on the response function while installing confidence in the capabilities of VCPCs to manage local emergency resources sufficiently so that community residents may be willing to pay VCPCs the "insurance premium" that was discussed. ACPCs and the ADDRMO will need to be involved in the review and approval process for disbursing funds, so concept and plan should be discussed with these stakeholders and the DoDMA. In these discussions, the possibility of DoDMA allocating its own funds or other means for capitalizing the funds after the project ends should be discussed.

³⁷ The ADDRMO in Nsanje indicated that this threshold level is 50 households. There is nothing in the DoDMA policies that specifies the level of this threshold, although each district has the flexibility to define thresholds. Only the level of 10 households is mandated by GoM policy.

In interviews with implementing staff at the district-levels, the JMTR found a bit of frustration that they did not receive feedback from the UBALE PMU on the FFA proposals that had been submitted, especially on the reasons for some proposals being rejected. They indicated that if there was a quality issue on the rejected proposals, then advice from the PMU would be helpful for improving future proposals. This is also a basic governance issue, i.e., transparency on decision-making, and UBALE needs to demonstrate the principles for which the project is advocating relative to governance.

The majority of the FFA projects in UBALE are river bank protection projects. A contributing factor to this was the need to make food available in 2016, following two years of drought for most UBALE households. Tree planting projects are easy to organize and do not require much technical input. These projects certainly had impact in making food available to vulnerable households at a crucial time. As projects to create community assets, however, they have had little immediate impact since the trees are too small for river bank stabilization, but even the long term impact will likely be limited. The JMTR found low survival rates on the seedlings that had been planted, and even more seedlings had been washed out by subsequent floods.

The watershed development activities, on the other hand, are highly appreciated by participants. The previous project, WALA, was doing watershed development, and the longer term results are starting now to be seen and appreciated. Participants can also see the visible impact of structures that are controlling erosion. Many participants interviewed during the JMTR reported that they would much rather use the FFA from UBALE to support more watershed development or water harvesting structures such as dams.

RECOMMENDATION: Watershed and Water Harvesting FFA Projects

The UBALE project should step back from River Bank Protection FFA projects, and focus more on watershed development or water catchment projects. While floods, especially along the Shire River need to be viewed as emergencies, the smaller-scale floods that occur in the project area should be viewed as opportunities for catching and storing water for irrigation or livestock. The project should identify a good hydrologist or civil engineer to advise on small-scale water harvesting, irrigation and flood mitigation structures appropriate for FFA in UBALE and pilot some of these structures in the remaining life of the project.

The UBALE project is also supporting latrine construction through FFA in public facilities, mainly health posts, but also in areas designated as evacuation centers and in one school. The design for these latrines conforms with the recommended GoM design. The JMTR found, however, that the workmanship was poor, mainly because the professional contractors hired to implement the construction are mainly acting as coordinators and not as technical supervisors. Basically, they ensure that the materials are available when the FFA laborers are ready to work, but they do not inspect the construction, nor are GoM engineers with the responsibility to certify construction at key stages available or consulted. The JMTR also found that the decision on latrines in a public facility was driven by the project, and didn't always meet the most critical need for the facility. JMTR reviewers were informed, for example, by respondents that "we were told that UBALE would build latrines...if we had been asked what we need, there are other structures that are more important here".

The JMTR was surprised to find that there are no economic development assets, such as feeder roads, market structures, or community storage structures, being constructed through FFA. These are not in the mandate for either the VCPC or VNRMC, but they most certainly are in the mandate of the VDC. Apparently, the original proposal for UBALE did contain a strategy to build economic development assets through FFA, but this was one of the activities that got removed in the final negotiation and approval process.

RECOMMENDATION: FFA Projects in Health Posts

UBALE should modify its approach with health posts to use FFA resources for needs-based health post facilities construction or rehabilitation. With targeted health posts, the project should conduct a participatory facilities needs assessment to identify key gaps, then develop FFA proposals to address the gaps, which may include latrines but could include bathing facilities, water point rehabilitation, and other facilities. Since this will take more time and may require more money for materials, the UBALE targets for health post rehabilitation should be reduced, targeting FFA investments on the health posts with the most critical needs. This means that UBALE will not be able to report that it has build latrines in a larger number of health posts, but it does mean that the impact achieved by the investment will likely be greater.

The targeting strategy for FFA rations in UBALE was on female-headed households, households with orphans, households dependent on *ganyu*³⁸, households identified as vulnerable by community, and also landowners for projects improving land resources. The JMTR found that the targeting implementation is pretty good for FFA food recipients. Sometimes this seemed coincidental – UBALE food recipients were identified by the community because they had not received food from WFP/World Vision or cash from the GoM Local development Funds. Other times, however, the selection of FFA participants reflected deliberate targeting – communities used a wealth ranking process to identify the right participants.

Governance in Purpose 3. In 2014, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Food for Peace (FFP) elevated governance and social accountability along with conflict sensitivity to become strategic considerations for all development food assistance projects (DFAP) going forward. The UBALE Project was one of the first DFAPs to operationalize this new mandate, making governance the foundational purpose of the 5-year UBALE project. This decision was based on a theory of change that identified effective, equitable governance as the cornerstone for the project's overall sustainability strategy.

UBALE strengthens the capacity of Malawian government partners to deliver public services at the district, area and village levels as well as the internal governance of non-governmental intermediaries. These intermediaries include community-based organizations (CBO) working on issues of natural resource management, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, civil protection, savings and internal lending communities (SILC), and farmer groups responsible for mobilizing citizen participation in governance and local development activities at the village and area levels.

³⁸ *Ganyu*, also known as piecemeal work in Malawi, is basically daily wage labor.

If successful, by the end of the project, all UBALE staff will be highly proficient in engaging government; all project beneficiaries will be empowered to demand good governance through their intermediary organizations; and targeted Government of Malawi (GoM) partners will be more willing and able to respond to this demand by supplying high quality services.

Achievements. At the midterm of UBALE's life of activity, many village and area development committees (VDC and ADC) are now functional; before, they were not. For those that have participated in the good governance training, they now have constitutions and action plans, which are changing and improving how VDC/ADC operate. The VDC/ADC are now asserting themselves more, viz. the district executive committee and council, as the legitimate coordinating bodies for local economic development. Finally, local sub-committees such as the civil protection committees are following the lead of VDC/ADC in adopting the same good governance principles and practices.

In addition, UBALE has stimulated youth and women's participation, although increased numbers of female and youth participants did not always translate into more meaningful participation never mind empowerment. Even where VDC/ADCs follow the 50/50 rule for leadership composition, men tend to dominate decision-making in local project planning while women participate more actively in project implementation. Youth generally feel excluded from VDC/ADC decision-making.

Still, many informants noted that the VDCs now distribute development activities' benefits more equitably despite complaints of nepotism and cronyism being practiced by both group village heads (GVH) and traditional authorities (TA). VDC/ADC and community members are now insisting on greater accountability and responsiveness from district-level officials. In particular, VDCs recognized that they needed to do a better job monitoring district-level procurement and government contractor performance.

Observations. Along with these achievements, there are also some significant challenges, some of which are beyond the scope of UBALE to address but which still call into question the project's major assumptions. Neither UBALE nor the district-level departments have sufficiently accompanied participants to institutionalize new knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired in the training workshops. This gap greatly undercuts a key element of the project's overall sustainability strategy. District officials attributed this deficiency to their limited levels of human, financial and other resources and to their having to pursue multiple, often competing priorities.

In addition, coordination with districts alone will not create the enabling environment needed for UBALE to succeed. UBALE may not have been designed to be a local governance project. However, without greater attention and resources paid to strengthening the capacity of its district government partners, UBALE risks reinforcing an unfortunate trend in Malawian governance: it improves or deteriorates, depending on the availability of donor-funded project resources. In addition, it is important to recognize the interdependence of core governance functions. Focusing on strengthening only a few makes sense to optimize limited project funding, but the selection should be based on a more thorough analysis of Malawian governance systems and structures.

Moreover, despite the return of elected ward councilors to reconstituted district councils, the Central Government's continues to wield excessive power over local government structures. For example, it has *de facto* authority over all aspects of district-level department staffing, including recruitment, supervision, promotion, sanctioning, etc. This system of dual administration further

reduces districts' already limited capacity to manage their meager human resource base as well as their ability to deliver critical services more effectively, equitably.

Another challenge observed was the VDC/ADC's lack of financial management capacity, which weakens their ability to function effectively, especially given Malawi's endemic, systemic corruption. For example, VDC/ADCs are unable to track the multiple sources of local development funding allocated by the district. The district informs the VDC/ADCs of the amounts allocated but VDC/ADCs have no idea where and how the money is being spent.

In addition, VDC/ADCs lack the capacity to generate local source revenues; they are completely dependent on the districts for local development financing. The districts, in turn, are dependent on the central government's conditional and unconditional transfers. At all levels, multiple funding sources combined with the politicization of resource allocation and decision-making reinforce the incentives for engaging in corrupt practices. VDC/ADCs and the various subcommittees have tried to "do the right thing," but they also realize that doing otherwise, i.e., working within the (corrupt) system, will enable them at least to obtain some public resources.

Conclusions and Recommendation. UBALE made a strategic choice to focus on only certain local governance functions, consistent with FFP's expectations and resource envelope. What the midterm review has demonstrated is that these functions (planning, M&E, and soon to be rolled out, resource mobilization), while critical, were insufficient to improve good governance at all levels in general and to assure districts' downward accountability to citizens in particular.

Recommendation: Public expenditure tracking surveys, public service performance contracts, and citizen parliaments are social accountability tools. They are by no means substitutes for statutory accountability mechanisms, but introducing their usage in UBALE will at least provide communities and VDC/ADCs with another lever for demanding accountability from district-level elected and appointed officials.

- Public expenditure tracking surveys: Community-based organizations, VDCs/ADCs and citizens can use these surveys to track the resources expended on local development project and to monitor outputs to verify that they were produced at or under budget and meet government standards. This tool "follows the money" to identify leakage points typically where there is corruption in a project's implementation.
- Service performance contracts: Based on indigenous practices in Rwanda, a service performance contract includes a public ceremony at which local officials commit to improving service delivery and specifically to reaching mutually agreed upon benchmarks, process and quality standards, etc.
- Citizen parliaments: A District Chair, Commissioner or Traditional Authority would convene all district-level officials so that citizens can directly demand accountabilities from them. The convening local leader would then instruct the responsible district-level official(s) to respond and detail and commit to any follow up actions to "cure" the issue.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Governance

Achievements. In Purpose 1, informants expressed appreciation for UBALE capacity building in conservation agriculture. In addition, UBALE-trained GoM agents were linking cooperatives and farmer's groups with big customers. Female SILC members benefited more from public services and participated more actively in VDC/ADC sub-committee activities. Overall, there appears to be a paradigm shift in the way that CRS, Save the Children, CARE and other international non-governmental organizations have operated in the past. There are now alliances with national public and private sector and civil society organizations to strengthen intermediaries' and government capacity to deliver more innovative services that are more responsive to participants' needs.

Similarly, both CRS more explicitly aligned their program approaches with GoM policies. This alignment has heightened the visibility of the UBALE at the national level through support to the NASFAM strategy and at the district level with more explicit support to government programs. As a result, there has been greater ownership by government and civil society through participation in design, planning and service delivery.

In Purpose 2, Story Workshop empowered traditional leaders to engage with health surveillance agents (HSA) on nutrition monitoring. HSAs were also provided VDCs with information on how to promote good hygiene and how to prevent and treat diseases at community level. More households have begun building pit latrines. Finally, in **Purpose 3**, district disaster plans were incorporated into district development plans and modified to reach the most vulnerable. Through Food for Assets (FFA), VNRMCs have co-managed woodlots, reducing pressure on Matandwe Forestry Reserve; community fish pond dams were also used for watering reforestation nurseries.

Across all three purposes, the proposed decentralization of decision-making has the potential to unblock local initiative and generate more effective, timely government responses to local development challenges, especially in times of crisis. More responsive government will contribute to increased sustainability of program results and their replication in other regions in the country, thus increasing the potential for impact.

Observations. In Purpose 1, AEDO's delivery of agricultural inputs was often too little, too late to have any positive effect on farmers' production or productivity. In addition, the new Land Law's (2016) enforcement has been uneven and created conflict between customary (GVH, TA) vs. statutory (GoM) authority to resolve land disputes. Malawian farmers are torn between the new system, in which they have little access to justice, and the old one, in which the chiefs regularly engage in petty corruption when allocating land.

In Purpose 2, informants described parallel healthcare systems. The public system had open access but offered little in terms of availability or quality of services. Those who were better off financially used the private system to access better quality services. Finally, those who were better-connected used their patron-client networks to access better quality services in the "club" system. Taken together, the majority of rural Malawians lack equitable access to quality healthcare services. In addition, the Village Health Committees were either inactive or simply not functioning. Finally, gender-based inequities reduced access to quality water supply, which was clearly demonstrated in the inadequate GoM response to the cholera outbreak in Nsanje.

In Purpose 3, the lack of training or information on community-led FFA proposals combined with lack of feedback on rejected proposals were symptomatic of the general lack of transparency in district-level disaster response and recovery. As well, poaching of flora and fauna remains critical challenge in protected areas. Finally, many informants complained of the inadequate GoM response to the shocks rural communities experience perennially.

Across all three purposes, district departments are chronically underfunded and unable to reach and respond adequately to the needs of the most vulnerable. In addition, even where donors and their implementing partners are doing better with program coordination to fill such gaps, the convergence of multiple, competing development initiatives has further stretched already over-extended staff. Finally, the absence of operational local (area-specific) economic development plans precludes the kind of coordinated and focused investment of the resources available that have the potential to capture opportunities for sustained socioeconomic growth.

Conclusions and Recommendations. CBOs and private sector groups are the entry point for integrating good governance into UBALE. They can also serve as incubators for civic participation, generating demand for improved service delivery while holding local governance structures accountable for supplying it. Currently, none of these groups consistently coordinate with VDC/ADCs, which is a missed opportunity and further erodes the latter's credibility as platforms for local governance.

CBOs and private sector groups will only be as effective as their capacity to engage local governance structures. For them to do so with credibility, they must first strengthen their capacity to manage their internal governance more transparently, accountably and democratically. This will produce two important benefits. First, democratic management is *good* management, and it will improve their capacity to better serve their members' interests. Second, this improved effectiveness will give them credibility to demand that local governance structures – e.g., VDC/ADCs, district councils, etc. do the same.

Recommendation: To assist CBOs and private sector groups in doing so, UBALE should extend the P3 package of good governance capacity building, including the expanded set of social accountability tools described above to these CBOs and private sector groups so that they can better engage VDC/ADC on issues covered by P1 and P2. Finally, UBALE should identify “lead” GVHs or TAs where it can apply this approach for integrating good governance more systematically across all three purposes and scale up once other GVH/TA respond positively to the anticipated demonstration effect.

Conclusion and Recommendation. Together the UBALE partners have a total of over 30 years' experience in food security programming in Malawi. Over the last 10 years, they have built up credibility with national and local government, private sector and civil society organizations. They are recognized as *bone fide* players in agricultural and rural development. With this track record, they are in a position to transition from a role of development facilitators and service providers to one in which they play a proactive role in shaping public and private development policy and practice. UBALE's explicit alignment with GoM policies and delivery through government, private sector and civil society organizations provides the ideal platform from which to initiate this transition.

Recommendation: Working in unison, the consortium partners should use UBALE as a platform to initiate change processes by influencing public and private policy and development practice. The suggested focus is climate smart agricultural extension and advisory services.

An explicit influence agenda would build on the strengthened relationship with the District Agricultural Development Offices (DADO) and the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM), innovations in and farmers' enthusiasm for climate smart and conservation agriculture practices and watershed management, and CRS' partnership with the USAID-funded Strengthening Agriculture and Nutrition Extension Services (SANE) project.

To begin, UBALE should undertake a contextual analysis to identify and select an influence goal that is technically sound and politically feasible. Next, UBALE should map stakeholder and power relations that will support or constrain achievement of the goal. The resulting influence plan would include: a) steps for strengthening alliances with like-minded stakeholders, b) assessment and identification of gaps in critical technical competencies to be filled; c) alignment of learning agenda research to support achievement of the influence goal; and d) a strategy to communicate evidence-based results to targeted audiences, combining audience-specific messaging with empirical evidence.

