Final evaluation CRS MALAWI WALA PROGRAM 2009-2014

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Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement (WALA) 2009-2014
A Title II MYAP Funded by USAID Food for Peace

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We sincerely hope that our findings, conclusions, and recommendations enable WALA to fine-tune its exit strategy in the coming months and guide future proposals of integrated food security and nutrition programs in Malawi, starting with the next round of Title II programs in Malawi (2014-18).

Finally, the team wants to acknowledge the important work conducted by two TANGO staff members: Lloyd Owen Banwart, who provided technical supervision to endline survey data collection and conducted processing and analysis and the quantitative bivariate and multivariate analysis related to the final evaluation, comparing baseline with endline results; and Monica Mueller, who has edited the main report and annexes.

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ACA	Agribusiness Community Agent
ACPC	Area Civil Protection Committee
ADC	Area Development Committee
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AgNRM	Agriculture and Natural Resource Management
ARR	Annual Results Report
ASP	Agribusiness Service Provider
CA	Conservation Agriculture
CAHW	Community Animal Health Worker
CATCH	Consortium Administration and Technical Capacity Hub
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CCFLS	Community Complementary Feeding and Learning Sessions
CDSO	Crude Degummed Soy Bean Oil
CGV	Care Group Volunteer
C-MIS	Consortium Management Information System
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
C-SAFE	Consortium for Southern Africa Food Security Emergency
CSB	Corn soy blend
CSI	Civil Society Index
DAHLD	Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
DCPC	District Civil Protection Committee
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EASPM	Economic Activity Selection, Planning, and Management
EI	Emmanuel International
EPA	Extension Planning Areas
FANTA	Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance
FEF	Farmer Extension Facilitator
FFA	Food for Assets
FFP	Food for Peace
FFW	Food for Work
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FISP	Farm Input Subsidy Program
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMP	Growth Monitoring and Promotion
GNI	Gross National Income
GoM	Government of Malawi
GVH	Group Village Head
HAS	Health Surveillance Assistant
HDDS	Household Dietary Diversity Score
HHN	Health, Hygiene, and Nutrition
HP	Health Promoter
HSA	Health Surveillance Assistant
IEC	Information, Education, and Communication
IEE	Initial Environmental Examination
I-LIFE	Improving Livelihoods through Increasing Food Security
IMPACT	Positive Action for Community Transformation
IPC	Integrated Phase Classification
IPTT	Indicator Performance Tracking Table
IR	Intermediate Results
ITT	Indicator Tracking Table
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
KII	Key Informant Interview
LOA	Life of Activity
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

MCHN	Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MDHS	Malawi Demographic and Health Survey
MoAFS	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoAHFP	Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning
MTE	Midterm Evaluation
MYAP	Multi-Year Assistance Program
NAC	National Aquaculture Centre
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PCI	Project Concern International
PG	Producer Group
PHHS	Post-Harvest Handling and Storage
PSP	Private Sector Providers
PVO	Private Voluntary Organizations
RFA	Request for Application
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
SFP	Supplementary Feeding Program
SO	Strategic Objective
TA	Traditional Authority
TLC	Total Land Care
TOT	Training-of-Trainers
TQC	Technical Quality Coordinator
TWG	Technical Working Group
U5	Under five (years of age)
VCPC	Village Civil Protection Committee
VDC	Village Development Committee
VHC	Village Health Committee
VSL	Village Savings and Loans
WALA	Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement
WDC	Watershed Development Committee
WILA	Water for Irrigation and Life Advancement
WMC	Water Management Committee
WOTR	Watershed Organization Trust
WVI	World Vision International

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Republic of Malawi is a landlocked country in southern Africa. The country has large freshwater resources and high agricultural potential. Climatic shocks affect the country frequently and constrain economic growth. As recently as 2004-2005, severe drought necessitated a costly humanitarian response to meet the basic food needs of an estimated 40 percent of the population.

In recent years, lack of crop diversification, poor yields, and dependence on rain-fed farming have been key factors in the deterioration of the food security situation. High population growth (over three percent) further contributes to increasing pressure for poor households to cultivate marginal and less fertile lands, particularly in densely populated districts in the south where food insecurity is the worst. Smallholder, rain-fed maize production is the predominant agricultural activity and the livestock sub-sector remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, poverty is widespread in the predominantly rural population.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Malawi began implementation of the Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement (WALA) program in July 2009, with an ending date of June 2014. This five-year USAID-funded PL480 Title II program is through Food for Peace (FFP) and implemented in the eight most food insecure districts in the south of Malawi. WALA is implemented by a consortium of nine Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) led by CRS Malawi as the grant holder. The seven implementing PVOs are Africare, Chikwawa Diocese, Emmanuel International, Project Concern International, Save the Children, Total Land Care, and World Vision International. Another partner, ACDI-VOCA, provides technical support on agribusiness.

TANGO International, Inc., a consulting firm based in Tucson, Arizona, USA, was contracted to conduct the final evaluation. The primary purpose of the final evaluation is to assess the program's overall performance under each of its specific Strategic Objectives (SOs). The evaluation took place during the fourth quarter of 2013, i.e., the second quarter of Year 5 of the program.

Objectives of the Final Evaluation

The objective of the final evaluation is to assess the impact of WALA program strategies and interventions implemented since June 2009 in achieving its three SOs and related intermediate results (IRs) in eight districts in southern Malawi. The evaluation assessed the program results and how program management and implementation affected and/or supported program achievements. This evaluation will inform future FFP and USAID development programming in Malawi.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Carry out a comparative analysis (bivariate and multivariate) of baseline and endline surveys[1] to assess the changes in the indicators (program result) as outlined in the indicator performance tracking table (IPTT);
2. Identify program strategies, structures, systems and interventions that contributed to or impeded the achievement of intended results of program interventions and links between inputs and results with gender focus;
3. Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of technical, managerial and resource management strategies;
4. Assess progress made in responding to the midterm evaluation recommendations
5. Assess the synergy between various WALA program components including linkages with Government of Malawi (GoM) and other development programs, and how the linkages enhance the program performance;
6. Assess the sustainability of the program outcomes;

[1] Baseline and endline survey reports and data sets will be made available, and these surveys were designed and implemented according to the FANTA/FFP guidelines.

7. List the major successes and challenges faced by the WALA program and how well these challenges were addressed;
8. Extract and report on lessons learned to inform future FFP program designs;
9. Make specific recommendations on improving strategies and program interventions for future programming and/or scale-up.

Design and Objectives

WALA is a five-year Title II Multi-Year Assistance Program (MYAP) funded by USAID to prevent and mitigate food insecurity in southern Malawi. WALA targets the most vulnerable communities and households, ensuring holistic provision of services to the selected groups. In the original design, targeted groups comprise households that have the following attributes: small and marginal farms, female-headed, host chronically ill persons (tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS), food insecure, and/or host orphans. WALA is implemented in the eight most food insecure districts of southern Malawi: Nsanje, Chikwawa, Thyolo, Mulanje, Zomba, Machinga, Chiradzulu and Balaka. CRS Malawi, through the Consortium Administration and Technical Capacity Hub (CATCH), has led the management and implementation of the program.

Goal: The goal of WALA is to improve the food security of 214,974 chronically food insecure households in 39 Traditional Authorities (TAs) in eight districts in southern Malawi by 2014 through strategic objectives in maternal and child health and nutrition (SO1); agriculture, natural resource management, irrigation, and economic activity (SO2); and disaster risk reduction (SO3). Each SO and its main corresponding activities are listed below.

SO1: Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN)

Target: 170,724 vulnerable households have improved MCHN status.
Main activities:

- Application of the Care Group model, a community-based health service provision strategy employed to increase the coverage and quality of health and nutrition services. All health and nutrition interventions below are implemented through this model.
- The Community Complementary Feeding and Learning Sessions approach is used to enhance the nutritional skills of mothers of children under five and pregnant and lactating women.
- Strengthening of the Ministry of Health (MoH) through capacity building, provision of resources, and collaboration in key activities.
- Strengthening the capacity of community-based organizations (CBOs[2]) to undertake and sustain development activities, such as village health committees.

SO2: Agriculture, Natural Resource Management (AgNRM), Irrigation, and Economic Activity

Target: 147,500 smallholder farming households have improved livelihood status.
Main activities:

- Formation of farmer groups or producer groups.
- Demonstration sites approach used to enhance agricultural production and promote improved farming practices, e.g., crop diversification, and watershed management.
- Small-scale irrigation, focusing on high-quality, nutritious crops, has been scaled up and integrated with other WALA components. Stream diversions for gravity systems and shallow wells for treadle pump systems are commonly utilized.
- Village Savings and Loans (VSLs) have been employed to increase household incomes and facilitate linkages with micro-enterprises in order to boost economic development.
- Farming as a business has been promoted through agribusiness groups by strengthening linkages between small-scale farmers and the private sector and helping farmers to take part in collective marketing.

[2] In this report, the term CBO is used to indicate any operational groups or formations often established and supported by the program in WALA Group Village Heads (GVH) and communities.

- Formation of livestock groups to boost the number of households with livestock including goat, pig, chicken, and fish.
- Strengthening the capacity of CBOs to undertake and sustain development activities, such as formation of water users committees and marketing clubs.

SO3: Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)
Target: 273 targeted communities have improved capacity to withstand shocks and stresses.
Main activities:

- Food safety net: provision of food aid to chronically ill beneficiaries who are targeted for other WALA interventions.
- Empowerment of communities on DRR and mitigation.
- Good governance elements such as the Participatory Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation exercises, and conflict management.
- Strengthening the capacity of local governance structures such as Village Civil Protection Committees (VCPC) and Area Civil Protection Committees.

The program has a number of crosscutting themes that include:

- Expanded knowledge management.
- Mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS into all WALA key activities.
- Gender mainstreaming in all key WALA activities.
- Environmental protection.

Main Evaluation Questions: Findings

IMPACT
To what extent did the program achieve the intended goal, objectives and results?

Title II programs typically combine strategies to improve maternal, child health, and nutrition status; improve livelihood status, to build up assets and strengthen resilience; and improve capacities of communities to withstand shocks and stresses (e.g., through DRR). Table 1 compares baseline and endline survey values for program population-based indicators, indicating percent change and whether or not the observed change is statistically significant.

Table 1: WALA population-based indicators, baseline to endline comparison

IPTT REF No	Indicators	2009 Baseline Survey	2013 Target	2013 End-line Survey	End-line Confidence Interval		2009 to 2013
					Lower	Upper	Difference
SO1: 170,724 vulnerable households have improved maternal and child health, and nutrition status							
1.1	**% stunted (HAZ < -2) children 6-59 months of age (Impact)**	**42.4%**	**36.0%**	**37.1%**	**34.9%**	**39.3%**	**-5.3*** **
1.2	**% underweight (WAZ < -2) children 0-59 months of (Impact)**	**17.6%**	**16.0%**	**11.3%**	**9.9%**	**12.7%**	**-6.3*** **
1.3	**% of children aged 0-59 months in Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) gaining weight in past 3 months (Impact)**	**59.6%**	**75.0%**	**72.2%**	**67.7%**	**76.7%**	**12.6*** **
SO 2: 147,500 smallholder farming households have improved livelihood status							
2.1	**Average months of adequate household food provisioning (Impact)**	**9.35**	**11**	**9.36**	**9.3**	**9.5**	**0.01**
2.2	**Average household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS) (Impact)**	**4.29**	**9**	**4.5**	**4.4**	**4.6**	**0.21*** **
SO3: 273 targeted communities have improved capacity to withstand shocks and stresses							
3.1	**% of household reported losses of livelihood assets due to shocks and stresses (Impact) (Population) (WALA) (GoM – MoAFS)**	**7.8%**	**8.0%**	**6.8%**	**5.9%**	**7.8%**	**-1.0**

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10, statistically different than the 2009 baseline point estimate

Improved Nutritional Status
Anthropometric measurements of children under five are considered a proxy for the nutritional status of the entire population. The quantitative data clearly show a marked improvement in chronic malnutrition and in underweight over the program period, with the target for underweight (11 percent) surpassed and that for HAZ (37 percent) almost achieved. This compares positively with the picture at national level: in the last Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) (2010), chronic malnutrition (HAZ) was estimated at 47 percent and underweight at 13 percent.

Household Food Access
Household food access is defined by USAID as the ability to acquire sufficient quality and quantity of food to meet all household members' nutritional requirements for productive lives. There are proxy measures of quantitative and qualitative aspects of food requirements. Both population-based indicators – household dietary diversity score (HDDS) and months of adequate household food provisioning (MoAHFP) – focus on the desired outcome of improved food access: improved household food consumption. Progress on both of these indicators between baseline and endline has been limited. The HDDS improvement was statistically significant – although well below target – while MoAHFP did not improve. It is important to note that the program, and the whole of Malawi for that matter, suffered two major shocks and stresses in 2012 (continuing into 2013). These incidents may help to explain these results as they had significant implications for people's ability to access food. The shock is related to the economic crisis, which saw price inflation in key producer and consumer goods after the 50 percent devaluation of the Malawian Kwacha (MWK) in May 2012. The April 2013 Malawi Price Bulletin from FEWS Net shows maize prices at markets throughout the country considerably higher for the 2012/2013 season (more than 300% higher in some markets) compared to the previous year and the five-year average. The stress is related to lack of and erratic rainfalls, which meant that farmers saw production fall for their main crops. In August 2013, FEWS Net reported increased food insecurity due to reduced crop yields because of a combination of flooding, prolonged dry spells and early cessation of rainfall during the 2012/2013 season and decreased production in the coming months. It is unfortunate that no data are available for individual years to be able to ascertain whether there is a trend, but it can be safely assumed that purchasing power has since significantly deteriorated (see also Section 3.1 comparing Gross National Income (GNI) data 2009-2013). It is important to consider that without WALA interventions, the negative impacts of these shocks and stresses on household food consumption could have been far worse, as suggested by endline data: for example, WALA households have an HDDS of 4.8 while non-WALA households have a HDDS of 3.9; similarly, WALA households have 9.5 months of adequate food provisioning compared to 9.1 months for non-WALA households.

How have WALA program activities improved the ability of program beneficiary households and communities to be able to mitigate, adapt to and recover from food security shocks and stresses?

Progress on the program's last population-based indicator (percentage of household reported losses of livelihood assets due to shocks and stresses) has been positive despite effects of the economic and climatic setbacks in 2012. This SO received approximately one-third of the WALA agriculture and health sector funding. WALA households report that they are better prepared for shocks because of increased savings (31.2 percent) and increased household assets (30.1 percent) relative to when the program began, compared to 20 percent of non-WALA households in both categories.

WALA uses a livelihoods framework and has incorporated into its design all three resilience capacities (i.e., absorptive, adaptive, and transformative). Thus, while the impact of WALA support may not yet be fully realized, the large investments made in capacity development of CBOs, community volunteers and facilitators and individual recipients of training and technical support are likely to lead to future benefits and increased resilience capacities.

BENEFICIARY SATISFACTION

How satisfied were beneficiaries with the program?

The interviews conducted with CATCH, PVOs, and beneficiaries in the field showed general satisfaction with the program. The immediate benefits to beneficiary households have been palpable under all SOs. These include the agricultural inputs, Food for Work (FFW), and safety nets for vulnerable groups (25,000 beneficiaries); technical support; and the establishment and strengthening of CBOs, which have obtained better prices for most participating farmers through collective purchasing of inputs and selling of outputs. There was also almost universal satisfaction with the VSL program, and general satisfaction with collective marketing experience. The comprehensive approach of Title II programs – focusing on all aspects of health, hygiene, nutrition, food production and marketing, and DRR has clearly changed many households' livelihoods for the better.

The program's main emphasis on skills transfer rather than handouts received criticism from some. It was observed that the safety net program was relatively small and could have been larger, particularly given the observed economic shock and drought conditions. Vulnerable households with chronically ill and orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) may not have benefitted as much as others from skills transfer activities due to multiple demands on their limited time and labor.

RELEVANCE

How relevant were program activities and beneficiary targeting, considering the needs of the target population?

The mission found that the Title II program design – a combination of MCHN, livelihood support, and DRR appropriate to the needs of the entire population – extended beyond the original target of assisting only chronically food insecure and very poor households. Most of the program is in technical support – without many free inputs – in Community Complementary Feeding and Learning Sessions (CCFLS), Care Groups and agriculture. This fits a self-selection approach that invites all who are willing to learn. In the future, it may be necessary to take specific account of the special needs of the very poorest and the most remote, tailoring approaches to these groups, and using other approaches with those who are not quite so disadvantaged. Special attention may be required on monitoring the very poorest groups supported by these program activities in their advances along a development pathway, from being dependent on safety nets to being included in CBOs focused on productive means (such as producer groups).

The pressure on land and vegetation by a large and growing population is an important factor that requires intensifying agricultural production while promoting local action for environmental protection. All activities promoted by WALA are thus relevant and appropriate for this context, including MCHN, agricultural production (Conservation Agriculture (CA)), post-harvest handling and storage, and collective marketing. All programs were developed together with, and were approved by the GoM. Implementation was conducted in close coordination with relevant ministries (e.g., Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and Ministry of Health).

EFFECTIVENESS

How effective were program activities and implementation?

Both the quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence of an overall effective program, although there was indication of some variation in performance on the ground. The final evaluation team attributes this variation to the following factors:

- Use of a volunteer extension system that generally lacks in-depth support, and where the success of on-the-job training depends very much on 1) the motivation and ability of individuals and 2) the support given by Farmer Extension Facilitators (FEFs) to lead farmers, and by Health Promoters (HPs) to Community Group Volunteers (CGVs);
- A self-help approach that is not popular with poor and very poor households – for some, due to lack of household members who are able to take advantage of program offerings;

- The gradual rollout of the program, which meant that communities were in different stages of implementation;
- Different PVO capacities, with differences in remuneration packages and, most importantly, differences in ratios of staff versus volunteers versus beneficiaries.

Successful implementation of the WALA model was usually observed in those communities that had frequent and consistent technical support over a three-year period, with implementation starting in the first two years of the program cycle. Based on baseline-endline comparisons and confirmed by observations and interviews in the field, non-WALA households generally saw smaller improvements in particular areas than WALA households.

The program design uses a volunteer extension system (through the Care Group and producer group models). This is an excellent strategy because it utilizes volunteers who work with their own communities and contribute to the sustainability of outcomes by retaining and passing on the knowledge and experience they have gained. However, it is clear that training needs to be on-going, with messages – especially complex ones – continually refreshed and revisited if the volunteers are to remain a useful resource for their community over the long term. The final evaluation team considers that insufficient resources have been made available to training and extension material to empower the agriculture volunteers. Moreover, volunteers' contributions – for five years in a row – should receive even more recognition in future programs through certificates and program identification items such as T-shirts, bags, umbrellas, etc. It is planned that WALA will provide certificates to HPs before program end, and this may extend to CGVs.

COORDINATION

How well did the program coordinate with other food security and humanitarian programming, with the host country government and with the donor?

The final evaluation team finds that WALA has overall provided a good example of program implementation through a partnership model. Partners include eight PVOs, CATCH, GoM, and USAID. Coordination and communication with other programs (some of which are similar in design) has been mostly through government-led sectoral committees, which have enabled the harmonization of extension approaches.

The program (mainly through CATCH but also individual PVOs) has coordinated its work well with the GoM, particularly at sub-national level: the location of CATCH outside the capital has reduced its potential reach and impact at the national level. However, excellent examples of collaboration with GoM include the collaboration on national guidelines for the sector in Conservation Agriculture (to be adopted before end of the program) and Community Animal Health Working Training Manual. In addition, WALA nutritionists have played an integral role in development of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) strategy for Malawi, providing technical support and sensitizing the MoH on the Care Group model.

