

STUDY ON THE DEMAND FOR AND SUPPLY OF EVALUATION IN MALAWI

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a review of two dimensions of evaluation practice in Malawi: (i) the conditions under which demand for evidence is generated; and (ii) the areas in which supply can be strengthened to meet and foster this demand. The review serves to highlight the prevalence of active, latent and potential demands for evaluation. The latent and potential demands are nested within requests for evidence from principals and government agents. This demand is not necessarily only conditioned by development partners, but results endogenously from government, based on articulated development objectives. Supply could in the short-term be strengthened through work with the main research centres of the Universities of Malawi (Centre for Social Research, Economics Department) and Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The major thrust of the review is that, within Malawi, there is a stronger demand for evidence for policy contestation than there is for systematic evaluations. This demand is circumscribed by politics of patronage, except on matters of common destiny or clearly science dominated fields like health. Evaluation studies are, in contrast to other forms of evidence, seen as a tool applied to support accountability for management or political leadership and sometimes used to explore complex areas on performance, be it good or bad. On the whole, both evaluation supply and demand is very limited in the country.

International consultants usually lead major evidence gathering or evaluation exercises, with local consultants playing a support role or taking the lead for smaller in-country assignments. As a result of which, for there to be a growth in systematic evaluations, as a useful tool for development, capacity enhancement efforts need to emphasise that evaluation can support learning that enables policy makers and programme implementation agents to understand how public investments could be improved. The limited supply of evaluative expertise shows some legitimate and good practice, and it is mostly linked to country-led demand by government, local donors and non-governmental organisations. Within this context, there are some examples of evaluation being applied to inform policies and development strategies.

There are a number of individual entry points for improving evaluation capacities in Malawi within the framework of the evolved National Development Monitoring and Evaluation System (NDMES). The existence of functional sector working groups, involving a number of institutions both in demand and supply, is perceived to be a resource that can be used to enhance the governance of evaluations and its growth as a tool for development policy. Malawi's central government uses a large array of donor-funded technical assistance to supply evaluative expertise. Some of the demand is endogenous and there are cases where evidence does feed into decision-making, especially on matters where substantial donor funds are at stake. It is unlikely that if donors withdrew resources, Government would identify substantial internal resources to support evaluation activities beyond programmes that have little popular support.

In undertaking evaluation capacity development (ECD), the central identifiable challenge from the review is the establishment of a coordinating framework or institutional mechanisms that would serve to foster evaluation capacity and be the target of genuine transfer of skills programs over the long term. These would strengthen the University Sector and other higher level technical institutions to deliver appropriate certified training in this field. The study brings to the fore the importance of shaping supply to fit with capabilities

within the demand space and the importance of enhanced coordination in government and institutional development for evaluations within the wider society.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank	MoAI	Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation
CABS	Common Approach to Budget Support	MP	Member of Parliament
CARD	Centre for Agriculture Research and Development	MPRS	Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy
CIHD	Centre for International Health and Development	MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
CLEAR-AA	Regional Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa	NCTP	National Cash Transfer Programme
CPAF	Common Performance Assessment Framework	NDMES	National Development Monitoring and Evaluation System
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations	NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
CSR	Centre for Social Research	NSO	National Statistics Office
CWIS	Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire Survey	ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
DA	District Assembly	OPC	Office of the President and Cabinet
DHS	Demographic Health Surveys	OSSREA	Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa
DIFD	UK Department for International Development	PEFA	Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability
DPs	Development Partners	PER	Public Expenditure Reviews
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	PETS	Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys
ECD	Evaluation capacity development	PFM	Public Financial Management
EU	European Union	PRU	Policy Research Unit
FISP	Free Inputs Subsidy Programme	PSIP	Public Sector Investment Programme
GoM	Government of Malawi	SDU	Service Delivery Unit
IHS	Integrated Household Survey	SP	Starter Pack
IMF	International Monetary Fund	SWG	Sector Working Groups
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation	TBAs	Traditional Birth Attendants
MAMP	Malawi Aid Management Platform	TIP	Targeted Inputs Program
MASEDA	Malawi Socio-Economic Database	TWC	Technical Working Committee
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals	UN	United Nations
MDHS	Malawi Demographic and Health Survey	USD	United States Dollars
MEJN	Malawi Economic Justice Network	WB	World Bank
MEMP	National Development Monitoring and Evaluation Master Plan		
MEPD	Ministry of Economic Planning and Development		
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy		

1. INTRODUCTION

1. This study provides an analytical mapping of the agents involved in evaluation practice and hence of the evaluation system in Malawi. It is inclusive of those agents involved in establishing demand for evaluation, the actors involved in connecting demand with supply, and those active in the supply of evaluations. The review and report has been undertaken to serve as a reference point for those engaged in supporting evaluation and evaluation capacity enhancement in the country. Consequently, the primary audience for this study is intended to be those interested in evaluation capacity development (ECD) in Malawi. The Regional Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA)² conducted this study on evaluation/evaluative research for the UK Department for International Development (DFID) as one of a set of cases covering five countries³. Fieldwork for this study took place from 17 to 21 June 2013.
2. A secondary audience for the report are individuals and stakeholders who have an interest in the development of country-wide evaluation systems. The analysis in this report presents a range of opportunities for capacity development in relation to government agents (central and line departments), the evaluation agents (consultants, think tanks and universities), and principal agents (development partners, Parliament, the executive and civil society). In undertaking the mapping of the evaluation context the study has identified latent, potential and actual demand, the conditions under which demand is generated and potential sources of supply within the evolving political economy of the country.
3. This study refers to evaluation as covering both evaluation and evaluative research and therefore uses the terms interchangeably. The primary objectives of the study are to explore:
 - 1) The conditions under which demand is generated for evaluation evidence; and
 - 2) The areas in which evaluation supply can be strengthened to meet and foster this demand.The guiding questions that interface with these objectives are:
 - (i) On the demand side:
 - a) What has been the actual demand for evaluation from principals?
 - b) Where is there latent and potential demand for evaluation?
 - c) How is evaluation demanded in the current organisational arrangements?
 - (ii) On the supply side:
 - a) What is the range and capacity of entities supplying evaluation services?
 - b) How relevant are the managers and producers of evaluation to the actual demand for evaluation?
 - (i) On matching evaluation supply and demand:
 - c) Where can evaluation supply (actual, latent and potential) be strengthened so that it meets and fosters demand?
4. This report finds that there is latent endogenous demand for evidence in Malawi. Supply is generally limited even though there are a number of local organisations which have

²CLEAR-AA is based at the Graduate School of Public and Development Management at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. CLEAR-AA aims to enhance development anchored in learning, evaluation and results.

³Beyond Malawi, the other case countries are Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda and Zambia.

undertaken good evaluation practice. Development partners largely support evaluation exercises, but there is growing evidence that Government is increasingly willing to support internally driven evidence gathering exercises. On the basis of the evidence, it is concluded in this study that there is a stronger demand for policy related evidence, especially quantitative, than there is for systematic evaluations. International rather than local resources are the main funding conduit for evaluation studies, even where there is strong government ownership. Evaluation activities are perceived to be a tool for investigation on resource utilisation to support external accountability, rather than as a tool for internal policy construction and development priority setting. Malawi is perceived to be open to the conduct of any type of evaluation, seemingly as these exercises come with further aid flow. However, in all of these, the central challenge is in the uptake of results from evaluation. As a result of this, it is widely concluded that for evaluation to be useful ECD efforts need to emphasise that evaluation promotes the identification of better policies to accelerate development results, and also enables managers or other implementing agents to be constructively engaged with.

5. The supply of expertise for quality evaluations is rather diffuse in the country, with several examples of legitimate and good practice at the individual and corporate level. The institutional capacity of Universities is largely reflected in the work of individual academic and has generally been driven by active resource related demands. Within these arrangements, there are examples of supply being successful at informing strategy and in some instances wider policy interventions.

1.1 Methodology

6. This study was carried out through a combination of desk review, including an analysis of existing evaluation products, and direct semi-structured interviews with a selection of informants from across stakeholder groupings identified as central for the study. The study methodology encompassed the following overlapping stages: i) establishing study commitment and support from key stakeholders; ii) collating and analysing primary and secondary data and information of the evaluation system (including available academic and popular literature); iii) conducting a series of interviews with actors that fall within the space established through the broad conceptual map; and iv) producing a draft paper. Each of these stages is discussed in more detail below.
7. **Establishing support from key stakeholders:** Given the nature of the study, an important initial step was to identify relevant national stakeholders who would be engaged with prior to, during and after the collection of data. Whilst the study was conducted independently, it is helpful that there is some level of active buy-in from key stakeholders to support the use of the study. In Malawi, letters were sent to the Government via the DFID Country Office to ask for appointments with senior government officials, while the country researcher made additional contact with a range of stakeholders at the technical level.
8. **Collating and analysing secondary data and information:** The collation and analysis of secondary data covered policy, academic and grey literature relating to the political context and the demand and supply side of evaluation. Included in this were studies on evaluation initiatives within government and the supply that emanates from outside of government. Following the country research phase further primary and secondary

documentation was referred to in order to substantiate the claims of the interviews and further develop findings.

9. **Interviews with key informants:** A series of interviews were arranged with key in-country stakeholders. The design of these interviews drew upon the literature review. Issues of potential and latent demand and the ability of supply to invoke demand were explored through the interview process. Data collection took place through semi-structured interviews that allowed people to narrate their story – with some probing taking place based on the guiding questions. The data from interviews was analysed during the field-work with emerging conclusions refined through synthesis.
10. **Production of a draft and final country report:** Following the completion of the first draft of this study, the reference group reviewed the study report internally and externally. During these processes adjustments were made to the report to aid the clarity and accuracy of the core findings. Table 1 details the representatives of stakeholders that were interviewed in Malawi.

