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POLICY BRIEF

Implementing Integrated Development in Malawi

USAID/Malawi developed its Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) in 2013, which aims to integrate its development activities across various sectors in order to achieve development results that will lead to improved quality of life for all Malawians. The CDCS development policy is based on the premise that if development assistance is integrated then development results will be enhanced, more sustainable, and lead to improved quality of life of all Malawians. This policy brief defines USAID/Malawi's integrated development policy and outlines the operational practices necessary to implement it, in light of lessons from earlier integrated development projects. This brief also draws policy recommendations for USAID/Malawi.

USAID/Malawi defines integrated development as “working jointly with others on a common goal that is beyond what any one person/group can accomplish alone. Integration includes joint planning, leveraging resources, evaluating outcomes together, and a holistic coordinated response that meets district development objectives.” Integration is intended to cultivate complementarity among the sector activities to achieve improvements in quality of life of all Malawians. Additionally, it is expected to build local capacity and put ownership in the hands of Malawians in order to ensure sustainability of institutions and program outcomes.

Operationalizing Integrated Development in Malawi

In order to operationalize integration, USAID/Malawi has formulated a 3-C approach that adds value to existing systems by identifying and realizing complementarity among activities and by intentionally creating explicit linkages (USAID/Malawi 2013).

The 3-Cs of Integration include:

- *Colocation* of USAID interventions/activities;
- *Coordination* within USAID and with other development partners (DPs);
- *Collaboration* between USAID and the Government of Malawi (GOM), district authorities, other DPs, civil society organizations (CSOs), and community based organizations (CBOs).

Since 2014, USAID/Malawi continues to apply the 3-C approach in three focus districts: Balaka, Lilongwe Rural, and Machinga. Investments across all three focus districts have increased across all sectors (education, health, nutrition, agriculture, eco-

nomie growth, food security, environment, and democracy and governance) with varying levels of integration based on the level of coordination and collaboration. Colocation is necessary, but it is not sufficient to independently effect integration because implementing partners (IPs) may not voluntarily cooperate with each other. Therefore, IPs that hold current awards from USAID in these districts are requested to coordinate and collaborate their work plans across sectors and to deliberately work together to develop a synergistic relationship and facilitate harmonious functioning of various agents without changing their basic way of doing business in order to collectively boost development outcomes.

Integrated development in Malawi involves several implementing partners across various development sectors working jointly with others through the 3-Cs of colocation, coordination, and collaboration to achieve a common goal that is beyond what any one person/group can accomplish alone.

Colocation is necessary, but coordination and collaboration across various sectors are essential and sufficient conditions for integration.

Integrated programs would involve more than one implementer, more than one sector, colocated programs, and implementers jointly planning, leveraging resources, evaluating outcomes, and providing a holistic coordinated response that meets country development objectives.

An example of an integrated program:

- *Development goal:* Increase HIV/AIDS screening and treatment.
- *Colocation:* Health Project and Education Project are located in the same place;

- *Coordination:* Health Project works with Education Project on their work plans to ensure that their activities align and complement one another and duplication is avoided;
- *Collaboration:* Stakeholders from Health Project and Stakeholders from Education Project work together on several activities. They can develop pamphlets and awareness campaigns on HIV screening and testing together and then work together to deliver it in community reading centers and high schools.

What Makes Integrated Development Work?

In the past, several donors – multilateral and bilateral, including USAID – have implemented policies that aim to integrate programs, projects, and activities in order to increase efficiencies, decrease costs, build capacity, and improve results. Lessons can be learned from a review of evaluations of integrated projects in many Asian countries, Guatemala, Malawi, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa on factors that facilitate integrated development to achieve results. They are discussed below.

Identification of common goals. Working across various sectors and projects requires the identification of and commitment to a common goal and objectives for all of the implementing partners to follow. In Nigeria, the USAID supported Focus States Strategy (FSS) integrated the activities across six IPs that covered a range of sectors with very different end goals. However, the IPs identified a number of common objectives, including developing public systems, building the capacity of local governments, and community engagement, which allowed them to streamline collaboration. This resulted in increased citizens' awareness and level of participation in local governance (Mitchell group, 2013).

Focus on limited areas. An impactful feature of many integrated programs has been the focus of resources and activities in limited geographic areas. In Guatemala, the USAID-supported Western Highlands Integrated Program (WHIP) targeted the Western Highlands (USAID/Guatemala, 2013; Matts, 2013), and in Nigeria, three USAID IPs focused on two of the country's 36 states rather than spreading resources thinly across the country. This allowed for increased staff interactions and more intensive, high quality activities in the selected states. Each program learned from one another's sectors of expertise, creating synergies and making each project holistic. For example, in Nigeria, the IP working on Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy, and Development trained the caregivers working with an education partner in empowerment and life skills. In Malawi, concentration of efforts in a limited area by the Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement (WALA) project was found to contribute to reduction in malnutrition and improvement in diet diversity (USAID/Malawi, 2013), and the Rapid and Effective Action for Combating HIV and AIDS (REACH) significantly contributed to combatting HIV through quick and efficient health service provision (Salephera Consulting, 2012).