SUSTAINABILITY

How sustainable are program outcomes?

The program has invested significantly in the establishment of, and technical and management support to, various CBOs. Some of these have good chances to be sustained over time. Examples include the Water User Committees, Watershed Development Committees, VSL groups, and VCPCs in areas frequently impacted by natural shocks (e.g., floods).

Others that are likely to be sustained over time include VSL groups and (possibly to a lesser extent) marketing clubs, where immediate benefits are to be expected. The outcomes in MCHN and AgNRM depend largely on a system of volunteers, supervised by more highly qualified and trained community members who usually receive stipends. Without this supervision, it is uncertain that many of these Care Groups or producer groups will continue to operate. On the other hand, some

level of sustainability was built in from the start, as these volunteers come from – and will stay in – their own communities.

The absence of good reference material for AgNRM will reduce the effectiveness of demonstration to additional smallholder farmers that would enable wider adoption of new technologies. Much of the infrastructure built under irrigation, watershed development and roads activities will be sustained for some time, particularly the structures that are linked to the CBOs, which can organize the community to maintain and repair them.

Finally, WALA is part of a broad effort to improve food security among poor and very poor households in southern Malawi. Programs with a similar design focusing on livelihoods and/or food security and nutrition have been implemented and are likely to be implemented in the future. As such, it is likely that a number of the WALA beneficiary households will receive some level of support in similar areas (e.g., MCHN, CA and VSL) in the future.

What exit strategies were incorporated into program design and what strategies were implemented?

Since the Midterm Evaluation (MTE), the program has prioritized and incorporated exit strategies into all components. Discussions with various beneficiary communities and partners have been conducted to generate exit plans. The GoM is rightly seen as a key partner to engage with for improving opportunities for continued support. WALA has engaged with the GoM from the start but the capacity of GoM to take over delivery of activities is limited. One example where partnership has worked is under SO2: some FEFs have agreed to continue as lead farmers in the national agricultural extension system.

WALA has specifically targeted some of the volunteers and retrained them as private service providers (e.g., Community Animal Health Workers). This provides them with income-generating opportunities that will give them an incentive to continue their work after the end of the program.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

How well were gender considerations integrated into program design and implementation?

WALA has had a gender strategy in place since the start of the program and has since produced guidance for each sector. However, the gender strategy does not include an in-depth contextual analysis of the situation specific to Malawi or the districts in which WALA is working. WALA's operational areas are varied and cover patrilineal, matrilineal, as well as both Muslim and Christian societies. A more comprehensive understanding of some of the important cultural differences between these groups in terms of gender could usefully inform program design and development.

However, "WALA was designed to ensure a greater role and involvement of women in economically productive activities and male involvement in health" (ARR FY13), and in terms of this limited goal, it has been successful.

How were HIV/AIDS and environmental issues addressed?

Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS

Overall, HIV/AIDS programming is mainstreamed well in MCHN activities and taken into consideration in SO2 and SO3 activities. WALA staff (SO1) work very closely with Positive Action for Community Transformation (IMPACT), with PVO staff usually sharing the same office space and coordinating well on promotional activities such as Community Health Days. In the majority of districts, health promoters make regular visits to HIV support groups to talk about nutrition and the importance of antiretroviral therapy, preventing mother-to-child transmission, growth monitoring and promotion for children and positive healthy living. They often work alongside clients and encourage members of HIV support groups to join WALA activities such as VSL and home gardens.

Referrals are made between HIV support groups and CGs. CGVs provide home follow-up to those affected by HIV and AIDS. In particular, the CG support and attention to growth faltering assists in early identification of children with HIV who need enhanced nutritional support and health care.

In terms of SO2, many aspects of conservation agriculture promoted by WALA are sensitive to the needs of people living with HIV, such as the minimum tillage and soil cover practices, which save hard labor and time in the field. In addition, intercropping and homestead gardens under the program support this population by providing foods that are more nutritious.

Under SO3, training in initial assessment to identify hazards, and interventions for preventing or reducing the impact of disasters, incorporates information on the effects of disasters on handicapped, ill, elderly, and other vulnerable people and how to mitigate negative impacts for these populations. The safety net program is specifically targeted to the chronically ill, elderly or those caring for OVCs. However, the evaluation found that the most highly vulnerable households appear to be less able to take advantage of group activities that are meant to facilitate transition out of safety nets support into more sustainable livelihoods.

Environmental Monitoring and Impact Mitigation
Overall, the program has performed very well on monitoring environmental impacts identified during the Initial Environmental Examination, as observed by the MTE and the final evaluation team. Relevant WALA activities include: (1) promotion of fuel-efficient stoves that emit less smoke; (2) watershed development; (3) mitigation measures in irrigation schemes; (4) applying water-catchment protection principles; (5) promotion of CA to reduce soil erosion and improve soil organic matter content; and (6) promotion of environmental protection measures by VCPCs.

Lessons Learned
Design/ implementation: Title II programs are comprehensive MCHN, household food security and DRR programs that typically target a large number of beneficiaries. WALA is no exception to this. This implies that implementation modalities for reaching beneficiaries should be fairly simple and straightforward. WALA has depended largely on community volunteers for delivery of various technical services to the final beneficiary. Future programs should be aware that sufficient extension materials should be made available at this level to maximize opportunities for success, and that sufficient incentives are needed to incentivize volunteers to undertake the work conscientiously for a number of years.

It is clear that extension module development needs to be prioritized early (e.g., five modules plus sessions on Supplemental Feeding Program and CCFLS) so that rollout is smooth and on time and does not cause lengthy delays in implementation. Moreover, the design and conduct of various training programs through a training-of-trainers system takes additional time.

Hygiene and sanitation interventions should include the entire community, as they are not specific to pregnant and lactating women and families with children under five, and given the role of men as decision-makers in communities (whether or not they are direct program beneficiaries). Improved orientation and engagement of village heads and Village Health Committees in these activities might lead to greater adoption of behavior changes across the community. The new MoH/SUN Care Groups (CLANS) will aim to engage the entire community in each targeted village, including youth, who are the parents of the future.

As to the AgNRM interventions, WALA should focus on fewer innovations and provide more in-depth support to their adoption. The design should be kept simple with focus on an extension program. Consideration should be given to allowing the communities some power of choice over which technologies they favor in order to increase chances for success with the chosen technologies.

Program Management: CATCH is a central support structure overseeing and guiding the

implementation of a standardized approach; it constitutes a separate administrative and management entity responsive to the donor, distinct from the CRS country office. This novel approach for Malawi has been considered a success and may be considered for future programs with several PVOs. Similarly, it has proven beneficial to the group that the technical leads are together in CATCH (in Blantyre), in close proximity to the field, which facilitates frequent face-to-face interaction between CATCH, PVOs, and partners such as the GoM.

Staffing: Frequent staff turnover has been a problem for WALA, in part due to the highly competitive labor market within Malawi and between development partners. The following lessons learned should be considered for future success: (1) a central recruitment function for CATCH staff would have aided efficiency in staffing; from the start (2) retention schemes should be implemented early in the program; (3) the outsourcing of technical support to service providers (such as with the irrigation component) may be more efficient/ effective than recruitment of individual experts.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): WALA did a very good job of designing and implementing an M & E system that tracked the quantitative indicators and provided the financial accountability requested by the donor. It also developed additional indicators to address qualitative issues, but they were not implemented in a way that provided systematic documentation of program quality. Given the donor's emphasis on tracking quantitative outputs and financial accountability, the emphasis on quantitative monitoring is understandable. On the other hand, monitoring program quality – including systematic documentation of what worked and how well, and what did not work – is vital because the depth and quality of interventions is crucial in determining sustainability of results. Systematic performance monitoring of quality, and building learning platforms for exchange with other programs (inside and outside USAID) should be a priority.

Summary Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions – SO1 MCHN

- SO1 was effective in offering a preventative approach to under nutrition while including responsive components (CCFLS and SFP) for children whose nutritional status is deteriorating.
- Key to its success has been the extended reach of the community-based Care Group implementation model, with knowledge, resources, and services accessible to all pregnant women and caregivers of under-5 children in the community. The focus on demonstration in CCFLS, on stoves, on hygiene and sanitation infrastructure, and the promotion of community-based GMP, are strong positive elements.
- Leadership for implementation has been largely delegated to health promoters and CGVs based in their own communities, which has contributed to community ownership and sustainability. WALA has greatly assisted the outreach capacity of the MOH.
- Nevertheless, the quantitative data suggest that the Care Group model may still have some way to go before it will achieve "saturation coverage" in WALA program areas.
- Engagement with the district-level MOH has been strong, but varies at field level. This is largely attributed to WALA's broad geographical reach, combined with a lack of financial resources and time to train and incorporate all HSAs in the program areas or extend orientation to VHCs.
- The MCHN sector has had inadequate responsibility for ensuring strong performance of SFP within WALA, and this activity, largely delegated to the commodities team for oversight of food distribution, has been poorly structured and implemented.

Recommendations – SO1 MCHN

- PVOs should start in all sites in the first two years rather than use phased expansion. This would enable consistent rollout of modules, provide sufficient time to adopt behavior changes, and facilitate Care Group graduation and MOH-supported handover in Year 5.
- Greater engagement of the MOH should be sought from the start of the program to ensure ownership, inclusion of HSAs/ VHCs in activities and training, and effective and timely handover.

- Availability of water for hygiene, sanitation, and kitchen gardens and safe water for household consumption were emphasized as key constraints to program implementation and impact. A future program should incorporate interventions to improve access to safe water.
- WALA should assume greater responsibility for providing technical support to the MOH in SFP, as well as ensure effective performance monitoring of sites where it is distributing SFP food. Ideally, oil and CSB should be pre-mixed prior to distribution to ensure the child receives the correct ration and that oil is not diverted into the household pot.
- CGVs should be recognized for their work and commitment and rewarded with small incentives over the course of the program, including bags, occasional drinks at meetings, and certificates.

Conclusions – SO2 Agriculture and Natural Resource Management, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming

- The package of WALA interventions, such as promoting improved seed varieties, crop cultivation and soil conservation technologies linked to CA, is relevant and appropriate, while there is a clear limitation to its expansion based on shortage of feeder and mulching material.
- The AgNRM component started during the first year but did not progress well due to TQC changes. As a consequence, PVOs initially lacked strategic guidance.
- The sheer breadth of AgNRM activities to implement has stretched WALA's capacity on the ground, which reduced potential impacts on program targets.
- The volunteer extension system is an excellent strategy but WALA has not invested enough in training and IEC material for volunteers, which has led to an inability to maximize opportunities for knowledge transfer and adoption of promoted technologies and behaviors.
- Equity is an issue with different support packages provided to different WALA communities and households.
- Results are mixed. Some progress has been made in areas such as irrigation and the adoption of new technologies, but their contribution to overall food security status is limited. The 2012 crop failures in southern Malawi and the economic crisis likely had a significant effect on the results.
- Behavior change has been slow, particularly the adoption of certain promoted CA technologies.
- Staff changes at CATCH and PVO, including changes to TQCs, have negatively affected the rollout and coherent vision for program priorities.
- Lead farmers, who are volunteers, have received too little support from WALA to become real agents of change benefitting other smallholder farmers.
- Technical manuals have been produced but simple extension tools to help the learning process on the ground (posters, leaflets, drawings) are missing.
- A lack of inputs after the first year may have led to a decrease in the effective use of demo plots. The use of demo plots is a practical solution for engaging volunteers, although it leads to decreased visibility of promoted technologies.

Recommendations – SO2 Agriculture and Natural Resource Management, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming

- WALA should focus on fewer innovations and provide more in-depth support to their adoption. The design should be kept simple, focused on extension and communities should be allowed some choice over technologies.
- In addition to site-specific irrigation technologies, WALA should consider other technologies such as drip irrigation and garden sacks.
- A workshop is suggested to discuss the impact and sustainability of various WALA models to enable future Title II programs that build on experiences and lessons learned from WALA.
- It should become a priority to develop extension material (e.g., simplified messages from the CAHW training manual) for the next phase of Title II programs, or by the GoM.
- Outsourcing of essential technical backstopping (similar to support provided under Agricane) may be considered if dependence on individuals becomes a risk to achieving results.

Conclusions – SO2 VSL and Agribusiness

VSL

- VSLs are popular and successful, and most targets have been met or almost met.
- The target number of men in groups has not been met. However, men are interested in the VSLs and their absence from meetings does not detract from its reach or effectiveness.
- PSPs are providing a needed service. The system should ensure that the PSPs remain motivated to continue and expand their work with the groups and be motivated to start new groups.
- Networks have been established, but will need some kind of technical backstopping in the future.
- The very poorest households, which are supposed to be a focus of the program, may not be able to benefit from this activity even though the value of shares is already very low in some VSLs.

Agribusiness

- The agribusiness activities have made an important contribution to the income of participating farmers in terms of improved prices from collective marketing and reduced costs through collective purchase of inputs.
- The proportion of group member farmers participating in collective marketing is a little lower than targeted but the final evaluation team does not consider this a serious issue. Collective marketing is less successful in remote areas.
- Some of the collective marketing disappointments have helped farmers appreciate the risks involved in working with the market and the need for caution when dealing with buyers.
- In general, caution needs to be exercised when creating expectations amongst farmers. Where risks are involved, they need to be made clear.
- It would have been preferable if WALA had included a greater number of buyers in its activities so it could reduce reliance on those few with whom it had built relationships.

Recommendations – SO2 VSL and Agribusiness

VSL

- The program should follow up on leads to establish long-term technical backstopping for the VSL PSP networks.
- It may be appropriate to remind some of the VSL groups as to why some best practices, such as maximum individual loan amounts, are recommended, and encourage them to be followed.

Agribusiness

- WALA should continue to work to find an entity that can organize the marketing fairs in future.
- WALA should continue to work hard to train the ASPs and ensure their comfort within their scope of work and their income-earning activities before the withdrawal of the program.

Conclusions – SO3 Disaster Risk Reduction

- WALA's focus on DRR is highly appropriate, given frequent disasters that are major contributors to chronic food insecurity and persistent poverty in southern Malawi.
- Overall, WALA has performed well under SO 3. The program has built community capacity in disaster preparedness and response, strengthened linkages among GoM DRR mechanisms, provided reliable safety nets to the most vulnerable households, and has facilitated the construction of infrastructure that has positive economic and environmental impacts.
- The delayed start to DRR activities means that many VCPC groups have not had adequate time to build strong capacity or to change the perspective on DRR in their communities.
- Sustainability of WALA-supported VCPCs depends in part on continuing support from the GoM. The new national DRR policy provides funding for preparedness and response and WALA VCPCs should be well positioned to take advantage of the small grants scheme under the new policy.
- The poorest households and most vulnerable households may find it difficult to find the time to broaden their participation in other WALA activities as intended without additional support.

- The FFW activities are appropriate and play an important complementary role in DRR and in improving productivity in communities.
- The combination of defined criteria for participation and community-based targeting that appears to work well in some of the communities, but does not appear to be applied by all communities.

Recommendations – SO3 Disaster Risk Reduction

- Prior to exit, ensure that VCPCs have the necessary skills to apply successfully to the small grants scheme that will be funded under the new national DRR policy.
- Refresher training should help VCPCs find ways to identify and incorporate new information into their repertoire to maintain community interest in their message.
- Keep DRR as an integrated activity but provide for a separate budget for training and community-based risk reduction activities, as well as training materials.
- If funds are inadequate to carry out activities, focus on more disaster-prone areas.
- Prior to program exit, increase the number of DRR training manuals provided to ACPCs.

Safety Nets

- The next program should consider significantly increasing the number of safety net beneficiaries, especially the chronically ill.
- The program should consider additional technical and material support to safety net beneficiaries to help them take advantage of other program activities that will reduce their vulnerability.

Food for Work

- Work with FFW communities on formulating infrastructure maintenance plans that have an organized approach to maintenance, articulating roles, responsibilities, and a timetable, especially with regard to roads.

1. Introduction

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) began implementing the Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement (WALA) program in July 2009. This five-year USAID-funded PL480 Title II program funded through Food for Peace (FFP) and implemented in the eight most food insecure districts in the south of Malawi will end by June 2014. WALA is implemented by a consortium of nine Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) led by CRS Malawi as the grant holder. The seven implementing PVOs are Africare, Chikwawa Diocese, Emmanuel International (EI), Project Concern International (PCI), Save the Children, Total Land Care (TLC),[3] and World Vision International (WVI). Another partner, ACDI-VOCA, provides technical support on agribusiness.

TANGO International, Inc., a consulting firm based in Tucson, Arizona, USA, has been contracted to conduct the final evaluation of the program. The primary purpose of the final evaluation is to assess the program's overall performance under each of its specific Strategic Objectives (SOs). The evaluation took place during the fourth quarter of 2013, i.e., the second quarter of the fifth year of implementation.

This report describes the background and context of the program; main objectives of the exercise; its methodology, which includes a quantitative endline survey and qualitative data collection; main findings regarding program achievements and challenges; and recommendations to be considered for future programs of similar scope. A compendium of annexes accompanies this narrative report.

2. Objectives and Methodology

2.1 Objectives of the Final Evaluation

The objective of the final evaluation is to assess the impact of WALA program strategies and interventions implemented since June 2009 in achieving its three SOs and related intermediate results (IRs) in eight districts in southern Malawi. The evaluation assessed the results of program and how the program management and implementation affected and/or supported program achievements. This will inform future Food for Peace and USAID development programming in Malawi.

The specific objectives were:

1. To carry out a comparative analysis (bivariate and multivariate) of baseline and endline surveys[4] to assess the changes in the indicators (program result) as outlined in the indicator performance tracking table (IPTT);
2. To identify program strategies, structures, systems and interventions that contributed to or impeded the achievement of intended results of program interventions and links between inputs and results with gender focus;
3. To assess the effectiveness and efficiency of technical, managerial and resource management strategies;
4. To assess progress made in responding to the midterm evaluation recommendations
5. To assess the synergy between various WALA program components including linkages with Government of Malawi and other development programs (e.g., Positive Action for Community Transformation (IMPACT), Water for Irrigation for Life Advancement (WILA), MCHN+), and how the linkages enhance the program performance;
6. To assess the sustainability of the program outcomes;
7. To list the major successes and challenges faced by the WALA program and how well these challenges were addressed;

[3] Replacing the Salvation Army from the original proposal.
[4] Baseline and endline survey reports and data sets will be made available, and these surveys were designed and implemented according to the FANTA/FFP guidelines.

8. To extract and report on lessons learned to inform future Food for Peace program designs;
9. To make specific recommendations on improving strategies and program interventions for future programming and/or scale-up.

Additional evaluation questions were included in the Scope of Work (Annex 2) and have been reworked in an evaluation matrix (Annex 3). These key questions were used for developing individual tools and protocols. Annex 4 provides a summary of responses to key questions. A matrix of key questions asked of key respondents is presented in Annex 5 followed by a schedule of key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Annex 6. Details on the evaluation approach, methodology, and study limitations are in Annex 7.

3. Overview of the Programmatic Context and Implementation

3.1 Vulnerability Context

The Republic of Malawi is a landlocked country in Southern Africa. The country has large freshwater resources and high agricultural potential. Climatic shocks affect the country frequently and constrain economic growth. As recently as 2004-2005, severe drought resulted in a costly humanitarian response to meet the basic food needs of 40 percent of the population. Other challenges include high population density and growth, a single annual rainy season, and environmental degradation (e.g., soil degradation and deforestation).

Lack of crop diversification, poor yields, and dependence on rain-fed farming are key factors in worsening food security in recent years. High population growth (over three percent, per current estimates of the National Statistics Office) further contributes to increasing pressure for poor households to cultivate marginal and less fertile lands, particularly in densely populated districts in the south where food insecurity is the worst. Smallholder rain-fed maize production is predominant and the livestock sub-sector remains underdeveloped. Poverty is widespread in the predominantly rural population.

