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# Engaging and Strengthening Local Systems in Feed the Future Malawi



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# Feed the Future & Civil Society

“Feed the Future is strengthened by high-quality, gender equitable consultation and engagement with a wide range of more empowered civil society organizations in the field and the effective promotion of inclusive country ownership.”

- Feed the Future Civil Society Action Plan

<http://feedthefuture.gov/resource/feed-future-civil-society-action-plan#>

USAID’s Local Solutions Framework describes USAID’s overarching approach to **“transforming innovations and reforms into sustained development”** through increased and improved engagement with local systems.

- USAID’s Local Solutions Framework

<http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/LocalSystemsFramework.pdf>

# The Malawian Context

- Malawi suffers from serious capacity gaps that hamper civil society organizations (CSOs) from playing their roles as effective service providers and advocates.



- By partnering with local organizations, USAID/Malawi's FTF program builds on and strengthens existing structures, networks, and expertise, and facilitates sustainability.



# Feed the Future Malawi's Approach

FTF Malawi takes a multi-faceted approach to engaging and strengthening local systems:

1. Mission-wide program to provide local capacity development (LCD) to direct grantees and sub-grantees
2. Grants under contract with built-in capacity development for local partners
3. Direct award to a local organization



# Approach 1: Mission LCD Mechanism (STEPS)

- USAID/Malawi's Supporting the Efforts of Partners (STEPS) program strengthens the capacity of local organizations across the Mission's portfolio.
  - \$12.5 million over 5 years, funded by all technical offices.
- STEPS works with over 40 USAID direct grantees and sub-grantees, at least 7 of which are FTF partners.
  - Areas of support include:
    - Financial and program management
    - Organizational governance
    - Communications
    - Advocacy
    - Strategic planning
    - Fundraising





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## Approach 2: Grants Under Contract (INVC)

- Malawi's flagship FTF activity, Integrating Nutrition in Value Chains (INVC), uses a US prime partner to oversee implementation *and* strengthen the capacity of 7 local organizations that implement integrated agriculture and nutrition interventions through grants under contract.
  - \$26.6 million 5-year contract with about \$6.4 million (24% of budget) in grants to local organizations.
- *Given existing capacity gaps, grants under contract allows us to achieve ambitious FTF results while partnering with and strengthening local organizations.*



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## Approach 2: Grants Under Contract (INVC), continued

### INVC Works with an Array of Local CSOs:

- National Smallholder Farmer's Association of Malawi (NASFAM), Farmer's Union of Malawi (FUM), Catholic Development Commission of Malawi (CADECOM):
  - Organize and support farmers' associations from production to marketing, reaching more than 200,000 farmers in 7 districts



- Agricultural Commodity Exchange for Africa (ACE):
  - Provides structured trade (warehouse receipt systems, forward contracts, auctions) and financing for smallholder farmers





## Approach 2: Grants Under Contract (INVC), continued

### INVC Works with an Array of Local CSOs:

- Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET):
  - Conducts advocacy, particularly on legume value chains.
- Nkhoma Hospital:
  - Provides community nutrition messaging and services, primarily through Care Groups linked with community-based farmer's groups.
- Pakachere Institute for Health Development and Communication:
  - Does nutrition BCC, community drama, and radio programs and jingles around nutrition and nutrition-sensitive agriculture.





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## Approach 2: Grants Under Contract (INVC), continued

Transition Plan: Some local sub-partners should be ready to transition to direct awardees by end of contract (Oct. 2016)

- Prime partner conducts annual Organizational Capacity Assessments (OCAs) on local partners to measure change.
- We are exploring ways to also measure improved *performance* of local partners through the Organizational Performance Index (OPI). *Stronger organizational capacity does not necessarily mean capacity to achieve results and better serve farmers!*

How to determine readiness and eligibility for direct USAID funding?

- OCA and OPI scores
- INVC performance evaluation- looking at the capacity development process and how it has affected local partners
- USAID Office of Financial Management assessment of local partners



## Approach 3: Direct Award (MAPS)

- USAID/Malawi has a Cooperative Agreement with the Farmer's Union of Malawi (FUM) to implement the Malawi Agricultural Policy Strengthening (MAPS) activity.
  - FUM facilitates the increased participation of non-state actors (associations, private sector, CSOs, etc.) in the agriculture policy dialogue.
  - FUM will receive targeted capacity building support through STEPS to improve its organizational capacity and performance. FUM also receives capacity development assistance as a sub under INVC.

