



Social Welfare Workforce STRENGTHENING FOR OVC

The Situation of OVC

Malawi, a predominantly agrarian society, has a population of approximately 14 million. Within this population, 930,000 people are living with HIV, including 91,000 children aged 0 to 14 years. AIDS is the leading cause of death in Malawi and contributes significantly to the country's low life expectancy of 48 years. It has also contributed to the vulnerability of 880,000 children who have lost one or both parents to AIDS). The overall prevalence of orphaned children in Malawi is 12 percent, while the prevalence of otherwise vulnerable children is 6 percent, according to the country's 2010 United Nations General Assembly Special Session report (UNGASS, 2010).

Orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) in Malawi typically lack access to services and rights that they are entitled to receive, including those for education, health, vocational, and life skills (World Food Program, 2009). OVC are less likely to attend school than other children, and their school attendance is often compromised because they need to earn a wage for their households. In 2009, the Government of Malawi (GoM) reported that 80 percent of Malawians depend on agriculture for their food and income. In cases where adults are too ill to carry out agricultural work, children might have to meet household expenses by resorting to negative survival strategies, such as petty crime, sex work, transactional sex, domestic work, and child labor, particularly in the agriculture industry. This is because children often lack the skills for agricultural tasks.

Traditionally, Malawians consider the care of children a responsibility not only of the nuclear family but also of the extended family and local community. When parents are unable to care for their children, individuals from the latter two groups often assume a caretaking role for the children. However, in a country where 52 percent of people live below the poverty line, family and community safety nets are stretched beyond their capacity. Although support services for the care of OVC are provided free of charge to some households, many more are left in need. In 2006, 85 percent of OVC households received no support services of any kind.

The Social Welfare System and How It Supports OVC

In 2003, the Government of Malawi developed an OVC policy and launched the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (NPA) in 2005. The overarching objective of this strategic document is to strengthen the capacity of families, communities, and government to scale up efforts that ensure the survival, growth, protection, and development of OVC. The NPA calls for the involvement of a multisectoral set of actors and stakeholders in the OVC response.

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development (MOGCCD) coordinates implementation of services for children through the Department of Children Affairs. The coordination of activities is carried out by professional staff at Ministry headquarters in Lilongwe and in 28 district social welfare offices. In addition, the Department of Children Affairs also looks into policy development, training, measurement and evaluation, standardization, and the provision of technical assistance and supervision to the district level. The Department's OVC activities are monitored by the National AIDS Commission, which is mandated to lead and coordinate the nationwide HIV/AIDS response as outlined in the *HIV and AIDS National Action Framework (NAF)*. This blueprint sets out goals and objectives to mitigate the social impact of HIV/AIDS among OVC. Accordingly, the NPA strategy draws from this

document. The NAF supports a comprehensive set of interventions that include psychosocial support, education, and legal and material support.

In addition, the MOGCCD chairs two groups, the National OVC Steering Committee and the National OVC Technical Working Group. The former coordinates OVC policy, while the latter coordinates technical areas of the OVC response.

The GoM is in the process of decentralizing and is devolving administrative responsibilities to districts. District Councils, which are headed by district commissioners, serve as local governing units. District Councils create plans for district development and for annual health-related activities. These plans are known respectively as District Development Plans and District Implementation Plans (DIPs). Recently, District Councils have begun to develop District Action Plans (DAPs) for activities related to OVC, girls, women, and HIV/AIDS. In a given district, the DAP is intended to be separate from but complementary to the DIP.

The District Council structure includes a Directorate of Health and Social Welfare, which has four divisions, including one for social welfare and another for community development. MOGCCD positions exist within both of these divisions.

Some of the functions of the Social Welfare Division are the provision of services for family and child protection, school/hospital social work, and juvenile crime prevention. Another component of the District Council is the Directorate of Programs. It has two divisions, one of which is dedicated to community development – a method of social work. Key functions of this directorate are the mobilization of communities for development projects, provision of services to build community capacity, and provision of civic education on HIV/AIDS. The respective purviews of the Social Welfare Division and the Community Development Division are not entirely discrete; there is some overlap.

Civil society organizations, such as nongovernmental and community- and faith-based organizations, support government efforts on OVC. Such organizations play a critical role in minimizing gaps in OVC services and care by providing a variety of services to ensure the well-being of children. Some also provide training to MOGCCD staff.

The Social Welfare Workforce for OVC

In the implementation of NAP, multisectoral and community involvement are priorities. A great share of Malawi's social welfare workforce is composed of volunteers. However, there are also paid social welfare workers in both the public and private sectors who address the needs of OVC; they include personnel of the MOGCCD, District Councils, and nongovernmental and community- and faith-based organizations. Available documents did not indicate the overall size of this workforce. However, a recent human resource (HR) gap analysis of the MOGCCD (formerly known as the Ministry of Women and Child Development [MOWCD]) included data on the size of its personnel. The Ministry's paper-based staff inventory showed a total of 1,680 positions in 2008, 63 percent of which were filled. This total included 163 positions in the MOGCCD's Lilongwe headquarters and 1,515 in district offices.