Table 1: Interview Respondents

Government Agents	Evaluation Community	Principals (representative)
Ministry of Health	Centre for Social Research	Parliament –Budget and Finance/Public Accounts Committee
National Statistical Office	Centre for Agriculture Research and Development	Malawi Economic Justice Network, PLAN Malawi, Water Aid, Tilitonse Program
Ministry of Economic Planning and Development	Private Consultants engaged in M&E	Development Partners (DFID, Norwegian Embassy, African Development Bank)
Ministry of Finance	Economics Department	The Office of the President and Cabinet
National Aids Commission		The United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF

Source: Author

11. This report is structured as a product that stands alone from the overall research synthesis and four other cases⁴. The findings of the country case of Malawi are presented in the following manner: First, the Malawian development context is described in relation to evaluation; second, the state of the current evaluation demand and supply is mapped; third, illustrations of how the development context interacts with evaluation supply and demand are detailed; and finally, pathways to improve the national evaluation context are suggested.

⁴ Those interested in a more detailed background, definitions of terms and the full methodological approach should read the Inception Report (22 April 2013).

2. DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

12. Malawi is a landlocked country with a surface area of approximately 118,484 km². The estimated population of Malawi is 15.4 million (National Statistics Office, 2008). Over 80 percent of the population live in rural areas depending on subsistence farming for their livelihood. Even though the country is one of the least urbanised countries in the world, it has one of the highest urbanisation rates at 6 percent per annum (NSO, 2008).
13. Malawi's economy has grown steadily since 2006, by an annual average of 7 percent per annum (Malawi Government: Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, 2012). This growth is largely attributed to investment in agriculture which accounts for nearly 34 percent of GDP (Reserve Bank of Malawi, 2012). The Free Inputs Subsidy Programme (FISP) was the main driver for agricultural growth. Mining, construction and manufacturing also grew strongly during this period of relative macro-economic stability. Since 2010, the economy slowed down with real GDP growth declining from 6.5 percent in 2010 to 4.3 percent in 2011 and 1.9 percent in 2012, mainly reflecting a contraction in agricultural output (Reserve Bank, 2012). Adverse weather conditions in parts of the country resulted in a decline in the output of maize (the main staple crop). Tobacco output, the main export earner, also contracted sharply in 2012 reflecting poor price incentives associated with the period of marked overvaluation of the exchange rate.
14. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world with a Human Development Index (HDI) ranking of 171 out of 187 countries (United Nations Development Programme: Human Development Report, 2012). Poverty remains high, widespread and concentrated in rural areas. The poverty level is estimated at 50.7 percent, only marginally down from the estimated 52.4 percent in 2005 (NSO, 2004 and 2010). Income remains very low and inequality has been increasing from 0.34 to 0.45 between 2005 and 2010. Poverty in rural areas is estimated at 56.6 percent relative to 17.3 percent in urban areas (Reserve Bank of Malawi, 2012). There are internal regional variations in the distribution of poverty amongst the country's three regions, with the country's centre ranked richest and the south as poorest.
15. Official development assistance (ODA) accounted for 40 percent of government revenue in the 2010/11 fiscal year and 19 percent of GDP (International Monetary Fund, 2012). Prior to the more recent reforms, the budget policy implemented in 2010 and 2011 was expansionary, with a large budget deficit. In the 2011/12 fiscal year, the Government of Malawi (GoM) instituted fiscal discipline measures by increasing the tax level and domestic borrowing. The overall fiscal deficit widened from nearly 3 percent of GDP in 2010/2011 to an estimated 7 percent in 2011/12, with domestic financing rising from 1.7 percent of GDP to 5.6 percent in respective years (IMF, 2012). Table I below reflects the general budget and donor contributions since the 2008-09 financial years.
16. Whilst the larger share of aid is delivered as direct project support, disbursement of budget support has grown substantively, from USD 67 million in 2004 to USD 164 million in 2009 (Resnick, 2012:6). Overall Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) in 2010/11 was estimated to be just under USD 800 million, with ODA accounting for more than 40 percent of government expenditure. Principal donors include DfID, European Union (EU), USAID, China, the World Bank (WB), African Development Bank (AfDB), Norway, Ireland, Germany and the United Nations (UN). The Aid provided is concentrated in areas of

basic services and infrastructure development. Beyond some selected areas of pool funding, donors tend to concentrate in areas of choice.

Table 1: Trends in FDA (US\$ Millions)

Year	Domestic revenue	Total expenditure	Gap	External assistance and loan		Average exchange rate (USD/kwacha)
				External assistance	Foreign Loan	
2008/9	950.4	1,751.8	801.4	539.0	92.2	0.0070
2009/0	1,240.0	1,713.3	473.3	426.7	46.7	0.0067
2010/1	1,333.3	1,897.4	564.1	403.8	70.5	0.0064
2011/2	727.3	993.9	266.7	48.5	54.5	0.0030

Source: IMF Country Report No. 12/221(2012) and No. 13/131 (2013). (Conversion into USD by authors)

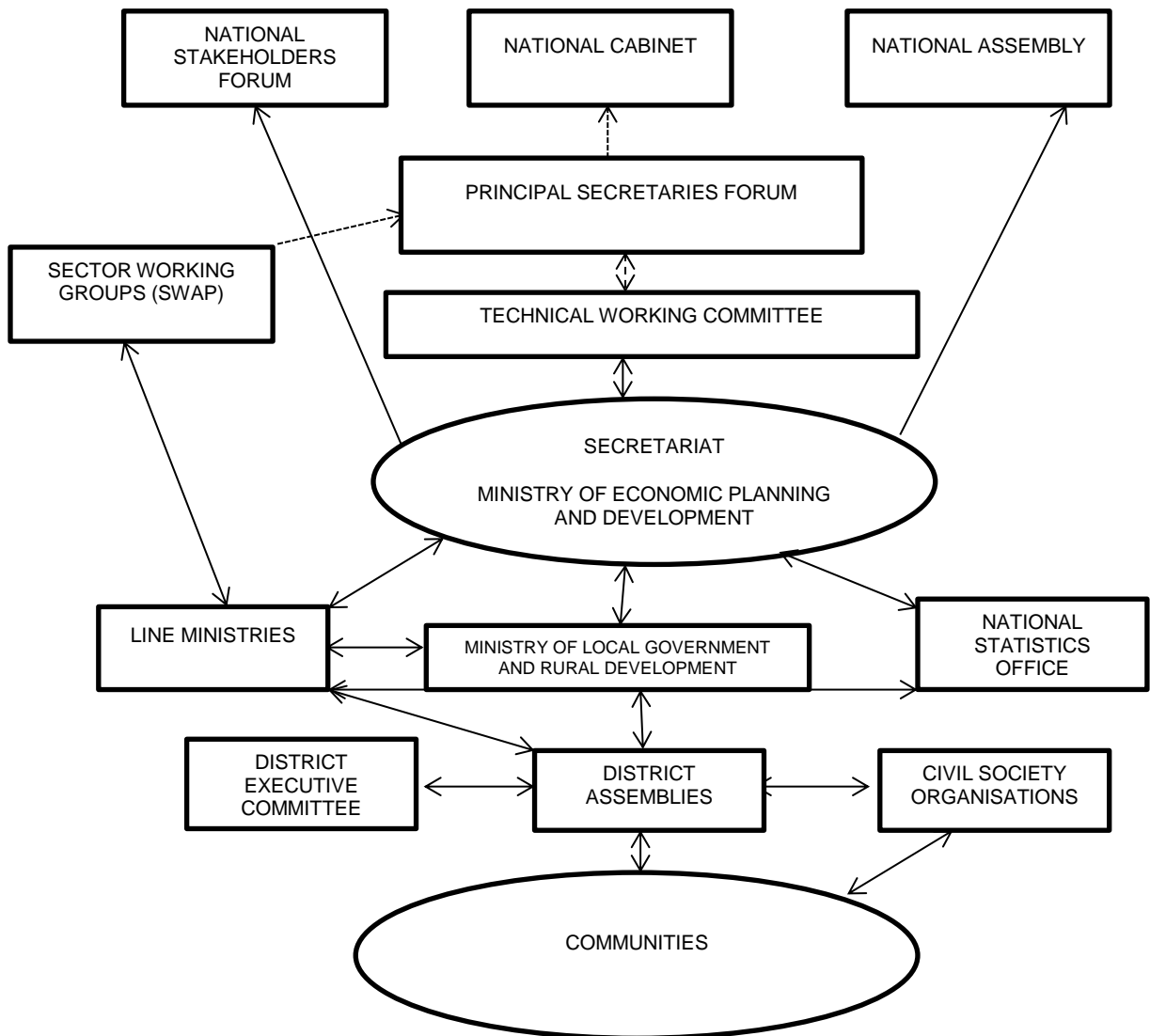
2.1 Development strategy and planning

17. In 1999, the GoM (with assistance from UNDP and the World Bank) established Vision 2020 as a long-term developmental plan for Malawi. This process was followed by the adoption of medium-term (three to five years) development strategies beginning with the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (MPRS) covering the 2002-05 period. Thereafter, Malawi's second generation PRS was renamed the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) and covered the period 2006 to 2011. As of to date, the country has an MGDS II covering the period 2011-2016.
18. The MGDSs are generally held to be more focussed on economic growth than the MPRS and developed with a more results orientation. Targets and priorities are established within the framework with linkages to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MGDS II is generally used for the purposes of budget allocation and hence serves to shape donor contributions, as reflected in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). The MGDS contains a results matrix, detailing long-term as well as policy actions and medium term goals.
19. Even though the MGDS serves as the framework for shaping budget allocation and donor contributions, there are been concerns about the extent to which allocations reflect actual implementation across government (Malawi Government: Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, 2009). In addition to gaps between commitment and actual contribution by government, adjustments often emerged because of revenue overestimations and the impact of the exchange rate. A notable feature of planning since the transition to democracy has been the multiplication of policy documents at the sectoral levels and absence of real implementation beyond the very short term (Booth, D, Cammack, D, Harrigan, J, Kanyongolo, E, Mataure and Ngwira, N (2006)).
20. Malawi has a framework for monitoring and evaluation that has only been partially activated, in the sense that some coordinating institutions and information systems are not working as was anticipated during the planning and design process. The system was designed in 2004 as part of the MPRS implementation process and has its roots in the national planning and budgeting systems. The budget system still has its own monitoring system which has linkages to the national system. Prior to this, national planning and

budget systems had their own standalone monitoring systems. The national framework has no legal instrument to support implementation.