Gender

In some Areas, VDC/ADCs have been integrating gender effectively without the accompaniment of gender champions. As well, there were some instances where there was good collaboration between government, CBOs and private sector groups. Finally, gender roles and responsibilities have been changing at the household level in the workload and decision-making domains.

For gender, there has been delayed implementation of gender activities in some areas. As well, some gender champions have disseminated messages without undergoing formal training; others lack the necessary reference materials to perform effectively. In UBALE, gender coordinators will work up to one year before the end of the project while Gender and Sustainability Field Officers will work through to the end. Finally, documentation of case studies has yet to begin.

To move beyond gender responsiveness to gender transformation, UBALE should redouble efforts to engage gender champions and to promote gender integration in target communities. Going forward, training should focus on those gender champions who have already been selected but who have yet to be trained. In addition, UBALE should extend gender integration within Purpose groups in Villages where there are no gender champions.

To broaden sensitization, UBALE should reach out to all focal Areas with gender messages regardless of how remote they might be, adapting the core messages to the specific context. Similarly, to ensure sustainability, UBALE should extend Gender Coordinators to the end of the project while developing sustainability and exit strategies starting now with government at all levels (VDC, ADC and District). Finally, UBALE should identify and start documenting longitudinal (multi-year) case studies and most significant change stories now as part of a more general effort to adopt complexity-aware monitoring and evaluation.

Environment

UBALE has submitted an IEE, and an amended IEE to the BEO in order to comply with Reg 216. _For each activity, mitigation measures were taken to ensure compliance.

No staff was hired to take care of this cross-cutting issue, and for each of the partners and sub-contractors, the head of either the Purpose 3, or the person responsible for FFA appears to be in charge of compliance and the implementation of the EMMP. Score cards were planned in Nsanje, but had not yet been written. It was unclear if there would be separate cards for environmental compliance for their activities.

Priority Recommendation: Ensure that the CRS budget has provisions for the hiring of an environmental compliance staff

It was apparent from multiple perspective of the JMTR team that dedicated staffing for environmental compliance was absent, and sorely needed. It is clear that the hiring of a project staff for the purpose of environmental compliance is essential. The burden of having to comply with the regulation, going through the sectoral best practices, and organizing the appropriate monitoring should not fall on the staff working on the different purposes. Environmental Compliance is a cross-cutting issue, and must have a dedicated staff, able to look at compliance across purposes.

We observed several activities that were out of compliance for 22 CFR 216 throughout the UBALE project (https://www.usaid.gov/our_work/environment/compliance/22cfr216).

- The tree planting activities showed that tree seedlings were planted too early, making them vulnerable to floods and droughts. The lack of monitoring from field staff was obvious, and the loss of planted trees very high. The diversity of the trees was also low for the FFA. Targeting non-invasive, diverse, indigenous species will ensure long-term resilience.
- Workers safety is non-existent for all FFA, seed multiplication activities that used pesticides, and paravet certification that used vaccinations and require proper medical waste disposal training.
- None of the water points were fenced after having received UBALE training. A lack of fencing is usually a proxy indicator for other failings in well operation and maintenance.

Priority Recommendation: Integrate the EMMP into the IPTT for environmental compliant indicators

The integration of considerations from the EMMP into the IPTT can be done through a more targeted definition of existing indicators (through the PIRS). This is the only guarantee that appropriate monitoring and evaluation of activities will encompass environmental compliance is through the integration of those standards into the IPTT. This has not been done for UBALE, and needs to be corrected. Once those indicators PIRS have been modified, they should be sent to the DCHA BEO (eclesceri@usaid.gov).

Priority Recommendation: Refocus training, messaging, research, and specific activities to accurately reflect the new normal caused by climate risk and variability in Malawi

In observations across the districts, there was an understandable widespread misconception by community members about climate variability and change. All VCPC and VNRMC groups were under the impression that “if they planted trees, the rains would come back, and droughts would stop”. This is categorically untrue, and a dangerous assumption. This misconception apparently is derived from an overly-complex set of training materials, where the manuals emphasize a module on global climate change education, and have very little on climate-smart management of natural resources. The message needs to be broken down into plainer speak, the scientific underlying concepts are not directed to a lay audience with limited numeracy and literacy. These misconceptions need to be corrected through more targeted messages during the trainings, and potentially a modification of the manuals. Additionally, droughts and floods have to be planned for through a modification of the protocols (longer periods for trees in nurseries, earlier planting of the trees to take advantage of the rainy season, more diverse and drought-resistant crops and indigenous species), as well as a more deliberate connection between communities and agro-

dealers. Lastly, a push for more monitoring will allow for weather-related actions/reactions across groups to assess current and changing coping strategies across purposes, and allow more experimental approach to home gardens and tree planting activities to improve climate-smart approaches. This lack of understanding of understanding on Climate Risks is unfortunate given that USAID hosted a climate smart agriculture training in Oct 2016 in Malawi.

Other Recommendations: Workers training and safety

For the FFA activities, none of the beneficiaries were trained for safety and accident/emergency protocol. The FFA committee was explained by extension workers of GoM or UBALE what they were supposed to do as far as tasks go. Then they would go there in the morning and tell beneficiaries what they were supposed to do (plant 50 trees each, where, what distance between the trees, for example). But no safety training, no protocol in case of accident/injury, etc... #3 is also concerned with worker's safety.

Recommendation: training of UBALE and GoM field officers in workers safety for FFA activities.

Other Recommendations: Boreholes sanitation training

Various NGOs have drilled boreholes in the districts UBALE is working in. UBALE is not drilling boreholes, but training the communities that have one through the water point committees. Many improvement came out of those trainings, but UBALE needs to monitor that any livestock fencing needs to be 15m (50ft) from the water point itself, which is was not. Also, all boreholes need to be fenced in on all sides, with a door, to avoid chickens, goats and other animals to potentially contaminate the water or the surrounding area.

Recommendation: Revamping of training for CLTS to include fencing, the issue of animal presence near the water and safe distances to respect for proper sanitation. (see sectoral guideline http://www.usaidgems.org/Documents/SectorGuidelines/Wat%20San%20Guideline%20Final_w_GCC_Addition__May11.pdf)

Other Recommendations: Use of pesticides and medical material without proper training

Copper sulfate is given to seed multiplication groups for the citrus seedlings. The GoM extension workers provide the sprayer, training on how to use it, and pesticide, but no training on safety or safety equipment. The fact that this is part of a UBALE activity, and that UBALE is training the GoM field officers, Reg 216 (environmental compliance) applies.

In the original IEE, this was recommended (section 2.1.3): “Although the program does not directly fund pesticide or fungicide procurement, suppliers should be informed about the safe use of these products to avoid harming the farmers’ health.”

The same issue applied to paravet certification, where the GoM supplies vaccines, but no medical waste safe disposal training.

Recommendation: Malawi has a PERSUAP. Please use it and associate proper training for the GoM field officers, and the populations given materials for the use of pesticides, and medical waste use and disposal.

Other Recommendations: Tree diversity and invasive species

Neem is the dominating tree species being grown in nurseries for the FFA activities, followed by Acacia, and sometimes a handful of other species. A lack of diversity will make the watershed and river banks more susceptible to pests and disease in the future.

While none of those species are native, one is not recommended. *Senna spectabilis* is a new world native that is known to become weedy in parts of Africa (reports from Uganda), where it invades degraded forest land, preventing native species from regenerating.

Recommendation: *Senna spectabilis* should not be planted for reforestation projects. Indigenous species should also be considered in greater proportion.

Implementation Systems

Management

Program Management investigations typically look at the leadership and vision in a project as well as the management structures that a project uses to plan strategy and operations, identify and solve problems, and make and communicate decisions. The JMTR found the following key features in the management systems for UBALE.

- CRS Headquarters is the recognized Cooperating Sponsor for the UBALE Agreements with FFP and OAA
- CRS Malawi is the lead agency primarily responsible for the quality of the program and use of resources
- An Executive Leadership Meeting of Country Directors meets quarterly to solve problems and provide advice to UBALE
- A Chief of Party (CoP) residing in the PMU is responsible for providing the vision for the project and overseeing implementation of the project
- A Project Management Unit (PMU) based in Blantyre administers the project
- Technical Leads for major components of the project are responsible for technical guidance and support and reside in the PMU
- Technical Working Groups meet quarterly to discuss issues and share experience
- The CoP and District Program Managers meet quarterly to discuss issues and coordinate plans
- The original plan was to use the CRS country office staff for administrative support but this did not work as well as anticipated, so the administrative support staff in the PMU was expanded
- Monthly skype calls between the project and the CRS CO on procurement
- Weekly skype calls also occur between the project and the CRS CO on program, finance and HR

UBALE is fortunate that the project year coincides with both the USG Fiscal Year and the CRS Fiscal Year, i.e., October to September. This facilitates planning since targets, budgets and reporting do not need to be prepared for multiple reporting periods.

UBALE is following on the WALA Project which was implemented in a total of eight districts by eight implementing partners, including CRS. UBALE actually has a greater number of targeted impact group households at around 234,000 than had WALA at 215,000, but the geographic scope and number of partners created unique management challenges for WALA. A number of respondents in the JMTR who had worked previously in WALA cited the

management benefits of reducing the number of partners and geographic coverage, while also reaching a comparable scale.

The director's meeting was cited by a number of respondents in the JMTR as a good mechanism for problem-solving, but some respondents suggested that the meetings could be more focused on addressing issues with less time spent on project updates which should be made available before the meeting.

All in all, the JMTR found a general feeling of satisfaction across the project with management at the consortium level, particularly relative to vision, leadership, and communications. A few partner representatives based in partner headquarters reported that they felt that there were limited opportunities for discussions on the bigger picture of the UBALE strategy. The Technical Working Groups focused mainly on operational and technical issues, and the Country Directors Meeting mainly focuses on major decisions. There is no structured mechanism for facilitating senior programmers from each partner to have direct input into strategic planning. Similarly, there is no structure at the highest level for facilitating government engagement in discussions around UBALE strategy.

RECOMMENDATION: Management Advisory Group

UBALE should consider forming an advisory group to meet semi-annually to discuss the UBALE strategy and how it should adapt to contextual changes and MEAL information. Participants in this group would include senior programmers from implementing and technical partners as well as representatives from key government partners. While it might be late in the life of UBALE for this structure to have significant impact, an advisory group would strengthen engagement with government at higher levels, if the right representatives can be identified.

The JMTR also looked at management systems within the implementing partners to identify opportunities for improving the effectiveness or efficiency of UBALE and found that CADECOM's organizational culture is oriented significantly around a top-down micro-management approach in a way that constrains project implementation. In the WALA Project, implementation in Chikwawa District was split between CRS in Nchalo TA and CADECOM in the rest of the district. The purpose of this was to allow CRS to have direct access to project participants as a learning and testing laboratory for project approaches. In UBALE, CADECOM is now doing all of Chikawa District, with blanket coverage in all TAs. This is the largest coverage by any of the three implementing partners, which means that improvements in management effectiveness or efficiency can have significant impact on the project. The JMTR found that the CADECOM board of directors has to approve all recruitment as well as major procurement, and it is not easy or timely to assemble the board to get a decision, which slows implementation. CADECOM Chikwawa oversees CADECOM Nchalo out of which UBALE is being implemented, so there is already in place a structure within the organization that can ensure that procurement and recruitment are conducted according to CADECOM policies. An organizational board of directors should not be involved in operational decisions, but should be focused mainly on the development of organizational policy and strategic decisions. The JMTR is not going to make a specific recommendation on an issue related to a partner's internal affairs,

but CRS and CADECOM are very closely related ideologically and there is opportunity through this relationship to improve the quality of UBALE by addressing this issue. The JMTR suggests that someone work with the CADECOM board to help them understand the impact of their organizational culture on project implementation. Unless lower level decision-makers are empowered to make decisions, the organization will find it difficult to manage large projects, constraining the organization's ability to compete for significant resources.

Partnerships

The UBALE project has engaged three kinds of partners, including consortium partners, technical partners and research partners. At the consortium level, CRS is the lead agency responsible for overall programmatic and financial oversight. CRS also manages (1) the commodity pipeline, (2) program-level knowledge management systems, (3) technical support for implementation in Chikwawa District by the Chikwawa Diocese, and (4) technical leadership for Purposes 1 (Income) and 2 (MCHN). CARE implements UBALE in Nsanje District and provides overall technical leadership on Purpose 3 (Community Resilience) and gender. The Chikwawa Diocese is responsible for implementation in Chikwawa District with technical support from CRS, and Save the Children is responsible for implementation in Rural Blantyre District and facilitates linkages to the SSDI and the Integrating Nutrition in Value Chains (INVC) Projects. NASFAM provides technical support for the formation and capacity building of marketing associations, and NCBA CLUSA oversees development of UBALE's agri-business strategy and provides technical support to NASFAM.

The UBALE Project works with a number of technical partners, including the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), the International Potato Center (CIP), the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), the GoM Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS) and Digital Green.

Finally, the UBALE Project works with a number of research partners on a project-defined research and learning agenda. These include the University of Notre Dame, Tufts University, the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and Purdue University.

Given time constraints for gathering information, the JMTR was not able to meet with or interview remotely all of the technical and research partners, but did have interviews at different levels with all consortium partners. The JMTR found that relationships with implementing partners are working well. The project is keeping to a core of business with each implementing partner, but with some variation between partners to allow them to capitalize on their own experience and competencies. The only suggestion made by respondents in interviews is that some partners expressed a desire to be able to see the project's quarterly reports.

Respondents in the JMTR reported that there was slow decision-making initially by SC HQ. The initial implementation agreement took a long time to finalize and staff recruitment in year one was slow, which put some strain on the partnership relationships. These same respondents, however, indicated that relationships are better at the moment.

The relationships with NASFAM are functional, although representatives from the latter indicated in JMTR interviews that they felt the opportunity for them to influence the technical quality of the project is limited in their view. NASFAM was not operational in Chikwawa and Nsanje Districts before UBALE came, but rather than working to implement a NASFAM

strategy for expanding into these areas, the project engaged NASFAM more as technical partner. The NASFAM headquarters programmers view UBALE as relatively independent, not integrated into NASFAM's programs. NASFAM Project Coordinator for UBALE was recruited from outside, not seconded from within the NASFAM ranks, and there is no budget for monitoring of project activities by NASFAM headquarters.

The JMTR heard that the relationship between CLUSA and NASFAM is good now, although it apparently started out with some tension. There will likely always be a bit of tension between the two organizations since NASFAM promotes informal marketing clusters as members of NASFAM. CLUSA is advocating for these clusters to eventually evolve into cooperatives, but NASFAM feels that the informal cluster organization is more effective than regulated formal cooperatives.

The only observation by the JMTR relative to the research partnerships in UBALE is that the project has to allocated additional time and resources to enable proposed research by research partners to obtain approval from the Malawi Institutional Research Board. So far, n research has not been approved, the moving through the bureaucracy takes time and costs money since the IRB approval requires a payment of 10% of the value of the research contract to the IRB.

The JMTR has no recommendations on partnerships in UBALE. While "tweaking" is possible, the relationships were generally found to be functional and effective.

Integration & Complementarity

The Integration and Complementarity systems investigates the external and internal positioning of UBALE and its relationships with other actors that further or impede the attainment of the projects outputs and outcomes.

External

1. Strategy. The JMTR team were informed in their interviews with Government of Malawi (GoM) staff at different levels that UBALE is well aligned with the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy and specifically the strategies of the principal Ministries and Departments with and through which the project is being implemented (Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development; Health; Disaster and Relief Management; Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare).

UBALE is also aligned with the USAID's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) 2013-2018. UBALE's three Sub-purposes contribute to the CDCS' three Development Objectives: Social Development (UBALE Sub-purpose 2), Sustainable Livelihoods (UBALE Sub-purpose 1) and Citizen Rights and Responsibilities (Sub-purpose 3). In addition, UBALE's cross-cutting gender interventions align with the CDCS promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in all USAID programs.

UBALE is providing support to NASFAM in developing a strategy to address the challenges of a changing operating and financing environment. In contrast, when interviewed, representatives of NASFAM management manifested that UBALE is too isolated and could be more involved in national efforts related to the design of humanitarian and resilience policy.

2. Coordination. As stated in other sections of this report, coordination with relevant government ministries at the District level has been good, with some unevenness in the

strength of these relationships among ministries. The fact that UBALE is implementing through, for example in Purpose 1, the District Agricultural Development Offices, the District Community Development Offices and NASFAM, has engendered a strong sense of ownership among these government and non-government partners.