Figure 1: Current estimated food security outcomes, July 2012, per FEWS NET

Small average landholdings and significant deforestation have also dramatically diminished Malawi's soil productivity due to increasingly intensive cultivation and soil erosion. Climate change threatens to further exacerbate these factors. Deforestation linked to unsustainable use of biomass fuel and traditional agricultural land-use practices is eroding the country's progress.

Food Availability

Between 2006 and 2010, the country experienced bumper crops for maize due to favorable climatic conditions, an expansion of areas under cultivation, and an input subsidy scheme that has reached a very large number of smallholder farmers (see text box on FISP, below). Malawi's agriculture Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by six percent during those years. Key economic indicators, including inflation, tax rates, and domestic and external debt levels, have remained stable throughout this period (FTF 2011). The prevalence of undernourished in Malawi (the official Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 hunger indicator) has also seen a gradual decline over time, from 46 percent in 1992-1994 to 28 percent in 2003-2005 and 20 percent for 2011-2013.

The country – and particularly the southern parts of Malawi – has seen worsening conditions since 2012. The FEWS Net-supported Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) maps provided in Annex 8

provide an overview of the food security conditions for the period when WALA has been operational (2009-2013).[5] This time series shows levels of moderate food insecurity in some districts in the south throughout this period. The worst conditions seem to have started in 2012 (Figure 1), which saw large parts of the south with reduced harvests due to late and erratic rains. These "stressed"[6] conditions are shown to have continued throughout 2013 as well. Conditions are expected to improve again with the next main harvest (from April 2014) based on good rains forecasted for the current rainy season. The IPC maps further indicate that without humanitarian assistance in the past two years the IPC classification would have deteriorated to the level of "crisis" (IPC Phase 3) for much of the south and for other parts of the country as well.

The combination of less favorable weather conditions in 2012 coincided with the devaluation of the Kwacha by almost 50 percent and with GoM President Banda's decision to decouple the currency from the US dollar in May 2012 to kick-start the Malawian economy. Subsequently, the costs for all essential goods rose dramatically due to increased prices for imports such as fuel. This has been a challenge for poor households that have limited scope for diversifying income opportunities. The deterioration in living standards is likely to have reduced any of the positive outcome and impact of the WALA program such as household food provisioning and people's ability to purchase inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizer bags, and tools.

Farm Input Subsidy Program (FISP)
Malawi has won international recognition for its implementation of the FISP introduced in 2005. The program aimed to ease financial constraints of poor smallholder farmers to enhance their productivity and household food security status. Farming households received vouchers for 100 kg of fertilizer, 2 kg of hybrid maize seed or 4 kg of open pollinated maize seed. Others received legume seed. The number of households receiving fertilizer coupons has averaged 1.7 million since the program's introduction. The FISP is an expanded version of the Starter Pack Programme, implemented between 1998-1999 and 2004-2005 with support from international development partners. In 2012, following the devaluation of the Kwacha and the subsequent economic downturn, only 1.4 million farmers received vouchers while only 140,000 metric tons of fertilizer was purchased for distribution – a reduction of 30,000 tons from the year before.

Source: AfDB report 2011; IFPRI Discussion Paper (2012); IRIN (2011)

Food Access
As most smallholder farmers are dependent on rain-fed production and rainfall is erratic, 60 percent of farmers are dependent on food purchases in the market. While most stakeholders have seen FISP as generally very successful, the economic crisis has also had detrimental effects on the ability of the GoM to purchase inputs and reach out to farmers. The program decreased in size in recent years, with farmers having greater difficulties accessing agricultural inputs. This resulted in a below-average 2012 cereal and cash crop production in southern Malawi. Reduced crop production limits household food stocks and informal on- and off-farm labor opportunities (*ganyu*). Moreover, stricter border controls imposed on migration to Mozambique have also likely limited labor income further.

The devaluation of the Kwacha in 2012 has resulted in high retail prices for maize, driven in part by the impact of currency devaluation. The southern region is particularly affected, as it is a deficit area that receives most of its food from central and northern Malawi. Therefore, transportation costs (which increased by more than 30 percent) play an important role in determining cereal prices (FEWSNET Web site 2013). The effects can be observed in Malawi's Gross National Income (GNI)

[5] The IPC is a set of standardized tools that aims at providing a "common currency" for classifying the severity and magnitude of food insecurity, and is used in many African and Asian countries. For more information, see www.ipcinfo.org. Additional details about food security in Malawi can be found at http://www.fews.net/pages/country.aspx?gb=mw
[6] "Stressed" is the descriptor for Phase 2 (of five phases) in the IPC. Higher-number phases indicate higher levels of food insecurity.

per capita, which steadily increased from USD320 in 2009 to USD340 in 2010 and USD360 in 2011 but reverted to 2009 levels in 2012 (World Bank 2013).

Markets
In general, markets for staple crops function poorly, especially for maize, and lead to high seasonal variation in staple food prices and decreased productivity. With only small percentages of maize reaching the markets, small changes in the quantity of grain traded have a major impact on prices. When yields are high, farm gate prices are often low and may not be sufficient to cover costs of production; when yields are low, subsequent high prices can prevent adequate household consumption (FTF 2011).

Food Utilization
The toll of food insecurity in Malawi manifests most significantly in the poor nutritional status of its children. Nearly half of Malawian children under five years of age are stunted, indicating a high level of chronic malnutrition.

The diet of Malawians is mainly composed of cereals, primarily maize, starchy roots (cassava and potatoes) and starchy fruit (plantain). Fruits and vegetables complement the diet. Overall, dietary energy supply is barely sufficient to meet population energy requirements and more than a third of the population is undernourished. Moreover, the diet lacks diversity and is poor in micronutrient-rich foods (FAO Malawi Country Profile 2013).

The HIV/AIDS epidemic, infectious diseases, malnutrition, and limited access to basic health care are among the major factors contributing to high infant and under-five mortality rates. The maternal mortality ratio remains very high: 675 per 100,000 live births (MDHS 2010). In the context of high morbidity and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, access to health services is still limited, and the lack of material and human resources further constrains the quality of services (AfDB 2011). While the country is on track to meet the MDG on child mortality and has managed to reverse the trend on HIV/AIDS, Malawi is off track on three MDGs: universal primary education, maternal health, and gender equality and women empowerment.

3.2 Program Description

Program History
WALA is the successor of another Title II development assistance program entitled: "Improving Livelihoods through Increasing Food Security" (I-LIFE) that was implemented from October 2005 – June 2009, led by CRS and CARE. A number of successful interventions and approaches that were piloted and refined under I-LIFE – including Village Savings and Loans (VSL) (though with the Private Sector Providers (PSP) approach; see below), the Care Group approach (see Annex 9), and the interventions associated with irrigation – were incorporated into the WALA design. While carrying over the successful interventions, WALA shifted the geographic focus to the eight southernmost districts not covered by I-LIFE, where food insecurity was estimated as most acute.[7] Five of the WALA PVOs were already members of the I-LIFE Consortium and thus provided necessary institutional memory.[8]

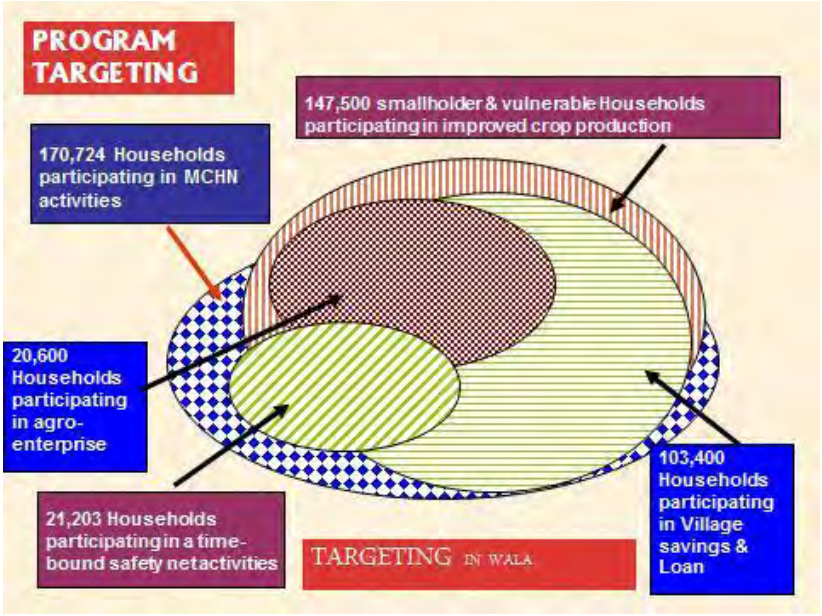
While WALA has integrated lessons learned from I-LIFE, its roots can be traced back further to the program implemented in Malawi (and neighboring countries) by the Consortium for Southern Africa Food Security Emergency (C-SAFE). C-SAFE responded to the immediate food security crisis with targeted food assistance to vulnerable groups, including households affected by HIV/AIDS. Transitional interventions focused on Food for Assets programming to build productive assets at the household and community level. The C-SAFE membership included World Vision International, EI, Catholic Relief Services, CARE, and ADRA. C-SAFE was also funded by USAID FFP.

[7] One of the eight districts (Thyolo) was covered by I-LIFE WVI. However, the WALA program is located in different areas (Traditional Authorities).
[8] CRS, Save the Children, EI, Africare and WVI.

Program Description
WALA is a five-year Title II Multi-Year Assistance Program (MYAP) funded by USAID to prevent and mitigate food insecurity in southern Malawi. WALA targets the most vulnerable communities and households, ensuring holistic provision of services to the selected groups. In the original design, targeted groups are comprised of households that have small and marginal farms, are female-headed, host chronically ill persons (tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS), are food insecure, and/or host orphans. WALA is implemented in the eight most food insecure districts of southern Malawi: Nsanje, Chikwawa, Thyolo, Mulanje, Zomba, Machinga, Chiradzulu and Balaka. CRS/Malawi, through the Consortium Administration and Technical Capacity Hub (CATCH), has led the management and implementation of the program.

Goal: The goal of WALA is to improve the food security of 214, 974 chronically food insecure households in 39 Traditional Authorities in eight districts in southern Malawi by 2014 through strategic objectives in maternal and child health and nutrition (MCHN) (SO1); agriculture, natural resource management (NRM), Irrigation and Economic Activity (SO2); and Disaster Risk Reduction (SO3).

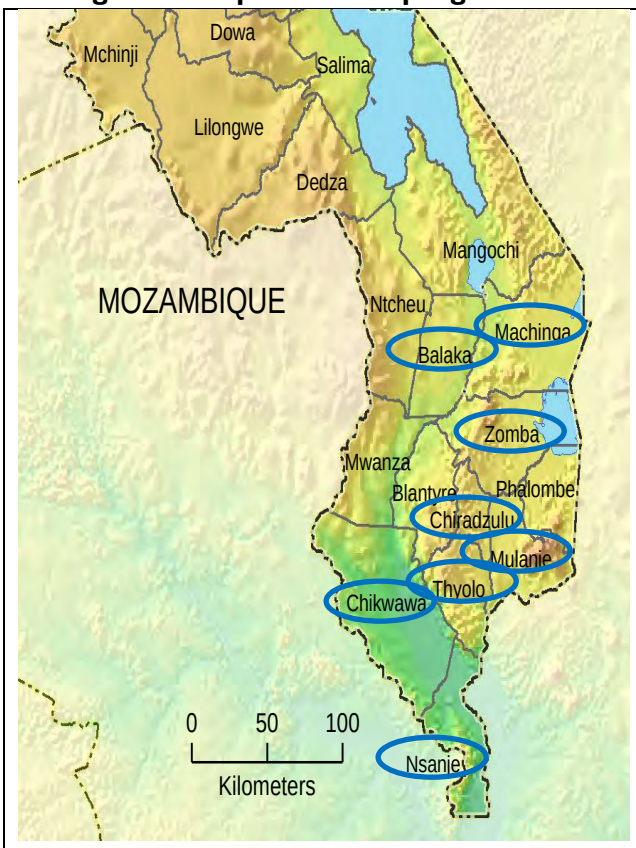
Figure 2: WALA program targeting of communities with multiple interventions



3.3 Targeting

The WALA program has targeted 215,000 chronically food insecure households in 39 Traditional Authorities within five livelihoods zones and eight districts in southern Malawi (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Map of WALA program areas and implementing PVOs



District	Implementing PVOs
Balaka	Project Concern International
Machinga	Project Concern International Emmanuel International
Zomba	Save the Children Emmanuel International
Chiradzulu	Save the Children
Mulanje	Africare
Thyolo	World Vision
Chikwawa	Chikwawa Diocese
Nsanje	Total Land Care

The program has no uniform targeting strategy, which was also noted in the midterm evaluation. Beneficiaries and beneficiary households are targeted differently under each SO. Table 2 summarizes beneficiary types by SO and the numbers that the program has been able to reach.

Table 2: WALA beneficiary summary as of November 2013

IR or SO 1.1	Type of Beneficiary	Total Beneficiaries through FY13	Breakdown by Sex	LOA Target
IR 1.1 Practices	Households with pregnant or lactating women and children U5	152,550 HH	NA	170,724
IR 1.2 Services		152,550 HH and 206,700 children U5	NA	170,724
SO 1 MCHN		152,550 HH	NA	170,724
SO 2 ANRM		153,622 HHs*		147,500
IR 2.1 Crop Production/ Irrigation/ livestock, etc.	Initially only smallholder farm households with <1 hectare of land, later opened up to all.	116,400 HHs	67,290 women and 49,120 men	147,500
IR 2.2 Financial	Initially only smallholder farm	92,710 HHs	62,470 women and 27,240 men	103,400

Services	households with <1 hectare of land, later opened up to all.			
IR 2.3 Marketing	Smallholder farm households with less than one hectare of land	27,210 HHs	-	20,600
SO3 DRR	Communities	251	NA	273
IR 3.1 DRR	Individuals trained	7560	3,400 women and 4,120 men	-
IR 3.2 Food Distribution	Individual food recipients	FY10: 8,220; FY11: 17,055; FY12: 17,145; FY13: 8,409	FY13: 4,600 women and 3,815 men	8,197 (annual safety net target)
Program Total	**Chronically food insecure households**	**226,580 (IPTT ARR 2013)**	**NA**	**214,970**

*This figure includes HHs in PG or VSL or irrigation or marketing or livestock (source: November 2013 data file).

Note that:

- SO1 targets *all* pregnant and lactating women and children under five years of age without regard to their socio-economic status, as health, hygiene, and nutrition (HHN). Behavior change is envisioned for all households, not just the poorest ones.
- The Supplementary Feeding Program under WALA was targeted based on referrals from clinics, hospitals, or Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) in the community;
- SO2 (Agriculture and NRM plus VSL) initially targeted smallholder farmers owning less than one hectare of land but have opened up participation to all farming households that are willing to engage in WALA activities.

In short, the program has moved away from specific targeting of the chronically food insecure (and very poor) to allow enrollment of all people from targeted communities. There is a lot to say in favor of this approach, particularly given that a large majority (approximately 90 percent of the population) is considered either *poor* (<USD2.5 per day) or *very poor* (<USD1.5 per day), so the income inequality is low. Moreover, the participation of poor households in WALA does not take away significant levels of input support from the *very poor* as it promotes behavior change through transfer of knowledge. Ultimately, the activities undertaken by WALA are also very suited to the *poor* farmers as they learn about technological innovations in crop cultivation and soil conservation, and are offered an opportunity for better market linages. The safety net element in WALA is relatively small; rather, the emphasis is on building local capacities to be more productive (e.g., by using improved seed varieties) and to become more resilient in the face of several risks to which Malawi is vulnerable (slow-onset disasters such as droughts and fast-onset disasters such as floods). WALA beneficiaries benefiting from VSL have a wide range of income levels, although the poorest families, with minimal or no cash income, have little to save and are less likely to be able to take part. The program elements that remained true to their original target are the Food for Work/Food for Assets (FFW/FFA) schemes and safety net/ emergency food rations.

WALA vs. Non-WALA

WALA is a community level project, and the associated quantitative survey was population-based. In tables providing analysis at the WALA and non-WALA disaggregation, this specifically refers to

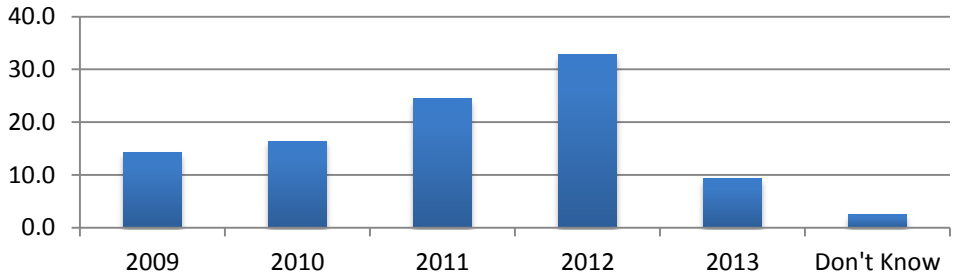
households that have a WALA CBO Member (WALA) and households that do not have a WALA CBO member (non-WALA).

3.4 WALA Implementation Experience

This section discusses participation in WALA as reported by participants in terms of the timing of first engagement in WALA activities, intensity of participation, and community-based organization (CBO) membership.

Based on household recall data from the endline survey,[9] WALA rollout was gradual, with first instance of engagement increasing steadily each year until peaking in 2012 (Figure 4). Of all WALA households, about half were enrolled by 2011 – midway through the program. In 2012 one-third of all WALA households engaged with WALA for the first time, with outliers for Chikwawa Diocese (40 percent) and PCI (35 percent). The current year (2013) still saw new engagement (about 10 percent of all WALA beneficiary households), with TLC (19 percent) and Chikwawa Diocese (12 percent) being the outliers.[10] This gradual-roll out of the program is according to plan; the capacity of the respective PVO determines the speed of rollout to a large extent. By end of 2011, for instance, both TLC and Chikwawa Diocese had not reached their 50 percent mark yet, while EI and WVI scored best on this account, having already introduced the program in 67 percent of WALA beneficiary households.