21. At a formal level, and in response to PRSP requirements and some pressures from donors on improved reporting systems, the GoM has been working on the development of an overall M&E system since 2002. Prior to 2002, M&E was not specifically engaged with in an organised manner (Chirwa 2004: 2). The National Development Monitoring and Evaluation Master Plan (MEMP) first appeared in 2002 and was finalised towards the end of 2004. The National M&E Framework is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: National M&E Framework



Source: Author based on the National Development Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Master plan (2008).

22. Progression towards the implementation of a coherent framework for M&E has been slow, although there have been periods of strong movement especially during MGDS 1. Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the system, as it was meant to work, rather than what has in practice transpired. For example, the National Stakeholders Forum has only been convened twice since the system was operationalised. Reporting to Parliament is, in practice, not based on oral presentations, but unfolds through the

circulation of published annual reviews of the national development strategy and monitoring reports of individual programs. Sector Working Groups (SWGs) are a relatively new addition (except the Health Sector one) and have been adopted for all public sectors where development partners are active.

23. The central and most consistent outputs of the NDMES have been regular annual reviews of the National Development Strategy, which is used to inform the planned budgets for the following year. It is generated on the basis of resources allocated by donors and government, for data collection on sector indicators, for the conducting of consultative workshops to review the results and to write up the annual reports. A further analytical output from the system is the generation of Public Sector Investment Program (PSIP) reports between 2006 and 2008, the annual progress reports on MDGs, Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) in the big Ministries of Education, Transport and Health. These reports are not widely circulated but used by the principal agents in the respective Ministries and the Ministry of Finance in effecting budget and procurement changes, and for allocating the national budget.
24. Figure 1 shows the framework for both monitoring and evaluation, but for the purposes of evaluative research not all its components apply. Lower level institutions, covering districts and communities, are generally not seen as part of the overall evaluation system. This is not to say that evaluation does not involve these groups, but that its demand elements seem to be currently limited to the higher levels of line Ministries and other national level bodies, including NGOs. According to the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD), the evaluation dimension in M&E is largely underdeveloped and hardly goes beyond the Principal Secretaries and National Stakeholders Forum. Beyond that, where executive power rests (President and Ministers) what matters most is simply to show evidence on the performance of policies and programs. The line Ministries is where the Sector Working Groups are based and these form the most active hub for evaluative research in addition to routine monitoring. The Principal Secretaries Forum was only activated some six years ago but it has been inconsistent ever since, and the National Stakeholders Forum has only been held once in 2008 (according to MEPD).

2.2 Political Economy of Malawi

25. Malawi re-introduced multi-party democracy in 1993. Malawi started off with multi-party democracy at independence in 1964 but this was quickly suppressed by Dr Hastings Banda's party within two years of winning elections. Malawi was ruled by a single party government lead by Dr Hastings Banda for 30 years. The period under Dr Banda is generally perceived as one with policy consistency and a high level of professionalism in the public service (Booth *et al* 2006; Chirwa *et al* 2008). This is contrasted with the last few years of Dr Banda's rule and the term of office of Bakili Muluzi (1994-2004). During this period there was no policy consistency reflected in rapid change and frequent clashes between government policy preferences and contrary donor approaches and perspectives (Harrigan 2003).
26. It was during Muluzi's second term of office that Malawi adopted the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategies (MPRS) under the influence of International Monetary Fund (IMF)/WB conditionality and the donor community. The adoption of the PRSP was a move towards greater policy coherence and the opening of spaces for evaluation and

research, but continuing patterns of patronage politics suggested that evidence did not really matter in the policy and decision making process (Booth *et al*, 2006). Whilst there was no open hostility to receiving evidence, there was reportedly little chance that the political leadership would learn from it and change established patterns of resource distribution. During this period, the IMF described Malawi as willing to implement policy reforms but unable to implement them due to lack of political will and capacity constraints (IMF, 2004).

27. The election of President Mutharika in 2004 and the initial appointment of qualified individuals within his Cabinet, raised hopes for the role of research, professional expertise in policy design and implementation. It was during this initial period that there were investments into systems for evidence-based policy making. Furthermore, the surveys of the NSO became more regular and encompassing. An M&E system was introduced in the central ministries and encompassed a framework to monitor and evaluate development progress.
28. It is held by stakeholders that whilst the Muluzi regime did not care much for evidence, the Mutharika regime did care but tampered with the results of surveys conducted. For example, Mutharika failed to release the complete results of the third Integrated Household Survey (IHS 3) by NSO. Outside of changes in political leadership, the mentality of a single, dominant political party, and a centralisation of power continues to be the norm. The value and relevance of evaluations and evidence for policy purposes is constrained by the realities of a political culture of patronage based decision-making, within which the focus is on the distribution of spoils, rather than informed policy construction and the functioning of formal state structures (Joala 2012: 62).
29. The politics of making policies on the podium⁵ has generally been evident in all these regimes since the transition to multi-party democracy. One consequence of the deep patterns of patronage is the gap between formally articulated policy perspectives and actual implementation practices (Booth *et al* 2006). Key initiatives are often adopted without any serious consideration of their viability and personality politics tend to prevent coordination. The general view is that politics embodied in patrimonial practices, disempower the civil service and progressively undermine the capacity to generate coherent technically grounded policy approaches.
30. Since coming into power following the death of Mutharika in April 2012, Malawi's new President Joyce Banda, has taken steps towards adjusting policies and opening the space for M&E and more open policy construction. She has strengthened monitoring and evaluation within the Office of the President and Cabinet by establishing a unit for performance management. However, there are many who hold that she is equally constrained by a deeply engrained culture of patronage. A key implication of the level of patronage politics is the loss of policy autonomy, reflected in an inability of public officials to carry out policies in accordance with public interest and to learn evidence from analytical research and evaluation. Whilst there are some unfolding steps to enhance policy capacity within the Presidency, the extent to which this would serve to overcome an entrenched and diffused culture of patrimonialism is difficult to determine.
31. Although patronage runs deep in the politics and policy process, actual patronage actions appear to be limited to areas that satisfy the largely economic and power

⁵ On the trail of Presidential public meetings and events.

interests of the ruling party. The general incentives for patrimonial action are thought to be very low in some areas, such as health and education delivery. In practice, there are also a number of competing patronage networks and which are amenable to the use of any evidence to discredit policies and practices. This has happened in Parliament, where those in opposition have appealed to findings from academic research to discredit the policies of those in power.

3. MAPPING OF EVALUATION IN MALAWI

32. This section presents the mapping of evaluation within Malawi for both supply and demand. Given the high level of ODA, nearly 40 percent of the budget in recent years, the demand for evaluation is primarily rooted in the work of Development Partners (DPs) and is evident in sector based interactions. Outside of a coordinated approach in practice, donors have initiated evaluations and related research for accountability purposes and as demanded by their own constituencies. Whilst some studies and evaluations are initiated in partnership with the GoM, generally these take place outside of a formalised process of feedback and generally unfold with the cooperation of individual public servants in a diffused system where larger buy-in and appreciation has not been fully established.
33. The descriptive overview that follows seeks to provide a more detailed analysis of the actors involved and their capacities for managing evaluations, conducting evaluations and using evaluations. The role and efficacy of stakeholders that express a demand for evaluation or have latent or potential demand capacity (legislative structures, the political executive, development partners and civil society) is explored in some detail. The areas of demand are then followed by an analytical overview of those institutions that are central to establishing a bridge between supply and demand - line Ministries and the National Statistical Office. Embodied within the linking structures is also the crucial role played by coordinating bodies. The final part focuses on those stakeholders active in the supply of evaluation (think tanks, universities and non-governmental evaluation organisations).

3.1 Principals

34. Demand within the political system is diffused and largely embedded within joint programme implementation frameworks or within specific sector working group (SWG) based interaction amongst donors and relevant government officials. Although the NDMES Master Plan suggest a level of coherence in approach and the basis for active demand, the evolving system reflects a combination of emergent and inconsistent central push, coupled with diffused pulls based on energies, incentives and resources of different actors within the wider pool of stakeholders.