In contrast, UBALE staff report that coordination with NGOs and UN agencies, which are implementing similar activities in the target districts (and funded by several donor agencies), is challenging (see immediately below).

3. **Complementarity.** There are intentional efforts to avoid redundancy and increase complementarity among institutions working in the same Districts. An example are the National and District level stakeholder panels. Also, integration of development efforts is also explicit in USAID's 3-C approach: colocation, coordination and collaboration, a guiding principal of the CDCS. The JMTR team were unable to ascertain the extent to which these mechanisms are truly functional.

From the outset, UBALE has made a conscientious effort to complement the activities of other development organizations, which is particularly important given that the project seeks near 100% coverage in the three target Districts. UBALE supports USAID in articulating to other donors what the project is doing, with the intention of avoiding duplication of investments.

4. **Harmonization.** There is a strong presence of several development agencies in the three Districts. While there have been intentional efforts to coordinate and complement actions with these agencies, staff provided several examples of a lack of harmonization of best practices associated with similar interventions. Among the most significant of these is the direct distribution of assets and approaches to the provision of technical and business assistance to nascent and established enterprises. These have the effect of undermining UBALE's intent to reduce the dependency syndrome in the communities they are working with. A concrete example is the practice of a peer agency which provides capital to savings groups.
5. **Conflicts.** One area of conflict was mentioned. This was with respect to the feeling among some development agencies that UBALE is not recognizing their contribution to outcomes in communities where they are both working. This is an issue that arises through UBALE's support to decentralized government and non-government structures in the intent to achieve District-wide impact. This intent has resulted in what appears to the agencies in question as a 'taking over' of groups established by these agencies. UBALE staff need to be sensitive to this and use the coordination mechanisms mentioned above to improve communication and attenuate possible misunderstandings.

Internal

Internal integration and complementarity refers a) to integrated sets of activities for different beneficiary categories within each target community, and b) to potential synergies within the project that could produce benefits for all households within a target community and which are not presently capitalized upon.

These aspects of integration have been commented on in the corresponding sections above dedicated to each Purpose and more specifically addressed under the 'Cross-purpose Integration' theme in the main text of this report together with a set of primary recommendations.

UBALE PMU and partner staff are encouraged to initiate a process of reflection about what changes in design and implementation methods might be introduced into future proposals to achieve greater synergy across different program components at the community level.

Financial Management Systems

The table below summarizes the total life of project cash budget and total project cost for the UBALE Project.

Table B-3. Cash Budget and Total project Cost for the UBALE Project

Fund Source	Value
CDF	40,000,000
202(e)	3,998,800
ITSH	4,078,150
FtF (via USAID Malawi)	398,400
Cost Share	1,403,452
TOTAL CASH BUDGET	48,878,802
C&F Value of Distributed Food	11,923,050
TOTAL PROJECT COST	61,801,852

The original proposed UBALE budget has been revised twice. In FY 15, an additional \$377,515 in Section 202(e) funds were allocated for local procurement of food commodities to meet immediate food needs for impacted beneficiaries living in project areas due to floods. In FY 16, \$3,058,789 in Section 202(e) funds, US\$31,794 for ITSH and 310 MT Veg Oil (valued as \$439,900) was allocated to UBALE as part of the emergency El Nino drought-related response.

Table B-4 provides information on the burn rate for UBALE, showing that the project is slightly underspent for this stage of the project life.

Table B-4. Burn Rate for the UBALE project Through March 2017

Period	Value
Original Approved Budget	49,878,802
Current Amended Budget	53,346,900
Total Expenses Projected through March 2017	24,526,509
Actual Burn Rate	46.0%
Target Burn Rate for March 2017 (30 months)	50.0%

The JMTR found two significant issues worth addressing in the investigations around financial management systems. The first of these is the delayed approval of CDF funds by the USAID Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OAA). The first occurred at the start the project in which approval of CDF funds was delayed by three months. The problem struck again, however, in the current fiscal year with a seven month delay in the approval of the largest component of funding for UBALE. This late CDF approval in FY 17, led to UBALE partners having to front their own funds to support project implementation or, in the case of partners without a strong financial resource base of private funds, CRS providing its own private funds to keep the project functioning. This issue is beyond the control of CRS or UBALE, although the project is

planning to submit the FY 18 PREP as early as possible to give USAID more time to review the PREP and approve the funding.

The second financial management systems issue that is affecting the efficiency of the project is related to the requirement by USAID and CRS policy for project partners who are not subject to A-133 audit requirements. These partners, CADECOM and NASFAM for UBALE, have to manage financial resources on a monthly basis, receiving advances and reporting monthly. Given the relatively small budget for NASFAM, the policy is not really a constraint. For CADECOM, however, which has the largest geographic coverage for any implementing partner. CADECOM has been a significant partner for CRS in WALA and now UBALE, but the scale of responsibilities has increased under UBALE. The project recognized a potential bottleneck on cash advances, and the initial advance for CADECOM for project start-up covered two months, which was sufficient for the first year when activities were just starting up. Respondents in the JMTR indicated that, while CRS and CADECOM are working diligently to make sure that project activities are not postponed due to cash flow problems, it is difficult to review financial reports, respond to questions on supporting documentation, and process advance replenishment for a significant project partner in one month. CRS has had to provide significant additional financial management support to CADECOM as a result of this policy, and the policy seems to be more of a burden than a financial management tool for an experienced partner like CADECOM.

RECOMMENDATION: Advancing & Reporting Period for CADECOM

CRS headquarters should find a way to address the cash flow constraints caused by the one month advance/replenishment system used for CADECOM. If the policy cannot be changed to allow proven partners to receive quarterly advances, then the amount of the advance provided to CADECOM should be increased to provide an adequate buffer to be able to process reports and make cash available.

Commodity Management Systems

The CRS UBALE commodity management team is responsible for planning together with CRS HQ for commodity call forwards. The CRS HQ works with LifeLink Logistics, a contractor managing all commodities from the US, mainly CSB and vegetable oil. For pigeon peas, the CRS UBALE team in Malawi handles the tender process and procurement as the pigeon peas are locally purchased. Lifelink Logistics is responsible for the transportation of commodities to the central warehouse in Blantyre, Malawi. Each of the UBALE partners except Save the Children has a warehouse. Save the Children draws from the central warehouse directly to the distribution points. A container is used for storage of any leftover commodities from the distribution points. CARE and CADECOM have warehouses that are fed from the central warehouse in Blantyre.

The warehouses, Blantyre, CADECOM and CARE, are well managed and adhering to the minimum acceptable warehouse management standards. To date UBALE has distributed 44% of the total Life of Award (LOA) quantities (See Table). UBALE uses a Microsoft Access based system called “ Food Log” to plan and manage all commodity movements from the primary warehouse to partner warehouses up to the final distribution points. The system is working well ensuring timely production of distribution reports.

Table B-5. Commodity Summary

Period	Total
FY 15	404.00
FY 16	2163.00
FY 17 (through March 2017)	2976.00
Cumulative disbursements through March 2017(<i>Total Food log dispatches</i>)	5153.66
Original Proposed LOA Quantities	10,440.00
Revised Projected LOA Quantities	11,735.00
Percentage of LOA Projection Achieved Through March 2017	44%

The repackaging of CSB from 5 kilogram bags to 3.125kg bags has been well received by beneficiaries and has provided two main advantages, convenience to recipients and efficient time management for the distributors. The repackaging has also ensured that there is no chance of contamination at distribution points.

The CADECOM warehouse is small, necessitating regular dispatches from the central warehouse in Blantyre. CADECOM has the highest number of beneficiaries and this creates challenges in adhering to warehouse management standards given the large volume of commodities handled in a small warehouse. It would cut costs of regular dispatches if CADECOM secured a larger warehouse.



Some beneficiaries complained about the quality of the pigeon peas, preferring beans instead. Post distribution monitoring by UBALE has revealed some concern from beneficiaries. However the pigeon peas have a much better nutritional value than beans. Beneficiaries have also complained about the quantities of commodities received and the absence of a cereal, maize meal, in the basket. UBALE seems to have handled these complains well, emphasizing the importance of addressing the nutritional requirements of children, pregnant and lactating women.

UBALE has faced some challenges in the efficient management and distribution of the commodities and these include;

1. A total of 1,100MT of CSB received mid December 2016 was said to be contaminated by the Malawi Bureau of Standards (MBS) following a series of laboratory tests. CRS lodged an appeal with MBS for it to reconsider the decision based on the major parameter coliform. MBS used 10cfu/g as threshold while most documents show 100cfu/g should be the threshold that should be used. The CSB was finally cleared for distribution following the intervention of the US government and discussions with the Malawi Ministry of Trade.
2. Local suppliers for the pigeon peas have had challenges, especially at the beginning of the program, in meeting the quality and quantities required by the program. However there has been a significant improvement and current suppliers have been able to deliver the quantities of the required quality as planned.

3. Reliability of transporters has been a challenge. UBALE is now working with relatively smaller transporters and this has improved the situation.
4. The program has received infested CSB twice and this has necessitated fumigation on arrival of the CSB. This has been a result of delays and misplacement at the Beira port of entry.
5. At the time of the JMTR a small proportion of the CSB received by CARE was caking. It appeared that the bags had probably been exposed to some moisture in transit. The Ministry of Health took samples for analysis to establish if the CSB was still suitable for human consumption. CARE isolated the affected bags to ensure none of the affected CSB would be distributed to beneficiaries. There were also complains from beneficiaries that the CSB had a sour taste.
6. The MVAC response created challenges for UBALE as there was no coordination between UBALE and WFP in terms of targeted beneficiaries and ration composition. The WFP basket included maize and the quantities were larger than the UBALE basket. Beneficiaries preferred to switch to MVAC since it provided a cereal and a larger ration size.

RECOMMENDATION: Commodity Management

Overall, the commodities are being managed well. Two recommendations are made as follows;

- CADECOM should consider renting a larger warehouse given the volume of commodities they are handling.
- USAID should ensure there is greater coordination of Partners that are funded by USAID, to avoid situations like what happened with the MVAC response, where two USAID funded partners compete instead of complementing each other.

Human Resource Management Systems

As UBALE prime, the CRS Project Management Unit (PMU) provides overall programmatic and financial oversight of technical interventions, and manages commodity logistics; monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) processes and operations research. The PMU also houses technical leadership on Purposes X, 1, 2 and 3 in close collaboration with consortium partners and research institutions. CARE implements in Nsanje and is technical lead on gender, while CADECOM and Save the Children implement in Chikwawa and Rural Blantyre districts, respectively.

Capacity Building and Performance Management: For the JMTR, human resource management includes recruitment, retention, capacity building and performance management. Both capacity building and performance management differ across the organizations. Within UBALE, there does not seem to be a system in place to encourage high performance or capacities building by the project, only some of the individual organizations provide professional capacity building opportunities. UBALE originally planned to provide capacity strengthening to Cadecom in several technical areas. Only some of these have been achieved to date.

The team recommends that UBALE itself can better motivate and capacitate staff, apart from what is done by the organizations. With regards to motivation, senior management may provide symbolic awards to staff for outstanding achievement, tied to performance reviews. Alternatively, expatriate and senior staff can provide more professional and technical capacity building for staff based in the districts.

Administrative Support Systems

One partner in UBALE (CADECOM) reported challenges with implementation due to underestimation of the human resources that would be required to support the government structures. “The government staff have their own work to do but we need them for our activities. They have to be with us for trainings, so sometimes it delays us.”

Procurement processes for CADECOM are handled by the CADECOM office in Chikwawa. The UBALE human resources and logistics officers submit memos to the internal procurement committee, which then delays the process, especially for things that were not in the original proposal. The UBALE team was advised to procure all items for FY17 in FY16, but then the funds were not yet available. The team has worked with CRS to try to improve the cash forecast, but some systems issues still remain. In addition, all the finance team resides in the Chikwawa rather than Nchalo and when approvals or procurements are delayed, activities have to be cancelled.

Communications between UBALE and CADECOM can be complex because of the need for CRS to communicate directly with the Chikwawa office and not with the CADECOM UBALE Program Manager. The PM relies on the Secretariat for important communications, and occasionally these get lost or delayed.

All the logistics for the project have to be handled by the PM, which limits his ability to perform his project management function effectively. There is no transport officer and no logistics officer.

ANNEX C. Detailed Observations and Additional Recommendations for the Njira Project

Purpose 1

This Annex summarizes the most salient achievements and challenges observed by the JMTR team, which provided the basis for formulating the principal and secondary recommendations for Purpose 1. Purpose 1 aims to increase the incomes of vulnerable households from agricultural and non-agricultural activities through 2 inter-related Sub-Purposes described in the Box below.

The review was undertaken by gathering information from project participants, implementing staff, program managers, and key informants connected to the project. Recommendations are formulated with a view to:

- (1) scaling up interventions that are proving to be effective in achieving outputs and outcomes
- (2) modifying interventions to improve effectiveness in achieving outputs and outcomes
- (3) piloting new interventions that are relevant and useful for achieving outputs and outcomes
- (4) suspending interventions that are not proving to be effective in achieving outputs or outcomes
- (5) improving the efficiency in the use of resources.

Purpose 1
Vulnerable HHs have increased access to and availability of diverse and nutritious food

Sub-Purpose 1.1: Increased sustainable nutrition-friendly and market-oriented agriculture production

Sub-Purpose 1.2: Increased agricultural and non-agricultural sales

Purpose 1 Targeting

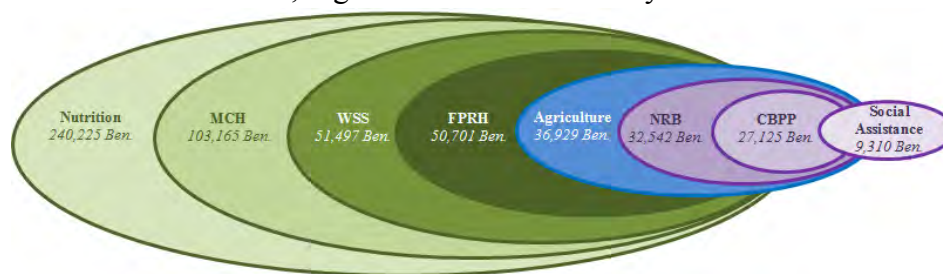
Purpose 1 is projected to reach 36,929 beneficiaries (Fig. 1), which is equivalent to the same number of households (HH). The HH targeted by Purpose 1 represent 58% of Njira's total target of 63,472 HH.³⁹

Observations

There is a high degree of overlap between the targeting of Purpose 1 and targeting for Purpose 3, Increased Resilience of Vulnerable Households (Figure 1). Of the 36,929 HH targeted by Purpose 1, all but 3,228 HH are also subjects of Purpose 3 interventions. This means that of the 36,929 HH targeted for Purpose 1, 97% are beneficiaries of 'natural resources and biodiversity', NRB, programming and 73% are beneficiaries of 'capacity building, preparedness and planning' CBPP interventions, both of which fall under Purpose 3 (see Figure 1).

³⁹ The information summarized in this section is the JMTR team's interpretation of the Njira Technical Narrative of the (PCI & EI. Njira Project. Balaka and Machinga Districts, Technical Narrative. Malawi. April 3, 2014) and how this compares with what we witnessed in the field and captured from our Focus Group Discussions and one-on-one interviews.

This degree of planned overlap between P1 and P3 is positive, given the emphasis on preparedness and management of risks from natural disasters, a vital factor for sustaining agricultural livelihoods. However, Figure 1 is not immediately intuitive as it mixes beneficiaries



of Purpose 2 (in green), where there are likely to be more than one beneficiary per HH, with beneficiaries of Purpose 1 (in blue), where one beneficiary is synonymous with one HH. Purpose 3 targets 35,770 HH (in purple), which suggests that a significant proportion of P2 HH, possibly over 30%, benefit neither from P1 nor P3 programming. Until the M&E information system can record how many of the project's interventions each HH is participating in, the exact degree of overlap will not be known.⁴⁰

Figure 1. Njira targeting by program element

Targeting within each Project Purpose is refined by tailoring to the needs of specific population groups. For Purpose 1, where targeted HH livelihoods depend largely on agriculturally-based activities, four 'Pathways to Sustainability to Food Security' have been defined. These pathways, with the corresponding products and services that the project delivers in support of each pathway, are shown in Table C-1.