Figure 4: First year of engagement for all WALA beneficiary households, by % of total, by year (2009-2013)

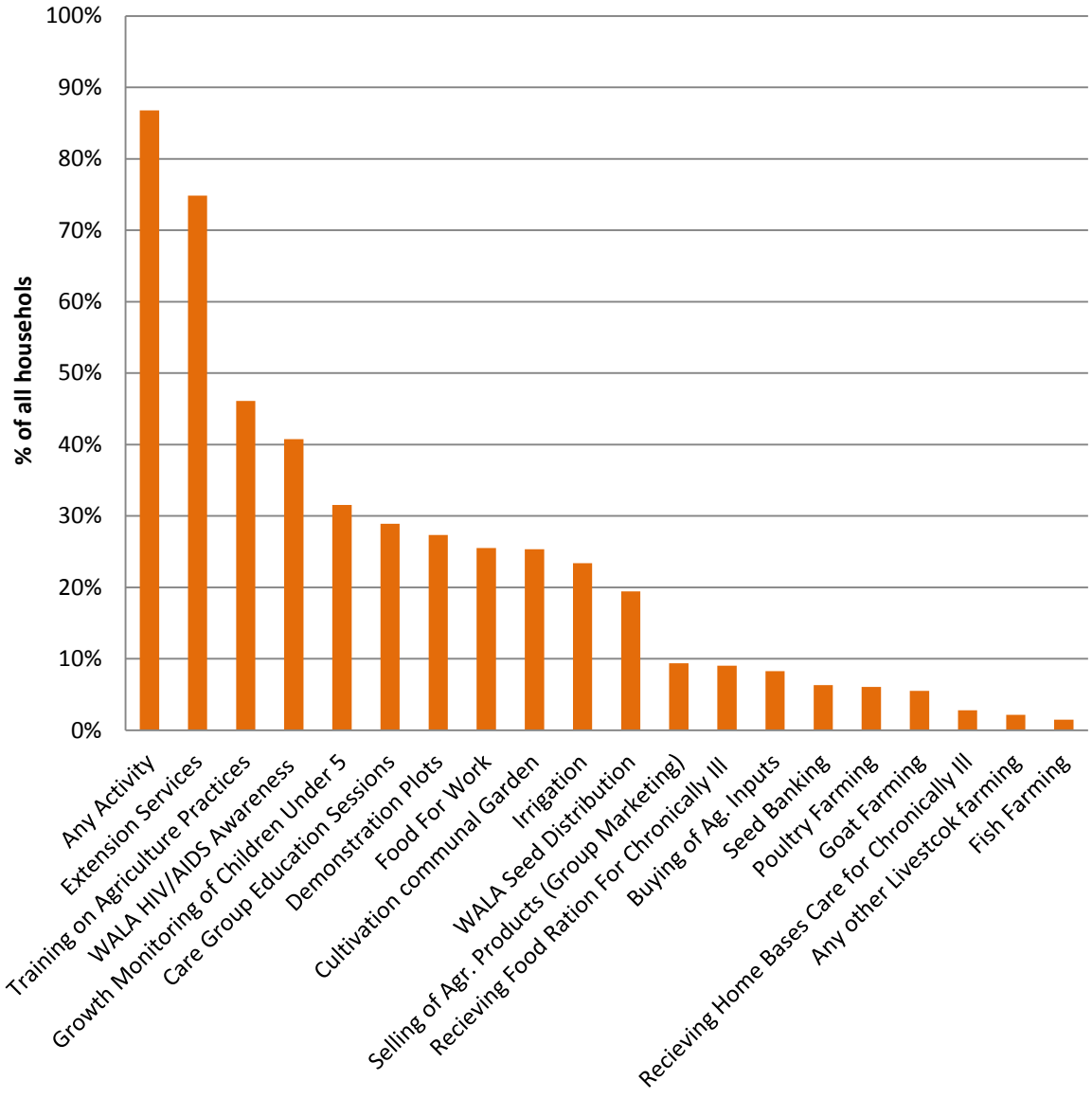


As for the intensity of the participation in WALA activities, 87 percent of respondents (47 percent without prompting and 40 percent after prompting) said that at least one member of their household had engaged in a WALA-promoted activity. Moreover, 37 percent reported to have engaged in one to three activities, 30 percent in four to six activities, and almost 20 percent in more than seven WALA activities.

Figure 5 shows the percentage of households reporting participation in WALA activities.

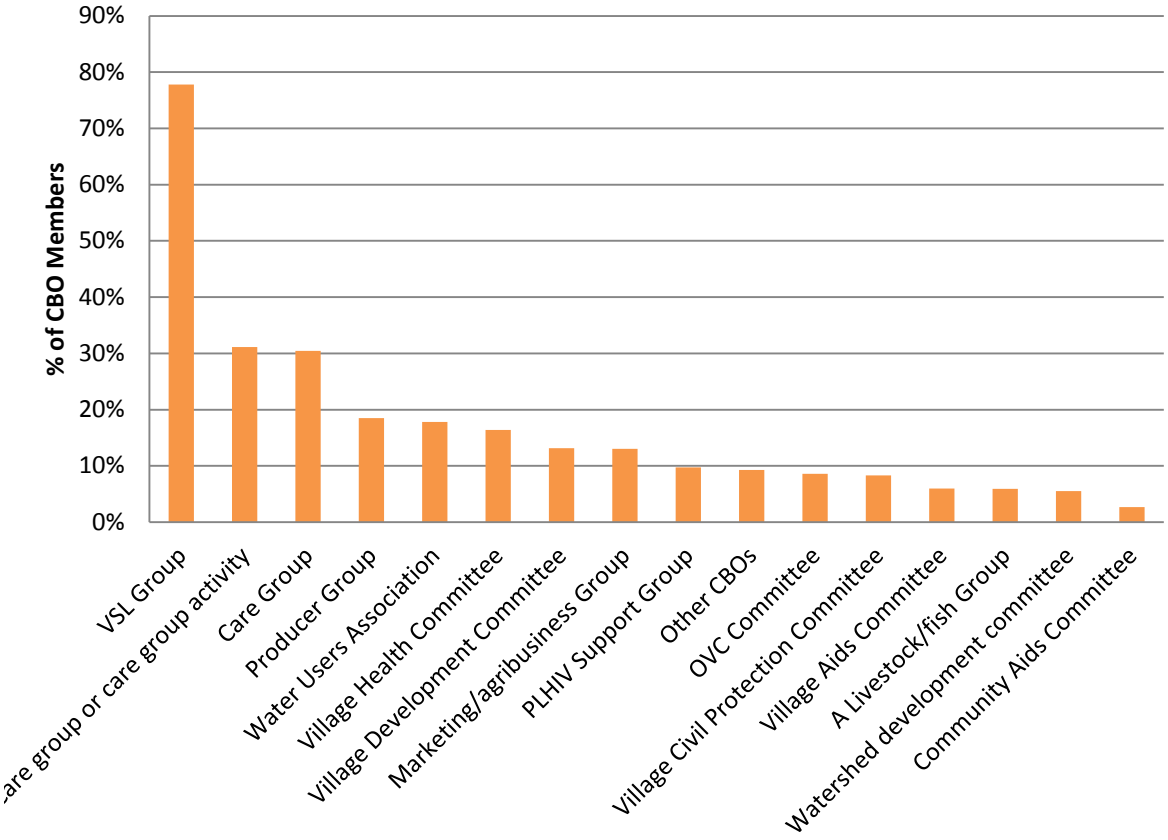
[9] The endline survey asked households with WALA CBO members to recall what year they first engaged with WALA.
[10] Note that TLC joined the program late (2010) while PVOs such as Africare, Chikwawa Diocese, and PCI did not have offices in the districts and had to set up offices and mobilize staff and other resources. SCI, WVI, and EI started operating from offices that were already in use by their organizations to run other programs.

Figure 5: Household participation in specific WALA activities, as reported by respondents



Participation can also be represented in terms of membership in CBOs that WALA helped to establish. Figure 6 shows overwhelming success of VSL groups, followed by Care Groups and producer groups (Agricultural and Natural Resource Management [AgNRM] groups). Care Groups are intended to function in coordination with Care-Group-led activities, and it is probable that household respondents transposed the two. When looking at all households, 31 percent engaged in a Care Group, via a CBO or as part of an activity, while 17 percent of households engaged with Care Groups through both programs.

Figure 6: Household membership community-based organizations supported by WALA



The WALA team noted that not all beneficiaries would strongly identify with producer groups as they were informal, and beneficiaries were not bound to remain in the producer group after learning new technologies. Looking at Figure 5 and the services received, it is plausible that many more have participated in Producer Groups (PGs) at one or another stage.

Finally, one should be aware that WALA has not operated in a vacuum – and the implications of this when interpreting the endline results. Malawi has and continues to receive significant external support and will likely receive more in the future. Households benefit from interventions by government, e.g., via HSAs and Agricultural Extension District Officers, and by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The endline survey found that 82 percent of respondents had received support from non-WALA entities. The most important non-WALA support received included (as a percentage of the total number of respondents) subsidy coupons (FISP) (63 percent); food during lean season (22 percent); orientation in MCHN (20 percent); and agriculture (17 percent); 18 percent said they did not receive any other assistance.

4. Program Effectiveness

4.1 WALA Progress at Impact Level

Title II food security programs like WALA are directed at reducing hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity in the developing world. Title II programs typically combine strategies aimed at 1) improved maternal, child health and nutrition status; 2) improved livelihood status – aiming to build up various assets and resilience; and 3) improved capacities of communities to withstand shocks and stresses (e.g., through DRR). Table 3 (p. 12) compares baseline and endline survey values for

program population-based indicators, indicating percent change and whether or not the observed change is statistically significant.

Improved Nutritional Status
Starting with the anthropometric measurements of children U5 that are a proxy for the entire population, the quantitative data clearly show a significant improvement in chronic malnutrition (HAZ) and in underweight over the program period, with the target for underweight (11 percent) surpassed and that for HAZ (37 percent) narrowly missed. This compares positively with the picture at national level: chronic malnutrition was estimated at 47 percent in 2010 and underweight at 13 percent in the last MDHS survey conducted in 2010.

Household Food Access
Household food access has been defined by USAID as the ability to acquire sufficient quality and quantity of food to meet all household members' nutritional requirements for productive lives. The HDDS and months of adequate household food provisioning (MoAHFP) are proxy measures of quantitative and qualitative aspects of food requirements. Both indicators focus on the desired outcome of improved food access: improved household food consumption.

In both cases, the progress made between baseline and endline has been limited. The HDDS improved significantly – although well below target – while the months of adequate food provisioning indicator improved only marginally. It is important to note that the program, and the whole of Malawi for that matter, has suffered from two shocks and stresses in 2012 (into 2013) that must have had significant implications on people's ability to access food. The shock related to the economic crisis – inflation of prices of key producer and consumer goods – after the 50 percent devaluation of the Kwacha in May 2012, while the stress is related to lack of and erratic rainfalls, which saw main crops reduced in size. It is unfortunate that no data are available for individual years so that a trend can be ascertained but it can be safely assumed (see also Section 3.1 comparing GNI data 2009-2013) that purchasing power has since significantly deteriorated. It is important to consider that without WALA interventions, the indicators could have been far worse. This is further supported by data from the endline survey. For example, WALA households have an HDDS of 4.8 while non-WALA households have a HDDS of 3.9; similarly, WALA households have 9.5 months of adequate food provisioning compared to 9.1 months for non-WALA households.

It bears noting that there is a large, and statistically significant, difference in the percentage of households to consume fruit between the baseline and end-line; far more households consumed fruits at the baseline (over double). This suggests that the timing of the en-line survey had an impact on accurate and comparable estimation of the HDDS to the baseline findings, particularly regarding fruit.

Improved Capacity to Withstand Shocks
The progress on this population-based indicator is significant, although it was funded at approximately one-third of the agriculture and health sector interventions. The effects from the economic and climatic set back in 2011/2012 will have affected this indicator as well, which otherwise could have been significantly higher.

Table 3: WALA population-based indicators, baseline to end-line comparison

IPTT REF No	Indicators	2009 Baseline Survey	2013 Target	2013 End-line Survey	End-line Confidence Interval		2009 to 2013
					Lower	Upper	Difference
SO1: 170,724 vulnerable households have improved maternal and child health, and nutrition status							
1.1	**% stunted (HAZ < -2) children 6-59 months of age (Impact)**	**42.4%**	**36.0%**	**37.1%**	**34.9%**	**39.3%**	**-5.3*** **
1.2	**% underweight (WAZ < -2) children 0-59 months of (Impact)**	**17.6%**	**16.0%**	**11.3%**	**9.9%**	**12.7%**	**-6.3*** **
1.3	**% of children aged 0-59 months in Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) gaining weight in past 3 months (Impact)**	**59.6%**	**75.0%**	**72.2%**	**67.7%**	**76.7%**	**12.6*** **
SO 2: 147,500 smallholder farming households have improved livelihood status							
2.1	**Average months of adequate household food provisioning (Impact)**	**9.35**	**11**	**9.36**	**9.3**	**9.5**	**00.01**
2.2	**Average household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS) (Impact)**	**4.29**	**9**	**4.5**	**4.4**	**4.6**	**0.21*** **
SO3: 273 targeted communities have improved capacity to withstand shocks and stresses							
3.1	**% of household reported losses of livelihood assets due to shocks and stresses (Impact) (Population) (WALA) (GoM – MoAFS)**	**7.8%**	**8.0%**	**6.8%**	**5.9%**	**7.8%**	**-1.0**

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10, statistically different than the 2009 baseline point estimate

Household engagement with WALA

Households that have been engaged with WALA for a longer length of time, as defined by the year that the first family member became a WALA CBO member, report lower cases of stunting and underweight and more higher dietary diversity scores. Table 4 presents each of the programs four strategic outcome (SO1.1, SO1.2, SO2.1, and SO2.2) indicator results disaggregated by the first year the household had a family member become a WALA CBO member. Households that first engaged with WALA five years ago (2009) have fewer stunted children than those that engaged later (2010-2012). Households that engaged in 2013 have a stunting rate marginally less than those that engaged in 2009. Similarly, households that engaged with WALA in year one (2009) have fewer underweight children (7.1 percent) compare to households that engaged with WALA later in its programming cycle.

Table 4: Strategic outcomes by first year of household engagement with WALA (WALA CBO households)

SO		Number of Observations
SO1.1 Percentage of stunted (HAZ ≤ -2) children 6-59 months of age		
2009	28.5	241
2010	44.8	248
2011	44.3	378
2012	35.9	607
2013	28.3	169
Don't Know	37.5	30
SO1.2 Percentage of underweight (WAZ ≤ -2) children 0-59 months of age		
2009	7.1	254
2010	15.5	276
2011	11.9	418
2012	10.6	663
2013	8.1	182
Don't Know	11.3	35
SO2.1. Months of adequate household food provisioning		
2009	9.4	274
2010	9.4	325
2011	9.4	495
2012	9.4	694
2013	9.3	205
Don't Know	8.4	56
SO2.2. Average modified Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS)		
2009	5.2	274
2010	5.0	325
2011	4.6	495
2012	4.9	694
2013	5.1	205
Don't Know	5.0	56

No strong pattern of change in HDDS emerges relative to how long households have been engaged with the project, and the changes in HDDS are fairly small, with differences amounting to no more than about half a food group (SO2.2). In months of adequate food provisioning (SO2.1) there is no discernible difference.

Households that participate in more WALA activities have improved outcomes for strategic outcome indicators.[11] Based on baseline-endline comparisons and confirmed by observations and interviews in the field, non-WALA households generally saw smaller improvements in particular areas than WALA households. Households that participated in one to six WALA activities are less likely to have a stunted child than households that have not participated in any WALA activities, however the number of activities the household engages with does not have a discernible impact (Table 5). The same is true for engagement with WALA and underweight children; households who have engaged with WALA one or more times are less likely to have an underweight child than households that have not have engaged with WALA activities. Strategic outcome 2.1 (months of adequate food provisioning) does not differ with the level of engagement in WALA activities. HDDS does not differ until at least seven or more activities, when the score indicates one food group more than households with no WALA activities. Nevertheless, as to changes of HDDS over time, it is worth noting that Malawi went through a difficult socio-economic period in 2012, and certain areas in the south were also affected by drought. In this context, WALA has been able to protect people's livelihoods and assets during difficult times, without consequences for the HDDS.

Table 5: Strategic outcome indicators by number of household WALA activities

SO		Number of observations
SO1.1 Percentage of stunted (HAZ ≤ -2) children 6-59 months of age		
No WALA activities	43.1	207
1-3 WALA activities	35.7	635
4-6 WALA activities	35.3	587
7 or more WALA activities	41.5	450
SO1.2 Percentage of underweight (WAZ ≤ -2) children 0-59 months of age		
No WALA activities	16.8	229
1-3 WALA activities	10.9	704
4-6 WALA activities	11.0	640
7 or more WALA activities	11.2	484
SO2.1. Months of adequate household food provisioning		
No WALA activities	9.3	321
1-3 WALA activities	9.5	882
4-6 WALA activities	9.3	711
7 or more WALA activities	9.3	466
SO2.2. Average modified Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS)		
No WALA activities	4.5	321
1-3 WALA activities	4.6	882
4-6 WALA activities	4.9	711
7 or more WALA activities	5.5	466

Table 6 and Table 7 present strategic outcomes 1.1 and 1.2 (stunting and underweight), disaggregated by six key group memberships.[12] In only three instances across the two indicators is there a statistical difference between those who have participated in the group and those who have not. Two of the cases (Stunting/care group participation and VHC/underweight) find that those who have participated in the group have a higher likelihood of having a worse outcome. A probable explanation is project targeting, and participant self-selection, with less food-secure households participating in the activities. The third instance of a statistical difference between group participation and SO1.2 (underweight) is with livestock/fish groups. Households with a livestock/fish group member are much less likely to have an underweight child (10.7 percent) compared to households without a livestock/fish group member (24.9 percent).

[11] Engagement in a WALA activity is defined as a type of engagement, not just CBO membership. The engagement can be a one-time interaction, or a multiple, continuous interaction.

[12] The six key groups/activities identified by project staff and included in this analysis are Care Group, marketing/agribusiness group, producer, group, VSL group, livestock/fish group, and water users group.

Table 6: SO1.1 outcome by WALA CBO group[a]

SO1.1 Percentage of stunted (HAZ ≤ -2) children 6-59 months of age		
	Mean %	**Number of observations**
Care Group		
Member	39.1**	1433
Non-Member	33.6	449
Marketing/Ag-Bus Group		
Member	37.4	1714
Non-Member	40.6	169
Producer Group		
Member	37.3	1654
Non-Member	40.7	225
VSL Group		
Member	36.0	1654
Non-Member	39.3	225
Livestock/Fish Group		
Member	37.3	1806
Non-Member	45.5	77
Water Users Group		
Member	37.1	1649
Non-Member	39.8	232
Village Health Committee		
Member	37.5	1675
Non-Member	38.9	209

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10, statistically different than the 2009 baseline point estimate

[a] Key community-based organizations as identified by WALA staff

Table 7: SO1.2 outcome by WALA CBO group[a]

SO1.2 Percentage of underweight (WAZ ≤ -2) children 0-59 months of age		
	Mean %	**Number of observations**
Care Group		
Member	11.4	1575
Non-Member	11.1	485
Marketing/Ag-Bus Group		
Member	11.5	1876
Non-Member	9.9	185
Producer Group		
Member	11.6	1815
Non-Member	9.6	242
VSL Group		
Member	10.9	1003
Non-Member	11.7	1058
Livestock/Fish Group		
Member	10.7***	1947
Non-Member	24.9	87
Water Users Group		
Member	11.2	1813
Non-Member	12.1	246
Village Health Committee		
Member	11.7*	1835
Non-Member	8.2	226

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10, statistically different than the 2009 baseline point estimate

[a] Key community-based organizations as identified by WALA staff

4.2 SO1 – MCHN

Introduction

SO1: 170,724 vulnerable households have improved maternal and child health, and nutrition status

SO1 has three Intermediate Results:

- IR 1.1: 170,724 households have demonstrated improved MCHN practices to prevent malnutrition;
- IR1.2 170,724 households have increased access to quality health and nutrition outreach services; and
- IR 1.3 2,148 community groups have enhanced capacity to address the health and nutrition needs of 170 724 households.

A full description of SO1 activities is found at Annex 10.

Performance

The quantitative data clearly show a significant improvement in both chronic malnutrition and in underweight over the period of the WALA program, with the target for underweight surpassed and that for HAZ narrowly missed (see Annex 11; Table 2). To compare with the picture at national level, the Malawi Nutrition Education and Communication Strategy 2012 notes a trend in improvement of nutrition indicators at the national level over the five-year period between the MDHS surveys of 2005 and 2010: national prevalence of chronic malnutrition (HAZ) was estimated at 47 percent in 2010, and underweight at 13 percent.[13]

Quantitative survey data revealed that approximately 30 percent of households in WALA areas participate in Care Group activities. This rises to 42 percent of WALA participating households with

[13] MDHS 2010, using WHO Growth Standards. 2005 MDHS data are not reported as they are published using NCHS reference data and not directly comparable.

a child under 5 years or a pregnant woman. The endline survey found that 34 percent of children in households that participated in Care Group activities were stunted (HAZ<-2) compared to 39 percent of non-participants (the difference is statistically significant), suggesting a positive effect of the program (Table 1). In all sites visited during the qualitative study, mothers and Care Group Volunteers (CGVs) were able to relate key messages learned. Table 8 shows the numbers of households and individuals reached over the course of the program.