The Political Executive

35. Malawi has a presidential type of political system, where Ministers, Heads and Deputy Heads of Ministries are appointed by the President and are answerable to them. One consequence of this is that the survival of Ministers and other senior government officials depends on 'toeing the line' any dissent to the President's wishes may result in job loss. Furthermore, the centralised nature of political parties and party political contestations creates an environment where the party leader's priorities become party

policies. This tendency has historically served as a major constraint on constructive criticism within the Executive and the willingness of Ministers and top level officials to draw on evidence to change policies set by the ruling government. Policy direction is very much centralised in the person of the President: any divergence from this scenario may be due to the personality of the President rather than substantive positions. The country's Cabinet has not been recognised as a source of evaluation demand: at most Ministers would encourage evaluations within their own portfolios as a means for demonstrating performance.

Legislative Structures

36. The role and value for evaluation in legislative structures must be seen in the context of past, current and future patterns on policy engagement within political parties. A recent study by Mpesi and Svasand (2012:20) demonstrates that policies, ideology or ideological perspectives are not significant elements in the existence or formation of political parties. The party system is fragmented with individuals changing from one party to another without substantive policy or ideological justification. Generally, Malawian political parties remain entirely associated with the personalities of their party leaders and offer little differentiation on policy issues (Resnick 2012: 3).
37. The fragmentation of party politics and the drive towards establishing parties for positioning purposes often renders the focus on policy issues weak. Individual members of parliament (MPs) engage on issues that impact on their constituencies, but not on larger policy issues that affect the whole country. This weakness has been noted by numerous actors and has reduced the value of legislative structures for policy relevant evaluations and research. In some cases, this lack of appreciation is explained by limited education and policy exposure amongst some of the serving MPs.
38. The National Assembly has historically relied on infrequent briefings by government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the performance of development policies and their implementation. In practice, the scrutiny of the government budget, bills and other public sector policies by the legislature has only been taken seriously when the ruling party is in the minority in the National Assembly, like, for example, during Muluzi's and Mutharika's first term. The lack of strong oversight by the National Assembly is attributed to the absence of research capacity, limited information flows and inadequate sitting time. Until the more recent construction of a new Parliament building around 2008, parliamentarians did not have a permanent place to convene (Resnick 2012:7).
39. In theory, there is an expectation that Parliament will engage with polices and be a source of demand, as it exercises oversight over implementation. Some level of engagement does take place on the budget, although indications are that the time given for debates is inadequate and would require changes in the manner in which the budget is constructed. Further, there are indications that the Public Accounts Committee of the Assembly engages periodically with information presented by Departments through the audit process. Generally, however Parliament is considered weak with limited internal technical capacity for policy engagement.
40. A number of donors have attempted to support the strengthening of Parliament, but the support has not been consistent, in part due to the governance challenges between

2010 and 2012⁶. Whilst there are indications of possible support to strengthen the role of Parliament in the oversight process and hence, by implication, on evaluations, the reality of limited funding flows and donor dependence establishes a range of constraints like inability to conduct regular meetings, seek technical inputs, among others. As large portion of foreign aid comes either in the form of grants or off-budget support, which does not require Parliamentary approval, it becomes difficult for MPs to engage in pertinent evaluation processes.

Development Partners

41. DPs have historically been the main source of demand for evaluations and for evidence based policy making. However, in practice this demand is mediated either through the direct commissioning of studies for accountability purposes or through coordinative engagements within established sector level structures. Development partners have over the past decade initiated many independent studies on areas that they are supporting. In 2006, external partners listed 27 analytical reports on the Country Analytical Works website. As there is no repository for evaluations completed or analytical studies, there is no point of reference to determine the coverage, quality and number of studies completed. Box 1 demonstrates donors' role in evaluation studies.

Box 1: National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP)

Donors have a strong role in influencing policy but they do not always commission studies to suit only their accountability or reporting requirements. The engagement of donors with government on research on the impact of the cash transfer programme demonstrates that the notion that 'donor funding' is equal to 'donor driven' may be too simplistic in Malawi. Where it matters, government has the capacity to take strong ownership of a research study and decide which recommendations to take on board.

Social cash transfers were positioned to become a major poverty reduction tool in Malawi's National Social Protection Policy. It is generally seen as the central effort to respond to widespread poverty, vulnerability and the limited ability of households to deal with climate related shocks. The NCTP started as a pilot programme in one district - Mchinji - in 2006 – and involved nearly 3,000 households (2008) then. The Programme has as of to date spread to cover all of Mchinji District and to more than seven districts benefitting about 24,000 households.

The Centre for International Health and Development (CIHD) at Boston University School of Public Health, jointly with the Centre for Social Research in Malawi, conducted a series of rigorous evaluations in 2008. The evaluations looked at the impact of the programme on children, families and the community. Results from the CIHD's impact evaluation revealed that cash transfer recipient families had fewer missed meals, lower rates of underweight children, fewer reported sicknesses, higher school enrolment, better access to medicines and health care, and a reduction in young children working to help support their families. The study also identified a number of weaknesses in the cash transfer program and made a number of recommendations.

The findings from the CIHD's evaluations were used by government to improve the programme's operations and beneficiary identification policies, as well as informing plans developed for scale up to more districts in the country. However, it has not been all the findings from the evaluation that were taken on board. In some instance, the

⁶ UNDP and Norway have been among such donors but they withdrew their support for various reasons. It has been observed that Malawi's MPs are often unable to critically analyse issues outside of Party parameters.

recommendations were considered unfeasible politically or because of the available infrastructure. In this instance, despite the fact that evaluation was funded by a donor, Government took strong ownership of the research results that despite donor pressure they have chosen which recommendations to take on board in the expansion of the program. Donors though are still heavily involved in the funding of the program expansion.

42. Whilst a relatively new development, and with the influence of donors, sector wide approaches (SWAs) or sector working groups (SWGs) have been operationalised for a number of sector and programme areas. Generally, they bring together all the major stakeholders working within a particular sector: government departments and institutions, development partners, civil society organisations, academia and community level groups. The SWGs create several sub-working groups among which there is always one that focuses on monitoring and evaluation. The lead Government Ministry for the SWG would initiate the establishment of an M&E unit or at minimum, would incorporate some element of M&E functionality to serve the purpose of collecting data and other information to feed the policy and programme formulation processes.
43. SWGs are normally chaired by a Principal Secretary and co-chaired by a donor. In practice, these are proving to be an important avenue for DPs to influence government policies and act as a basis to identify research and evaluation opportunities. For example, the agriculture and water sectors have established regular periodic consultative meetings and one joint sector review held around November or January each year where policy based studies form part of the agenda. Functionality and pressures for evaluations vary between different sectors and are most often shaped by interests established amongst key role players. Such structures seem to work on the basis of the energy of donor funded initiatives within Ministries.
44. As a result of historical challenges on the flow of donor resources and participation within coordinating structures like SWGs, evaluative research and capacity has been relatively diffused in the system. Whilst some sectors, such as health and education have developed their own systems and some advances have been made on collating studies completed, coordination levels have been low and there has not been a defined modality for exchange amongst donors, beyond the data that feeds into the Malawi Aid Management Platform (MAMP). There is wider appreciation for the MAMP and its utility in collating data and aping progress on aid but it does not incorporate, at present, information on evaluations that have been completed or that are underway. Indications are that this will be incorporated into future modules, but the primary focus of the stakeholders is on tracking disbursements and reporting on spending within priority sectors.

Civil Society

45. The Malawian civil society has demonstrated reasonable capacity to engage with government and Parliament on policy issues, but it has not historically been a source of demand for evaluations. There are a number of civil society organisations that have been active in encouraging evaluations, like the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), WaterAid, World Vision, but the focus of their studies has largely been in the context of mobilising resources for advocacy work or operational programming. Perhaps this is unavoidable given the high levels of poverty experienced and their

general engagements with communities in the country. MEJN uses local consultants to carry out regular budget reviews every year with support from donors.

46. There are established networks and organised formations for civil society engagements and consultations, but the main channel for expressing evaluation demands has been the same as those utilised by DPs. Civil society organisations participate in the SWGs and District Executive Sub-Committee on M&E on the basis of their areas of interest. Some of the civil society organisations (CSOs), like Plan Malawi, even serve as the Chairpersons of sub-committees of SWGs and where necessary have established networks to mobilise resources or influence policies. For example, CSOs have formed their own network in the water sector (Water Environment Sanitation (WES) Network) they are given the platform at the SWG forums to present their perspectives on the implementation and delivery of water services in the country.
47. Given the nature of diffused resource flows from donors and the fact that many projects are initiated directly through non-governmental organisations, some CSOs are given the responsibility to chair sub-committees of the SWG. For example, Plan International chairs the Sanitation Sub-committee. CSOs also interact with the NSO in terms of improving data protocols, provision and dissemination. WaterAid, for example, has been facilitating a national taskforce that is refining definitions of water and sanitation indicators used in the national surveys conducted by NSO.

3.2 Government Agents

48. Within the system of government, sector Ministries are crucial for establishing the link between supply and demand. Not only are they generally entrusted with the responsibility for collecting and collating information for their sector, but they stand at the centre of providing the required information to those who demand it and are also central to ensuring that evidence is generated for policy purposes. Even though they may often also be viewed as integral to establishing demand and supplying information, they are, in practice, primarily involved in the exercise of linking supply with demand. Central to this process is also the role of the government established National Statistical Office.

Lead Ministry - Economic Planning and Development

49. A national M&E system was adopted in 2002 under the leadership of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development. This system was relatively weak by the time the Mutharika administration took power in 2004. Under the Mutharika administration, in 2007, the M&E system was extended to the district and community levels. Government also took a direct role in providing funding and paying district M&E officers. It was also extended to other central Ministries which had no M&E Units. These included the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Water, and the Ministry of Labour. Within the framework of the M&E Master Plan, the Monitoring and Evaluation Division of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development serves as the Secretariat for the national M&E system. It has the responsibility for coordinating outcome and impact monitoring across all sectors and undertaking producing poverty analysis. The Secretariat is, furthermore, responsible for disseminating annual national development reviews.

