

Social Accountability in Social Protection in Malawi

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CIVIL SOCIETY SOCIAL PROTECTION NETWORK

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Background

- Irish Aid through ILO has been working with CSSPN on advocacy, budget tracking and social accountability
- In 2024, the CSSPN was funded to develop guidelines for civil society organizations to strengthen social accountability mechanisms. This was a response to recommendations which was made by two studies done in 2018 and 2020 commissioned by ILO , and UNICEF & GIZ respectively
- Both studies highlighted the importance of independent social accountability mechanisms where the beneficiaries are powerholders can engage each other for the betterment of service delivery
- Studies key findings included:
 - There were some forms of social accountability though impact was low
 - Civil society engagement was limited due to low interest
 - The mechanisms didn't guarantee privacy and security of complainants

Ntcheu Mission

- CSSPN wanted to test the tools in Ntcheu, but at the time it was learnt that UNICEF with funding from Irish Aid was implementing Harmonized Grievance Redress Mechanisms in Ntcheu.
- CSSPN contacted ILO, UNICEF and Ntcheu District council on the need to test the tools on the ground.
- Main objective of the mission was changed to:
 - Learn how the Harmonized Grievance Redress Mechanisms was designed and compare with the CSSPN guide
 - Review the set up of the structures and composition of the structures
 - Appreciate the tools being used
 - Gain insights from the members of the committees at all levels

Key Observations

- Composition of harmonized grievance redress mechanism committee has membership dominated by government agencies those related to implementation of social protection and law enforcement. It also has civil society representative.
- The committees were oriented on their roles but not on how each specific program was designed, the type of transfers beneficiaries get, level of benefits and frequency of transfers. This could have given them better understanding of potential cases and how they can be resolved.
- All members of the committees are volunteers. They are not paid salary for being members of the committees. This is good as it reduces the operational costs thereby making the system sustainable.
- At the time of this exercise, most committees were not trained and had not grievance register books. This delayed operations. They had no documented cases received, processed and referred.

Recommendations

- Review structure of the harmonized grievance redress mechanism committees to enhance independence. This can be done by ensuring that such structures should be civil society lead. Presence of government officers like the police, anti-corruption, social welfare already makes these structures lean towards implementers than beneficiaries
- Ensure that every committee should be trained on basic social protection focusing on design, objectives, transfers, frequency and payment mechanisms. This will contribute to making committees handle the cases in a human manner.
- Tools to be used should be simplified to speed up processing of the cases. They should be provided at the end of every training session after orienting them on how it works.
- Raise awareness of the structures in use so that the community is well informed of existence of such committees and how they process cases.

Why Civil Society Organizations?

- CSOs have a reputation for advocating for human rights, social justice, and accountability, making them credible leaders in grievance mechanisms.
- CSOs are independent from government and UN agencies, allowing them to remain impartial and unbiased in addressing grievances.
- CSOs can provide a neutral platform for stakeholders to voice their concerns, ensuring that grievances are addressed without fear of retribution or bias.
- CSOs often have established relationships with local communities, built on trust, credibility, and a deep understanding of community needs and concerns.
- CSOs can respond quickly to emerging grievances and adapt to changing community needs.
- By leading in grievance redress mechanisms on social protection, CSOs can ensure that the needs and concerns of marginalized communities are prioritized, and that grievances are addressed in a fair, transparent, and accountable manner.