Table 8: SO1 activities in terms of Specific Objectives target numbers reached

		FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13
	Target	**Achievement**			
Households reached	**170 724**	91648	138 609	166 651	152 550
Children U5 reached		No data	No data	163 688	206 717
CGs	**2148**	728	1134	1445	1554
SFP children		0	0	7912	7663
SFP pregnant & lactating women		0	0	8118	7301

Source: WALA Annual reports FY2010-2013

IR 1.1: 170,724 vulnerable households have improved maternal and child health, and nutrition practices

Table 8 above shows that 152,550 households (89 percent) of target households were reached by SO1 activities in 2013, with a peak of 166,651 (98 percent) in 2012. Significant improvements have been seen in all WALA indicators for infant and young child feeding practices, with the exception of exclusive breastfeeding rates, which, at 68 percent prevalence in 2013, remained below the national level of 71 percent for infants under six months in Malawi (MDHS 2010). An 8.5 percentage point increase was seen between baseline and endline studies in the percentage of children aged 6-23 months who receive a minimum acceptable diet alongside breast milk (12.3 at baseline vs 20.7 at endline). In addition, the environmental and personal hygiene practices have improved by 19.9 percentage points at the household level (6.1 to 26.0), which beneficiaries reported has assisted in reducing the frequency and severity of childhood illness. A notable reduction in the incidence of disease, particularly cholera and diarrhea, was cited by the majority of respondents during the qualitative study. New practices learned through the WALA program and ongoing support through the care group structure has contributed to these successes.

While tip-taps, stoves, latrines and dish racks were in evidence in villages sampled by the qualitative study, the endline survey reveals that latrine availability has not improved from the high baseline prevalence of 88 percent of households (Annex 11, Figure 4), whereas percentage of households with a hand-washing facility has improved from 10 percent to 34 percent and those observed to have water in them, from 5 percent to 11 percent. This shows a significant improvement in availability of hand-washing facilities. However, while hand-washing practices after visiting the toilet have improved, there have been no such improvements around food handling and feeding (Annex 11, Figure 3). Focus group respondents stated that lack of access to water was a barrier to uptake and effective use of hand washing facilities, as well as cultural practices in some locations. The quantitative survey found that 71 percent of households now have a clothesline (76 percent WALA; 63 percent non-WALA), 44 percent have a rubbish pit (49 percent WALA; 35 percent non-WALA) and 28 percent have a plate/drying rack (32 percent WALA; 21 percent non-WALA), however there is a lack of baseline data against which to measure progress in these indicators. Nevertheless, the data indicate that program activities had a positive and statistically significant effect on these improvements in WALA households (households with a WALA CBO member) in comparison with non-WALA households.

IR 1.2: 170,724 vulnerable households have increased use of quality maternal and child health, and nutrition services

In terms of improvements in access to services, it is important to acknowledge the role and efforts of the Malawi Ministry of Health (MoH) and to note that there have been substantial improvements in the indicators at a national level over the last 5-10 years. Concurring with these positive changes at national level, significant advancement was made in WALA areas, where 89 percent of the births of children aged 0–11 months were attended by skilled health personnel in 2013, an increase from 78 percent in 2009.

WALA set an ambitious target of 80 percent for regular attendance of children aged 0-59 months at GMP sessions, and although a significant increase in regular attendance was noted, the unreliability of MoH-led sessions is reported to be one important external factor that inhibited higher achievement on this indicator (ARR FY13).

The target of 78 percent for post-natal Vitamin A supplementation for the mother at eight weeks was not achieved, but reached just 61 percent. This target was difficult for the WALA program to strongly influence. The Annual Report FY13, along with evaluation interviewees, notes that unavailability of Vitamin A in health facilities and poor recording of supplementation during clinic sessions were external factors that hindered achievement of the target (ARR FY13).

Community Complementary Feeding and Learning Session (CCFLS)

The CCFLS demonstration sessions are an important aspect of the program, effectively putting teaching into practice and assisting caregivers to see, learn, and practice new skills in food preparation. MCHN+ funding was used to boost CCFLS performance through a project with Chancellor College to develop and pilot a training course on Food Processing and Preparation and facilitate CCFLS training for Government staff,[14] resulting in the production of a "Food Processing and Meal Management Resource Book" for use in community rollout.

Mothers in all program areas described how they can now prepare nourishing porridge for their children with their new knowledge. There were also numerous reports of rehabilitation through CCFLS of children whose growth was faltering, however the data to support this are not systematically recorded. A one-off data report generated by the WALA Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) unit[15] that compared child weight-for-age z-score on Day 1 and Day 12 of CCFLS found a significant improvement, with mean WAZ at baseline -1.34, reaching -0.98 on Day 12. The average weight gained by 961 participants for whom data were recorded was 496 grams over the 12-day period.

Communities have begun adapting the CCFLS protocol to more closely meet their needs, capacity and time constraints, with models ranging from monthly CCFLS for three to six days, to twice yearly for 12 days (as program design), as well as communities where 12 days are dedicated to CCFLS if there is a child to be rehabilitate, decreasing to six days if not (as recommended in the midterm evaluation). The important success factor is that communities are using CCFLS to transfer skills to new caregivers and to assist rehabilitation of children before they reach a stage where they might have to be referred to a recuperative program such as Supplemental Feeding Program, Outpatient Therapeutic Program, or Nutrition Rehabilitation Unit. The main challenge to CCFLS implementation has been lack of food availability in the dry season when home gardens have dried up and the majority of communities do not have adequate water available to support them.

Supplementary Feeding Program (SFP)

There is no performance data available for SFP. The SFP system is not entirely compatible with the MoH SFP system and has caused confusion among communities and some frustration among staff. Although there are distinct benefits of the outreach approach, taking SFP closer to communities, WALA is insufficiently supporting MoH with the technical components, with the result that the current process is managed as a food distribution rather than a program for rehabilitation of

[14] District Health Office (DHO), Agriculture, Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC), and MoH.
[15] Community-led Complementary Feeding and Learning Sessions Data Report. Draft 053113. Internal document.

malnourished children and pregnant and lactating mothers. In particular, the current process of providing bags of corn-soy blend (CSB) and cans of oil to a group of mothers and asking them to divide it between them is doing little to assist caregivers with comprehending the message that they are being given a therapeutic ration for a malnourished child. In the MoH system, the oil and CSB are pre-mixed and each mother is given the correct quantity for her child during a biweekly distribution.

Although WALA has Standard Operating Guidelines to guide the SFP, the exit criteria described within it are not being adhered to (in practice almost all pregnant and lactating women stay for one year in the program and all children under-5 stay for four months). Its guidance on program monitoring is inadequate, with the result that WALA is simply monitoring the number of beneficiaries and food provided, and does not consolidate the data on performance of the program in terms of cure rate or trends in new admissions. This made it impossible to assess the effectiveness of this activity. It also leaves the program ripe for exploitation and diversion of food to ineligible beneficiaries.[16]

Observations of SFP in three sites found HSAs to have poor screening and monitoring skills and despite the attendance of various WALA staff, it was observed that inadequate technical support is provided to the HSAs. Complaints were raised to the final evaluation team and it was noted that not all PVOs have complaints or a feedback channel available to beneficiaries to take their grievances to WALA staff. In particular, the WALA practice of screening children in the community weeks in advance of a distribution, while not screening for new admissions on the distribution day itself (as is done at MoH facilities) creates many problems as children and pregnant women may present with improved nutritional status by the time they come to receive SFP. This in turn makes it difficult for communities to understand who is selected for SFP and why.

Sustainability

Exit strategies, with a key focus on handover to the MoH, have been late to implement in MCHN. PVOs only started to implement them from July 2013, some only starting at the time of the evaluation. The GoM has signed up to the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement and its approach incorporates an adaptation of the Care Group model, which is starting to be rolled out at district level, with the aim of reaching all community members in targeted villages (not just children under-5 and pregnant and lactating women). "Malawi is focusing on community-based action, with the 1,000 Special Days National Nutrition Education and Communication Strategy being prioritized from 2012 to 2017 to reduce child stunting among children under two years to less than 20 percent through behavior change and awareness-raising at the community level. This will include a combination of means using mass and community media, family counseling, awareness-raising of local leaders and capacity building of multi-sectoral frontline workers."[17] WALA nutritionists have played an integral role in development of the SUN strategy for Malawi, providing technical support and sensitizing the MoH on the Care Group model. The scale-up is dependent on the support of partners at the district level. At present, it is clear that, despite their willingness and effective engagement at district level, the MoH will not be able to pick up all current WALA activities in 2014, even in districts where the SUN rollout is starting. WALA has not managed to orient all HSAs in their program areas on the MCHN activities and their capacity is limited, particularly by competing work demands.

However, it appears likely that behaviors changed over the course of the program will be sustained and may proliferate more widely through diffusion in the community. Key health and nutrition messages and knowledge are embedded in WALA communities and resident CGVs are well trained and will retain the modules for future reference. Qualitative interviews and discussions revealed a strong ongoing commitment by CGVs and health promoters and a willingness to continue

[16] The evaluation team received several reports from beneficiaries of irregularities in procedures and of ineligible cases receiving rations, while genuine cases were turned away. However, these were not possible to substantiate during the evaluation timeframe.

[17] www.scalingupnutrition.org/sun-countries/malawi

supporting communities after the WALA program ends. In villages with good uptake of latrines, stoves, cupboards, dish racks, etc., these will continue to be used beyond the WALA phase-out and their use in some households may influence others in the community.

4.3 SO2 – AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming

Introduction

SO 2: 147,500 smallholder farming households have improved livelihood status

WALA's comprehensive aim is to impart improved technologies and management practices to smallholder farming households. Many of these newly promoted crop cultivation technologies are associated with conservation agriculture (CA).

WALA has embraced an approach that transfers practical knowledge of innovations through self-help schemes, rather than implementing large free-input schemes. The latter practice may be what the population has been accustomed to in the past, but building up of human and financial assets is not likely to occur in the long term. The endline suggested that WALA beneficiary households owned significantly larger agricultural plots of land (2.1 acres) than non-WALA households (only 1.7 acres).[18] This is possibly a result of the self-help approach, which allowed all community members to participate in the program and benefit from the assistance aimed to strengthen livelihoods assets and resilience capacities.

Performance – AgNRM

IR2.1 147,500 smallholder farming households have improved crop production practices

By 2013, out of a target of 147,500 smallholder-farming households, 116,410 individuals (79 percent) had been reached. This comprises USG-supported short-term agriculture sector productivity training, with women making up 58 percent of beneficiaries by 2013. While not originally planned, additional Group Village Heads (GVHs) were added, as targets were not met. Consequently, WALA has kept adding new households (from existing WALA communities) until December 2013. This would allow the new beneficiaries to participate in training during one crop cycle. It may be therefore possible to engage about 85 percent of its stated target in AgNRM.

An overview of the achievements in outcome indicators under SO2/Agriculture is shown in Table 9. Detailed results from the endline are in Annex 12.

[18] Some care needs to be taken when considering these results as not all farmers do know the exact size of their plot(s).

Table 9: Overview of achievements in outcome indicators under SO2 (Agriculture): baseline versus endline

Outcome Indicators SO2	Baseline	Endline	FY13 WALA Beneficiaries
2.1.1a % households using 3 out of 5 WALA promoted sustainable crop cultivation technologies (quality seeds, crop rotation, intercropping, minimum tillage or mulching	27	33	38
2.1.1b % households using 2 out of 3 WALA promoted soil conservation technologies (1. fertilizer or leguminous trees, 2. contour ridges, box ridges and bunds, or 3. vetiver grass)	12	16	20
2.1.1c % households using post-harvest handling storage technologies	39	41	40

Generally, the results are mixed: they are positive in irrigation, while adoption of crop cultivation and soil conservation technologies (particularly indicators 2.1.1a-b) has shown only modest gains. The latter was often acknowledged by PVOs in their briefings to the final evaluation team. Additional analysis on the adoption of individual technologies shows relatively small advances (in percentages) since baseline (see Annex 12 for more details). Some of the positive findings that largely can be attributed to WALA (based on observations and interviews) include the following:

- Crop rotation of maize with other crops increased from 17 (baseline) to 21 percent (endline);
- Construction of soil ridges increased from 86 (baseline) to 88 percent (endline). The construction of box ridges increased to 53 percent among WALA beneficiary households versus 45 percent among non-WALA households at endline;
- Under tillage techniques, the most significant change was observed in the variable "remove all of the previous crop stubble." This saw a marked decrease from 34 percent (baseline) to only seven percent (endline);
- Under intercropping techniques, the most significant change was observed in the variable "Plant maize and other crop seeds at the same time on the same planting station." This saw an increase from 25 percent (baseline) to 47 percent (endline);
- Mulching increased from 15 percent (baseline) to 30 percent (endline) for all respondents;
- Another positive result can be observed in the marked increase of households that planted maize in the last irrigation season. The percentage at baseline (27 percent of all households) had increased to 51 percent at endline. While non-WALA households also saw a significant increase (41 percent), the percentage of WALA beneficiary households had increased to 57 percent.

Extension Model

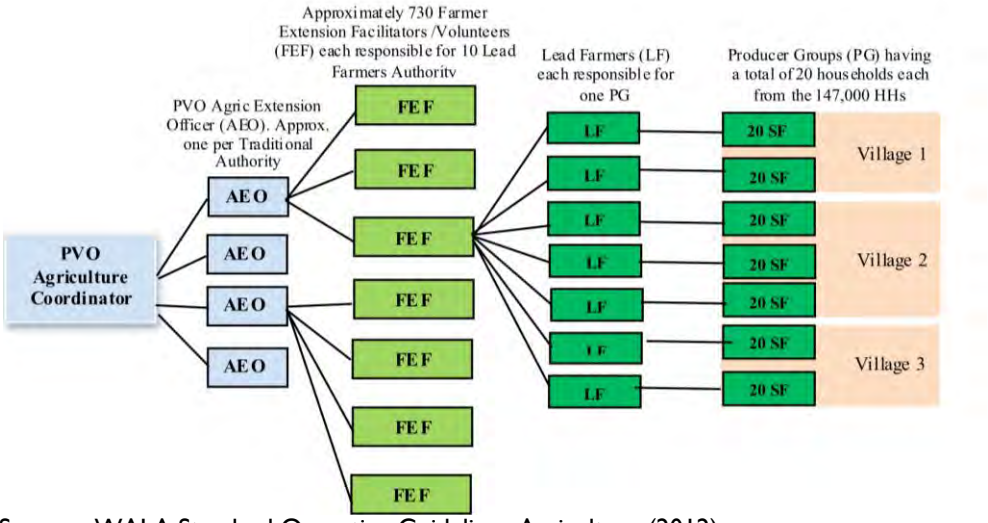
WALA has worked through the establishment of producer groups that have 15-20 farmers, led by a volunteer lead farmer who is in turn supported by a Farmer Extension Facilitator (FEF). Lead Farmers are usually selected from the producer groups themselves, and often are among the more successful and respected farmers that reside in one of the GVH communities. FEFs are selected by the community or GVH. WALA is expected to link the FEFs to sources of innovations and information such as the Ministry of Agriculture's Extension and Research, the private sector, and other partners. FEFs generally receive incentives in terms of transport and remuneration. The FEFs receive support from WALA extension officers (observed to include several former (retired) government extension staff) who receive direction from the PVO technical coordinator.

Whereas CATCH has a single Technical Quality Coordinator (TQC) for each of the technical areas – and MCHN and AgNRM have an additional staff member (Program Officer) in the field, either by

design or out of necessity (delays in recruitment, etc.) – these positions are often combined, such as AgNRM, livestock, irrigation, agri-business, and VSL. Even at field level, some of the field extension facilitators combine the tasks such as AgNRM and agri-business. The basic agriculture extension system, based on the Care Group model, is shown in Figure 7.

This model is a multi-layered approach to extension, where in the end the program interacts with its 100,000+ beneficiaries mainly through volunteers who are exposed to limited amounts of formal training. Much of the knowledge transfer takes place on demonstration plots that are often maintained by FEFs and/or a small group of lead farmers. WALA reported that 170 community nurseries had been established for improved cassava and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes (ARR FY13). The producer groups generally meet during the main cropping season when new techniques and practices can be observed. The land for demonstration plots is often assigned to the producer groups by the Village Headman or GVH, and is part of the broader commitment of the community to participate in WALA. Therefore, while the effectiveness of building the capacity of targeted beneficiaries can be questioned, perhaps the strongest capacity has been built among program staff and volunteers, particularly the FEFs.

Figure 7: Community-based Farmer Extension System



Source: WALA Standard Operating Guidelines Agriculture (2012)

Conservation Agriculture

Many of the promoted technologies, although not all, can be grouped under the banner of conservation agriculture (CA), which receives a lot of emphasis in the program. CA is generally accepted as "resource-saving agricultural crop production that strives to achieve acceptable profits together with high and sustained production levels while concurrently conserving the environment".[19]. CA addresses some of the main weaknesses in the agricultural system of smallholder farming as increased pressure from conventional farming practices on soils and crop yields has become evident in Malawi. These result in reduced soil fertility, nutrient depletion, acidification, erosion, and excessive competition from weeds. It is for this reason that the portfolio of technologies and practices promoted by WALA are appropriate to the local agro-ecological environments as viewed by interviewed community members and agricultural experts alike. WALA also participates in the National Conservation Agricultural Task Force and has contributed to the development of a manual on CA that should be adopted by all agencies engaged in the Task Force before the program closes down. During the start-up phase, WALA received external technical support to formulate a CA strategy from the Conservation Farming Unit in Zambia.

CA was observed to suit resource-constrained poor and very poor households by design, as it provides an alternative to purchasing expensive inorganic fertilizers, using plant residues and organic

[19] FAO 2007 in Mloza-Banda and Nanthambwe, 2010.

fertilizers from livestock and small stock instead. WALA beneficiaries at times referred to CA as "the fertilizer of the poor." The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS) has formally signed off on the program design and has influenced the design to ensure that the promoted technologies and practices are in line with government policies.[20]

Awareness of the (potential) benefits of the various crop cultivation and soil conservation technologies was observed during key informant interviews (KIIs) in the field. Producer group members could easily list the benefits of using improved varieties of maize and vegetables, inter-cropping, and mulching. The use of newly aligned contour ridges (with 75 cm spacing and one maize seed per planting station, 30 cm apart,[21] called *sasakawa*) was observed to be the most popular technology in the field.

The set of technologies promoted by the program is a mixture of traditional and CA technologies and in strict accordance with government policies and priorities. Crop diversification – planting groundnuts, cassava, sorghum, and/or vegetables in addition to maize – is also popular. These other crops are used for home consumption and for sales. Collective marketing is conducted through participation in the agro-business clubs. Crop rotation is not very popular, as people's plots are said to be too small.

Popular crop cultivation and soil conservation technologies observed in the field that are marketed in the field as Conservation Agriculture:

- ✓ Ridge realignment
- ✓ *Sasakawa* (One-One), a spacing technique that increases plant density
- ✓ Inter-cropping/ mixed cropping
- ✓ Pit/basin planting in combination with compost manure
- ✓ Mulching in combination with minimum tillage

Challenges

The relative shortage of both vegetative matter and animal manure limits the uptake of these technologies. In Jali, Zomba District, it was observed that a 70 kg bag of animal manure was sold for 500-700 MWK. This clearly reflects strong demand, but also shows the limitations to adopting these new technologies. Introducing larger numbers of small stock to provide the manure will only help if simultaneous efforts in agro-forestry emerge to provide new sources of fuel wood, livestock feed, and ground cover. Mulching is further affected by feeding of free-ranging livestock, malicious fires, and termites. Because of this scarcity, the areas that receive mulch cover have been observed to be relatively small, but farmers concerned are content about increases in yields and the prospect of improved soil fertility over time.