- **Delays in Implementation and Spending**

- Activities that rely heavily on local partners take longer to achieve results and often carry pipelines.
- As USAID and our partners learn and adapt, we are picking up the pace of implementation and spending, but this continues to be a challenge.
- There is definitely a tension between achieving quick results and LCD priorities:

*“When working through local partners, you cannot expect to really begin to see results until about Year 3.”*

*(Comment at USAID Local Solutions Summit in November 2014)*





# Key Challenges

- **Increased Demands on AOR/COR:** AOR/CORS of Local Solutions-focused activities spend extra time working with local partners. While challenging, this is also rewarding. It can be hard to find the time.
- **High Turn-over of Staff:** Staff at local organizations often leave soon after completing training on USAID award management.
  - *To deal with this, we have adapted our capacity development efforts to focus on strengthening systems rather than individuals, largely through the use of embedded advisors.*

# Key Challenges

- **Local Partners not Ready for Direct Awards:** After an assessment of INVC, which we intended to turn over to local partners through direct awards by end of Year 3, we learned that partners were not ready. *It takes 3 years for the partners to hit their stride and achieve results.*
- We have high hopes that with continued targeted capacity building, 2-3 local partners will be ready to become direct USAID awardees by FY 2017.



# Key Successes

- **Mentoring and Coaching:** On the job mentoring and coaching has proven to have a far greater impact on building stronger systems for organizations than classroom-based trainings for individuals.
  - Coaching high-level management in particular can have a major influence on the entire organization.



- **Community and Local Government Ownership/Buy-In:** Working with local organizations which are already well known throughout Malawi adds credibility and facilitates ownership, buy-in, and sustainability.

# Key Successes, cont.

- **M&E:** By having AORs/CORs and our M&E Specialist work closely with local partners, we have seen tremendous improvements in the quality of data and in the effort that our local partners now put into M&E.
  - FTF M&E is challenging for all partners, and especially those new to USAID! We have to make an extra effort with local partners.

**USAID** ATTENDANCE REGISTRATION FORM

FEED/FUTURE  
Improving Productivity  
in Your Country Through  
Innovative Agricultural Practices

EVENT NAME: INVC FIELD DAY in SOYA PRODUCTION (LOCAL LEADERS & CAP)

EVENT TYPE:  TRAINING  WORKSHOP  FIELD DAY; OTHER \_\_\_\_\_ (Tick where appropriate)

SECTOR:  Agriculture  NUTRITION

DATE(S): 05/04/2014 VENUE: NISAKET GAC DISTRICT: LEHLEBCHIT

ORGANIZING PARTNER NAME: NISAKET

No	Name	Sex	Organization	Position	Telephone Cell	Email	No of INVC Training workshop Exams attended	AG. LEAD. (1) Problem 2) Business & Other (3) Other	Signature or Thumb Print
01	Sakira Kushe	F	Uple	Chairman	-	-	3	0 2 3 4 5	<i>[Signature]</i>
02	Datum All	F	-	-	-	-	1	0 2 3 4 5	<i>[Signature]</i>
03	Sakira Wral	F	Ngibubwagne	member	-	-	3	0 2 3 4 5	<i>[Signature]</i>
04	Rose Mussa	F	Chingwade	member	-	-	1	0 2 3 4 5	<i>[Signature]</i>
05	Emara Kama	F	Ngibubwagne	member	-	-	1	0 2 3 4 5	<i>[Signature]</i>
06	Sakira Adams	F	Ngibubwagne	member	-	-	3	0 2 3 4 5	<i>[Signature]</i>
07	Aisha Mussa	F	Chingwade	member	-	-	2	0 2 3 4 5	<i>[Signature]</i>
08	Little Mussa	F	Ngibubwagne	member	-	-	3	0 2 3 4 5	<i>[Signature]</i>



# Key Takeaways

- *Be flexible and embrace adaptive management!*
- Mission staff must spend extra time with local partners to ensure they achieve results *and* become stronger partners.
- Providing long-term embedded advisors may be one of the most effective approaches and worth further exploring.
- Aspirational targets around # of direct awards do not always fit the reality. **A mix of direct and sub-awards is probably the best approach to meeting Local Solutions targets while achieving FTF results.**
- Direct awards to local partners should be highly focused, building on partners' areas of expertise and limiting risk.
- Always carefully assess risk vs. reward.



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**THANK YOU!**

**ZIKOMO  
KWAMBIRI!**