50. The national M&E system envisaged the establishment of a representative Technical Working Committee (TWC) to guide the development and operationalisation of the monitoring and evaluation system throughout the public sector. As substantial resources would be required to implement such a system, government and donors established a programme – the Joint Programme Support for Monitoring and Evaluation – to support the process of implementation. It was anticipated that this structure would consider technical reports and recommendations from the Secretariat which would include progress reports from implementing institutions. However, the desired ambition that included drawing on external research centres, on a quarterly basis or when required, has not been realised. The TWC has had limited impact because of funding and capacity constraints facing member institutions. External technical assistance was used in the early years when designing the system. This included producing manuals for training, forms for collecting data at various levels, and conducting training itself. This was phased out in 2007.
51. The main consistent outputs of the National M&E System to date have been regular annual reviews of the national development strategy which is used to inform the national budget the following year. Use is made of both donor and government funding to carry out data collection on the sector indicators and conduct consultative workshops to review the results and write up the annual reports. The other analytical reviews that emerged out of the initial attempts at coherence in M&E are as follows:
- a. **Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) Reports:** Between 2006 and 2008, a number of individual projects in the key sectors of the economy (water, transport, agriculture) were assessed in terms of implementation. Reports were written, published, circulated widely and presented to the National Assembly. One such report on the transport sector triggered debate in Parliament and led to corruption related investigations.
 - b. **Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS):** Between 2008 and 2010, the system was used to conduct public expenditure tracking in Education, Transport and Health. These reports were not widely circulated but were used by the Principal Secretaries in the respective Ministries, and the Ministry of Finance, in effecting budget and procurement changes, and for allocating the national budget.
 - c. **MDGs Annual Progress Reports:** These have been produced on a consistent basis and continue to be generated with limited external assistance.
52. The main persistent criticisms against the outputs of the M&E systems, both at the national and sector level are twofold: the quality of data used and the quality of analysis. Firstly, on the quality of data used: the annual reviews do not have many quantitative indicators and as a result the reviews rely on subject expert opinion. The data for quantitative indicators is also not updated on a regular basis. Secondly, the quality of analysis: the reports are not seen to have adequate analytical depth so as to inform national budget planning and other specific policy reforms. Issues of data and staff capacity seem to be at play here. Analytical skills are underdeveloped in many non-research oriented institutions even if adequately qualified personnel are available.
53. It was anticipated that the use of resources would be monitored through annual Public Expenditure Reviews (PER). This has however not unfolded as expected. Although line ministries provide financial reports to the Monitoring Section of the Ministry of Finance,

some Ministries do not comply and it has not proven possible to impose any form of sanction. Compliance is often waived due to political pressures (Chirwa 2004: 4). Box 2 explores this challenge in more detail.

54. One of the main tests for the sustainability of government's efforts on evidence-based policy formulation and evaluation is the provision of an explicit budget line for these functions in the national budget. This has happened for the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD), the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and the Office of the President and Cabinet. MEPD also carries the extra burden of supervising M&E Units in line Ministries. However, in none of these institutions is government funding adequate to carry out periodic field visits, collect regular and reliable data without the support of donors. This constraint is what led UNDP to establish a multi-donor trust fund in 2006 to support the development of M&E functions in the public sector.

Box 2: Public finance management systems performance assessment

The current budget system does not always allocate resources according to the priorities of the MGDS, and this problem has been outstanding even for earlier national development strategies. There is need to improve the public finance management system for this to be achieved by making adjustments to the core structure for accounting (Malawi Government: MEPD, 2008). This is an issue that requires implementation more than new studies to assess what is wrong, but government has remained receptive, perhaps to a fault, to persistent demands from donors to regularly assess the performance of the public sector financial management system.

The Common Approach to Budget Support (CABS) donors has been providing budgetary support to Malawi on the basis of the introduction of reforms to the government financial system. A June 2005 public expenditure financial accountability (PEFA) assessment revealed that the new government, which came into power in May 2004, had inherited an economy in fiscal crisis with high interest payments on domestic debt and significant arrears throughout the Government. Since that time, the new government showed political commitment to reverse the trend.

Government made some attempts to improve transparency and accountability in the management of public resources. There were still outstanding issues government had to address: weak Parliamentary oversight; the lack of linkage between the Government's Strategic Plan (Malawi Growth and Development Strategy) and the financial planning and budgeting systems; the complexity of budget documents; delays in preparation of financial accounts; the publication of Audit reports and follow-up of audit recommendations; and concerns over continuing weaknesses identified within the GoM's internal control systems. Government and donors agreed on the need for a new PEFA assessment to follow up on achievements on previous recommendations and identify any other new issues for consideration. The new PEFA assessment was conducted in 2008.

The main objective of the 2008 PEFA assessment was to take stock of the progress made in the public financial management (PFM) reform process since the previous exercise (May-June 2006) and assist Government in determining its most urgent PFM priorities. The assessment results were expected to inform CABS donors on their support through budgetary support and technical assistance to PFM issues. The study was carried out by a team made of only international consultants from Consortium POHL Consulting & Associates. The study involved evaluating the performance of the PFM system against a set of 28 high level performance indicators for the government, plus 3 additional indicators that measure

the performance of donors involved in the government's budgetary processes. Consultants interviewed government officials, donors, and private sector organisations.

The completed assessment found that government maintained good fiscal discipline at the aggregate level in the last three years, but the credibility of the budget was undermined by deviation from plans. Whilst the formulation of the MDGS outlined government's priority areas, weaknesses in the planning system made it difficult to direct resources to those areas. In many significant areas the outcomes from the financial management system could not be determined, resulting in 'no-score' because of the weaknesses in the data for monitoring areas, unreported government operations, procurement, and predictability of direct budget support. Thereby in an overall sense it was not possible to determine the impact of the financial systems on efficient service delivery.

Government had already done its internal report on the matter and the results from this study were nothing new. Senior government officials in Treasury believe that donors prefer reports from their own consultants in order to learn about what is happening. They pointed out that some issues recommended in the study have been on the drawing board for many years, like the need to have a budget that has an appropriate policy based classification structure to deliver on the MGDS programmes, and the capacity for the efficient delivery of services to ensure financial resources allocated for priority development interventions are spent.

The process on the assessment is revealing of the momentum that donors themselves establish with respect to analytical studies and evaluations. In this instance, donors were simply keen to have their own study or independent assessment. Relevant government officials were aware that the study is unlikely to reveal anything new, but that they felt it was difficult for donors to appreciate their position. The overall impact is that such initiatives generally undermine the ability to take a united position on resolving problems: it promotes a government versus donors' mentality. The logic of having two studies is partly rooted in donor perspectives on the need for independence on evaluations studies.

Line Ministries

55. The NDME Master Plan envisages a substantive role for line ministries even though the institutional framework remains relatively weak and much of the evaluative activities unfold on an ad-hoc basis. Some line Ministries have M&E units that are officially created and operational. However, most do not appear to have any established capacity for evaluation. A study conducted in 2004 (Chirwa, 2004) revealed that even where line ministries established M&E units, they do not appear to have the legal or administrative foundations for collecting and collating data. A related challenge is the lack of monitoring reports, even in the Ministries that have M&E units. Although some Ministries indicated that they produce monitoring and evaluation reports, these are often *ad hoc* and mostly related to donor-funded projects. There is generally no evidence that the M&E units in various Ministries produce periodic and regular monitoring reports.
56. Linkages among various Ministries with respect to the exchange of information are weak or non-existent. Many of the M&E units do not send their monitoring reports to MEPD or other line Ministries. It is generally held that the Monitoring and Evaluation Division of MEPD lacks the political power or leadership skills to coordinate the activities of line ministries and civil society organisations. For example, some of the line ministries are developing their own monitoring and evaluation systems independent of the national

framework of poverty monitoring and evaluation – such as Department of Local Government, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health.

57. The capacity of M&E Units in line Ministries is limited (Arcadis Euroconsult 2004). There are no work plans for the M&E work and no separate budget for monitoring activities. Apart from funding problems, many M&E units do not have adequate human resources to discharge their duties effectively. Where M&E Units do not exist, for example, in the Ministry responsible for Climate Change, the monitoring activities are undertaken by planning officers who view monitoring as a secondary activity. Official estimates in the public sector for vacancy rates at the professional grades (first degree entry point) are between 50 to 60 percent suggesting that there are capacity gaps in M&E Units. The lack of coordination also reflects the capacity in the number of staff and management skills in the M&E Division. As a result, many line Ministries do not seem to appreciate the central role MEPSD plays in the coordination of monitoring and evaluation activities. This view was expressed by MEPSD itself and donors that support M&E work like UNDP, DFID and UNICEF.
58. The case of traditional birth attendants reveals important lessons on the power and limitations of the Presidency to tamper with established policies in a field dominated by donor funding and vested interests of government officials (see Box 3). The other lessons relate to the complexity of implementing policy based on evidence from other countries, the problems of tampering with research findings, the conflicts between bureaucrats and politicians in policy making, and the limitations of even good research to provide unambiguous direction.