Watershed Development Activities

Watershed development activities were introduced with guidance from the Watershed Organization Trust (WOTR) of India. Without a clear target to aim for, WALA was able to conduct soil and water conservation treatments to more than 2,000 hectares, reaching six percent of endline respondents. These activities are seen by the final evaluation team as among the more successful activities implemented. By the end of FY13, communities stated to have observed regeneration of vegetation and rising water tables. The final evaluation team appreciated the approach taken that emphasizes a clear "assessment, analysis, and action" ("Triple A") sequence of activities. It starts with mapping community assets and assessing their exposure to various risks, including droughts and floods. The team was also impressed by the enthusiasm, determination, and vision of committee

[20] The GoM may be serious about promoting CA, as they realize that the large economic transfers into the FISP of the past may not be economically feasible in the future. Cheaper alternatives need to be identified to maintain or increase crop productivity while preventing soil erosion and preserving soil fertility.
[21] While interviews in the field all referred to the 30 cm mentioned, the GoM standard is said to be only 25cm.

members to reduce and mitigate these risks. The execution of the identified activities has been supported by FFW schemes. This clearly qualifies as an example where well-organized communities have been rewarded for their willingness to engage in these activities and initiative.

Sustainability – AgNRM

The program needs to be commended for working closely with the GoM, and the MoAFS in particular, at national, district, and sub-district levels. All agricultural interventions have been screened and approved by the GoM. This has certainly caused delays in rolling out the program and in generating much-needed guidance for the PVOs. The GoM agricultural extension system also depends on lead farmers, but lacks the intermediary layer of FEFs.

The program reported that 74 FEFs have been trained as Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs), while the remaining ones are being trained as fruit tree grafters. All training is aimed at providing FEF trainees with income opportunities once the program withdraws. Lead farmers in turn have been targeted for inclusion in the GoM extension system, so they can continue their role within the community following the phase-out of the program.

It has been noted that there is a lack of extension material at the beneficiary level. While it may be too late to develop the extension for FEFs and lead farmers to help sustain promoted technologies over time before mid-2014, the material should be developed with assistance from education specialists (WALA staff or with assistance from GoM) so that it can be used during the next phase of Title II programs, or even better, by the GoM itself. WALA has produced a number of manuals in collaboration with the GoM. The CA manual is currently being reviewed by the National Task Force while another one on post-harvest handling is being peer reviewed but is also expected to be officially endorsed before the program closes.

What seems certain though, is that CA interventions will continue in one form or another in southern Malawi, as they receive broad support from the GoM and NGOs. Messages on the use of improved varieties and the importance of soil conservation have been heard and are taken seriously. Many beneficiaries said that the improved varieties (particularly of vegetables) are also locally available.

Of the other structures established, the Watershed Development Committee (WDC) seems among the more durable and powerful CBOs the program has established. They seem to have greater leverage perhaps because they represent the larger community interests, whereas other CBOs represent smaller interest groups. Certain WDCs – not all - have made plans to expand the infrastructure without inputs from the program. They have also stated that they already have sufficient technical expertise and could do so without further guidance.

Performance – Small-scale Irrigation

As has been stated in Chapter 4, there is large potential for irrigation in several districts where the program is operational. For several years, various NGOs, donors and the GoM have aimed to increase farmers' access to irrigated agricultural land. WALA's irrigation team was also responsible for the implementation of a OFDA-funded WILA program, which ran from 2010 to 2012.

Since its inception, WALA has been able to construct 71 irrigation sites benefiting 3,840 beneficiary households. This represents three percent of the total of WALA beneficiary households that the program has managed to reach under the AgNRM program component thus far. The total number of hectares of land brought under irrigation through WALA activities has been on target (424 hectares versus a target of 400) for Year 4, while the Life of the Activity (LOA) target – including Year 5 – is 500 hectares. WALA expects to reach at least 470 hectares, verified through digital mapping exercise. The newly established irrigation sites are either river diversion, gravity-fed or make use of treadle pumps. Farmers use them during the dry season (May-October). Many of the farmers, linked through Water User Committees, rent plots of land and as part of the agreement, they prepare the land for the landowner to use at the start of the rains.

Table 10: Overview of achievements in outcome indicators under SO2 Irrigation, comparing baseline versus endline values

Outcome Indicators SO2	Baseline	FY13 Targets	ARR FY13 WALA Beneficiaries
2.1.3 % of irrigation sites installing two or more WALA promoted design considerations (lined canals, drip systems, adequate field drainage structures, vegetative cover and shutoff valves)	0	80	85
2.1.4 % of water users committees using two or more WALA promoted operational practices (user fees, high frequency low flow watering schedules, structure maintenance clearing of weeds and sediments, periodic drainage of waterlogged fields, periodic flushing out of canals to remove snails)	0	80	97
2.1.5 Number (cumulative) of hectares of land brought under irrigation by WALA activities	0	400 (Yr 4)	424

The two main technologies promoted include river diversion and gravity-fed schemes as well as treadle pumps. River diversion and gravity-fed schemes are locally appropriate technological options, requiring labor for digging and lining canals and constructing diversion structures, with costs for the design, cement and piping if needed. Operation of the schemes does not cost anything as they are powered by gravity. Routine maintenance (mostly cleaning debris from canals) must be performed but is considered not too costly.

Treadle pumps typically use water that is less than six meters below the surface (from a canal, shallow groundwater). This technology is particularly useful to communities in low-lying areas. Treadle pumps need to be replaced every few years and as such, operation and maintenance costs are higher. For a further breakdown by scheme, beneficiaries and funding invested see Annex 12, Table 7.

The irrigation team has stuck to its successful formula from I-Life as to its design, implementation, and technical backstopping through Agricane. This formula of outsourcing could be considered for other components as well. The selection of sites follows clear and detailed operating procedures and guidelines including site assessment, environmental screening, and completing USAID micro grant application forms that include detailed proposals for feasibility of the irrigation site and cultivation plans.

In addition, prospective beneficiaries benefit from training in various skills such as water distribution, record keeping, leadership, group dynamics, conflict resolution, farming as a business, and collective marketing. WALA also closely collaborates with irrigation engineers and Extension Planning Areas (EPA)-level agricultural extension officers from the MoAFS. Some of the irrigation sites have even been constructed jointly with the GoM, next to a GoM irrigation scheme and sharing a water resource.

Challenges

Due to the considerable investments in hardware and software, the irrigation schemes benefit a relatively small proportion of program participants (4,000 households), which points to issues of equity in the distribution of program benefits. WALA has prioritized the relatively expensive river-diversion and gravity-fed schemes and treadle pumps over the promotion of low-investment irrigation technologies such as drip irrigation or garden sacks that can reach a larger number of households. Consideration might be given in the future to more equitable solutions focusing on the use of drip irrigation and garden sacks on small garden or school plots (in support of growing

nutritious foods). Irrigation schemes enabling greater land coverage remain relevant where opportunities and demand from farmers for such schemes arise.

Sustainability – Small-scale Irrigation
It is likely that the functioning irrigation schemes – gravity-fed, river-diversion schemes, and treadle pumps – will continue their operations in the future given the high potential for profitability and the increased access to fresh maize year-round. It is positive to observe that communities are expected to provide materials and labor for irrigation infrastructure, which is the best way to assure some level of commitment from the community. Only the construction of night reservoirs is eligible for FFW schemes. It was observed that some schemes that used treadle pumps initially have adopted engines to power their irrigation schemes instead of using manual labor.

Full sustainability is not assured though, as many of the Water Management Committees (WMCs) are new to their job and a reasonable fee structure has not yet been established. It was observed that the WMCs interviewed in the field have set fairly low fees. When maintenance costs increase, chances are that farmers may refuse to pay higher upfront fees and drop out.

The program has established good connections with the GoM, which should be available to advise once the program has ended.

Performance – Livestock and Fisheries
Successes

Overall, WALA has shown that small stock and fish farming can be an inherent part of the model of improving nutrition and income through livelihood support and promoting CA technologies.

The MTE noted that there seems to be significant demand for support to small stock, poultry, and fish development in southern Malawi. This was also observed by the final evaluation team during field visits. These activities fit nicely in CA principles and promoted technologies and include the distribution of broilers (improved breeds such as Black Australorp), goats, pigs, fishpond construction, and livestock technical support. The program advocated for the purchase of poultry using VSL savings and share-outs. More than 3,000 Black Australorps have been purchased this way.

Responding directly to MTE recommendations, WALA initiated a study to review the appropriateness and success of the pass-on scheme of goats and poultry. Moreover, much emphasis since the 2012 MTE has been on animal husbandry training among PG and VSL groups, while the distribution of free animals continued under the pass-on scheme.

The importance of training community animal health workers (CAHWs) as a key ingredient of this component was already identified in the USAID Malawi strategy for 2009-2014. Since the MTE, WALA and the Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development (DAHLD) have successfully trained 130 CAHWs (90 men and 40 women). The final evaluation team met with motivated FEFs and Agribusiness Community Agents (ACAs) that underwent CAHW training, and they see good potential for future employment. The training has imparted skills relating to livestock, health, and production extension services, while referring complicated cases to qualified veterinary personnel. This training for CAHWs is viewed as filling a critical gap in services to the communities, and in improving access to vaccines and vaccination of animals. One of the real achievements under this component has been the adoption by the GoM (2013) of the WALA's Community Animal Health Worker Training Manual developed in FY12 by the program in collaboration with local government staff. Manuals for training of CAHWs have been distributed to all agriculture offices in the south and are used.

Fish farming has also been viewed as providing a good alternative income opportunity. The program has often linked fish farms with WALA irrigation schemes that have constructed night reservoirs for water storage with help from FFW schemes. Participants interviewed were very positive about the

profitability of the business. WALA has thus made very good use of new opportunities, integrating various economic activities that can be attached to new infrastructure and creating multiple benefits for concerned households.

However, this is illustrative of the inequality in the distribution of benefits between WALA beneficiaries and communities. The ARR FY13 reports that the program has developed a number of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials in consultation with representatives from the Department of Agricultural Extension Service, the Department of Fisheries, and DAHLD. These have been reviewed and approved by USAID/Malawi.

Challenges

As the livestock/ fish farming component started in Year 3 with the recruitment of the TQC in CATCH,[22] results as far as numbers of beneficiaries (7,320 farmers in 548 groups) and the pass-on rates (over 150 goats) could be higher, especially given the potential size of this component (no specific targets have been set in the IPTT although this component contributes to IPTT indicator 2.3.1.).

From KIIs with producer and livestock groups, it was evident that livestock diseases are a considerable problem (e.g., Newcastle disease for local indigenous chickens) and lead to high animal/chicken mortality rates if no vaccination is given. Given the number of veterinary officers available in each district (believed to be only two), with support from one assistant veterinary officer for each EPA, access to expertise and vaccines is not universal. Early in the program, animals are thought to have perished, as the full training and service package had not yet been established.

One of the constraints reported by WALA staff was the lack of expertise among WALA staff, including experts in AgNRM, agri-business, VSL, and extension staff (agricultural extension officers, agricultural community agents, FEFs and lead farmers. WALA's CAHW strategy has directly addressed this gap.

Sustainability – Livestock and Fisheries

The promotion of small stock as part of livelihoods strategies for poor and very poor families in southern Malawi is likely to prove an effective way for increasing food access and nutrition. Animal manure is also an important asset to farmers, for its benefits to soil fertility. The one clear challenge to sustainability is the lack of feeder grass, which should be considered another essential part of the livestock component, similar to the observed lack of mulching material. The increased pressure on natural resources for fuel wood and building material due to high population density and increases over time will be the main limiting factor on introducing significant numbers of livestock and small stock in these communities.

The engagement with the DAHLD and National Aquaculture Centre (NAC) has assured a continuing interest in these areas in the GVHs where WALA is active. Fish ponds using irrigation night reservoirs have shown themselves to be profitable and are expected to expand on their own using existing reservoirs, basins or ponds, although the absence of FFW, used for repairing or constructing new reservoirs, will be missed.

Performance – Village Savings and Loans Groups

IR 2.2: 103,400 smallholder farming households have increased use of financial services

[22] Recruitment of TQCs was initially in the hands of PVOs. When different modalities were suggested and recruitment for these positions was late, CATCH intervened and started to work on a new modality whereby TQCs would be based inside CATCH and hired by CRS, if possible. This seems quite efficient and effective for such a large program.

Some background on how the VSL component works is provided in Annex 13. It is arguably the most popular activity for WALA: 87 percent of the respondents to the endline survey who participate in WALA groups belonged to a VSL group, two and a half times the number involved in the next most widespread activity.[23] There are now well over 7,000 VSL groups in the WALA areas, and many more have developed as part of the same system but outside of the area. An idea of its impact is indicated by the fact that about $1.6 million (more than the target of $1.5 million) has been saved by the WALA groups[24] in the current savings cycle.

Achievement of targets: There are three official indicators for the VSL component and the program is more or less on target for most of them. (Annex 12, Table 12).

***Savings*:** The first target, which is for total amount saved, has reached more than the level set for this stage in the program. This is achieved by encouraging members to save very small amounts of money but on a very regular basis. This process has the capacity to make a substantial difference to households by providing access when needed to loan funds and – at the share-out that takes place at the end of a cycle – to a relatively large lump sum.

The value of shares in the groups varies from MWK 50 (about $ 0.12) to MWK 200 (about $ 0.50), with the commonest figure being MWK100. Many members buy more than one share during a meeting, in order to maximize their income during the share-out, but there are also those who find it hard to come up with the necessary minimum amount at each meeting. Even when they find it hard, however, those spoken to are generally positive about the pressure to save because of the benefits they receive, both from the loans and from the share-out.

***Productive loans*:** The second target is the percentage of loans taken out for "productive" purposes. This proportion has fluctuated over the years from over-achievement in 2011 to broad compliance in the years since. These data are provided in Annex 12, Table 12 and the breakdown for the single year of 2013 by PVO and by district is presented in Annex 12, Table 13.[25]

The definition of "productive" in this context is that the loan should be used for something that potentially leads to a profit within a short period. Table 14 (Annex 12) summarizes the uses to which loans and share-outs[26] are used and "productive" covers those items in the top two sections of the table. It leaves out the items in the bottom section, which includes such things as school fees and livestock.

Whatever the definition of the word, there are strong arguments for encouraging members to use lump sums of money for investment purposes. Nevertheless, the other uses cited in the table are also important contributions to livelihood and there is no lack of anecdotal evidence from members about how important VSL funds have been even for routine recurrent but crucial expenditure, especially food, at difficult times.

***Number of Clients*:** The third target, which is the number of "clients," is a little under achieved overall, although some PVOs have already enrolled their target number and there is still time for the others to do so. Until recently, it was thought that this target was fully met but earlier enrolment figures had been based on VSL group records and included double counting of households that had

[23] Care Groups (30 per cent). It is pointed out by the M&E Manager that the number of households benefitting from Care Groups may be underreported. It is also the case that care groups are not eligible for the whole community so the potential reach is not as great. However, none of this detracts from the popularity of the VSL Component.
[24] See also Annex 12, Table 12. The total savings recorded in this table is taken from the FY 2012 Annual Results Report (ARR). They are a little higher than the figures appearing in the IPTT, which is the official source, but they are used anyway to give an idea of the breakdown by PVOs, which is not available from the IPTT. Other figures in the ARR, including the PVO disaggregation, show complete consistency with the IPTT.
[25] It should be noted that the records of the groups are not reliable in this matter (see below) so this indicator is populated using questions asked from the sample in the annual survey.
[26] The questions do not differentiate between the loans and share-outs - both provide lump sums of money that would not otherwise available to members.

both husband and wife as VSL members. When membership was cross-checked against household ID in the Consortium Management Information System (C-MIS), achievement fell to the levels shown. Even after this adjustment, however, it seems likely that targets will be met by the end of the program.[27]

***Gender balance of members*:** There are also targets for the gender balance of individual members and it is these that contain the one target that is not likely to be achieved. Men are considerably under represented and their reluctance to join means that, whilst the female target is over-subscribed, it is not now possible to reach the hoped for direct participation of men.

A separate study is investigating the role of gender in the VSLs and it will deal with this matter in more detail. It can be pointed out here, however, that the gender balance in VSL groups may reflect division of labor in the family rather than lack of interest by men in the clubs and what they offer. Many respondents said that the women were there on behalf of their husbands, who were engaged in other income earning activities. In any case, discussion with VSL members, including those men that do participate directly and even take leadership roles, suggests that men are often closely involved with the movements of funds supported by the clubs even when they are not present.

Important gender related issues include who makes the decisions about how many shares to buy, when loans are taken, how much for, what the loan and the share-out money is used for, what the source of the money is for repayments and how much of a role each spouses plays more generally. In fact, it is not unusual for both husband and wife to be members of clubs, usually different ones, although reportedly cases exist where they are members of the same club.[28]

Introduction of Private Service Providers (PSPs): The successful introduction of the PSP system, introduced to sustain support to the clubs after the program ends, is a notable achievement of the program. This did involve asking beneficiaries to pay for a service they had previously received for nothing (see Annex 13), which is never an easy task, and most PSPs reported that the transition from CA to PSP was difficult. In many cases, it was necessary for them to call in support from program staff to convince clubs that the change would be in their interests. The staff did provide the support requested; however most PSPs have managed to develop this income source. Furthermore, the endline survey showed that 68 percent of members questioned expressed positive support for PSPs, even though they now have to be paid.

Nine percent expressed open dissatisfaction, however, and complaints were received, both during interviews and in the survey, about PSPs who did not visit their groups enough or only attended to get paid. This came from only a very small number of people spoken to by the final evaluation team, however, and a fairly small number in the survey, although it must also be recorded that 24 percent of the respondents to the survey declined to say whether they were satisfied or not.

There has been some discussion about whether groups, especially the stronger ones, can exist without PSPs. However, one of the most important routine services provided by PSPs – calculating and overseeing the share-out – could quite easily be carried out by many of the stronger groups. However, the presence of an independent person who is outside the group, as is the PSP, to do the calculations does provide confidence to other group members, especially those who find the management procedures hard to understand and who might otherwise be suspicious that they are being disadvantaged by their better-educated colleagues.

Other services provided by PSPs are no less important. These include training in management methods and governance, and linking to other support through the networks. Potential PSPs also ensure that standards and procedures within the VSLs are maintained over time.

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[27] – and when PVOs have entered the details of all VSL group membership in the C-MIS.

[28] The evaluation team did not come across this first hand but it was reported to them and the investigator in the gender study also mentioned it. The evaluation team therefore leaves it to that study to investigate the matter in more detail.

PSP Networks: The development of a network in each district to support the PSPs, including more local sub-networks in some places, is a further achievement of the program. There do remain some outstanding questions about the existence of external technical support for the networks when the program ends, however. At that time, the networks will liaise with Village Development Committees (VDC) and Area Development Committees (ADC).

The VDCs and ADCs can provide official recognition and status and a depository for data collection and performance monitoring and the maintenance of standards. However, the provision of technical support and the ability to monitor and disseminate new ideas about how VSLs can develop would certainly benefit from further external linkages. Of course the larger NGOs involved in this system globally will have some stake in promoting continuing high standards, and program staff are aware of the value of ensuring the existence of a continuing support service for the networks.