Table C-1. Njira's Pathways to Sustainable Food Security and associated packages of products and services

Pathway	Descriptor	Packages of products and services
Increased Yield	Agriculture intensification tailored to size of land holding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved seed + high impact agronomy Conservation agriculture Labor-saving technologies Access to capital from VSL. In selected livelihood zones, also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irrigation + non-traditional livestock + additional financial capital via external group lending
Increased Market Access	Conservation agriculture tailored to production of surplus for markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market information + increasing livestock + multiple cropping + out-growers' schemes + grading Sorting and bulking and other value adding + sales contracts with agri-business. In some areas, also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warehouse receipt system (WRS) and post-harvest storage or processing
Agroforestry and Diversification	Agriculture adapted to communities most vulnerable to food insecurity due to climate change or chronic shocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversification of crops + drought resistant seeds + watershed approach (selected areas) + CA + increased sustainable access to water. May also include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fuel efficient stoves + forest regeneration + increased

⁴⁰ Information provided in the Annual Results Report for FY2016 page 24 and 25 estimates that the P1/P2 overlap is 65% and the P1/P3 overlap is 60%. If these estimates are what is indeed occurring, Figure 1 should be adjusted.

		access to sustainable fodder and fuel wood + behavior change messaging through traditional authorities designed to shift social norms and eradicate harmful practices
Homestead Production of Nutritious Crops	Increased agriculture-nutrition linkages driving behavior change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased diversification during rain-fed agriculture + labor-saving technologies + kitchen garden with permaculture agronomy + NTL + new technologies for nutritious crop cultivation + processing and preservation techniques

In the proposal, four strategic platforms are proposed in support of these pathways (Table C-2). Each platform is projected to have a ‘jointly developed capacity building plan with developmental milestones and graduation criteria over the LoP to operationalize *Njira* activities, ensure results, and promote sustainable impact.’

Table C-2. Purpose 1 Strategic Platforms in support of Njira’s Pathways to Sustainable Food Security

Platform	Purpose	Key Activities
Integrated Community Groups	Community and HH behavior change messages	<u>Producer Groups</u> : CSA practice adoption; source planting material/seeds and agronomy, improved soil fertility; facilitation of dialogue on crop budgeting and equity in control over resources; lead farmers to manage demo plots <u>VSL Groups</u> : Access to capital for farm and off farm microenterprise; women’s leadership and entrepreneurship <u>Market Groups</u> : Hub for group bulking; access to markets
Local NGOs	Leadership, coordination, training, SBC and sustainability	<u>NASFAM</u> : Coordinating seed/agronomy and linking producer groups; membership option for producers <u>Chinansi Foundation</u> : Negotiation and facilitation between producers and commercial buyers <u>Kusamala</u> : Training <i>Njira</i> staff on enhanced permaculture, kitchen gardens
Ubwino Centers	Community-based information sharing	Information and technical support on agronomic and livestock practices and threats. Increase local ownership of combined project activities.

The concrete activities that make up the packages of products and services mentioned above and being delivered by *Njira* are summarized by Sub-purpose and Output in Table 3.

The JMTR team recognizes that considerable thought has been given to conceptualizing how the interventions of Purpose 1 fit with the Theory of Change. The intent that ‘Each vulnerable HH will have a tailored set of steps that, in combination, will create pathways to help them to achieve increased access and availability to diverse and nutritious foods’⁴¹ is ambitious and it is evident that the Wealth Ranking exercise has been an essential endeavor in this direction.

In our conversations with community groups, individual interviews with project staff and observations of the information available in the Ubwino Centers, we were unable to identify the Pathways and their associated packages of products services specific directed at different population segments.

The Wealth Ranking exercise identified ‘ultra-poor, ‘poor’ and ‘well-off’ population groups. Across the two Districts, 50% of the population fall within the ‘ultra-poor’ group, 39% within the ‘poor’ group and 11% within the ‘well-off’ group. We might have therefore expected to

⁴¹ Page 20, PCI & EI · *Njira* Project · Technical Narrative. Balaka and Machinga Districts, Malawi · April 3, 2014

observe specific combinations of products and services for each of these wealth groups differentiated by Livelihood Zone.

The data provided by the Malawi Livelihood Baseline Profile for the Middle Shire Livelihood Zone (Table 4), which uses 4 wealth groups, underlines the importance of this analysis. Their study highlights the importance for the very poor and poor of the sale of labor as a source of income.⁴² The implications for Njira are that, for the 50% ‘ultra-poor’ (if these are the equivalent of the ‘very poor’ of the MVAC study), the emphasis needs to be on creating job opportunities within and outside the agricultural sector and in identifying micro- and small income generating businesses that they can involve themselves in. The project is well placed to do this with the set of activities being undertaken but is presently lacking a ‘job creation lens’ to identify agricultural and non-agricultural business opportunities that will create the highest return in terms of offering meaningful work opportunities for the very poor and poor in each of the Livelihood Zones in which Njira is operating.

Without having a budget breakdown to hand, but using as a guide the number of activities under each Sub-purpose (17 for Sub-purpose 1.1 and 8 under Sub-purpose 1.2), the staffing ratios and the relative progress made under each Sub-purpose to date, the project’s investment may be skewed toward production, with less resources dedicated toward the promotion of micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses that will create jobs.

Table C-3. Summary of the Technical Interventions for Purpose 1.

Sub-purpose	Output	Activity		
1.1: Increased sustainable nutrition-friendly and market-oriented agriculture production	1.1.1: Adoption of climate smart agriculture	1. Doer /non-doer analysis of CSA uptake		
		2. CSA plan development		
		3. Conservation agriculture		
		4. Agronomy practices		
		5. Participatory agroforestry		
1.1.2: Adoption of improved crop production practices	1.1.2: Adoption of improved crop production practices	6. Watershed management		
		7. Fuel efficient cook stoves		
		8. Climate change capacity building		
1.1.3: Increased diversity of nutritious crops	1.1.3: Increased diversity of nutritious crops	1. High quality and disease-free seeds and planting material		
		2. Demonstration plots		
		3. Small-scale irrigation		
		1.1.4: Increased livestock production	1.1.4: Increased livestock production	4. High yielding kitchen gardens
				1. NTL options for women-headed HHs and the most vulnerable
1.2: Increased sustainable HH income	1.2.1: Increased access to markets	2. Small stock availability through backyard poultry for poor HHs		
		3. Small livestock availability		
		4. Fodder production		
		5. Fee-for-service paravet system		
1.2.2: Increased access to financial capital	1.2.2: Increased access to financial capital	1. Capacity of farmers to commercialize		
		2. Access to commercial marketing systems		
		3. Linking marketing groups with buyers		
1.2.3: Increased participation of women in	1.2.3: Increased participation of women in	4. Marketing learning alliance		
		1. Formation of VSL groups		
		2. Establish linkages with financial institutions		
		1. Community mobilization for microenterprise development		
		2. Rapid market analysis		

⁴² MVAC Livelihoods Baseline Profiles. National Overview Report. FEWS NET; GoM; MVAC; WFP. 2015

 agricultural and financial
 decision-making

Table C-4. Breakdown of annual cash income showing the relative importance of each option by wealth group for Middle Shire Livelihood Zone, %.

Source of income	Wealth Group			
	Very poor	Poor	Middle	Better-off
Crop and livestock sales	13	30	65	61
Labor sales	66	58	0	0
Self-employment and petty trade	21	12	35	39

Observations about extension delivery for Purpose 1

The extension staff employed and the principal groups formed or in the process of formation under Purpose 1 is summarized in Table C-5. Ratios of staff to volunteers and volunteers to groups are shown in Table C-6. The JMTR team recognizes that these ratios will change, particularly those for the finance area as more WE/VSL groups are formed (the LoP target is 1,808 groups of which 1,035 or 57% have been formed).

The figures suggest that production facilitators have a much wider range of activities to execute than market and finance facilitators. This is borne out by the information provided in Table 3. The newness of marketing and enterprise skills for farmers and the time-consuming nature of brokering relationships with private sector buyers might suggest that the ratio of 10:1 for the marketing area is high.

The question that this information poses is “as the project moves into the last 2½ years of execution, and with changes that may be brought into effect because of the JMTR, should the staff ratios change to accommodate these changes?”

Observations by Sub-purpose

Sub-Purpose 1.1. Increased Sustainable Nutrition-Friendly and Market-Oriented Agriculture Production

Observations

Thoughtful, holistic design. We found that the holistic design that is on paper for Njira is always readily available in the minds of the staff at multiple levels. Staff easily saw connections between Purposes and understood the importance of the cross-cutting themes. The implementation and impact of that design is discussed more below.

Impactful Dynamic Team structure. The frontline field staff, mostly young and quite energetic, expressed enthusiasm for the Dynamic Team structure where the entire team meets every week and updates each other on progress and plans. This structure seems to facilitate continuity and cohesion between team members and in the communities in which they work. Staff expressed that community members can and do ask them regularly questions about a variety of technical areas, knowing they can rely on any one individual to know a little and know where to get further information.

Pass-on model understood and appreciated. Multiple groups operated under a variation of the pass-on model and overall, the community members appreciated the model. They even internalized it to the extent that certain intended immediate benefits were not realized. For

Technical area	District	Njira staff		Volunteers			Organizations formed by Njira							Total HH
		Coordinators	Facilitators	Lead Farmers	Community agents	Contact Farmers	Production		Marketing			Finance		
							Production Groups	Water User Committees	Marketing Clubs	Marketing Groups	Marketing Associations	WE/VSL Groups	Cluster Level Associations	
		District	TA	GVH	GVH	Village	Village	Village	Village	GVH	TA	Village	GVH	
Production	Balaka	2	15	35		502	502	8						12,529
	Machinga	2	18	49		949	949	15						20,129
Marketing	Balaka	1	6	56		560			560	56				
	Machinga	1	6	57		570			570	57				
Finance	Balaka	1	8		90							465		
	Machinga	1	6		120							596		

Table C-5. Njira technical staffing, community volunteers and groups at GVH and village level as reported during the JMTR

Technical Area	Lead Farmer or Community Agent : Facilitator	Group or Club : Lead Farmer or Community Agent
Production	2.3 – 2.7	14.6 – 19.7
Marketing	9.3	10.0
Finance	11.3 – 20.0	5.0 – 5.2

Table C-6. Staffing ratios

example, no recipients of pigeons reported that they had eaten any of their pigeons as they instead had to multiply enough to pass on first.

Pervasive disappointment in distributions. Over and over again, even when not asked, community members expressed disappointment to JMTR team members across Purposes in either mis-timed distributions or in changed quantities. This was true of seed multiplication groups, Lead Farmers, and livestock beneficiaries, particularly of the latter. Njira staff reported that sourcing had been difficult on multiple instances for various reasons and that there were delays on the ground as beneficiaries could not always receive certain distributions until they fulfilled certain requirements. Whatever the reasoning, the JMTR team found that the distribution system, as beneficial as it could be, currently is harming trust in the communities and is not functioning as it should.

Large quantity and high diversity of trainings. In Purpose 1, community members could detail a wide array of trainings that were ranged from agriculturally-focused to business to general livelihood and life improvement. When asked, community members and staff could detail training structures that use basic adult learning principles. This impressive array of training seems to have absorbed a large amount of time of staff at all levels.

Need for learning check-in's. Some Njira staff expressed support for the idea that learning check-in's and retention evaluation is needed. Since information and punctuated trainings are only one step in behaviour and attitudinal change, the JMTR team was supportively sceptical about the true impact of all those trainings.

Overwhelming array of on-ground activities. When trying to review all the various activities and engaged community groups/individuals across Purpose 1.1, the JMTR reviewer for that area was quickly overwhelmed. There were on-ground activities she never had time to investigate due to the sheer number of activities, groups, distributions, etc. in this sub-Purpose.

Decent level of intra- and inter-Purpose intervention overlaps. Most community members in P1.1 focal groups and interviews had received training relevant to P1.2 and the other Purposes and/or were members of other Purpose groups. This overlap seemed reflective of the original integrated design of Njira. Community members seemed to be comfortable with this level of learning and engagement.

Government partners supportive but not fully engaged. While government partners were knowledgeable about Njira and could detail how they had attended Njira events, there did not seem to be a strong sense of ownership of the Njira project but more of a removed watchfulness. This was occasionally also reflected in how community members would identify themselves, by project name, instead of feeling associated with the government.

Market-orientation and sustainability vague or uncertain. While community members were knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their engagement with their groups or in their role as agents, they did not express a solid plan for how their group or role as expert would continue after Njira Project ends. These groups included seed multiplication, tree nurseries, watershed management, and livestock pass-on groups. There was not an intentionality of market-orientation in any group beyond those that fell under P1.2.

Livestock fairs particularly popular and well-run. Of all the Purpose 1.1 events that were hosted by Njira, livestock fairs were particularly well-received. They engaged not only beneficiaries but also private sectors and community agents. A government livestock specialist in

one District expressed strong support for the continuation of these events. The JMTR team, however, did not discover any post-Njira plan for these popular events.

Community ownership and adoption unknown. Because of the large number of trainings and on-ground activities as well as the lack of long-term plans/intentions expressed by groups, the JMTR team did not sense a strong sense of community ownership of Njira's interventions. The community were very invested in the short-term but how much of that will translate into long-term impact through ownership and adoption is unknown.

Conclusions and secondary recommendations on Sub-purpose 1.1.

The translation of this multi-faceted sub-purpose from design onto the ground has generated good start-up energy in the communities. However, the implementation is currently unwieldy as Njira moves past the halfway mark. Perhaps more than any other Purpose or sub-Purpose, the activities in P1.1 must be refined and honed, trimmed down such that frontline staff can maintain focus and help change Njira from a training- and distribution-heavy project to a behavioural change and true learning project (see primary Recommendation N11).

In addition to the overarching recommendations contained in the main text related to this Purpose, we have the following secondary recommendations specific to P1.1:

- Investigate the potential for community-led, private-sector-led, and/or government-led livestock fairs post-Njira
- Ensure retention and cross-Purpose/intervention applicability of nutrition trainings and initiatives particularly
- Re-evaluate the TOC around the livestock distribution, particularly pigeons
- Ensure that livestock beneficiaries receive remedial training as needed if there was more than a month's delay between training and distribution
- Find the community members with high success rates in the seed multiplication work, livestock pass-on program, and other "pass-on" type of work, learn how and why they succeeded, and where applicable, have other community members learn from them
- Ensure that climate change training and integration happens across P1.1 in not just crop production but also for nutrition and livestock. Keep in mind that climate-smartness and resilient food security status for smallholders will never be achieved if only a few techniques are adopted.

Sub-Purpose 1.2: Increased agricultural and non-agricultural sales

The business orientation of this Sub-Purpose is manifested through two strategies:

1. The formation of marketing clubs, marketing groups and marketing associations for the collective sale of prioritized agricultural crops and livestock, following the NASFAM model. This strategy focuses on farmers with relatively larger landholdings (not less than 0.4 ha), or with access to irrigation or Traditional Authority (TA) land, who can produce consistent surplus production for sale. The crops prioritized for marketing are groundnuts, pigeon peas, cowpeas, soybeans, cassava and birds eye chilies.
2. The establishment of WE/VSL groups that are the foundation for progressing along a 'wealth generation pathway' aimed at wealth creation through agricultural and non-agricultural micro- and small businesses or engage in more gainful employment. This strategy targets

small holders with less than 0.7 ha, estimated at 64% of the target population. They will use WE/VSL to generate capital to invest in small livestock, grow existing business, create new ones, rent land or improve their food production.

The JMTR commends the explicit strategy to support agricultural and non-agricultural income generation, which acknowledges that not all targeted households will be able to sustain their livelihoods through agriculture alone. Having acknowledged this, Njira needs to be proactive in identifying business opportunities for both the above strategies. It is suggested that a territorial approach is used that matches livelihood zones' competitive advantage with the demands from local and external markets. This point will be expanded upon below under the local economic development observation.

Observations on Output 1.2.1: Increased access to markets

Exceptional response. The response from the community to the process of establishing marketing clubs has been exceptional. The number formed has met the project's target, with 570 clubs formed in Machinga and 560 clubs in Balaka.

Functioning governance structures. All clubs and groups with whom we talked showed understanding of good governance principles, could relate concisely why they had formed their club and what activities the members undertake together.