Box 3: The role of Traditional Birth Attendants in the Health Sector

Traditional birth attendants (TBAs) are mostly women who assist mothers to deliver outside the formal health system. They generally form an important link in the chain of health personnel that provide primary health care services in Malawi. Despite the establishment of many hospitals and health centres across the country, it is to the TBAs that the majority of women turn to in times of child-birth. Over 60 per cent of birth deliveries in the country take place in villages and generally outside of health care facilities or hospitals.

Given the numbers of women that turn to TBAs, successive governments regarded TBAs as an important component in the delivery of maternal health. The training of TBAs became an essential part of the Maternal and Child Health Services, and the Ministry of Health began registering those who had undergone training in 1976. By the time the TBA policy was suspended in the late 1990s, there were over 5000 TBAs out of which the Ministry of Health had managed to train just over 2000. According to the 2000 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS), TBAs assisted in 10.5 percent of live births in urban areas and 24.4 percent of live births in the rural areas.

By the year 2000, many international organisations changed their approach on TBAs and their role was redefined to, amongst others, assist in the birth planning, by arranging transport, by providing social and emotional support for the woman and to sensitise the community on national strategies for skilled birth. The change in approach was as a result of research findings based mostly on developed countries, which demonstrated lower maternal death rates for countries that did not use TBAs (Stanton, 2008). At the same time, a growing body of research showed that for developing countries the TBAs should be retained in birth delivery especially where there was inadequate health infrastructure and shortage of skilled birth delivery personnel.

Malawi, through the Ministry of Health, quickly signed up to the new international position on TBAs and abandoned the support that had hitherto been offered to the development of TBAs. The Muluzi Administration called government withdrawal from supporting TBAs a suspension of policy and never bothered to publicise it. In contrast to the international studies, local data showed that the maternal mortality doubled, from 620 to 1120 per 100000 live births between 1992 and 2000. At pains to explain the situation, the Ministry of Health's Reproductive Health Unit commissioned a study to investigate the impact of the suspended TBA support programme. The study was conducted by Centre for Social Research (CSR) in 2003 but the study report was rejected by officials on the bases of methodologies utilised. Encouraged somewhat by donors, government continued with its policy and adopted laws that stopped TBAs from delivering babies and also prohibited women from giving birth at a TBA's house.

In 2010 President Mutharika lifted the ban on the TBAs, but there was a struggle to re-implement TBA support efforts where most of the funds were provided by donors. Donors could not see the basis for this new expenditure and government could not entirely afford to shoulder it. So confusion on TBAs' role resurfaced at the national level from 2010 until last year when there was a change of regime and the new President has reinstated the ban on TBAs. The struggle to act on the basis of local evidence that contradicts wider studies reflect the power that is exercised by donors and the reality that evidence based policy making is not only a challenge for the Malawi government, but also has bearing on DP who function on the basis of international policy templates.

59. Given the centrality of the President in the policy process, during the Mutharika period, a Policy Research Unit (PRU), fully staffed and paid for by government was established in the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC). Its overall mission was to improve and standardise the formulation of policies across government institutions. There was no direct involvement of donors in setting up the Unit in 2005 and it was staffed by competent professional staff from a number of fields: economics, health, education and statistics. Later, some limited donor support was identified for training and assistance with systems and procedures for evaluating policies before they are submitted to Cabinet.
60. The PRU had immediate impact on the policy formulation process as a number of policy documents were referred back that did not meet set criteria on quality, content and implementation plans. The officials of the Unit were also assigned to attend numerous Cabinet committees that deliberated on policy. However, within a short period of time after establishing PRU, the then President shifted towards a more dictatorial policy approach where the role of evidence was minimal. This was worsened by general budget constraints from 2010 and as a result the PRU lost its intended focus.
61. High level consultations during this study indicate that the President and Ministers are beginning to place added emphasis on driving implementation and policy as a collective and hence are looking forward to more effective reporting on government's performance. One purported indicator of this movement towards better information for policy is the establishment of a Service Delivery Unit (SDU) with the mandate to monitor and evaluate the delivery of public services. Indications from within OPC are that the SDU is being established with external international support.
62. The President has reportedly placed added emphasis on the importance of results-based monitoring. As a result of this, the SDU has conducted a number of service delivery

assessments where government departments and public institutions explained the reasons for their performance. The growing and recognised challenge, however, is the absence of clear indicators for performance at the Ministry or department level and the lack of baseline data. Within the current system, with restrictive sector resource allocations and the continuing pressures for patronage, it is difficult to envisage how the Cabinet or the President could become a source of substantive demand for evaluation or independent research.

National Statistical Office

63. The National Statistical Office is the government department that is charged with the responsibility of collecting national data under the Statistical Act. The NSO was identified as a key player in the poverty monitoring system with respect to the generation of outcome and impact indicators through periodic surveys. For example, within the MPRS, it was envisaged that the Core Welfare Indicators Survey (CWIS) would be carried out annually and that the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) and Demographic Health Survey (DHS) would be carried out every five years.
64. Notable surveys that have been carried out by NSO since the launch of the first medium term national development strategy (MPRS) in 2002 include the Core CWIS and two IHS. The initial surveys were conducted on schedule but thereafter it has not been possible to maintain consistency in timing. The IHS, for example, has been carried out in 1998, 2004 and 2010 which is not in line with the expected five year time periods in the NDMES. In order to improve the capacity of NSO in the collection of data, there are plans to have a statistical master plan. A needs assessment funded by DFID has been carried, but generally progress has been slow.
65. NSO is also responsible for the Malawi Socio-Economic Database (MASEDA), a computer based data base at District Assembly (DA) level that was designed to be key feature of the national poverty monitoring system. Under the system, output and impact indicators are expected to be captured at district level. The DAs are expected to send the up-dated information to NSO which in turn will integrate the district and line ministries information into one data base that will be provided to the M&E Division of MEPS (NSO, 2004). Many officers in the DAs were trained in the operation and use of MASEDA, but not all the DAs have the application and requisite hardware. As a consequence, the system is not fully institutionalised (GOM, 2004c). In addition, MASEDA has been confronted with a range of administrative problems since its establishment and has not really received the required support from line or sector Ministries.
66. The role of research institutions, such as universities and other key supply agents for evaluative research and other studies, in the national poverty monitoring systems, have been articulated both under the M&E MP and MASEDA but it has never been fully operationalised. Research institutions often conduct studies, both commissioned and non-commissioned, that may provide information on poverty outcomes and these should find a proper channel to inform policy and decision makers on a regular basis. However, in the national poverty monitoring system research institutions and universities do not seem to play an active and dedicated role in poverty monitoring.

3.3. Supply of evidence and evaluation agents

67. Many DPs have historically commissioned evaluations that cover the spectrum of the development assistance provided. These studies are largely directed at providing information for external accountability purposes and are focused on the efficacy of interventions from the perspective of DPs, rather than from the perspective of Government. Recommendations in many of the reports are primarily focused on changes that are needed within DP practices as they interface with Government. Supply is spread across professional public and private suppliers, and embedded in the work of independent think-tanks, universities and professional associations.

Professional suppliers

68. There were many reports of evaluations done by Malawian institutions but given the time constraints for the study, it was not possible to access these, as are the reports commissioned by external institutions. This has to do with record keeping: many external institutions have websites hosting their work but local ones do not. Thus many of the evaluations reviewed during the study process were contracted to agents based in the North but completed in partnership with local consultants. The general view in Malawi, confirmed by UNDP and UNICEF during the study, is that there is substantive capacity in the country for the management and delivery of evaluation studies. The views of UNDP and UNICEF are very important on this matter, given that UNDP run the programme that recruited 40 M&E officers at the district level and UNICEF was behind initial efforts to establish an evaluation association in Malawi plus many other activities related to M&E. There is, however, no real evidence of substantive capacity for delivery. Stakeholders point to the existence of specific individuals and institutions outside of government carrying out evaluative research.

69. It has not been possible to make any authoritative judgment in this study on the wider capacity for supply of evaluative research within the country. Many indications incline towards the extensive use of foreign consulting firms who work in partnership with local providers. On the surface, and based on studies generated by local academics and consultants, there appears to be a high level of available capacity. The challenge is that there is no source of information on the number of professionally trained evaluation specialists and it appears that many who enter the space do so on the basis of skills obtained in other areas of analytical work.

Independent think tanks and research institutions

70. The most prominently identified research institute established, as a Malawi-owned specific think-tank, is the Centre for Social Research (CSR). CSR was established in 1992, initially as an exclusive Project Unit within the University of Malawi to evaluate the implementation of UNICEF's nationwide water, sanitation and health programmes. UNICEF noticed a gap in local capacity to conduct technically grounded evaluations of its programs that required survey based methodologies, and teamed up with the University of Malawi to establish CSR for this purpose.

71. CSR initially relied on staff in the Faculty of Social Science at Chancellor College, but the volume of work was such that it had to recruit its own fulltime staff without necessarily cutting off the need to draw on relevant additional expertise, when needed, from the University. Over the years, with a change in approach to monitoring and evaluation,

UNICEF facilitated the evolution of CSR into an independent research institution that could stand on its own and serve other clients. CSR has grown and now has a staff compliment of 12, five of whom have PhDs and it still draws on staff in the University when needed.