VSLs as a Source of Income: In addition to helping families develop an understanding of the importance of saving and offering a relatively painless way of doing it, even for those who are relatively poor, VSLs provide income through share-out of savings plus interest earned, which is distributed at the end of each cycle.

The data gathered in the Portfolio forms and included in the VSL-MIS give some idea of the level of return to members. The average return on savings in the most up to date figures provided to the evaluation team is 39 percent over the cycle, which is 44 percent at an annualized rate. Return amongst the PVOs varies from 15 percent to 62 percent with the most of the PVOs showing returns in the range from 30 to 35 percent. As a return this is impressive by any standard, especially given the relatively small risks involved.

On the other hand, for households to be able to benefit from the groups they do need to be able to save. As noted above, even with the value of shares set at MWK 50 some families do not have the resources to take part. People cannot save what they do not have, so VSLs are not for the very poorest or destitute. Nevertheless, they can make a significant contribution to the income of the low-income families targeted and certainly justify their popularity.

Although it is not in agreement with best practice guidelines and training given to the groups, interviews did reveal that sometimes the pressure to make savings earn interest results in members taking out loans they do not really want so that everyone contributes to the income. Also very occasionally, individuals are allowed to take out larger loans than either the rules or best practice suggests is prudent. Sometimes when this happens, additional safeguards are taken along the lines of more traditional credit programs, such as using assets as guarantees.

Default is rare in VSLs but members do quite often experience difficulty in making repayments, and the last weeks and months of a cycle are usually dedicated to recovering problem loans. The money is nearly always forthcoming in one way or another but the process does cause distress and it is not a good idea to allow agreed individual credit limits to be exceeded.

Economic Activity Selection, Planning, and Management (EASPM): The EASPM training (explained in Annex 13) is an important step in the development of VSLs because it relates directly to the pressure to take out loans that may not be needed especially in the middle of the cycle when the amount of cash available becomes substantial and there is a general desire for it to be earning something.

There has been some discussion about using funds that are not loaned out for group income-earning activities. Some groups have experimented with these but it not easy to find such activities that have

a payback period within the cycle, especially ones that pay returns as large as the loans do. In any case, this activity pushes the VSLs into areas that go beyond their core purpose.[29]

EASPM, on the other hand, helps members to consider income-generating possibilities on their own, and provides them with very basic tools to implement them successfully. This therefore encourages them to find profitable reasons for taking out loans. In a short study like the Evaluation it is hard to quantify how successful it is, but questioning of participants who have been trained did show some grasp of the concepts being passed on to them and the Annual Survey did show considerable IGA use of loans amongst respondents and the evaluation team therefore regards this as an important sub component to have introduced.

Sustainability – Village Savings and Loans Groups

The PSP system and its associated networks have generated a cadre of people who are skilled, respected in the community, and (for the most part) unlikely to move. The system of transforming CAs into PSPs was specifically introduced in order to encourage sustainability and the system has been in place long enough for it to have been tested. It therefore has a good chance of working over the long term, so long as the networks carry out their responsibilities seriously.

One possible issue brought up has been the availability of some way in which the networks themselves can recourse to technical advice, both to solve any problems that come up and to keep them in touch with new developments that may occur over time. The program is aware of the need for this resource but none has yet been assured.

In addition, the sustainability of VSLs will obviously be greater for groups that have been established for longer and have more experience when the program finishes. This has been dealt with by the program through periodic assessments of VSL performance and "graduating" those that need less supervision. About 75 percent of members belong to groups that have thus far graduated.

Performance – Agribusiness

IR 2.3: 20,600 smallholder farming HHs have engaged in commercial marketing

Annex 14 offers a brief description of how this component operates. Encouraging farmers to broaden their horizon from predominantly subsistence to market focused activity involves substantial behavioral change and is not easy. Unlike the VSL activity, which is a more closed system where influence can be brought to bear on all the actors, agribusiness activities operate in an open environment. Farmers need to learn not just new techniques, but new concepts, and how to deal with people who have more sophistication and accumulated knowledge about how the system works than they do. Under these circumstances, the progress the program has made in this area is notable.

Annex 12, Table 8 shows broad success in the indicators chosen for the component, particularly in the first two. These were the percentage of farmers cultivating at least two of the five priority products that were promoted by WALA (96 percent achieved) and the number of individuals enrolled in marketing groups (target surpassed by about 28 percent).[30]

[29] The MTE also cautioned against group investments. In that case, it was because the MTE considered that such group investments do not have a high success rate and it suggested a study might be carried out on the fate of those group investments that have been made in WALA. The final evaluation did not see evidence of any such study having taken place but it does agree that VSLs should generally stick to their core objective of encouraging saving.

[30] Some tables show this activity as considerably over-achieved but it was realized that the manual recording process of members was leading to inaccuracies. When this correction was made the original target of 20,600 was revised to reflect actual achievement levels in year 3 of 26,377. The data now presented therefore suggests that the original target set has been exceeded by about a quarter.

Training for farming as a business and choice of output mix: Five products were chosen as priorities for promotion by the program[31] and the indicator monitoring the percentage of farmers who produce at least two of them reflects the aims of output diversification and choice of product mix based on profitability. The prioritized products are not new to all the farmers but techniques to choose an appropriate output mix, to optimize yields and how to approach mass markets, are. It can be noted also that the percentage of farmers doing this increased from baseline for the program as a whole and for all but one of the districts and PVOs that were covered.

The approach of the agribusiness component was to use value chain analysis to investigate the feasibility of crops in each area, taking into account market opportunity and agro-ecological zone, and then allow PVOs to make decisions about the most appropriate ones to promote based on the results. Differences in conditions and changes in opportunities require flexibility, and the program has not confined itself to the five crops mentioned. Annex 12, Table 11 gives an idea of the range of cash crops that was encouraged.

Over time conditions change, of course, and so do the opportunities. The real objective is therefore for farmers to be able to make their own decisions successfully in the future, combining knowledge of their costs with an understanding of market opportunities and arrive at an appropriate output mix.

WALA promoted this by training and by the hands-on experience provided through clubs and clusters.[32] Overall technical guidance for all of this has been provided by ACDI / VOCA, which has a long experience in this field.

In order to implement its activities the component has made use of a comprehensive series of training materials. The limited educational background of WALA beneficiary farmers limit their capacity to absorb advanced concepts for analyzing output choices, but the evaluation team was able to observe that the training had successfully provided basic understanding of the concepts such as costs and profit and loss.

This was a more limited goal than initial aspirations, which included passing on value chain and gross margin analysis, but even getting across basic business concepts to large numbers of farmers used to subsistence output is demanding. However, the formal training was supported by three years of practical collective marketing experience. It remains to be seen whether all this will be enough to encourage good decision to be made in the future. Continuing support from maintaining clubs and clusters will certainly help if it is available.

***Collective marketing*:** Program targets are provided for two collective marketing variables. The first is the number of participants enrolled in marketing clubs, which has been broadly achieved. The second is the percentage of the marketing group members who actually participated in collective marketing. In this case, the target was 60 percent. Only 53 percent[33] was reached on average across the PVOs, implying an achievement rate of about 86 percent.

***Participation levels*:** 60 percent might seem an easily achievable target for clubs that were formed for the specific purposes of collective marketing. However, it was realistic given the variability in the motivation of farmers for joining, and the number of farmers who find that they are not able or willing to fulfill all the conditions that are needed if they are to take part, and be successful, in the process of collective marketing. When it comes to the point, even those that want to may find that they need to sell their produce more quickly than the process allows and be forced to continue to sell on their own.

[31] rice, beans, groundnuts, pigeon peas, poultry or fish

[32] The system used is explained in the Annex.

[33] There was quite a lot of variation amongst the PVOs but the information was not very reliable because the size of the sample of qualifying respondents was quite small, in fact in the case of four PVOs, too small for the results to be reported.

It should be noted also that the program works in some quite remote locations where marketing of any sort is difficult and from where transport of large quantities of output is difficult and expensive. The success of collective marketing efforts was noticeably less in the more remote areas visited.

Some of the reasons why the target was not met in 2013 also have to be the difficulties faced by farmers when they found themselves unable to sell their chili[34] crop as expected (see below).

***The range of experiences with collective marketing*:** In general, the experience of collective marketing has been varied, including both the successes and disappointments that are an inevitable part of participating in a market system.

The evaluation team spoke to many farmers who were very happy with the comparison they could make between the experiences they are used to when working on their own with those they have achieved when marketing collectively.

When combined with others they can sell to buyers that they would never be able to approach individually. Furthermore, when acting collectively they can even command better prices from the same buyers they use individually. Combining in this way also gives leverage that protects them against some sharp practices, such as under weighing of their produce. Farmers were able to identify all these issues for the evaluation.

However, the evaluation team was also made aware of disappointments. Some of these included simple things, such as making arrangements with buyers to buy, only to find that they do not arrive as agreed.

This problem applied to more than one type of crop, including the much-discussed case of chilies. After the program introduced this crop to farmers and successfully connected them with a buyer over two years, a series of circumstances combined to reduce the willingness and capacity of the buyer to buy at the levels and prices that the farmers thought had been agreed on for the 2013 season. This left some farmers with lower prices than they had expected[35] and others with unsold output, in spite of a document that had been signed by the company. The document had been referred to as an out-grower agreement but it turned out not to be as firm a commitment by the buyer as the farmers thought. The expectations that had been created amongst the farmers were therefore not fulfilled to everyone's satisfaction.

It is not a bad thing that such disappointments occurred during the lifetime of the program because the experience did illustrate some of the dangers of interacting with a market while program staff are still available to explain and motivate. If this support had not been available, the farmers might have found it harder to overcome their disappointment.

As it was, most of those the evaluation team spoke to accepted that they had had two years of success behind them and that problems of this sort were occasionally inevitable. Many continued to be willing not just to market collectively, but to carry on working with chilies. It is also noted that, as Annex 12, Table 11 indicates, substantial collective marketing did take place this year in a wide variety of crops.

***Marketing Fairs*:** Helping farmers to build skills in contacting buyers has been a major preoccupation of WALA. A continuing problem with this issue, however, is the relatively small number of buyers that have been found to work with the farmers.

[34] These are bird's eye chilies but for brevity are simply referred to as "chilies" in this report.
[35] As program staff have pointed out, a situation was created where other output buyers did enter, contacted by farmers, especially through ASPs / ACAs, which was a relief to beneficiaries as well as the program.

One important approach that has been used to deal with this has been the marketing fair. This tool has evolved over the life of the program, starting out as more general agricultural fairs and gradually becoming more focused on marketing. Even now not all of them attract a large number of buyers, but they remain popular with the farmers and many of the contacts farmers have come from meetings at the fairs.

Over the life of the program, much has been learned about how to use these fairs and when they should be held. It has been a productive learning experience but the main difficulty faced at this stage is that, if the fairs are to be continued in the future, an organizing body will be needed after the program has departed. Efforts are being made to find one but this issue remained unresolved at the time of the evaluation.[36]

Clubs and clusters: The clubs and clusters approach used by the program (described in Annex 14) appear to have been an effective mechanism for reaching large numbers of farmers. The clubs are small enough for farmers to be trained effectively and to support each other, while the clusters are large enough to make collective marketing feasible. As long as they continue to provide technical support of the farmers and continue to be successful in collective marketing, there will be an incentive for the farmers to maintain them.

In order to encourage this, one of the pillars of the agribusiness exit strategy is to help clusters acting as marketing groups form into networks that would allow them to interact more efficiently with buyers and other bodies.[37]

Introduction of the Agribusiness Service Provider (ASP) system: As is the case for other components in the program, volunteers have been crucial in achieving breadth of coverage for training and for other support. In this component, ACAs have played this role. Chosen from the cluster membership they have been trained to help with training, market identification, and general support activities for the clubs and clusters.

In order to encourage these activities to continue after the end of the program, the idea introduced under the VSL component has been extended to the Agribusiness component. This has been to transform the volunteer ACAs into income-earning "Agribusiness Service Providers" (ASPs), who earn fees for the services they provide.

The ASP system is much newer than the PSP one. In fact, although planning and development of the system were initiated in 2012, it was only introduced earlier this year (2013) so is still less than a year old.[38] WALA will have to work hard at the process of training and certification if it is to be completed in time. The ACAs will lose their volunteer stipends at the end of 2013[39] well before the transition process to ASPs has been completed.

The program has informed the evaluation team that the fees recommended for ASPs have been set at a level that will provide an acceptable income. It is possible however that in the long run, the ASPs will concentrate on the very specific activities where the income earning opportunities lie, and they may find it a challenge to continue more general support for clubs and clusters.[40]

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[36] In their comments on the draft of this report, WALA has referred to how competition among buyers is motivating them to use fairs and other means of attracting farmers in the future.

[37] Originally, the aim was to work toward forming cooperatives. However, a number of problems, including farmers' capacity levels, convinced WALA that it would be more effective to concentrate on building famers' business capacity that would help them move towards a formalization of arrangements in the future.

[38] The program has pointed out that some ACAs who might be able to take advantage of income-earning opportunities were already identified in 2012.

[39] In some PVOs, some ACAs told the evaluation team that they were already no longer receiving their stipend.

[40] The program also points out that it has developed arrangements between product providers and ASPs that will provide an income source that will help to tie the ASPs to clubs and clusters.

The view of the evaluation team is that setting up the ASP system is more difficult than it was for the PSPs. The work of the ASPs involves more sophistication than that of the PSPs and they will have to work unaided in an open system and interact with sophisticated buyers at all levels. Many of the ASPs that the evaluation team spoke to are clearly capable and motivated but it remains an open question whether there is time for both the introduction of the system and its consolidation before fieldwork has to be terminated, especially in the light of the fact that the support from ACDI / VOCA is already ending. A support network similar to that for the PSPs is under preparation. This is an important innovation but it is too early to tell whether it will become effective before the program ends. In any case, the evaluation team feels that this process would have benefitted from more time to establish and consolidate.

Sustainability – Agribusiness

The basic premise for the agribusiness component is that farmers will be better off by moving from reliance on home consumption of family output, and on to the market system. It also relies on the fact that marketing, both selling of crops and buying of inputs, is more efficient and results in better prices, when larger quantities are involved. This in turn means combining with other farmers who are trying to do the same thing.

These are relatively simple concepts and once grasped by the farmers they are unlikely to lose them, so they will be sustained.

More difficult innovations to sustain are the institutional components of the program that were established to help put these concepts into practice. The most visible of these are the clubs and the clusters and, whether or not they are transformed into formal cooperatives, they are more likely to continue if they deliver on the expectations of sufficient numbers of farmers.

4.4 SO3 – Disaster Risk Reduction

Introduction

SO3: 273 targeted communities have improved capacity to withstand shocks and stresses

SO3 has two Intermediate Results:

- IR 3.1: 273 targeted communities have strengthened mechanisms for disaster preparedness, response, and mitigation
- IR 3.2: 21,203 food insecure households have enhanced capacity to withstand shocks and stress

Table 11: Disaster risk reduction survey data analysis

IPTT REF No	Indicators	2009 Baseline Survey	2013 Target	2013 Endline Survey	2009 to 2013 Difference
SO3: 273 targeted communities have improved capacity to withstand shocks and stresses					
3.1	% of household reported losses of livelihood assets due to shocks and stresses (Impact) (Population) (WALA) (GoM – MoAFS)	7.8%	8.0%	6.8%	-1.0

The baseline to endline data for SO3 does not show a statistically significant difference in asset losses by households due to shocks and stresses. That there was no change in household asset losses during the period is significant for several reasons. First, the baseline value of 7.8 percent is low, attributed to three consecutive years of good weather prior to the commencement of WALA. WALA kept the same value for the endline survey (after rounding it up) as the program decided that a further decrease in asset loss would be difficult to achieve. Second, in 2012-2013, WALA

households suffered severe external shocks from the currency devaluation, food price increases, and fuel shortages. In addition to these global shocks, during the past two years 27 percent of WALA households experienced drought, 26 percent were affected by floods and 14 percent by strong winds (Annex 15, Figure 10). It is a significant achievement for the program that households in the program area were able to maintain a low incidence of loss in the context of multiple severe shocks.

WALA's strategy is to revitalize and strengthen multiple levels of the GoM's disaster management and response system, and to link households to participatory community structures and community structures to the government disaster response offices. WALA seeks to improve the resilience of the most vulnerable through food rations, and of communities through the construction of infrastructure through Food for Work (FFW).

Performance – Community Mechanisms

IR 3.1: 273 targeted communities have strengthened mechanisms for disaster preparedness, response, and mitigation

Village Civil Protection Committees: WALA has trained Village Civil Protection Committees (VCPCs) in 251 communities, 92 percent of its target of 273 communities as of Year 4,[41] and revitalized 39 Area Civil Protection Committees (ACPC) and eight District Civil Protection Committees (DCPCs).

Training is based on WALA's Disaster Risk Reduction Training Manual, an excellent training tool. In focus group interviews, WALA-supported VCPCs demonstrated a good understanding of local threats, DRR measures, and how to apply their training. VCPCs monitor early warning signs, inform the community about threats and actions to take, and encourage risk reduction measures (see Annex 16). WALA VCPCs have mapped community vulnerabilities and capacities for DRR and shared that analysis with community members.

The strongest VCPCs describe a wide range of DRR activities that they undertake together with other WALA groups. Many activities promoted by VCPCs are implemented by other technical sectors, so integration of DRR and technical activities is critical to the VCPC's ability to strengthen community preparedness. VCPCs also work to expand people's perception of DRR, e.g., by encouraging people to see agriculture not only as food production but also as a risk reduction activity that can help protect the community in the future.

Endline data on DRR activities does not allow for baseline comparison or attribution to WALA alone. However, it does show a high level of community awareness of the primary activities promoted by the VCPCs (in conjunction with other WALA groups), designed to strengthen environmental defenses against drought, such as planting drought-resistant crops (93 percent WALA; 86 percent non-WALA); and the risk of floods and high winds through afforestation (95 percent WALA; 90 percent non-WALA). This indicates that VCPCs have successfully linked to SO2 activities (Annex 15, Table 16).

Empowerment of communities in DRR: A major change attributed to WALA VCPCs is an organized approach to disaster reduction and response to smaller scale disasters in communities that were previously left to cope on their own (the GoM prioritizes response to large scale disasters due to limited funds). Endline data show that community awareness of VCPCs and their activities has increased dramatically; 62 percent and 51 percent of WALA and non-WALA households, respectively, recognize that DRR activity has taken place in their community. This was confirmed in mixed group discussions.

[41] The target of 273 communities in the IPTT was based on the estimated number of communities required to reach the overall target. However, most of the WALA targets were reached by covering 251 communities and as such, WALA only worked with 251 communities and 251 VCPCs.

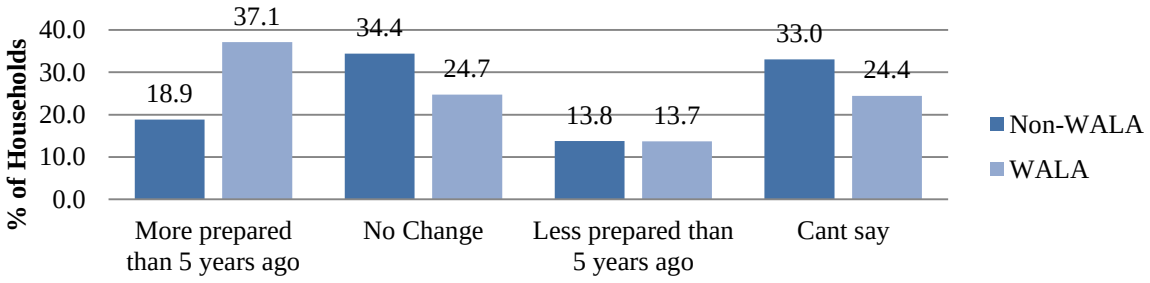
Linkages with formal disaster management mechanisms: WALA has successfully formed strong linkages along the formal chain of GoM DRR offices. WALA PVOs attend DCPC meetings and keep district officers informed of activities. District-level DRR staff state that they have a good relationship with WALA, value its contributions, and consider the ACPCs and VCPCs well trained. ACPC members, who are the VCPC's key link to the district DRR structure, say that WALA has strengthened their capacity to train and monitor VCPCs, and to pass on information to the district. When WALA noted that extension workers were not participating in the VCPCs due to distance or vacancies, the program recruited volunteers and retained extension workers in an advisory capacity, where they assist whenever requested.