Positive about collective marketing despite low prices. Focus Group Discussions with market club members revealed satisfaction with the progress that has been made in collectively marketing their agricultural products in 2016. This is encouraging since several clubs did not realize the prices that they expected for their produce. As an example, one group sold 690 kg of pigeon pea at MKW 350/kg to Rab Processors Ltd., a price below their expectations, which ranged from MKW 500 to 800/kg. Members did however admit that the price they received was higher than that being paid by local 'vendors', which oscillated between MKW 250 – 200/kg.

A common misperception of farmers is to expect to sell their grain legumes at a price close to that at which they buy seed. So, another group told us that they had bought pigeon pea seed at MKW 1500/kg and cowpea seed at MKW 1000/kg, and were expecting last year to sell their grain at MKW 1000 and MKW 600/kg respectively.

Calculating costs of production. While members of the marketing clubs would confidently tell us whether they made or lost money from the sale of their produce, without exception they said that they did not know how to calculate their costs of production. The ability to calculate costs and profit is a need that came up constantly.

Unanimous demand for more training. Related to the above, the club and group market committees were unanimous about the need for more training and support from their Agribusiness Facilitators and Community Agents.

We were told by one Agribusiness Facilitator, responsible for 9 Group Village Heads (GVH) with 11 Lead Farmers, that he had received training on governance, value addition, marketing communication, negotiating and pricing and gross margin. The last training was in May 2016 and he had not received further training since then. What he learns he has 'cascaded' to the 11 Lead Farmers. Sometimes he brings the 11 Lead Farmers and 110 Contact Farmers (one for each club) together for training. Support is provided by two Agricultural Extension Development Officers (AEDO) who have also received the training. They divide the group into three subgroups of 35

participants. In turn, the Contact Farmers have the responsibility to relay what they have learnt to his or her club members.

In the same meeting, there was another Agribusiness Facilitator who had been hired late in 2016. He had yet to receive any training in marketing skills. The high turn-over of staff, and the on-going need for training new staff, was mentioned by several Njira staff, particularly in Balaka District.

We were informed by staff in Machinga and Balaka that training on marketing skills had been delayed and that courses on business management are still pending. The causes for the delays were attributed to the need first undertake wealth ranking and then to form production groups, before establishing market clubs.⁴³ Staff felt that if this process had been undertaken expeditiously, the marketing results for FY16 would have been better.

Adult education techniques and didactic materials. In our meetings with market clubs and group market committees there was no evidence of didactic materials used in training and mentoring. We were told that adult learning skills are incorporated into their training sessions. Facilitators confirmed that they have the manuals prepared by CNFA⁴⁴ and that they use flip chart paper and marker pens to transmit the learning messages and skills.

Two Ubwino Centers were visited. The charts on the walls of the centers were dedicated to demographic information about the GVH and in the case of marketing, the number of clubs and their male/female composition. There were no marketing messages, crop cost structures, calculations of gross margins or information about collective sales.

Fee-for-service model. The Njira submission states that ‘Njira will strengthen the current agribusiness technical assistance capacity of a local NGO, Chinansi, resulting in their ability to provide support to marketing groups for a fee from Y4 onwards’. In conversations with Njira staff about the concept of ‘fee-for-service’ there was ambiguity about the ability or willingness of marketing clubs and groups to pay for technical assistance. There was general unawareness among the clubs and group committees about this pending change and how it might affect their ‘bottom-line’.

The JMTR team were unable to speak or communicate with staff of Chinansi to learn about their previous experience and how they plan to provide and charge for technical assistance to the 113 group marketing committees, or what relationship they will establish with NASFAM, who is an actor that will play a critical role in post-NASFAM support to the market clubs and groups.

Women and marketing. The disaggregation by sex of membership in marketing clubs shows that out of a total of 2,338 members as of 30 September 2016, 601 are men and 1,707 are women. The JMTR team observed that women are playing an active role in the clubs and marketing groups. Their participation is significant and often analytical. Many show signs of entrepreneurial spirit, with a clear idea of the obstacles that they face in getting their produce to market. For example, when asked about their needs and the obstacles they face, the factors they mentioned included the condition of the roads that makes it difficult to transport their produce to market, the lack of transport services and poor mobile phone networks that hinder

⁴³ The criteria for selecting marketing club members are: land holding size not less than 0.4 ha, wealth rank of middle to better-off, with startup assets, member of a producer or WE/VSL group.

⁴⁴ Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture, the Demonstration and Replication Partner with responsibility for train-the-trainers instruction and value-chain assessment.

communication with buyers. This in contrast to the frequent request for the project to make available more assets.

The participation and enthusiasm of women to engage in marketing and business activities is very encouraging. This is especially so given the very sombre review of the many social and cultural obstacles that women face in undertaking these roles (see p 41. Njira Participatory Gender Analysis Report. Malawi 2016). Going forward, it will be important to monitor any negative consequences of this upsurge of women's participation in marketing and business activities.

Private sector services, subsidies and incentives. Njira is explicit in its attempt to combat a pervasive culture of dependency that has developed over the years with its guiding 'empowerment' and 'access' principles. For marketing and enterprise development, a key strategy for achieving a sustainable pathway to greater prosperity for the very poor, it is doubly important that development projects avoid direct asset transfers and the provision of incentives that reinforce a dependency syndrome and act to 'crowd-out' existing or potential private enterprise.

The JMTR team recognize the difficulty Njira has in treading a fine line between providing essential assets and services to the most vulnerable, especially in times of high stress such as flooding and drought, and ensuring that assets and services are provided at cost through private providers to actual and would be entrepreneurs. Subsidizing these costs is acceptable and necessary for the less well off. However, the management of these subsidies should through existing businesses or through support for the creation new businesses.

Njira faces internal contradictions and external competition from peer organizations in trying to execute its 'empowerment' and 'access' strategies. Internally, there are what appear to be contradictions, and commented on by staff, where for example, locally recruited volunteers receive a monthly stipend others do not, some receive project T-shirts and *chitenje* others do not, bicycles are provided to some and not to others. These benefits are considered necessary incentives and essential items that these volunteers need to carry out their respective jobs. This works well during the life of the project but raises the issue of whether – or what proportion of – volunteers will continue to provide services to their communities once these incentives cease. On the other side of the coin, the incentives that these volunteers receive can be demotivating for those volunteers who do not receive them. This situation is further complicated by the intended move toward fee-for-service payment of Chinansi staff and the Investment Advisors, IA (see observation on Progress under Output 1.2.3)

Local economic development. The actions of this Sub-Purpose have been selected and targeted based on an appreciation of the wants, needs and challenges faced by the rural population that have access to land for production and can produce a surplus for sale. The JMTR team was told by District Agricultural Development Officers that Njira's interventions complement and are in line with local development programs.

What is not clear is how Njira's interventions align and support local economic development plans – if they exist - that target different population groups. As mentioned above, job creation is a major challenge for achieving equitable development for the ultra- or very poor. Some and perhaps most employment opportunities for the very poor will come from on- and off-farm agriculture-related activities. But the opportunities may not be connected solely to the value chains prioritized by Njira, but rather to other value chains or natural resource-derived products

that are important drivers of the local economy (e.g., tobacco, cotton, horticulture, charcoal, bricks, etc.).

For projects like Njira, which act locally in a situation where there are multiple endogenous and exogenous development actors, an attempt to develop harmonized sub-District local economic development plans, at TA or EPA level, would be a major step forward. If these plans were to be developed by engaging all relevant stakeholders and identified opportunities for different population segments, a more enabling environment within which different actors can achieve their objectives in a synergistic manner would be achieved. PCI's Wealth Generation Pathway approach (for more details see below under Business skills training) would fit well into these plans. The advent of the USAID-funded Local Government Accountability and Performance (LGAP) project under the Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS)⁴⁵ could provide the impetus for this to become a reality.

Observations on Output 1.2.2: Increased access to financial capital

Women's empowerment. The WE/VSL saving and lending approach targets vulnerable women.⁴⁶ By end FY16, 580 new groups had been formed and 264 groups adopted from previous development projects. Of the 18,785 members, 91% are women and 9% are men. In FY16, cumulative value of savings and loan fund utilization have exceeded targets by 280% and 160% respectively. Average annual cumulative value of savings per group were UD\$ 770 or US\$ 35 per member.⁴⁷

Beyond these purely financial statistics, the JMTR team observed that women participate actively and freely with overall positive consequences for intra-HH relationships. District government and village leaders manifested that value the WE/VSL approach for its impact on HH dynamics and resilience.

Model of good governance. The WE/VSL approach embeds good governance practices within the methodology. This results in strong and cohesive groups, with clear objectives. In addition, the savings and lending activity meets immediate financial needs of members. This combination of strong governance and positive results has shown that these groups will last beyond the life of the project. All these aspects were observed by the JMTR team.

Leadership and empowerment. The WE/VSL, which builds on earlier savings and lending approaches, has incorporated important innovations. One of these is the rotation of leadership of the group at each meeting, which provides all members with the opportunity to develop meeting management and leadership skills.

Discussion of social issues. Another innovation is the discussion of social issues of importance to local community. This can include the generation of ideas on how to deal with the issues and plans for how to put the ideas into practice. These discussions have been greatly appreciated and have allowed for previously taboo subjects to be aired both in the groups and the community at large.

Decision-making on how best to use resources. For many members, their participation in WE/VSL groups is the first time that have saved money and had the opportunity to take out

⁴⁵ USAID/Malawi. Implementing Integrated Development in Malawi. Policy Brief. July 2015.

⁴⁶ Njira Project: Pathways to Sustainable Food Security. WE/VSL Standard Operating Guidelines. August 2015.

⁴⁷ Njira enters WE/VSL financial and operational data into the Savings Groups Information Exchange (SAVIX), a database which receives information from 27 Savings Group facilitating agencies worldwide.

loans. As the team observed this can be truly life-changing in terms of meeting immediate household needs and providing a basis for investing in income generating activities.

However, the strength and cohesiveness of the groups and the fact that members do have access to financial resources, means that the number of demands for use of these resources also increases, both from within the family unit (e.g., children's education, health, household improvements, etc.) and from external demands, some of which are generated by Njira's interventions (e.g., water point charges, marketing club contributions, etc.). Decision-making by individual members or households about best use of savings and loans becomes harder.

To the JMTR team's knowledge, the WE/VSL methodology does not include household financial planning to facilitate this type of decision-making. The areas that additional financial education should cover include: how to make a household budget (to balance income with expenses and savings); why to save, where to save and how to make a saving's plan; how to borrow money, where to borrow and working out if the family can afford to borrow.

Involvement of men. An issue that was discussed during the verification workshop with Njira staff had to do with men's participation in savings and lending groups. The question posed was, "if an approach that fosters a culture of good governance, saving and the ability to access loans, which are all critical bases from which to engage in business and other collective activities at the local level, why limit the savings and lending approach to what is - in practical terms - women only groups?". There were varied responses from staff, with some advocating for maintaining the present focus, others that the self-selection principal should dictate the composition of the group and others supporting the promotion of men only groups. Since Njira is promoting several collective activities, many of which need to access financial resources and which are not confined solely to women, it is relevant to examine how the successes of the WE/VSL model can be replicated in other types of group or committee activity.

Business skills training. An important component of the WE/VSL approach is building the business and entrepreneurial skills of members to help them initiate or grow existing income generation activities. The JMTR team's Focus Group Discussions with WE/VSL groups revealed a wide range of business interests. Some of the most often mentioned were petty trading of charcoal, dried fish, cooking oil, salt, maize, groundnuts, pigeon peas, preparation and selling of *mandazi*. Some groups have initiated collective activities to generate cash to boost their savings. One group planted an irrigated plot with maize for household consumption and sold the surplus. This year the group has been given a piece of land by the village chief where they will plant pigeon pea and soybean.

There is unanimous demand for business training by the groups. The PCI Wealth Generation Pathway approach, which 'supports sustainable income generating activities for poor populations through meaningful employment or entrepreneurship', is due to be rolled out in the next semester.⁴⁸ In 2015, the project undertook a 'Preliminary Investigation into Njira's Wealth Generation Pathways Pilot'. The study made a series of recommendations for providing support to nascent and existing enterprises and the options for linking them to the formal financial sector.

⁴⁸ PCI. Wealth Generation Pathways. PowerPoint presentation. 2016. The approach uses 'market-based approaches to build capacity of participants (Workforce Development) and enhance the industries that participants operate in (Empowering Markets)'. The desired outcomes are twofold: i) Sustainably employed participants and ii) Successful entrepreneurs.

The JMTR team are unaware of concrete actions taken in the field since the study was undertaken.

To fill the immediate demand for basic business training, CARE's Economic Activity Selection, Planning, and Management (EASPM) approach is being used to train government and project field staff, community agents and WE/VSL groups.

The Njira Purpose 1 technical team recognizes that meeting the demand from WE/VSL groups for business training and providing follow-up support is a major challenge over the next two and a half years (see observations on Output 1.2.3).

Observations on Output 1.2.3: Increased participation of women in agricultural and financial decision-making

Progress. There are two activities under this Output:

Activity 1, 'Community mobilization for microenterprise development', has yet to get underway. The proposal is for Njira to train 'a cadre of women *Investment Advisors* (IAs) to provide business development services (BDS) to those groups (WE/VSL, producer, Care groups) that wish to develop a wealth generation plan'. A fee-for-service approach is proposed.

Activity 2, Rapid market analysis'. In April 2016, CNFA completed an End Market Analysis of Goats, Pigeons, Pigeon Pea and Cowpea. The results were presented at a stakeholders' workshop, which was an important starting point for establishing relationships between farmers, input suppliers, banks and buyers (Njira Annual Results Report FY 2016). The analysis provided the following outlook for the 4 products studied:

Goats. Demand is high and increasing. As urbanization continues, demand and prices to consumers are likely to rise as post-production value adding packaging, cold storage, etc. become more widespread. The challenge for Njira is to link the formal private sector value chain actors directly with organized farmers. The JMTR team were not made aware whether there has been any action to identify farmers interested in organizing themselves, upgrade their goat production practices and to sell collectively for the urban market.

Pigeons. The informality of the current marketing channels for pigeons makes it difficult to estimate current and future demand. Sales in local markets need to be explored. The exception is Mandevu Farms that produces and sells prepared pigeons. The Farm is expanding its business and is interested to explore a connection with Njira's farmers as suppliers. The JMTR team are not aware if follow-up with Mandevu Farm has taken place.

Pigeon peas and cowpeas. Demand for both crops was found to exceed supply, with the market for pigeon pea being significantly larger than for cowpea. Constraints to and opportunities for improving the efficiency within the respective value chains were identified. The JMTR team observed that several of these constraints are being addressed by Njira. One of the most of important of these is the dependence on local vendors that offer low prices that is being addressed by establishing relationships with larger buyers in trading centers.

Relationship with CNFA. The relationship with CNFA has been a contractual one. Their inputs - the marketing and enterprise development training manuals, participation as trainers in the Training of Trainers events and the end market analysis - were completed in the second semester of 2016. CNFA does not have an office in Malawi, support was provided from their HQ in Washington. Since delivering the above products and services, there has been no further technical input from CNFA. At the time of the review, contact was reestablished.

Conclusions and secondary recommendations for Sub-Purpose 1.2

Njira has established, through marketing clubs, marketing groups and WE/VSL groups, a foundation on which to consolidate and strengthen forms of organization that must be self-sustaining once the project terminates in September 2019.

For marketing clubs and groups, the most pressing priorities are a) to continue to bolster their leadership and management skills and b) to strengthen their business skills through training, follow-up and mentoring. The current marketing season is critical given that the harvests are likely to be better than last year. If the increased supply translates into lower prices, then the overly high expectations of club members will likely be dashed and their enthusiasm for collective marketing diminished. With a further two complete production seasons to come (2018 and 2019), farmers, their clubs and groups have the opportunity, with continued mentoring and skills reinforcement, to become more savvy about the optimum combinations of crops to grow to reduce market price risks.

For WE/VSL, the imperative is to provide graduated and sufficiently mature groups with the business skills training that they need to make their pathway to sustainability food security a reality, either through growing or initiating their own businesses or finding meaningful employment.

The Wealth Generation Pathway approach has yet to be fully appreciated or understood within Njira. The approach espouses market-oriented development where projects facilitate rather than ‘crowd-out’ relationships between customers and private sector providers of products and services. The Wealth Generation Pathway approach and its guiding principles are not exclusive to the WE/VSL strategy and needs to be adopted across P1.