Autonomy for implementers to choose the projects and activities to

integrate. Lack of autonomy and power for field-level implementers to make the projects relevant in the field and to coordinate among IPs led to ineffective and unsustainable projects and failure of many integrated projects in Asia (Kumar, 1987). Also, the operationalization of strategic plans into work plans with timelines and responsibilities of each actor may impact integration efforts. For example, in Nigeria, IPs developed their own work plans but exchanged them and provided feedback to one another, which proved to be a factor of success for project integration.

Coordination of activities and collaborative partnerships. When diverse sets of implementers are required to coordinate and collaborate, changes in relationships, procedures, and structures, as well as substantial investments of time and organizational resources for the implementers are needed. Nonetheless, when they coordinate and collaborate, considerable results can be achieved in reduction in expenses, increased efficiency, and improved service delivery. For example, in Ethiopia, the Pastoralists' Area Resilience Improvement through Market Expansion (PRIME) shared office spaces in headquarters and in field offices, streamlined reporting structures, developed common work plans, and established operating procedures to guide the use of common facilities and resources in areas where partners colocate to reduce operating costs (Feed the Future, 2015). In Guatemala, frequent interaction among stakeholders was shown to help with effective coordination of activities and learning across the partners. Conversely, in many integrated projects evaluated in the 1980s in Asia, the lack of coordination in allocating responsibilities and decision-making was found to affect project management within and across implementing partners leading to the collapse of the projects. As a result, the projects were only moderately successful in attaining national-level objectives in food self-sufficiency, gross national product, or national security (Kumar, 1987).

Adequate resources dedicated for collaborative activities. Lack of sufficient financial and capable human resources affected the extent of collaboration each IP could accomplish, as shown in an earlier assessment of 11 integrated development projects in Asia and Latin America, and eventually affected project management within and across IPs (Kumar, 1987). In contrast, coordination units that were equipped with qualified personnel and funds were able to better implement integrated rural development projects, as demonstrated by the REACH project in Malawi. REACH combined organizational capacity development with grant-making and technical support to improve capacity and provide adequate funds, resulting in helping local partners engage in activities in a collaborative, coordinated, and efficient way.

Effective communication among implementing partners and stakeholders. With different IPs working together, staff members across the projects will be expected to take on the additional work to collaborate. Staff may be required to attend cross-sectoral meetings in addition to their regular meetings, collect data about integration in addition to their own project's outcomes, and have a much larger network of supervisors and colleagues to navigate. In such cases, frequent staff meetings between IPs and the involvement of local government facilitated effective coordination and collaboration. In

Guatemala, structured interactions among the IPs, government officials, the private sector, and local communities allowed for adaptation and information sharing between partners fostering a highly cooperative environment to effectively implement the projects. Guatemala's experience also showed that meetings between too many staff members were unproductive, and they need to only include important technical staff and leadership for effectiveness. In Malawi, reporting maps were created for WALA to facilitate communication. In Ethiopia, reporting structures and schedules were developed by PRIME for the entire network of collaborating partners. In addition, the PRIME consortium created a unified communication system called Conceptual Notes to allow partners to modify their own activities while ensuring that they would meet the entire project's objectives.

Formal centralized multi-sectoral management system. In Malawi, a formal system called the Consortium Administration and Technical Capacity Hub (CATCH) was formed in the WALA project to standardize the management of operations, communicate with USAID about administrative issues, and provide technical assistance to IPs in the field. In Nigeria, on the other hand, the secretariat oversaw collaboration issues between IPs, but the role was informal and resulted in duplication of efforts, inconsistent community involvement, and variation in employee compensation across different partners, and contributed to a reduction in cooperation among the coordinating partners.

Strong leadership commitment and political will. The leadership involved during the strategy planning and throughout implementation was found to heavily influence integrated development projects in terms of commitment to integration and achieving common goals. Also, a high-level local and central government involvement in the strategic planning process was crucial to ensure political support and that separate ministries worked together across sectors. In Malawi, local government actors were highly involved in the WALA project from the initial stage, which ensured program sustainability through effective exit strategies and enabled smooth transfer of program responsibilities for continued operation and scale-up. Also, the Malawian government ensured that the program incorporated national standards from the start and created cross-sectoral committees to coordinate dispersed extension programs, contributing to the success of WALA.