72. Malawi does not appear to have other well established independent research institutions. At a minimum, professional bodies, such as the Law Society, Accountants Society, Economics Association, do position themselves as think tanks on occasion depending on the topical issues at hand and the capacity of the institution to offer advice. Capacity, funding or/and management problems appear to have crippled the performance of a number of locally-owned policy advocacy CSOs. The study did not find a single CSO with a fully-fledged research or monitoring and evaluation unit. Many international CSOs work with the government and invest into areas identified by government. Plan Malawi and Water Aid engage in analysis in their areas of interest and do utilise statistical data on poverty and other indicators provided by NSO. Where things are not working well, they will share their findings with government in a non-confrontational manner to seek resolution.
73. The few available suppliers of analytical studies, work as individuals, and are generally based at the University of Malawi. It is held by some stakeholders that the capacity may not really exist in the country to conduct large-scale multi-disciplinary research or evaluation given the fragmented nature of its suppliers. It is difficult to judge whether there is inadequate research or evaluation capacity in the country, and the use of external (to the country) consultants is perhaps more due to lack of corporatisation than availability. It is held by some of the stakeholders that the fragmentation might also be a manifestation of high demand for research and evaluation services. Capable people do not see the need to work under employment terms as is often the case with corporate entities.

Universities

74. Malawi has three publicly funded universities and seven privately funded Universities and colleges. The most prominent is the University of Malawi which started in 1965 with 90 students. A study conducted by the Southern African Regional University Association reveals that there are approximately 890 academic and research staff at universities in Malawi. Of this number, approximately 90 percent are employed by the University of Malawi. The majority of qualifications are awarded at the undergraduate level. It is furthermore reported that the University of Malawi only produced one doctoral graduate in the 2009/2010 academic year (SARUA: 2012), the highest being seven in 2008/09. Whilst there are plans underway to expand post graduate studies and numbers of students, available data paints a bleak picture on the production of the required research capabilities that the country would need for the future. Outside of the work undertaken by the Department of Economics at the University, there is very little to suggest that the universities are or will be, in the short-run, a source of adequate evaluation expertise.
75. The Department of Economics has a professional staff compliment of 11, with 9 at the PhD level. Compared to other University Departments, it currently has the highest number of PhD holders. Given this reality, the academics are generally sought after for analytical and research work commissioned by donors. The work should be channelled

through the Consultancy Bureau of the University, but this strategy has not worked in practice and lecturers tend to engage in their own consultancy work. The demand is seen to be high and lecturers have the opportunity to choose who to work for.

76. The University of Malawi has a Centre for Agriculture Research and Development (CARD) based at the Bunda College of Agriculture. This research based institute has full time professional staff members who engage in monitoring and evaluation of agriculture and natural resource based projects. CARD has a smaller staff compliment than CSR: five professional staff of whom three have PhDs. CARD provides training on short courses on monitoring and evaluation, unlike the Department of Economics. Two relatively new private Universities, the Catholic University and the University of St John the Baptist have introduced diploma level courses in monitoring and evaluation in 2013.

Evaluators and evaluation associations

77. It is not possible to establish the actual number of skilled evaluators within Malawi. However, during interactions with stakeholders, the individuals responsible for M&E within DP, government and local institutions characterised themselves as evaluators and generally held related titles. Given the general global growth in the area of M&E, a number of Malawian institutions have indicated that they intend appointing skilled individuals for M&E purposes for in the future.
78. Given that evaluation has not really taken root as an area of professional specialisation, it is hence not surprising that Malawi does not have a functional Evaluation Association. An attempt was made to launch such an association in 2012, but this initial momentum fizzled out. There are current efforts underway to re-establish a momentum for such an association and that it is likely that such a body will be established in the course of 2013 or 2014.
79. Besides the possibility of membership to the African Evaluation Association, individuals engaged with during the study process expressed an eagerness for the establishment of the association in order to drive awareness on evaluation and research to guide policy making in the country. Many also asserted that the association would provide a basis for enhancing local participation in evaluations undertaken and could be instrumental in promoting the development of relevant training and educational programmes.
80. A common observation from the key informants is that there is demand for evaluation services in the country and that existing suppliers, such as CSR, are unable to respond to the many requests. Whilst the sources of demand is still largely from within DP driven processes, the supply availability, at the level of corporate structures continues to be low, with the consequence that foreign organisations commission and contract out to individual consultants. According to the Department of Economics at the University of Malawi, the general perspective is that many of the evaluations conducted tend to be descriptive analyses that do not provide adequate sense or lessons on the achievements of particular interventions, nor can the reports themselves meet the standards of quality for publication in peer reviewed publications or journals.
81. Many evaluation interventions have no baseline data for identified indicators, rendering the exercise difficult to complete and of no real value. Data available from official statistical sources tends to be too general to be used in the context of narrowly defined interventions. Stakeholders have expressed that there is need to increase the uptake of

evidence in both policy and practice. There is also need for research results and findings to be robust, hence, raising the importance of triangulation especially on sensitive or contentious issues. These challenges and the opportunities for enhancing demand and supply are taken up in more detail in Box 4.

Box 4: Starter Packs/Targeted Input Programme

The proliferation of SWGs may not be adequate to resolve the perennial problem that both government and donors can look at recommendations from studies differently. For example, Malawi has become famous for the current Farm Inputs Subsidy Program (FISP) and the programme has been the subject of wider contestation and numerous studies by both government and donors. This case largely demonstrates that both government and donors cherry pick recommendations from research findings, for different reasons.

The Starter Pack (SP) program and its successor, the Targeted Inputs Program (TIP), were implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MoAI) for nearly five years. The main objective of the programme was to increase food security by giving smallholders in rural areas packs of fertiliser to grow adequate food to feed their families. Both Programs were funded by government and international donors - the World Bank, DFID and EU.

A large-scale M&E exercise was initiated between 1999 and 2002. This included an initiative to assess the impact of the programme. The research was commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and funded by DFID at a cost of USD 1.3 million. It involved 13 integrated modules – comprising nationwide surveys, participatory research exercises and a set of case studies. Technical support and supervision was provided by the Statistical Services Centre, University of Reading and Calibre Consultants.

The research found that provision of free inputs had positive impact on food security in Malawi, in particular during SP1 and SP2 when there was universal coverage. The Programme was capable of contributing an average of two to three 50 kg bags of maize per beneficiary household. In 2000, the additional maize produced (around 350,000 tonnes) was adequate to create a surplus at macro-level and keep maize prices low until the following harvest. The replacement of Starter Pack by TIP – with fewer beneficiaries and lower output per beneficiary – was a major contributing factor to the 2002 hunger crisis, when maize prices rose to roughly six times as high as the previous year.

In 2002, Government adopted the research recommendation to return to a universal Starter Pack, hence the TIP (a precursor of the current FISP), providing a pack of free inputs for every rural smallholder. In the 2002-03 season Government, with support from DFID and Norway, distributed two million packs in time for the rains. Government tried to obtain funding for a further one million packs, but progress was slow and distribution of the additional packs was too late for the planting season. Although government was keen to extend the programme on the basis of the positive evaluations, it generally ignored areas that did not contribute to building its wider popularity, such as crop diversification and the use of better quality seeds. On the donor side, including the World Bank, the UN agencies, the EU, DFID and USAID, indications were that there was an element of reluctance to discuss the research findings and their policy implications on aid flows. In particular, there was reluctance to appreciate, amongst others, the evidence on the effectiveness of free inputs as a transitional (medium-term) food security measure in the context of agricultural liberalisation in an extremely poor country.

Government easily adopted the recommendation to return to a universal Starter Pack and the reason was simply political imperative. The Starter Pack was highly popular in rural areas and probably contributed to the re-election of Muluzi in 1999, as his government was seen to be doing something about hunger. On the other hand, TIP – which involved scaling

down and targeting – was highly unpopular. Even those who received a pack under TIP thought that the programme was unfair and socially divisive. After the 2002 hunger crisis, continued targeting would have been political suicide. The reasons why government ignored the findings on sustainable agriculture are more complex and perhaps related to a well-funded international lobby organisation promoting intensive cropping of hybrid maize - Saskawa.

The donor community had its own share in ignoring research findings. Amongst others, donors stuck to their established perspectives on social interventions as key drivers for development and the general agendas developed by donors themselves on what interventions were appropriate to addresses deepening poverty in the country. This experience points to the importance of securing commitment to engage in the results of evaluations in an open and transparent manner.

4. Pathways, opportunities and challenges

82. This report sought to understand: (i) the conditions under which demand is generated for evidence; and (ii) the areas in which supply can be strengthened to meet and foster this demand. This report has shown that there are currently mainly latent and potential demands for evaluation in Malawi. The latent and potential demands are nested within the demands for evidence from principals and civil society in Malawi. At present, the demand is largely conditioned and driven by development partners. Supply could in the short-term be strengthened through existing civil society based organisations and the University of Malawi. A range of pathways relating to these twin challenges is identified in response to the main research questions below.
83. This study set out to understand the conditions under which demand is generated for evidence in policy and decision making and the areas in which supply can be strengthened to meet and foster this demand in Malawi. Demand has been weak and inconsistent largely due to a deeply rooted historical culture of patronage and fluid policies. On a positive note, the current government has taken positive steps to introduce a system of performance assessments where the definition and collection of indicators for monitoring will take a prominent role. Donors have become even more supportive in recent years, if the level of recent financial support the country has been receiving is anything to go by. Coupled with the positive space government is promoting on the use of evidence in management, the future for making use of research findings from evaluation seems promising. The main limitation that an absence of collated information makes reasonable estimates on the capacity for evaluative research difficult.
84. The drive into the future has to be predicated on the reality that patrimonialism will continue to shape policy discourse, implementation and indeed the nature and responsiveness to evaluations and analytical studies. National systems designed nearly ten years ago are still nascent. Key stakeholder roles are not well defined, nor are linkages across key public sector institutions strong. With a supportive policy environment, there is room in the future for the use of evaluative studies. Where evidence is provided from objective and undisputable scientific research, especially in fields such as health, there is usually willingness to make use of them. The current government is rolling out a results-based management system and this has opened up more space and opportunities for the use of evidence. The senior bureaucrats are likely to seize the opportunity to encourage monitoring and the collection of credible

administrative data in their institutions so as to provide quantitative data for assessments.