Of the 21 primary recommendations presented in the main text (and copied below in the following section), 4 are relevant to Sub-purpose 1.2, these are:

- Recommendation N1. Sustainability vision and plan. This recommendation is relevant across all three Purposes
- Recommendation N3. Local economic development plans
- Recommendation N9. Growing business
- Recommendation N11. Ensuring true learning under Purpose 1. This recommendation is relevant for both Sub-purpose 1.1 and 1.2.

Two secondary recommendations, both of which are related to and enlarge on Recommendation N3 and Recommendation N9, are

1. Develop clear Njira policies and practices related to:
 - a. the roles and responsibilities of community agents who volunteer their services and the incentives they receive for doing their job.
 - b. the promotion and creation of private fee-paying services, either through local NGOs or Investment Advisors. These guidelines should also address how less well-off participants can access fee-paying services using ‘smart’ subsidies (i.e., those that do not involve the project providing technical assistance or assets directly to these participants).

2. Move purposefully to develop fully the Investment Advisor concept, addressing the concerns of internal stakeholders⁴⁹ and pilot a prototype of the concept within the next six months.

The following activities need to be undertaken:

- Identify the demand for IA services and craft a value proposition that will meet the needs of the potential client businesses
- Develop a preliminary business model for the prospective IA, which describes how the IAs will deliver services to and capture value from their clients
- Develop the advanced business skills curriculum taking into consideration the needs identified
- Select and train IAs for a pilot scheme
- Pilot and test market the IA scheme to assess its viability

UBALE has advanced with a similar approach and Njira is advised to observe and learn from their experience.

Purpose 2

Under this component, the Njira Project plans to reach a total of 240,225 beneficiaries including 103,165 beneficiaries with MCHN interventions, 51,497 beneficiaries with water supply and sanitation interventions, and 50,701 beneficiaries with family planning and reproductive health interventions. Major interventions the JMTR team visited include: Care group model (health and nutrition education and counselling); Roll out of health and nutrition education modules to households to neighbor women;

Conditional supplementary feeding program for children and mothers and distribution of multivitamins; Community-led complementary feeding and learning sessions (CCFLS); Growth monitoring and promotion; Backyard Gardens (P1); Fathers groups; and Couples Workshops (examined by gender team members). A description of the purpose and sub-purposes is included in the table.

Purpose 2: Improved health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating women and children under five
Sub-Purpose 2.1 Improved nutrition and health practices
Sub-Purpose 2.2 Increased utilization of reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health prevention and treatment services
Sub-Purpose 2.3 Increased utilization of hygiene, sanitation and water facilities

CCFLS. Community complementary feeding and learning sessions are highly appreciated by communities who cited new learning of infant and young child foods (beyond Nsima). Neighbor women also felt the use of more diverse foods for child feeding will continue once project ends. While both aspects could be viewed as positive, the JMTR cannot determine whether the CCFLS is being implemented effectively. Recipes should be based on locally available foods, but include imported commodities: CSB, veg oil and beans. CCFLS quality varies, one promoter observed by the team did not know what a growth chart is, nor where to refer a child who is ill or

⁴⁹ The JMTR team was informed that there is concern over the proposed fee-for-service approach among the Njira staff. Currently, community agents are providing their services free. This could jeopardize the economic viability of a fee-for-service approach.

malnourished. CCFLS includes all children under five in the project, but typically focuses on children under two who are malnourished. With these numbers, it will be very difficult to sustain this level of scale after the project ends. The predecessor of CCFLS, Positive Deviance/Hearth has been abandoned by many FFP partners due to the high level of resources needed for supervision, as well as food resources, especially if the foods are imported US commodities. In addition, some of the foods in the recipes are not easily affordable, especially proteins (eggs, fish) and pulses (soya), vegetable oil.

With regards to the way forward for CCFLS, the review team recommends that Njira and UBALE to hold a sharing workshop – approaches and tools for the activity differ from project to project. Importantly, imported commodities must be removed from the recipes, for the purposes of sustainability. Finally, Njira must strengthen lead mothers' and promoters' capacity in GMP,⁵⁰ as promoters will not be able to maintain the level of scale to supervise after Njira phase out.

Perceived Gap: District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC) and related structures.

Within both Njira districts, the DNCC itself is inactive and ownership of Njira nutrition activities by GoM is limited. While not typical of most FFP development programs, Njira should have a more prominent role in the DNCC as the biggest nutrition program in the districts. The review team learned of multiple reports from the MoH and other stakeholders regarding Njira's lack of coordination, including claims that Njira is not sharing /informing DNCC of regular activities or project updates. The DNCC members in both districts reported never having visited care group-related activities in the field, despite being trainers. It is unclear whether Njira has any vision on the role it could play within the DNCC, but there appears to be an opportunity to do so. One viewpoint on sustainability of MCHN activities by a DNCC member was: "as soon as these projects move out of the area everything 'goes down.'" The JMTR team recommends that Njira play a more active role within the DNCC, with greater support to DNCC to improve planning and coordination, as well as strengthen GoM buy-in into the program.

WASH. Njira WASH is using four different approaches and these are: capacity building of water point committees (WPC) for the continuous availability of safe and clean water, sanitation and hygiene education through Care Groups, Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) and Sanitation marketing (which is yet start) and dissemination of hygiene messages through WASH campaigns.

The project is on track to achieving the targets that were set, some of the big achievements under WASH include: roll-out of CLTS, sanitation and hygiene modules through care groups, this has led to an increase in the number of latrines and handwashing facilities and as a result communities are now living in safe environments that have been declared as open defecation free (ODF) areas. Natural leaders, Lead mothers and Neighbor women and members of the community were able to articulate sanitation and hygiene messages

Capacity building of water point committees (WPC) was done through community based management (CBM) training, the trained WPCs are now able to conduct operation and maintenance of the borehole pumps leading to a reduced down time of less than 24 hours.

⁵⁰ HSAs are currently playing a role in GMP for CCLFS activities, but given their workload it is unlikely that they will be able to continue. Lead Mothers should be able to carry out GMP activities, with the proper training and support.

Capacity building of area mechanics has also contributed towards the reduced down time as they are providing support to water point committees in addressing major break-downs.

Achievements have indeed been made however it was observed that there were some gaps on empowering water point committees to mobilize resources for the construction/rehabilitation of water infrastructure to meet the need for clean and safe water availability. Currently at least 50% of the community members reported that they are not able to get water within the recommended standard of 20L per person per day within 30 minutes walking distance because some of these boreholes are serving more than 250 people and the infrastructure is also in poor condition.

On sanitation, it was also observed that demand creation for sanitation services through CLTS and Care groups approaches has resulted in most households constructing unimproved and unsustainable sanitary facilities. Already at least 10% of these latrines have collapsed due to the heavy rains in the just ended rainy season.

There was also little evidence that handwashing behavior is being adopted as more than 70% of the households had bottles that were dirty or too small for the households to fully practice handwashing.

In order to address the existing gaps, there is need to facilitate the development of a long-term sustainability plan for water points by following the Malawi Government guidance on the minimum borehole maintenance fund. In line with this, Njira can set up a minimum amount that would act as a guide for the WPC. Establishment of a broader support structure such as borehole user association which can be linked to village savings and loans groups for the safe keeping of the fund as well as fund growth would also help to ensure that there is long term sustainability of the water facilities.

It is very recommendable that the project is planning to start sanitation marketing in order to make available sanitation products and services within the community however the scale is small. We recommend that the project should scale up social marketing approaches as this will lead to construction of more sustainable sanitary facilities. This should not be difficult as in the Njira impact areas because of the culture, the current designs in the areas provides for dignity and privacy however the floors are permeable. For the project to design market desired products for each area they have to conduct a formative research and not just an assessment and facilitate establishment of a network of Sanitation Entrepreneurs/Marketers who will introduce sanitation products at a fee.

Finally the project has to implement sustainable behavior change communication approaches, to ensure adoption and practice is enhanced.

Purpose 3

Table C-6 shows the outputs, outcomes, and sub-purposes under Purpose 3 in the Njira Project as indicated in the project's IPTT.

Table C-6. Outputs, Outcomes, and Sub-Purposes for Purpose 3 in the Njira Project

PURPOSE 3: Improved capacity to prepare for, manage and respond to shocks.
Sub-Purpose 3.1: Improved community and household assets for disaster mitigation
Immediate Outcome 3.1.1: Improved access to safety nets
Output: Safety net design and implementation

Sub-Purpose 3.2: Improved institutional support for DRM structures at all levels (community, district and national)			
Immediate Outcome 3.2.1: Strengthened VCPCs, ACPCs, and DCPCs		Immediate Outcome 3.2.2: Improved early warning systems and contingency plans	Immediate Outcome 3.2.3: Community Disaster Risk reduction Plans developed and implemented
Lower Level Outcome: Participation of CPCs	Lower Level Outcome: Technical Capacities of CPCs		
Output: CPC Meetings	Outputs: DRM Training, Governance, Gender & Environment Training, Curriculum Development	Outputs: District Contingency Plans , EWS Technologies, Community Contingency Plans	Outputs: VCPC DRM Plans, Community DRM Mapping, Geo-Reference Maps, CommunityDRM Plans, DRR Awareness Raising
Sub-Purpose 3.3: Enhanced community empowerment in managing disasters			
Immediate Outcome 3.3.1: Increased awareness of plans for managing and responding to shocks		Immediate Outcome 3.3.2: Increased skills to manage and respond to shocks	Immediate Outcome 3.3.3: Improved access to systems that are in place to manage shocks
Outputs: None specified		Output: None specified	Output: None specified

In the field, the JMTR found the following activities being implemented.

- Under P3, Njira is working in 2 Districts with 11 TAs and 84 GVHs
- The focus of P3 interventions is primarily on the Civil Protection Committee structures (VCPCs, ACPCs, DCPCs) and working with the Assistant District Disaster Risk Management Officer (ADDRMO)
- The Development Committee structure (VDCs mainly) is also engaged especially for the development of the Ubwino Centers
- Capacity Building of the CPC structure through training on selected modules from the DoDMA DRM Training Manual, Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Assessments (PCVAs), and development of DRM Plans and Contingency Plans
- Participatory Rural Appraisals have been implemented to develop community profiles
- Early warning systems capacity building has been done through Early Warning Training (One of the modules in the DRM Training Manual), provision of rain gauges in all Ubwino Centers (84), provision of river gauges in selected river crossings sites (13 sites), and provision of drums, whistles, megaphones and cell phones.
- Financial support has been provided for development of district contingency plans
- The following types of FFA projects have been implemented:
 - Watershed Development (28) – Contour trenches, check dams, stone bunds, water absorption trenches, gully plugs, planting of trees or vetiver grass, and management of the natural regeneration of trees
 - Afforestation (24) – Seedlings, nursery and planting of trees on communal land
 - Road Rehabilitation (13) – Side brushing, basic drainage (camber & checks), planting of trees or grass, and filling in pot holes
 - Irrigation Protection(12) – Planting of trees around newly constructed irrigation systems
 - River Bank Stabilization (9) – Dredging of stream beds, raising banks, planting of trees or grass along stream beds to stabilize banks

- Dam Construction (5) – Construction of dams in or near stream beds to capture and store water for irrigation
- The distribution of food in FFA activities is being called a “safety net”
- Starting in Year 2, monthly rapid food security assessments have been implemented to monitor recovery from El Nino
- Ten watershed development sites encompassing 680 hectares have been developed
- Training has been provided to VNRMCs on tree nursery management
- All committees have been trained on good governance and gender
- Geo-reference maps have been developed using the Dynamic Research-Informed System for Managing Risk (D-RISK)
- DRM simulations have been conducted in a few GVHs

JMTR Observations. While a lot of progress has been made on implementing a wide array of activities, as indicated above, the JMTR was struck by the absence of a well-defined Theory of Change for this component of the project. The strategy for the component is not defined well enough for implementers to see clearly how what they are doing is resulting in desired sustainable impact. As indicated in Table B-x, the project has a sub-purpose (3.3) for which no project outputs have been defined, making it difficult to see how the project intends to produce immediate outcomes leading to achievement of the sub-purpose. In interviews held with implementing staff during the JMTR, nearly all could explain what outputs were expected to be produced by the project, but few could clearly articulate the sustainable impact that was expected to be achieved.

RECOMMENDATION: Vision for Purpose 3

At the beginning of the next planning cycle, the Njira Project should conduct a visioning/analysis/planning exercise around the question of what specific sustainable impact does the Njira Project intend to achieve under Purpose 3. Discussions should be held around what it means to think “sustainability”, using the FANTA II “Sustaining Development....” paper as a guide. Specific sustainability objectives should be developed for Purpose 3, and a sustainability analysis conducted on on these objectives to identify constraints and opportunities. Activities to address these constraints and opportunities should be included in the DIP/PREP.

At the community level, the JMTR found that asset management committees around each FFA site were in place and they have made some commitment to maintaining the assets, but a clearly articulated long-term vision for what the Njira project expects to be sustained after the project ends is missing. In most tree planting FFAs, a significant percentage of trees have already died. It's not clear whether roads will continue to be maintained. The tree nurseries that were visited during the JMTR were barely functioning, if at all. The JMTR did see some FFA projects that were functioning more effectively. Management committees for dams and for dredging activities are excited and have plans for the future. Watershed development activities are also highly appreciated in general and recognized for their potential impact, especially where Njira is working in WALA GVHs. A pattern that emerged was that the more successful FFA sites were also more community-driven, i.e., identified spontaneously by communities. The Njira Project has already made the decision to focus future FFA investments more on watershed development,

water harvesting such as dams, and small-scale stream bed dredging and less on tree planting. More attention, however, needs to be given across Purpose 3 on what the project hopes people will see in five year's time after the project has ended.

The government committees, e.g., Civil Protection Committees and Development Committees, at the area level and district-levels are composed of government staff who already have full-time jobs. These are also committees, not departments, which would have staff dedicated to their functions. Additional human or financial resources have not been allocated by government to the committees to enable them to function. Ambitious implementation plans are difficult to achieve in this type of structure. Only the VCPCs really have time to undertake significant awareness raising on disaster preparedness and mitigation.

A major function of the Civil Protection Committee structure is to assess and report on the scale of disasters that occur and then to support the emergency response when it occurs. The JMTR found that VCPC's are doing a pretty good job with assessing and reporting on disasters. ACPCs are also verifying and reporting on emergencies, usually in a timely way. The JMTR found, however, that not much is happening on responding to the reports, except in the case of very large disasters, for which resources are mobilized from NGOs and donors. VCPCs rarely hear back on the decisions made on their assessment reports, and sometimes the response received when it does come does not match the needs of the people affected by the emergency or the recommended response from the VCPC.

RECOMMENDATION: Operationalizing Sub-Purpose 3.3

For the remaining two years of Njira, the Project should focus on making the assessment/response function of the Civil Protection Committee structure fully functional (Sub-Purpose 3.3). The project should develop a system for monitoring the performance of this system more rigorously, i.e., work with the ADDRMO to set up a monitoring system to track the processing of reports from VCPCs and the responses made for each. To reinforce the role of VCPCs and ACPCs, the project should develop and implement a pilot activity in which funds are made available within Njira to support small-scale emergency responses identified by VCPCs. The purpose of this fund would be build the capacities of the CPC structure, not to implement an emergency response. The funds would be used for smaller disaster responses such as windstorms or fires which are below the threshold for the DCPC to make an appeal. The project should work with VCPCs, ACPCS, DCPCs, the ADDRMO and the national level DoDMA to develop plans for managing the funds, and these plans should include strategies for apitalizing the funds after the project ends.

The JMTR observed that the planting of trees outside of a watershed development plan is having little impact because of the relatively low survival rate on trees and where trees have been planted as river bank stabilization, seedlings are being washed out by the subsequent flood in some cases before they have become large enough to have any impact on stabilization. The watershed development activities, dam construction and stream bed dredging are appreciated by participants who indicated that they would rather use the FFA to support more of these types of investments.

In 2015 and 2016, households targeted by the Njira project were suffering significant food shortages and market prices for the staple food were high. It made sense then to make distributed food available through FFA. Given the large amounts of food being distributed now by Njira, WFP and others, there is concern that commercial suppliers might be shifting their marketing strategies to other markets where there is more demand for their products. The food made available in Njira was clearly designed to be a “wage” for the work done on a community asset. If food is available in the market, then cash is easier to manage and it won’t disrupt commercial markets, rather it might strengthen local markets.