Because community development is a method of social work, this section of the profile includes information about the personnel of the MOGCCD's Department of Community Development as well as its Department of Children Affairs, whose functions include coordination of child welfare and protection services. A senior technical officer at the central level directs each of these departments and is supported by junior staff.

However, the MOGCCD's mandate is for all implementation to take place at the district and community levels. Thus, the Departments of Children Affairs and Community Development are supposed to deploy staff to the districts. The goal is to have one social welfare officer (SWO) and one community development officer (CDO) in each district office along with, on average, a 15-member support staff comprising social welfare assistants (SWAs) and community development assistants (CDAs).

According to the gap analysis, most central-level staff hold a diploma or a degree. MOGCCD frontline staff typically have received training and a certificate from Magomero Training College, a government institution that falls under the MOGCCD. Magomero is the principal provider of pre-service training for Ministry staff stationed in the districts. It also trains staff from other government departments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the delivery of social work services and community development.

Community child protection workers are another category of worker. They are trained volunteers who work at the community level. Their duties are to facilitate child protection interventions, provide child protection referral services, and link communities to district officials (Sibale, B. and Nthambi, T. 2008). These workers, who numbered 800 in

November 2009, receive small allowances that are drawn from funds provided by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The MOGCCD is placing one-third of these workers on its payroll.

For the gap analysis, members of the Ministry's frontline staff were surveyed about the tasks they undertake on an annual basis. The following were among the tasks that SWOs and SWAs mentioned: providing casework services to individuals and families; tracking cases of child abuse and adoption and preparing social inquiry reports; tracking infants whose mothers are dead or institutionalized; engaging in activities related to early child development services and school social welfare programs, assisting in the establishment of community-based child care centers (CBCCs) and community-based organizations (CBOs); training NGOs; and managing projects such as social cash transfers and accelerated child survival and development. CDOs and CDAs who participated in the same survey mentioned the following tasks: supervising community development activities and projects; planning, organizing, and conducting trainings for community leaders, CBCCs, CBOs, and NGOs; and general HIV/AIDS work.

Challenges Faced by the Social Welfare Workforce for OVC

The effects of HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, short life expectancy, and widespread poverty have combined in Malawi to create a great demand for social welfare services. At the same time, these conditions have imposed limitations on the country's ability to build a workforce that is large enough and skilled enough to meet the needs of OVC and other vulnerable populations.

In 2008, the MOGCCD reported a vacancy rate of 47 percent. Although this percentage is for all of the Ministry's vacancies, not just social welfare vacancies, the figure nonetheless suggests the degree to which the GoM's primary social welfare agency is understaffed. Because of this shortage, existing workers must carry greater workloads, often with very limited resources. And such shortages are not limited to the Ministry. They constrain the capacity of many organizations working at the national, district, and community levels to carry out social welfare functions and services, including those for OVC.

Moreover, many members of the social welfare workforce are community volunteers. In a country where the number of secondary school graduates is quite low, volunteers often lack the skills and knowledge to perform critical social welfare tasks and services. Volunteers are also more inclined to conduct business at their own pace (United Nations Malawi, 2008).

This skills and training deficit is not limited to community volunteers. MOGCCD personnel at headquarters and in the districts also lack the competencies to perform the Ministry's core functions (MOWCD, 2007). According to a 2009 report, the situation for SWOs and CDOs is "desperate." The report explains that nearly two-thirds of these workers have only completed two out of the four years of secondary school. For pre-service training, most go on to Magomero Training College, which has a one-year certificate program in social work. However, the report notes that the curriculum for this program is extremely limited, and the education it provides does not meet the standards required (USAID/UNICEF, 2009). Magomero provides some in-service training, as well, but NGOs, CBOs, and the United Nations Children's Program serve as the primary providers of in-service training for the MOGCCD. At present, few other training opportunities are available in social work. Although Catholic University has an undergraduate degree program in social work, the program is still new and has yet to establish its credibility. Another school, Chancellor College, is in the process of planning an undergraduate social work program, but the program has yet to be implemented (MOGCCD, 2009).

For SWOs, the skills and training deficit has prevented them from taking part in important district-level policy and planning processes. Also, as the report observed, SWOs tend to lack the articulate voice of the educated and thus are unable to speak persuasively about the important role that social welfare plays in development. Their confidence is further undermined by comparisons between their level of education and that of other GoM frontline staff. All other frontline staff have at least an undergraduate degree (USAID/UNICEF, 2009).