Localization and capacity building for achieving sustainability. Evaluations of WALA and REACH in Malawi showed that integrating community members into the planning and evaluation of the program and the use of local volunteers played a major role in impacting the project results. The evaluations also recommended that sufficient training, information materials, and incentives are needed to motivate volunteers to continually engage in the activities. REACH also showed that capacity building of local organizations is important to help mobilize resources from various agencies in order to enhance financial sustainability and increased local ownership of development programs.

Better Practices for Integration

- Identification of common goals
- Focus on limited areas
- Autonomy for implementers to choose the projects and activities to integrate
- Coordination of activities and collaborative partnerships
- Adequate resources dedicated for collaborative activities
- Effective communication among IPs and stakeholders
- Formal centralized multi-sectoral management system
- Strong leadership and political will
- Localization and local capacity building for achieving sustainability.

Recommendations for USAID

Past experiences with integrated programs suggest that integrated development projects can show positive results, but they require careful planning and execution to achieve collaboration and coordination with several stakeholders, including staff within a development agency, other development agencies, project implementers, the government, and the potential beneficiaries. As such, some guidance is provided below as USAID/Malawi moves forward in implementing the integrated development policy.

Work with other development partners (DPs). The primary focus of most DPs in Malawi is on improving the quality of life of Malawians. Therefore, it is rational for USAID to identify commonalities in the programs undertaken by the DPs and coordinate with them to implement them. Currently, USAID is leading the donor coordination committee that will help identify activities that are occurring in the same location and that have a common objective. USAID should go beyond identification of overlaps and facilitate explicit linkages in activities based on complementarities in their design and operational strategies, which can be accomplished through activity mapping and joint needs assessments.

Go beyond collaboration within sectors. USAID/Malawi is facilitating bi-annual USAID partners meetings where current IPs meet to work together to identify opportunities and plan for collaboration and coordination. Interviews conducted by Social Impact during November-December 2014 with many current USAID-supported IPs revealed that USAID has prompted discussions that have led IPs to begin to coordinate work plans or collaborate on shared activities. However, much of the planned coordination and collaboration appears to be among the health sector IPs. Plans for collaborative projects across sectors were tentative and remained in the very early stages, with most IPs having conducted only a few meetings (Social Impact, 2015). Truly integrated development requires USAID and IPs to extend beyond *within sector* integration and provide resources and support for IPs to collocate, coordinate and collaborate with one another *across sectors*. A close examination of challenges to collaboration among IPs across sectors through regular consultations is needed. To that end, an annual stakeholder analysis planned by the Mission could help to identify areas for additional

coordination and support by USAID and incentives needed to motivate voluntary collaboration. Dissemination of the results from the analysis could promote active dialogue between USAID and the IPs and among the IPs to help strengthen integration efforts.

Identify common strategies and goals. Interviews conducted by Social Impact show that IPs across sectors that share common operational strategies have now begun collaboration to achieve common goals. For instance, a health IP and an education IP that are using information dissemination as a strategy to improve their results are collaborating on the development of a comic book featuring malaria which is soon to be distributed in reading centers and schools across many Malawian districts. Another health IP and a livelihood development IP have identified potential opportunities to disseminate HIV information through self-help groups organized for livelihood improvements (Social Impact, 2015). It is likely that common strategies to achieve goals can motivate integration. New awards made by USAID/Malawi are expected to require integration of activities from the program planning and inception stage. Examination of proposals that outline integration approach and activities, and post-award in-depth case studies could help understand factors that drive efficient and effective integration processes, including use of common strategies, in order to shape future awards.

Establish clear communication channels, roles, and responsibilities to guide and champion integration efforts. Based on learning from earlier integrated development programs, a dedicated person at USAID/Malawi to lead and coordinate integration activities could help implement a successful integration policy. The lead person would regularly communicate with IPs, DPs, and government entities about integration efforts and reporting requirements, serve as a resource on how to bolster integration, and champion the integration policy among partners by highlighting examples of success and innovation. The Mission's bi-annual partner meetings and other dissemination opportunities, additional partner strategic meetings, electronic communications, and discussion forums could also further help clarify roles and responsibilities with regard to integration and learning from integrated efforts. This is particularly important in early stages of integration as IPs in Malawi are still getting familiarized with the integration policy. Interviews with IPs, conducted by Social Impact, also indicated that several IPs were uncertain how the integration policy would unfold and of its effects on their operations (Social Impact, 2015). Therefore, the lead person should also facilitate development

of regular communication plans to ensure the goals of the integration policy are fully realized, and help the IPs engage effectively with local government entities in development activities.

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