RECOMMENDATION: Use of Food in FFA projects

The Njira Project should continue to shift the use of food in FFA projects to projects that will actually produce a sustainable community asset that will generate at least some immediate returns to participants. This means reducing the use of food for afforestation and road maintenance projects, and shifting the use to more watershed development and water harvesting and water storage community assets. In order to promote market development, the project might also consider shifting the compensation in Njira from FFA to CFA this year and next, if food is available in the markets.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Governance

The Governance component of Njira focuses on strengthening the governance structure and capacity of the different groups participating in Njira interventions. It is therefore a central piece of the project’s sustainability strategy.⁵¹

The project recently filled the Governance Coordinator position, vacant since November 2016. The project is well-positioned now to move forward with building the capacities of all groups and committees to practice internal good governance and demand transparency and accountability from service providers.

Of the many groups or committees that Njira has created or is seeking to strengthen, the project has made the most progress with the WE/VSL which is recognized as a model for how to integrate the principles of good governance into the creation of new rural institutions. There are also incipient signs in other structures established by the project, but more needs to be done to ensure that good governance practices are firmly established.

In line with the USAID principal of ‘colocation, coordination, and collaboration’, Njira has initiated coordination with the Local Government Accountability and Performance (LGAP) program awarded to DAI in the second half of 2016. LGAP is designed to build the capacity of Government of Malawi institutions and other stakeholders to improve local government performance and transparency; increase citizen engagement and oversight for accountable and responsive government; and strengthen the policy and systems enabling environment for decentralization in Malawi. LGAP will support a district-led development approach to support

⁵¹ See: Njira Pathways to Sustainable Food Security. Sustainability Strategy, June 2016.

improvements in service delivery, including health, education, economic development and environmental protection.

Njira is in the process of establishing an MoU with LGAP for collaboration to promote citizen engagement and oversight for accountable and responsive government in the health, economic development and environmental protection sectors at the sub-District levels.

Recommendation #3: Reinforce the critical role that building good governance practices and skills, at all levels of projects interventions, has in achieving the desired outcomes of empowerment and sustained impact.

The RMTJ team suggests the following actions:

- Reinforce in all staff the importance of governance skills in achieving the project' goal. Provide the staff with orientation and training on how they play a role in this process
- Ensure early integration of the governance skills training and follow-up in all instances where Njira is creating or strengthening structures (groups, committees, cluster, etc.) that are intended to last beyond the life of project
- Examine cases where the project sees early and positive successes in good governance to learn from these and apply the learning in planning of subsequent interventions
- Conduct periodic assessments on the understanding and practice of good governance and use these to base a follow-up strategy, which refreshes, retrains and mentors the groups where necessary.
- Once democratic internal governance is achieved, prepare mature community-based groups to a) engage regularly with external actors, especially at the district level, b) participate in local democratic processes and c) demand greater levels of responsiveness to their service needs.

Gender

From the start of the project, the Njira Project has undertaken concerted efforts to institutionalize gender across implementation structures and to integrate specific strategies for women's empowerment and male engagement within the community groups. These are guided by the gender analysis, conducted in collaboration with Ubale, and the resulting gender strategy and Standard Operating Procedures that were developed in the first year of the project. The project has made strides to train project staff in gender concepts, from the PMU level down to volunteers.

At the district level, gender activities are done in close coordination with the community development officers. Key to the project approach is the training and deployment of 'male champions' and 'model couples' who were chosen by their communities as role models for demonstrating positive, equitable behaviors in their households. The JMTR team found that community vetting and selection process was a source of pride for the champions, that the criteria had been applied consistently, and that the champions have a good understanding of their role and core messages. The champions report close coordination with village leaders, who help to facilitate access to the community for sensitization activities. The project has also used various channels to undertake "community dialogues" to promote gender equality themes. These are delivered through project sector facilitators and gender champions but have yet to reach scale.

The Njira project seeks to empower women by facilitating their meaningful participation in community groups promoted by the project (e.g. farmer's groups, producer groups, marketing groups, water point committees), including in leadership positions, and increasing their influence and control over household assets and decision-making. The WE/VSL component is one of the project's main strategies to address the latter. At the time of the midterm review, the project had recently begun rolling out couple's dialogues for WE group members and their partners, to promote household-level discussion and joint decision-making on savings, spending, and agricultural investments. These efforts are situated within a global male engagement strategy for the PCI WE program. However, project staff have expressed uncertainty about how to facilitate the couple's discussions, citing a lack of skill and concerns about how to achieve coverage with the activity. The WE management and gender teams have made attempts to coordinate their various gender-specific trainings and approaches. At times this has been easier than at others.

The following achievements and observations are in addition to those mentioned under recommendation N-14 in the body of this report.

Achievements

- Significant number of staff from the PMU down to community-based volunteers trained on gender concepts and are familiar with core project documents related to gender.
- Gender analysis and training materials developed jointly with Ubale and government stakeholders.
- Consultative process to develop core gender messages by sector; Consistent use of gender messages and training materials.
- Community leaders who were interviewed for the JMTR expressed support for the project's women's empowerment agenda; District govt. and village leaders value WE/VSL for its positive impact on HH dynamics and resilience
- High participation of women across community groups, including in leadership positions; Some reports that men still dominate discussions in WPCs despite a 6:4 ratio of women to men.
- Women report participating in household decision-making regarding agricultural investments and income; Women WE/VSL members report household influence over how to use share-out and loans.
- Men and women interviewed across various groups expressed awareness of the value of shared workload and joint decision-making between couples; Broad recognition amongst those interviewed of women's right to participate and have a business.

Observations

- No complaints from women about increased time burden due to participation in Njira groups
- Protection protocols are in place at food distribution points to ensure safety of recipients.
- Despite challenges, sector facilitators engaged in supporting gender champions and in community dialogues

- Well-established links to government officers (CDAs in both districts; the DCDO in Machinga) who are involved in training participants for VSL and gender
- However, unresolved issue with DCDO in Balaka could inhibit collaboration over time; uncoordinated contact with CDAs from Njira staff working in different sectors /activities causing increased burden.
- Mixed level of coordination between Njira and village gender committees
- Njira gender training materials feature content on GBV (primarily on adopting non-violent communication in the home), but unclear how the project envisions its contribution to the reduction of GBV and which types of violence the project activities target. Addressing GBV requires in-depth understanding of social determinants of violence which may not be reflected in current approach (see Yoneco below).
- Linked to the above, Yoneco contract is delayed, the draft SOW has potential overlap with activities undertaken by district gender coordinators, and doesn't appear to be part of a cohesive approach to addressing GBV.
- In Machinga, male migration was mentioned frequently by staff and project stakeholders as a community reality.
- Gender coordinators seemed to lack details about the “Engendered Markets” mapping exercise planned under P1 this quarter.

Supporting recommendations

In addition to the recommendation featured in the main body of this report, the Njira Project should consider the following:

- As part of the mid-term review and theory of change validation, revisit findings from the gender analysis to see if there have been any changes in the last 2.5 years that have implications for the project approaches. Update core gender messages for each “P” as needed.
- Formulate a clearer vision of Njira’s contribution to GBV reduction, specifically:
 - Identify which form(s) of GBV the project seeks to address and formulate a hypothesis of how the project is influencing change.
- In line with above and considering the remaining timeframe, reexamine the relevance of involving YONECO as a sub-grantee; If proceeding as planned, use the partnership to fill strategic gaps and ensure harmonization of materials and plans to avoid confusion.
- As part of upcoming annual planning process:
 - Gain a better understanding of the effects of migration on health and livelihoods strategies at household levels.
 - Ensure that all male engagement activities are planned and executed with a clear articulation of the behavior or knowledge the project wants men to acquire in support of gender norms change.
- Integrate “inclusive DRM,” i.e. gender-responsive DRM, technical concepts and materials into the “Gender and Governance” training curricula under P3.

- Share consolidated project implementation plans with DCDO & avoid uncoordinated contact with office.
- Ensure meaningful involvement of the gender coordinators in the Engendering Markets mapping exercise.
- Review protection measures for distribution points on a quarterly basis; engage the VCPCs in the process.

Environment

Across all Purposes, the JMTR team observed that environmental management had been well integrated into original and revised design of environmental compliance, intervention design, and monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, the staff across Njira appeared to consider environmental compliance standards and sustainability best practices as a normal part of their work as opposed to an imposition or something tangential. We did observe a few, specific recurring trouble-spots on the environmental compliance side and environmental threats and issues that should be heightened within the last few years of Njira. The specific observations to support this summation include:

Effective incorporation of Sun Mountain staff member. The Njira team member in charge of this cross-cutting theme was well received across the Purposes and integrated into the normal fabric of day-to-day work of the project. This incorporation provided for deliberate, not tangential or after-thought, focus on environmental considerations. The fact that the staff member also is still closely linked with her parent organization also provides for good backstopping as needed.

General feeling of knowledge and appreciation for compliance. Staff appeared to be familiar with the environmental checklists enough to know most of the topline considerations particular to their technical purview by heart. The JMTR team feels this is indicative of compliance moving from a checklist to a true norm. This supports and enables the Sun Mountain team member to conduct regular spot checks in the field without that seeming onerous or worrisome to field or PMU staff.

Extensive and thorough initial compliance documentation and monitoring. The thoroughness of the environmental compliance documents per intervention category show the rigorous professionalism of having a Sun Mountain staff member on the team.

Environmental sustainability in the design of field infrastructure. Irrigation schemes are designed by professional engineer and both staff and communities feel comfortable that schemes will not negatively impact water resources. Watershed management efforts very well received and where relevant they build upon the successes and learning from WALA. Agroforestry initiatives popular and farmers evinced the intention of long-term adoption and modifications as needed.

Good climate change sensitization. The EMPP has been updated to incorporate climate change considerations even more thoroughly after the October 2016 workshop on Environment and Climate Change hosted by USAID for FFP and FTF. Climate change messaging has already started across the Purposes but more thorough training is in the offing. Climate change links are particularly strong across Purpose 1 and 3 for seasonal analysis, forecasting, and planning.

Trouble-spots for environmental health. Despite environmental compliance documentation and checklists, the team observed that there was a near complete lack of adequate fencing around water sources and latrines in disrepair due to poor siting (e.g., sandy soils), design (e.g.,

inadequate materials), or use. The team also observed that there was little understanding of the indirect enabling of use of pesticides, fertilizers, and medical supplies for which Njira would be responsible.

Watershed and riverbank management complicated. Watershed management involves scientific and engineering expertise as well as community buy-in. Riverbank restoration and stabilization is often difficult due to erratic weather. The designs for both must be grounded in ecology and hydrology specific to that place. The JMTR team observed that there was too often rote application of compliance checklists in these complicated interventions which may result in poorly-designed interventions that fail. Additionally, the community must thoroughly own, through understanding and valuation, these endeavors for them to have long-term impact.

New normal in Malawi. Climate change and long-term environmental degradation has already wrought a new normal in Malawi and changes will continue to deepen or unfold. This new normal requires not only new training for production-level adaptations but also merits shifts in refresher training and messaging, pest and disease training for livestock, selection and design of FFA assets, and even preparedness of increased/novel human diseases. While Njira's documents reflect a sense of this new normal, we observed that on the ground messaging and training need to go further such that only truly catastrophic floods and droughts are viewed as disasters whereas the recurrent droughts, floods, dry spells, and erratic rains are expected.

RECOMMENDATION: Avoiding Compliance Complacency

The Njira project should ensure heightened environmental rigor and resiliency by avoiding compliance complacency. Specific implementation suggestions for this recommendation include:

- Focus resources on trouble-spots for environmental health. These are detailed above and we also stress that consideration of likely climate change impacts on water point resources should be taken.
- Monitor & adjust, as needed, environmentally-impactful activities. Initial checklists for environmental compliance and sustainability are only for the design and implementation stage. True compliance and consideration for environmental management will require close follow-up. The team thinks that particularly there should careful monitoring of water source levels, quality and governance issues in irrigation schemes, monitoring of the multi-season efficacy and community buy-in of watershed management interventions, and following through with consultation from an agricultural or environmental engineer as the amended EMMP recommends. If follow-up reveals trouble spots, we subsequently recommend using the in-house expertise of Sun Mountain and also leveraging local knowledge from the communities who know the landscapes best.
- Roll out climate change training now and reinforce climate-smart messaging across Purposes.
- Prepare additional training on pesticides, fertilizer, and medical supplies, as warranted, given the responsibility of Njira for incidental or indirect enabling of those resources through their interventions

Overall, Njira displayed a remarkably sound appreciation and integration of environmental management. Thus, there were no recommendations about this cross-cutting theme that arose to a primary recommendation. However, the JMTR team would still like to encourage the following recommendation.

Implementation Systems

Management

Program Management investigations typically look at the leadership and vision in a project as well as the management structures that a project uses to plan strategy and operations, identify and solve problems, and make and communicate decisions. The JMTR found the following key features in the management systems for Njira.

- PCI Headquarters is the recognized Cooperating Sponsor for the UBALE Agreements with FFP and OAA
- PCI Malawi, based in Blantyre, is the lead agency primarily responsible for overall quality of the program and use of resources
- A Project Management Unit (PMU) based in Zomba oversees technical quality in the project
- A Chief of Party splitting time between Zomba and Blantyre is responsible for overseeing implementation of the project
- Project implementation in Machinga is managed by Emmanuel International with a PM based in Ntaja and a deputy PM based in Zomba
- Project implementation in Balaka is managed by PCI with a PM based in Balaka
- The project has a Program Advisory Body or Steering Committee composed of the Country Representatives or Country Directors of consortium partners and the CoP
- Quarterly partner meetings are held with senior implementing staff to discuss implementation

The Njira Project represents the first opportunity for PCI to manage a consortium project of substantial size in Malawi. The first CoP who came in at project start-up was relatively inexperienced for a consortium project of substantial size, so the project did not have clear vision and direction and the PCI Country Director had to provide much hands-on guidance during this period. Even at the time of the JMTR, it was difficult to find a consistent vision for the project, especially describing the sustainable impact that the project intends to achieve. The current CoP, who is highly experienced, has been in place less than a year. In interviews with staff during the JMTR, many respondents could clearly describe life-of-activity targets, but few appeared to be thinking beyond the end of the project to what they hoped people would still be able to see from Njira in five years' time.

RECOMMENDATION: Vision for Sustainable Impact

At the beginning of the next planning cycle, the Njira Project should conduct a visioning/analysis/planning exercise around the question of what specific sustainable impact does the Njira Project intend to achieve. Discussions should be held around what it means to think “sustainability”, using the FANTA II “Sustaining Development...” paper as a guide. Specific sustainability objectives under each purpose in the project should be defined and analyzed to identify constraints and opportunities that will affect achievement of the objective. Activities should be included in the DIP to capitalize on or address these. (Note: This is a similar recommendation as for Purpose 3, but applied to the project as a whole).

The JMTR heard many reports from staff at the frontline staff that planned activities are often disrupted because they are diverted to other unplanned activities, sometimes related to MEL. In looking into the planning systems for Njira, the JMTR noted that the DIP itself appears complete and sufficiently detailed, but there is not enough joint planning across purposes. This is critical for a project like Njira which uses a team of frontline staff for implementing activities. Frontline staff reported that they did not participate much in developing operational plans, that project management often brings too many activities at once across all purposes so priorities get confused on the ground, and that plans seem to change often at short notice.

RECOMMENDATION: Frontlines Implementation Planning

In the next planning cycle, the Njira DIP planning process should be revised to be more inclusive of views from the front-lines, and it should be made as realistic and achievable as possible so that frontlines do not feel overwhelmed by the demands placed on them. Before the DIP is finalized, the expectations for frontline delivery should be consolidated across all purposes and examined to ensure that they are feasible.

Partnerships

At the consortium level, PCI is the lead agency responsible for overall project management, technical coordination, financial oversight, commodity management, centralized procurement, and project-level knowledge management. PCI is also the implementing agency in Balaka District. Njira has two other consortium-level partners. Emmanuel International is the implementing partner in Machinga District, and Agricane is responsible for developing and implementing irrigation interventions in both districts.