85. The clear areas for investment in order to promote evaluation capacity development in Malawi would have to involve investment in training and capacity building at the individual and institutional levels. Donors could, for example, promote the introduction of University level training in this area, support institutional development for evaluative research outside the public sector like the establishment of an independent evaluators association or its equivalent, strengthen linkages and the role of civil society to contribute to uptake of evaluative research.

4.1 Building the demand for evaluation

86. Even though the demand for evidence primarily centres on the collation of evidence to shape the distribution of patronage, to contest elections and for constituency distribution purposes, it provides a latent opportunity for enhancing the overall evaluation system. In addition, civil society and development partners have active spaces for articulating their perspectives, thus opening many for enhancing demand for evaluations. These opportunities and the challenges they embody for the future are elaborated below.
87. It is important that Malawian policy-makers and implementers own the research evidence needed for effective support and implementation. This is in contrast to the position where evidence is largely the property and domain of research providers, or sometimes lower level technocrats who try to introduce research findings in the system without much success. Ownership of the best available evidence can enhance its use and facilitate well informed decisions. In order to improve ownership and uptake of evidence, in both policy and practice, developing better, on-going interaction between evidence providers and evidence users is necessary and can be constructed on the basis of added engagement on establishing a common coordinative mechanism for evaluations that unfold on government programmes.
88. Malawi does not have regular and vibrant policy dialogue forums. The M&E Master Plan envisaged engagements with stakeholders, but efforts in this direction have been slow. Key informants observed that government has historically avoided such forums on the ground that they tend towards being politicised and are used as opportunities to criticise the ruling government. It may well be possible to introduce dialogue on the basis of substantive research and to establish such high level forums for simply sharing results of completed research of national value. There generally appears to be a sense of openness to wider engagements and learning, but limited investments are being made in efforts to foster dialogue on the basis of active research.
89. A further challenge for the research community in Malawi is to make research findings usable for the policy-making community. Research studies are not easily accessible documents to the busy bureaucrats and policy makers. Evaluation studies tend to be generated as complex documents that few are able to engage with. Beyond the production of Executive Summaries, there needs to be engagement amongst all parties to facilitate greater capacity for the communication of findings in a manner that would facilitate media and policy attention. Given the absence of active coordinating efforts

and leadership in this terrain this has not been an element of expressed concern but a reality observed by many commentators.

90. Malawi does face a key challenge on how to communicate evaluation research findings in order to influence policy and program design changes, despite the fact that some studies are commissioned by the institutions themselves – government, donors and civil society organisations alike. The strategies used to get research findings to their point of use involve both dissemination (providing information from the supplier outwards – using media, seminars) and the provision of access (libraries, websites, and other repositories of information which research users can get hold of). In some countries, institutional arrangements in the form of evaluation associations do help to serve as quick reference for locating suppliers and users of evaluation research. The apprehension at the higher levels to engage with complex research studies can be overcome if the studies are disseminated to fit in with the reality of existing capacity constraints. The fact that most policy makers will not engage with complex documents may not be unique to Malawi but what is important is to arrange appropriate packaging to reach the intended audience.

4.2 Strengthening evaluation through government agents

91. Government agents are central to the establishment of a workable and sustainable system for the evaluation of development interventions. The current system reflects a level of diffusion and unevenness in capability and commitment. Building the required capability for an integrated orientation takes time. Outside of the numerous challenges for enhanced capacity, there is system wide commitment for coordination, reflected in part by a growing interest with the establishment of centralised coordinative capacity and with the systems that have unfolded historically. The opportunities and challenges embodied in this space are captured in the paragraphs that follow.
92. There is need to distinguish people who are users of research-based evidence and those who are providers of research. It is not necessary for professional decision-makers and practitioners to be competent executors of research, but it is both reasonable and necessary for such people to be able to understand and use research results in their professional practice. An increasingly necessary skill for professional policy-makers and practitioners is to know about the different kinds of relevant research studies available in their area of work; how to gain access to them and how to critically appraise them. Without such knowledge and understanding it is difficult to see how a strong demand for research, let alone evaluative research, can be established and, hence, how to enhance its practical application. Joint training and professional development opportunities for policy-makers and analysts may be one way of taking this forward and for matching strong demand with a good supply of appropriate evidence.
93. In light of the fact that most studies are commissioned or funded by DPs, Malawi needs to establish an active forum or institution base for identifying research areas that would be important for the development of the country. This was somewhat envisaged within the M&E Master Plan but seems to not have been taken forward. Robust research into this area would be of prime importance and needs to be established by Malawians themselves. Good research will also require improving statistics at the National Statistical Office that are often seen as not regular, comprehensive and consistent. The NSO is aware of its challenges in this regard, but it does believe it is getting adequate

support from government and stakeholders to move in the right direction. The only real autonomy the NSO has is when to release survey results, but even that can sometimes be compromised with a strong interventionist government. The NSO also constantly confronted capacity problems as recruitments for replacements are beyond its control. A comprehensive up to date national statistical and administrative databank would reduce the costs of research in the country as time and resources for primary data collection would be reduced.

4.3 Building the wider supply system

94. Whilst there is some disconnect between supply and demand, there is general appreciation of capacities within civil society and on the need to enhance research capability across the country. Existing institutions and individual are overwhelmed with immediate demand, hence living little time for the building of institutions that could serve to enhance capacity at a wider level. Given the potential level of demand for the limited supply, the opportunities for enhancing capacity in this space is fairly wide and explored in the paragraphs that follow:
95. Malawi has a clear shortage of certified monitoring and evaluation training programmes. The public sector is known for high vacancy for professional staff, and is often as high as 50 percent due to low wages. The lack of quality training in M&E would also affect the quality of administrative data collected for implementing program and project interventions, and it is not surprising that some observers indicated that it is nearly impossible in the public sector to carry out impact evaluations of specific projects due to lack of data or its poor quality.
96. Although the MAMP would capture some of the information on completed studies, Malawi would benefit from a central repository of all types of research in the country, as long as it is of good quality, and these would be grouped into various fields of study in a databank. Depending on the costs and demand, it can be explored whether access would be free or not or a combination. There might also be incentives provided for individual researchers to deposit their research studies in such an arrangement. National or educational institutions libraries can be linked to such a repository, or they can be brought together in an arrangement to oversee this
97. There is a lack of professional or peer reviewed publications in the country. This makes it difficult to follow through developments in the local research community. The Malawi Journal of Social Sciences, the only peer reviewed journal for the University of Malawi, has of late been irregular, dependant often on the person who is the editor at the time. There is need to invest in such publications and resolve challenges that limit their availability.

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Appendix A: Interview list

No	Name	Position	Organisation
	Mr Williams Samute	Deputy Chief Secretary	Office of the President and Cabinet
2	MrLuckieSikwese	Principal Secretary, Public Sector Reforms	Office of the President and Cabinet
3	Mr Cliff Chiunda	Director, Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation	Office of the President and Cabinet
4	Mr Francis Zhuwao	Acting Director, Economic Affairs	Office of the President and Cabinet
5	MrTwaibu Ali	Deputy Director, Debt and Aid Management	Ministry of Finance
6	Ms Kate Msukwa	Principal Economist	Ministry of Finance
7	MsTiyamikeKanthambe	Debt and Aid Officer	Ministry of Finance
8	Mr Jimmy Kawaye	Program Manager, Joint Program Support for Monitoring and Evaluation	Ministry of Economic Planning and Development
9	Hon. Abbie Shaba	M.P., Budget and Finance Committee	Malawi Parliament
10	Ms Naomi Kitahara	Deputy Resident Representative	United Nations Development Programme
14	Mr Ernest Misomali	Assistant Resident Representative	United Nations Development Programme
16	Mr Peter Kulemeka	M&E Trust Fund Manager	United Nations Development Programme
17	Mr Patrick Kamwendo	MDGs Advisor	United Nations Development Programme
18	Dr A. Mwaba	Country Representative	African Development Bank
19	Mr Benson Nkhoma	Principal Water and Sanitation Specialist	African Development Bank
21	MrNysonChizani	M & E Specialist	UNICEF
22	MrAshish Shah	Evaluation and Results Advisor	DFID
23	Mr Stein TerjeVikan	Program Manager, Support to National Statistical Office	Norwegian Embassy
24	MrDalisoKubalasa	Executive Director	Malawi Economic Justice Network
25	Mrs Matilda Palamuleni	Director of Programmes	Ministry of Health
26	MrHeatherwickNjati	Director of Planning	National Aids Commission
27	Mr Davie Kalomba	Director of Planning	WaterAid
28	Mr Boyce Nyirenda	Acting Country Program Manager	Plan International (KalondolondoPrg)
29	MrSiphoJale	Quality Effectiveness and Learning Specialist	Plan International (KalondolondoPrg)
30	Mr C. Machinjili	Commissioner	National Statistical Office
31	Mrs Mercy Kanyuka	Deputy Commissioner	National Statistical Office
32	Dr A. Munthali	Director	Centre for Social Research, University of Malawi
33	DrMussa	The Head	Economics Department, University of Malawi
34	Prof Ephraim Chirwa	Managing Consultant	WADONDA Consult
35	Mr Allan Chintedza	Program Manager	Tilitonse Program