In order to improve their job performance, MOGCCD district staff members have said they must receive support supervision from the Ministry's central level; the types of supervision they said were needed are strategic planning, general technical supervision, and overall guidance (MOWCD, 2007). In addition, they have contended that the MOGCCD does not have a career ladder for their positions; until recently, moreover, it had no job descriptions. Frontline staff members also said the MOGCCD rarely promotes staff or transfers them to central-level Ministry positions based on their experience and job performance. Although the Ministry maintains that opportunities for promotions do exist through a competitive process, it acknowledges that frontline staff advancement is limited. In addition, some district staff have said that although promotions change titles, they do not change the tasks to which promoted staff are assigned or the pay they receive for their work.

As is the case in many other countries, the salaries for social welfare work are low, particularly given the long hours, heavy workload, and varied skills it requires. Many MOGCCD district staff supplement their income by conducting trainings for NGOs, CBOs, and faith-based organizations, which offer per diems. While the Ministry views such training activities as good, there is concern that they might prevent its district staff from implementing their own work plans (MOWCD, 2007). Limited resources have other effects, as well. According to some frontline personnel of the MOGCCD, district funding is not sufficient to cover the costs of their activities, leaving them with little to do (MOWCD, 2007). District Council personnel have agreed that district funding is insufficient to cover Ministry operational costs.

At MOGCCD headquarters, other challenges exist. Of note, there is significant programmatic overlap among the Ministry's three technical departments: the Departments of Gender, Children Affairs, and Community Development. As a result, service delivery by frontline staff is confused. It has also been reported that working relationships have been poor between personnel in technical departments and those in planning, finance, and administration. In addition, central departments do not have clear mandates, and some central functions have yet to be transferred to districts.

Efforts to Address Challenges

Many of the challenges reported in this profile were identified in early 2008 during the MOWCD's thorough HR gap analysis. Since that time, the MOGCCD has been working to minimize the number and degree of the challenges that were identified. In this endeavor, the Ministry has adopted an approach that begins its strengthening efforts at the top, using organizational development techniques (USAID/UNICEF, 2009). This approach has included the following activities, among others¹:

- A November 2008 retreat to unite Ministry departments and present to staff a new vision and direction. Retreat activities aimed to improve participants' understanding of productive listening and speaking skills, the benefits of teamwork, and strategic problem-solving. Participants also had an opportunity to identify the challenges they faced at work. The retreat was "the moment when changes in attitude and commitment, and the possibility of change management became a real possibility for the Ministry."
- Production of HR materials in April 2009. The materials included job descriptions that were in line with a previously issued functional review and aimed to motivate and inspire staff and provide accountability for their performance. The materials also included a career path document and training strategy. One outcome of this activity was the decision to have the Ministry work towards requiring SWOs and CDOs to hold undergraduate degrees. Another was an increased number of Ministry staff who were enthusiastic about reform.
- Three leadership retreats in June 2009. Through these retreats a senior leadership group (SLG) was formed, which signaled the MOGCCD's recognition that a holistic and integrated approach was essential to success. It further signaled that the Ministry's Principal Secretary needed to have a circle of trusted and engaged partners. The SLG now provides strategic organizational leadership and management to fulfill the Ministry's mission and vision.
- Development of a detailed training assessment. This offers an analysis of the MOGCCD's HR gaps, position by position, and presents a credible plan for responding to the human capacity needs of the MOGCCD.
- Promotion of data use in HR decision making. The MOGCCD has begun to develop a Human Resource Information System database module, which will enable it to track staff recruitment, deployment, retention, and training. The Ministry will also be able to apply current HR information from database-generated reports to plan and make management decisions and ensure work is fairly distributed.
- Development of a series of interventions for 2010 and 2011. These interventions focus on leadership and management and include SLG team building, individual executive coaching, and refinement of the Ministry's strategic plan.

In addition, the MOGCCD has begun efforts to upgrade Magomero College. In 2009, a team of four consultants assessed Magomero's overall state, including its infrastructure, staff, and program curricula. As part of their assignment, the consultants wrote a report that recommends practical steps to improve Magomero. Their objective

¹ The activities outlined here were drawn from *Reforming Social Welfare: A New Development Approach in Malawi's Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development*, a publication of the U.S. Agency for International Development and the United Nations Children's Fund.

was to outline a plan for Magomero to advance the training it offered in social work and in community development from certificate programs to programs that confer a three-year diploma and an undergraduate degree.

A national taskforce has since been set up to steer the upgrade. A team of experts drafted a new curriculum, which was set to be reviewed in September 2010 at a meeting of stakeholders. Work is also under way to establish an affiliation between Magomero and Chancellor College in which the latter will serve as a consultant and guide to the former. Methods to strengthen Magomero's staff of trainers are also being considered, and improvements to its library, which the four consultants deemed "totally inadequate" in their assessment of Magomero, are in the works.

Tools, Resources, and Curricula to Support Efforts

Reforming Social Welfare: A New Development Approach in Malawi's Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development. This document walks through the process the MOGCCD has taken to strengthen the capacity of its central- and district-level staff. http://www.usaid.gov/mw/documents/social_welfare.pdf

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