Njira has a number of technical partners, including the Department of Disaster and Management Affairs (DoDMA), Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA) for agri-business interventions, Total Land Care on conservation agriculture and fuel efficient stoves, Sun Mountain International for environmental and climate change-related interventions, Watershed Organization Trust for watershed management interventions, Village Outreach for making health information available by phone/SMS and Kusamala In for permaculture.

The JMTR observed that the biggest challenge for the Njira Project relative to partnerships is the relationship between PCI and EI. Both organizations were working at the same level in the WALA Project, i.e., both implementing partners in a consortium led by CRS. In this period, PCI and EI had strong relationships with each other and were basically on the same page ideologically relative to a FFP project, so that when the call for proposals that resulted in the Njira Project was announced, the two organizations agreed to work together.

Roles have changed, however, in Njira, and the organizations are no longer at the same level. PCI is the grantholder and lead for the consortium, while EI is an implementing partner under PCI. As mentioned, the Njira Project represents the first opportunity for PCI to manage a consortium project of substantial size in Malawi, and so the organization put in place strong, centralized systems for ensuring high levels of accountability for the resources received from FFP. The systems are much more rigorous than those that had been used in WALA and they are very centralized, which has put stress on the relationship between PCI and EI. While some

adjustments have been made in the systems, the centralized procurement and heavy financial oversight continue to contribute to increasing tension in the partnership.

The JMTR also observed that with only two implementing partners, the two district-level implementation teams, one for PCI and one for EI, have been put into a spirit of competition. It is not a healthy competition, however. Each district team feels that the other team gets more attention from the PMU, and the district teams are treated differently on some things, for example, on financial oversight and even on simple things like hotel bookings or communications on meeting times. This has further amplified the tension between the two partners. While in WALA there was a strong sense of camaraderie between PCI and EI and easy sharing of information and experience, that is no longer happening.

RECOMMENDATION: Strengthening the Relationship between PCI and EI

Even though roles have changes for PCI and EI in the Njira Project, the two organizations should try to find a way to restore the old sense of camaraderie that existed during the WALA period. This can be done by making it a point to show respect for each other and being transparent and fully communicative. It is not just the responsibility of the OMU to solve problems. The two organizations should work together to address challenges, and midway through the project now, the finance and procurement systems should be further adapted to be more equitable and efficient (see recommendations below).

Integration & Complementarity

The Integration and Complementarity theme investigates the external and internal positioning of Njira and its relationships with other actors that further or impede the attainment of the projects outputs and outcomes.

External

1. Strategy. Government of Malawi (GoM) staff at different levels manifested that Njira aligns well with the strategies of the principal Ministries and Departments with which the project interacts (Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development; Health; Disaster and Relief Management; Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare).

Njira aligns with the USAID's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) 2013-2018. The project's three Sub-purposes contribute to the CDCS' three Development Objectives: Social Development (Njira Sub-purpose 2), Sustainable Livelihoods (Njira Sub-purpose 1) and Citizen Rights and Responsibilities (Njira Sub-purpose 3 and the Governance cross-cutting theme). In addition, Njira's cross-cutting theme on gender equity aligns with the CDCS' promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in all USAID programs.

2. Coordination. As stated in other sections of this report, coordination with relevant government ministries at the District level has been good, with some relationships proving to be stronger than others.

In contrast, coordination with NGOs and UN agencies, which are implementing similar activities in the target districts (and funded by several donor agencies), was considered a

challenge by Njira PMU and partner staff. JMTR team members observed specific examples of limited and deficient coordination and complementarity with SNIC (Irish Aid), Scaling up Nutrition (UNICEF), SUN in nutrition and mVAC (WFP, United Purpose, World Vision) in food aid.

3. Complementarity. There are intentional efforts to avoid redundancy and increase complementarity among institutions working in the same Districts. An example are the National and District level stakeholder panels. Also, integration of development efforts is also explicit in USAID's 3-C approach: colocation, coordination and collaboration, a guiding principal of the CDCS. The JMTR team were unable to ascertain the extent to which these mechanisms are truly functional.

From the outset, Njira has made a conscientious effort to complement the activities of other development organizations. The Participatory Rural Appraisal undertaken at the beginning of the project mapped development activities in the target TAs to identify which agencies were doing what and where. The intention is to update the information yearly as an input to the recently initiated USAID-funded Local Government Accountability and Performance (LGAP) project.

4. Harmonization. There is a strong presence of different development agencies in Balaka and Machinga In Machinga District, project staff identified 9 other development agencies involved in food security-related interventions; of these 7 receive funding from USAID.

While there have been intentional efforts to coordinate and complement actions with these agencies, several examples of a lack of harmonization of best practices associated with similar interventions were provided by staff. The most significant of those mentioned is the disparate policies on payment to partners and incentives to participants, such as government extension officers and farmers respectively. This results in these actors preferring to work with those agencies that provide better benefits.

5. Conflicts. No immediate or past conflicts were brought to the notice of JMTR team members in their interaction with Njira staff and key stakeholders.

Internal

Internal integration and complementarity refers to a) integrated sets of activities for different beneficiary categories within each target community, and b) potential synergies within the project that could produce benefits for all households within a target community and which are not presently capitalized upon.

Njira staff recognize and are energized by the project's integrated, holistic approach to food security. This integrative approach is also appreciated by key stakeholders. As commented in the sections dedicated to each Purpose, Njira has been intentional in attempting to tailor and package activities to different wealth groups. In addition, the Dynamic Groups and Ubwino Centers are examples of how Njira is attempting to ensure integration across Purposes. Improvements to these and other interventions to enhance synergy are commented on in the main text of this report.

Njira staff are encouraged to initiate a process of reflection about what changes in project design and implementation methods might be introduced into future proposals to achieve greater synergy across different program components at the community level.

Financial Management Systems

Table C-7 below summarizes the life-of-project cash budget and total project cost.

Table C-7. Cash Budget and Total Project Cost for the Njira Project

Fund Source	Value
CDF	20,000,000
202(e)	4,950,193
ITSH	2,151,191
Cost Share	6,000,000
TOTAL CASH BUDGET	33,101,384
C&F Value of Distributed Food	6,266,000
TOTAL PROJECT COST	39,367,384

Since the project began, Njira received an additional \$824,504 in 202€ funds and \$138,591 in ITSH funds as part of an El Nino emergency response in 206. The relatively large amount of cost share for a FFP project in Njira is the value of the in-kind supply of multi-vitamins from a USA-based source to be distributed under Purpose 2 and the value of OFSP vines received from the FAO. Table C-8 provides information on the burn rate for Njira, showing that the project is slightly underspent for this stage of the project life.

Table C-8. Burn Rate for the Njira project Through February 2017

Period	Value
Original Approved Budget	32,138,289
Current Amended Budget	33,101,384
Total Expenses Projected through February 2017	15,267,347
Actual Burn Rate	46.1%
Target Burn Rate for March 2017 (29 months)	48.3%

PCI Malawi in Blantyre oversees overall financial management for Njira. Finance managers were recently placed in Zomba and Balaka to provide more support for financial management at the project and district-levels. The JMTR noted that there are differing financial signing authorities at the district level with the limit for the project Manager in Balaka (PCI) at the equivalent of \$1500 and the limit for the project Manager in Machnga (EI) at the equivalent of \$350.

The Njira Project also faced the same problem as UBALE with the late approval of CDF funds by the OAA at the start of the project and then again in 2017 for the FY 17/IY 3 PREP. Because Njira is a smaller project, however, the impact was felt less in Njira than in UBALE. The FY 17 delay also occurred after a relatively large advance had been given to EI, so the cash flow delay was barely felt at all by EI. PCI did have to front some of its own private funds to Njira to keep the project operating until the CDF transfer was made.

The JMTR heard from respondents at different levels that the financial oversight on EI seems to be excessive for an experienced partner. The quarterly reviews of financial reports that are conducted by PCI on EI expenses are felt like an audit, and the team from Blantyre that comes to do this can take up to three weeks to review financial report and supporting documentation. The benefit from doing these intensive reviews is that it identifies potential audit findings before they become a problem, but the costs seems excessive in terms of the staff resources required to conduct the review. The process also contributes to the deteriorating partnership relations between PCI and EI.

RECOMMENDATION: Financial Oversight of EI

Unless there have been significant benefits in identifying potential problems through the financial reviews conducted on EI's quarterly reports, Njira should lighten up on the financial oversight of EI. The two organizations should work together as partners to identify and solve problems in the financial management system, either with policies/procedures or with execution. Any problems found in the systems should be fixed, after which, it should not be necessary .conduct informal audits every three months

Commodity Management Systems

NJIRA manages commodities for four types of rations depending on the target group. The PM2A has three rations, Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLW), Children under two and a household ration. The breakdown of ration sizes is as follows;

PLW ration calculation

Commodity	Amount per day (grams)	Amount per month (kg)	Total kcal provided per day	Total Protein (g) provided per day
Vegetable Oil	30	0.917	265	0
Pinto Beans	50	1.5	170	10
CSB+	133	4	507	18
Totals	213 grams	6.417 kg	942 kcal	28 grams

Child under 2 years

Commodity	Amount per day (grams)	Amount per month (kg)	Total kcal provided per day	Total Protein (g) provided per day
Vegetable Oil	15	0.458	133	0
CSB+	50	1.5	190	7
Totals	65 grams	2.96 kg	323 kcal	7 grams

Household

Commodity	Amount per day (grams)	Amount per month (kg)	Total kcal provided per day	Total Protein (g) provided per day
Vegetable Oil	61	1.834	540	0
Pinto Beans	166	5	564	35
Totals	227 grams	6.834	1,104 kcal	35 grams

Food for Assets (FFA)

Beneficiary Criteria	Ration Size		
	Pinto Beans (US Origin) Kg/Person	Corn Soya Blend (US Origin) Kg/Person	Vegetable Oil (US Origin) Kg/Person
Vulnerable	15	-	3.674

PCI Malawi along with PCI International office is responsible for managing the commodity pipeline including call forwards. PANALPINA Inc is the shipping agent responsible for all shipping arrangements to the PCI warehouse in Blantyre. PCI Malawi is responsible for all inland transportation and management of the warehouses in Blantyre and Balaka.

The management of the commodity pipeline has been satisfactory for the FY16. To date 77.4% of the LOA commodities have been distributed.

Table C-9. LOA Commodity Summary

Period	Total
FY 15	1530
FY 16	1540
FY 17 (through March 2017)	680*
Cumulative disbursements through March 2017	3750
Original Proposed LOA Quantities	4824
Revised Projected LOA Quantities	5504**
Percentage of LOA Projection Achieved Through March 2017	77.74%

For FY17, PCI has experienced a pipeline break as 680MT of commodities (CSB, Pinto beans & vegetable oil) called forward did not arrive in time. At the time of the JMTR PCI was still to receive 70MT of CSB. Two main challenges have made it difficult for PCI to manage their pipeline better and these include;

- NJIRA had opted for Beira as the preferred port of discharge but this was changed to Nacala for all NJIRA shipments. Nacala presents two main challenges, transportation is by rail and that caused up to two weeks delay in the arrival of commodities at the destination warehouse and the insecurity around Nacala and the need for military escort of trucks presents another risk in moving commodities and further delays.
- PCI tried to arrange commodities from the Durban PREPO stock but unfortunately there was an error in the USAID warehouse spreadsheets, not all products were

available in the PREPO as indicated on the spreadsheets. Some commodities were then diverted from incoming ships, resulting in delays and a pipeline break.

PCI operates two warehouses, one in Blantyre and another in Balaka. The general state of warehouses visited was commendable. However Machinga does not have a warehouse and is supplied from the Balaka warehouse. The lack of a warehouse for Machinga has created challenges with distribution planning as the commodities have to be transported from Balaka a day before the distribution. The trucks are parked at a police station overnight increasing the risk of commodity losses to theft although no thefts have been experienced to date. The transporter at times uses one large truck to ferry commodities from Balaka, creating the need to offload commodities into smaller trucks destined for the food distribution points. Such additional activities delay the arrival of commodities at the food distribution points, resulting in beneficiaries waiting longer at distribution points. Returns from the distributions are supposed to be sent back to Balaka creating an extra cost.

NJIRA initially faced challenges with distribution management at the FDPs in the first year of implementation especially managing the beneficiary queues during distributions. Human personnel requirements for effective management of distributions were underestimated. Field based Facilitators were tasked with conducting the distributions over and above their program related duties. The situation has significantly improved following the recent recruitment of Commodity Distributors. Related to the challenges of distribution management was the issue of inaccuracies in scooping that resulted in an accumulation of 2MT of CSB. The Commodity distributors still require training and handholding to improve their distribution management.

PCI faced challenges in finding a suitable warehouse in Blantyre that could meet the standards as defined in the USAID PEA guidelines, especially the guideline on “*100 meters away from human inhabitants*”. PCI is forced to conduct any fumigation off site as the warehouse is located where there are a number of offices. The situation was worsened by that the cost of renting the warehouse was significantly under budgeted.

The WFP/MVAC distributions in Balaka, at the same food distribution points, caused significant distortions and confusion among beneficiaries in October and November of 2016. WFP/MVAC distributions were not conditional and yet PCI distributions were conditional on participating in Care Groups. The WFP/MVAC basket included maize which is not available in the PCI basket. The situation was eventually resolved following the intervention of the district council in Balaka.

G-PATH, a database and information management system, is used for beneficiary registration and graduation as well as for generating recipient list of beneficiaries for each round of distribution, distribution plan and reporting. The commodity inventory module of G-PATH seem to be fully functional. However the presence of duplicates and some errors in the database creates challenges with distribution planning and management. Recipient lists are not printed in time, that complicates the verification exercise that should be conducted prior to the distribution. The recipient lists normally contain errors, with some beneficiaries names missing. As a result some beneficiaries are turned away at distribution points when they are fully eligible and registered in the system. This has been a source of frustration for beneficiaries across the two districts, with the challenge more pronounced in Balaka than Machinga. Capturing distribution attendance in the system is also a challenge given limited internet access and this impacts on the timely reconciliation of recipient status reports required for monthly CSR and quarterly QWICR reporting.

No structured post distribution monitoring is being conducted by MEL to establish the performance of the food security indicators for the households receiving assistance. However compliance monitoring is conducted and the compliance monitoring reports have been useful in highlighting the challenges being encountered at the distribution points.

RECOMMENDATION: Commodity Management

Strengthen commodity distribution management.

- Establish a warehouse in Machinga for better distribution management.
- Clean up G-PATH of duplicates and registration errors to improve distribution efficiencies and reduce beneficiary attrition with distribution processes.
- Provide training & mentoring to recently recruited Food Distributors to increase overall management at food distribution sites as well as scooping accuracy.
- MEL should undertake post distribution monitoring to measure performance of food security indicators on beneficiary households.

Human Resource Management Systems

The information and recommendations provided in the main text summarize all of the key observations that emerged from the JMTR investigations around human resource management systems.

Administrative Support Systems

This area is closely related to what follows the procurement processes in the main text. These processes have controls that are very tight. These tight processes are by necessity, chronically slow, and have interfered with implementation of activities in multiple cases. Multiple staff reported that payment processes are slow, resulting in unpaid vendors and hotels refusing to supply again. Staff reimbursements can take extremely long; some receive smaller amounts than they have requested. While management has addressed some of the problems with this, the unhappiness regarding these processes runs deep among the staff and continues to dominate the discussion.

The number of vehicles (9 cars in Balaka, 6 cars in Machinga) seems more than adequate for a project of this size and scope...it is actually unusual for a FFP to have this many field-based vehicles. Staff in districts, however, still cite transportation challenges. The bicycles break down frequently and repairs take a long time. Staff repeatedly observed a lack of concern from management for their situation and an overall sense of frustration about management that was raised on multiple issues. Staff complaints about small issues and lack of communication on

RECOMMENDATION: Administrative Support

To reduce frustration among project staff, ensure clear and timely communication about policies on issues of needed supplies, repairs and reimbursements so that expectations of the staff are clear. Ensure prompt action on staff payment requests and follow up thoroughly on when they raise issues. To help improve transparency of decision-making, institute a system where staff problems can be heard and addressed respectfully. Given the depth of the issue among the staff, a special effort needs to be made (maybe with an outside facilitator) to address the remaining resentment and allow the organization to move forward in a positive

them have led to more generalized demoralization that goes far beyond the original issue and has apparently contributed to unnecessary staff turnover.

Even though the internet and electricity in Malawi are unreliable, an upgraded internet service could improve productivity.