WALA participates in the national disaster response structure through the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee food security assessments and the Famine Early Warning System Network. It also monitors district-level household food stocks and coping mechanisms and uses the information to assess whether additional food assistance is needed.

Gender: The DRR training manual mainstreams discussion of the needs of women and girls, and their capacities, though it looks at women's capabilities in a very limited manner (e.g., a main capacity for response is the ability to run). VCPCs have members specially designated to look after the needs of women and children in disaster response. Women comprise about one-third of the VCPC membership and only about one-fifth of the leadership positions. VCPC members insist that men and women perform the same duties. This is credible as the VCPC's primary activities are communication with and motivation of community members.

Resilience: A significant percentage of households (37 percent WALA; 19 percent non-WALA) perceive themselves to be better prepared for shocks than before the program began. However, the majority do not believe that they are better prepared (63 percent WALA, 81 percent non-WALA) (Figure 8). The main reasons given by WALA households for their increased resilience are an increase in savings and assets. Since the VCPC serves all households in the community (whether WALA participants or not) and disseminates some of its information through community meetings, both WALA participants and non-WALA households receive information on how to prepare for and reduce the impact of shocks.

Figure 8: Perception of shock preparedness relative to five years ago



Challenges

Insufficient time to build capacity: WALA had no DRR TQC during the first two years of the program.[42] Consequently many VCPCs were established and trained beginning in 2012, and have not had adequate time and mentoring to develop their skills (e.g., carrying out their Action Plans; mobilizing funds). Weaker VCPCs have a narrow concept of their potential as a force in DRR, and do not appear to be well integrated into technical sector activities. WALA PVOs have a qualitative checklist to monitor VCPC development but this information is not aggregated above PVO level.

[42] One of the WALA PVO partners was responsible for hiring the DRR TQC, in line with the original program agreement. When the partner was unable to fill the position after a long delay, CATCH assumed responsibility for filling the position.

The SOG for DRR was produced only in Year 3 but is of high quality, which helps account for the progress made since 2012.

The lack of time for DRR to become embedded in communities is also reflected in interviews with many GVHs, who failed to mention VCPC support as a feature of WALA, even after probing. This may also reflect the GVHs' perception that health, agriculture and VSL interventions are more important to local development than disaster risk reduction, and a need for greater sensitization of GVHs.

Funding: Perhaps because DRR is an integrated approach, the SO3 budget is approximately one-third of the other SOs. The lack of funds has reportedly constrained implementation. For example, while training targets were met, some PVOs reduced the number of training days, which district officials felt reduced the quality of the training. Limited funding constrained PVO support of some initiatives, such as tree nurseries and desilting. ACPC members stated that due to budget limitations VCPCs do not receive individual training materials, which are important to ensuring a common understanding of the DRR material. Funding from the GoM is a major challenge to a DRR response from the district DRR offices, which have "zero" budget and are reliant on WALA and others to fund disaster response and regular meetings.

Keeping skills current: Keeping skills up to date and refreshing messages to the community will be a challenge for VCPCs after the program ends. Over time, it is likely that most community members will have heard and applied – or grown tired of – the same advice. VCPCs will need a way to stay abreast of new ideas to maintain community interest.

ACPCs: ACPC members noted several challenges, including staying current with their skills without PVO support, the attrition of members trained as trainers of VCPCs (unless the GoM provides training), and transportation, though WALA has given bicycles to several ACPCs.

Sustainability – Community Mechanisms

Level of community activity: VCPCs in less disaster-prone areas have little to respond to outside of individual household disasters, and thus will have little access to outside funds and are less sustainable. Sustainability is much stronger in areas that face more frequent threats, though they will also need funding to maintain activities. VCPCs are applying their training in fundraising and have modest fund balances. Other factors supporting sustainability are good cross-sector representation in VCPCs (eight percent of WALA CBO members belong to a VCPC), and that membership carries a degree of prestige and community recognition.

Appreciation of the importance of DRR: The endline survey reflects a perception that individual household assets rather than community assets enable households to better prepare for shocks. WALA households report that they are better prepared because of increased savings (31.2 percent) and increased household assets (30 percent) compared to 20 percent of non-WALA households in both categories (Annex 15, Figure 12). Neither the community early warning system nor improved infrastructure is seen as increasing resilience, possibly because household assets are considered most important in disaster recovery.

Support from ACPCs: WALA has strengthened the skills of ACPCs to deliver DRR training to VCPCs. ACPC members stated they are confident of these skills and are training VCPCs in WALA and non-WALA areas. Some ACPCs emphasized the need for refresher training of VCPCs (which is part of WALA's exit plan).

Support from GoM: The GoM has developed a new National Disaster Risk Management Policy that marks a shift from disaster response to reducing risk and building resilience. The policy also closes several gaps in the national DRR system that WALA has been addressing since 2012. The new act will also make funds available to support the initial costs of disaster response and recovery

operations.[43] This funding is important to VCPC sustainability, and WALA-supported VCPCs, with training in proposal writing, are well positioned to take advantage of the small grants scheme focusing on community based DRR initiatives.[44]

Performance – Safety Nets and FFW

IR 3.2: 21,203 food insecure households have enhanced capacity to withstand shocks and stress

Safety Nets: The program has successfully delivered rations on a reliable schedule to highly vulnerable households (chronically ill, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), elderly) allowing them to recover their health and become more productive. As of September 2013, safety net rations had been delivered to over 25,202 people,[45] 67 percent of whom are women. Recipients repeated messages promoted by WALA during each distribution (i.e., view the food as medicine; the food is provided by the US government). Food monitors remind recipients that the food is for one year only and encourage them to join WALA groups to improve their food security. Endline data show that 27 percent of households receiving food rations belong to 1-2 WALA groups, 31 percent belong to 3-4 groups, and 41 percent belong to five or more WALA groups.

Targeting: WALA uses a guided community-based targeting system with clear criteria and multiple checks to determine eligibility. The criteria and process appear to be appropriate, as recounted during interviews with safety net recipients, village leaders, and WALA commodities staff, although opportunities to verify this independently were limited.

Capacity of vulnerable households strengthened: Focus group respondents reported that the food ration restores strength and energy, allowing them to work again. Most respondents said that prior to receiving the rations, they would do *ganyu* until they had enough money to purchase food for that day, and often lacked strength to work for long periods of time. The food rations allow them time to work on their own fields and many no longer do *ganyu*.

Food for Work: Among the achievements of FFW activities is the construction or rehabilitation of critical infrastructure in 160 communities as of September 2013,[46] which will have positive long-term economic and environmental impacts. Beneficiaries see FFW as a benefit both to community infrastructure and as much-needed support to their households during the lean season, providing food whose value is higher than *ganyu* wages.

FFW activities have supported DRR measures in erosion control (contour ridging, tree nurseries), infrastructure development (roads, night reservoirs, dams, irrigation schemes, watershed protection) and enabled communities to make progress on some community-initiated activities by freeing up labor. The limited number of structures viewed appeared to be appropriate and well-constructed. Community members appreciate WALA technical support for infrastructure construction, stating that they learned proper methods of construction that they can apply in future. WALA issued its Guidelines for Food for Work and Food for Assets in July 2010, which clearly explain eligibility, work norms, and designs.

Among the most positive achievements seen during the fieldwork are communities where the benefits attained under FFW have motivated people to continue their work without a further food incentive. One community visited during fieldwork had manually desilted a stream, and in another, a Watershed Committee plans to extend flood control measures (check dams, tree planting, stone bunds) done with FFW to reach more areas in the village with its own labor.

[43] Government of Malawi. 2013. Disaster Risk Management Act.
[44] Government of Malawi. 2013. Disaster Risk Management Act.
[45] Data from WALA PVO annual and cumulative ITT data. September 2013. Total is approximate as data for this specific category not reported separately by one PVO.
[46] WALA PVO annual and cumulative ITT data. September 2013.

Challenges

Safety Nets

Low number of eligible households assisted. The total number of households designated for safety net assistance appears to be quite low, especially given an HIV prevalence rate of 15 percent in southern Malawi.[47] Many local leaders and participants expressed concern that the number of CIs is much greater than the rations provided. In the endline survey, 20 percent of households have a chronically ill member, which may include many elderly.

Leveraging WALA activities to decrease vulnerability. A key concept behind the provision of safety net rations is that households dependent on *ganyu* use the year-long ration support and skills learned from WALA to improve household food security. Endline data show a high level of participation among households receiving rations. According to beneficiaries and local leaders, safety net rations have improved food security for the majority of recipients and freed many from *ganyu*; however, the endline survey shows that there was no statistically significant decline in *ganyu* between baseline (31 percent) and endline (29 percent). Many households said they do less *ganyu*, but the most vulnerable rely on *ganyu* or VSL loans to buy food and household items, suggesting that their degree of vulnerability remains high.

Food for Work

Planned maintenance of infrastructure. The main challenge observed in relation to FFW infrastructure is the need to sensitize community leaders to establish a regular maintenance plan for roads.

Selection of activities. WALA guidelines specify that the community must actively participate in the planning and agree to the implementation of the FFW activities. Some of the FFW beneficiaries interviewed did not know how or why the FFW activities were selected. This should be explained in community meetings, and may reflect either poor communication or an inadequate process in a few communities.

Sustainability – Safety Nets and FFW

Safety nets. The combination of a food ration and participation in WALA may not be sufficient to overcome the time and labor constraints of the most vulnerable households.

FFW. The infrastructure provides clear benefits to the community and thus is likely to be sustained. Where groups such as a Watershed Committee are active, there is also strong motivation to maintain benefits. The main threat to community efforts to achieve sustainability would appear to be the expectation that another program may come after WALA to provide FFW.

4.5 Cross-cutting Issues

Good Governance

IR 3.3: 8,000 community-led groups have practiced good governance principles

WALA has trained 10,544 community groups[48] and 251 VDCs and VCPCs in good governance as of the end of Year 4,[49] and trained 71,593 people in in-group dynamics, 61 percent of them women.[50]

Most of the groups interviewed confirmed that they received training in governance, group formation, and leadership. A variety of groups said that when their groups were formed, they were advised by group leaders (FEFs, lead farmers, and VSL leadership) to decide how they would run the group. Many provided examples of how the training has strengthened their capacity to function as a group. The most frequently cited benefit is knowledge of how to develop a constitution because,

[47] Malawi Demographic and Health Survey, 2010.
[48] WALA. 2013. Annual Results Report.
[49] Data from WALA PVO annual and cumulative ITT data. September 2013.
[50] Ibid.

according to a VSL in Mulanje, it "makes us do things in an orderly manner." FEFs said they have learned skills critical to creating successful groups, such as how to select good leaders.

Governance training is mainstreamed so that WALA participants are prepared to work in groups before they launch activities. The Governance TQC trains PVO coordinators, and training is cascaded down to volunteers and to groups. The approach is good; however, mainstreaming has been constrained by several factors. The PVO designated as the technical lead started activities but did not recruit a Governance TQC until Year 2. Sector training was already underway, and while governance training was incorporated it did not receive equal emphasis. All groups have received training in governance, but the delayed start and reduced emphasis has not allowed some groups to gain experience. In addition, the Governance TQC is not based in CATCH, which hampers coordination and participation in meetings.

WALA has two very good tools to measure the progress of the internal governance capacity of community groups: the Civil Society Index (CSI) and the Food Security Community Capacity Index. The tools are to help communities evaluate the performance of service providers in order to create greater accountability and transparency, and to influence services that affect their food security. Both were developed under I-LIFE but were not extensively used in WALA until midway through the program. It was planned to apply the tools in all GVHs; in practice, it has been used with VDCs and water user committees. A third tool, Participatory Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (PPM&E), is designed to help groups develop a vision and strategic plans, carry out participatory M&E, and determine the impact of their actions on the community. Following the MTE recommendation to strengthen PPM&E training, WALA hired Praxis from India to train the governance coordinators on PPM&E. WALA has now trained 3,950 WALA-formed/assisted groups in PPM&E.[51] WALA has developed an advocacy manual and trained PVO coordinators; the intent is to strengthen the ability of groups to advocate for services after the program ends.

Overall, governance training has strengthened the ability of groups to function as formal organizations, which is critical to their effectiveness and sustainability. Those basic organizational skills will remain in the community and will benefit other efforts. Had governance training started at the outset of the program, it would have created deeper understanding and capacity in the groups.

Gender

WALA has had a gender strategy in place since the start of the program and has since produced guidance for each sector. However, the gender strategy does not include an in-depth contextual analysis of the situation specific to Malawi or the districts in which WALA is working. WALA's operational areas are varied and cover patrilineal, matrilineal, as well as both Muslim and Christian societies. A more comprehensive understanding of some of the important cultural differences between these groups in terms of gender could usefully inform program design and development.

However, "WALA was designed to ensure a greater role and involvement of women in economically productive activities and male involvement in health" and in terms of this limited goal, it has been successful with women making up 85 percent of participants in VSL groups, 68 percent in agribusiness groups, 57 percent in small-scale irrigation groups, and 62 percent in livestock activities (ARR FY13; p. 9).

Two major constraints to improving gender mainstreaming in WALA are that the majority of PVOs have no gender focal person and that almost no gender training of PVO or CATCH staff has been conducted throughout the program.

In summary, gender issues have been considered in the WALA program, yet more in-depth analysis could be undertaken to better understand the specific issues relevant to gender roles and responsibilities in program areas and to tailor interventions to respond appropriately and effectively

[51] Ibid.

in the districts of operation. A future program would benefit from a more thorough gender analysis that investigates the cultural and gender differences between and within districts/program areas. This would improve understanding of the roles of men and women within the household and assist program staff to tailor interventions more specifically towards supporting both men and women. In particular, efforts should be made to ensure women's burdens are not increased through their participation in activities. In addition, training in a gender-sensitive approach and implementation should be provided to all program staff to enable its mainstreaming in all activities. Additional discussion on gender aspects of WALA is found in Annex 17.

Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS Considerations

HIV in Malawi remains a significant challenge to the health and development of the population. The MDHS 2010 reports that prevalence in urban areas is twice that of rural areas: 17 percent of women and men aged 15-49 in urban areas are infected with HIV compared with nine percent in rural areas. The southern region has the highest HIV prevalence with 15 percent (18 percent women, 11 percent men), which is about twice that of the Central Region (eight percent) and Northern Region (seven percent). Women remain disproportionately affected.

The WALA program aims to mainstream HIV/AIDS considerations into its activities, as well as to work closely with the IMPACT program.

The evaluation found that HIV considerations are effectively mainstreamed in MCHN activities, which work very closely with IMPACT, with PVO staff usually sharing the same office space and coordinating well on promotional activities such as Community Health Days. In the majority of districts, health promoters make regular visits to HIV support groups to talk about nutrition and the importance of antiretroviral therapy, preventing mother-to-child transmission, and growth monitoring and promotion for children and positive healthy living. They often work alongside expert clients and encourage members of HIV support groups to join WALA activities such as VSL and home gardens. Referrals are made between HIV support groups and CGs. CGVs provide home follow up to those affected by HIV and AIDS. In particular, the CG support and attention to growth faltering assists in early identification of children with HIV who need enhanced nutritional support and health care.

HIV messages are integrated in MCHN modules, including messages on the importance of both men and women attending early for antenatal care so that couples can be tested for HIV, PMTCT advice, and Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) messages and support.

Child Health Days and community open days have been used as another opportunity for promotion of the MCHN activities and messages – including food processing and food preservation displays – alongside HIV counselling and testing.

In terms of SO2, many aspects of conservation agriculture are suitable in principle for active people living with HIV due to the principles of minimum tillage and soil cover, which provide large gains in hard labor and time savings in the field. Intercropping and homestead gardens also aim to provide more nutritious foods. The appropriateness of irrigation technologies is considered in relation to time constraints (for women and those caring for the chronically ill) and to ease of operation or use.

In SO3, training in initial assessment to identify hazards that affect communities and interventions for either preventing or reducing the impact of disasters incorporates effects on handicapped, ill, elderly, and other vulnerable people. The safety net program is specifically targeted to the chronically ill or those caring for OVCs. However, the evaluation found that there has been less attention to transition out of safety nets and support beyond food handouts for these vulnerable groups.

WALA has selected only one indicator to monitor HIV mainstreaming: *Cross Cutting 4.1. Percentage of individuals (men or women) aged 15-49 years who have comprehensive HIV knowledge (identify two prevention methods and three misconceptions).* This has improved from a baseline of 44 percent in 2009

to 50 percent (WALA 52 percent versus non-WALA 45 percent) in 2013. While this is an important shift and is commendable, it missed the WALA target of 65 percent. It is obvious that work remains to be done to ensure that the majority of the population has access to adequate knowledge. It may also not be the most appropriate indicator in terms of program activities because awareness raising on prevention has not featured highly as a WALA activity under any of the SOs.

Overall, HIV/AIDS programming is mainstreamed well in MCHN activities and taken into consideration in SO2 and SO3 activities. Since WALA is not specifically engaged in education activities on HIV prevention, more appropriate indicators to assess the effectiveness of HIV mainstreaming could be considered in future programs or a stronger emphasis be placed on HIV prevention and awareness-raising. It is important that future programs continue to consider HIV/AIDS implications thoroughly in their design and that HIV concerns do not slip off the radar. Considering the ongoing high prevalence rates, combined with low awareness on prevention in the population, a future program should consider whether to enhance its awareness-raising activities.

Environmental Monitoring and Impact Mitigation

The program has been observant to the need for environmental monitoring and impact mitigation. The MTE report referred to a number of activities that were implemented to mitigate and prevent environmental degradation. These included watershed development, conservation agriculture, and irrigation.

These had been specified in the Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) that is written during the proposal submission process. One of the main restrictions is on the use of fertilizer and herbicides in crop cultivation techniques and Post-Harvest Handling and Storage (PHHS). The MTE also noted that the program had worked toward integrating environmental protection in all SOs as a cross-cutting theme by inviting external technical assistance from CRS Madagascar in 2011 to enhance capacities for environmental monitoring in WALA.

The program's ARR FY13 reports on the relevant activities it has embarked on, including:

- Promotion of fuel-efficient stoves that emit less smoke (which can cause respiratory problems), with support from the Mulanje Renewable Energy Conservation Trust (addressing one of the recommendations from the MTE);
- Facilitation of watershed development, seeking to reverse the degradation and loss of soil, arable land, and forest. Treatments include contour continuous trenches, stone bunds, infiltration pits and trenches, gully plugs, and reforestation. Conservation treatments have been applied to more than 2,000 hectares to date;
- Incorporating mitigation measures into irrigation scheme design and construction that cover monitoring of waterlogging from irrigation systems;
- Applying water-catchment protection principles to the development of each irrigation scheme. Site-specific micro-grant proposals must include an environmental impact mitigation plan; and
- Promotion of CA, which helps to reduce soil erosion and improves soil organic matter content, soil water holding capacities, and soil fertility of small farm holdings;

Other relevant activities, identified by the evaluation team, include:

- Environmental protection by VCPCs: advocating tree nurseries and planting trees, reduced cutting of trees, vetiver grasses, and windbreakers around homesteads.

A potential clash has emerged between the limitations set by the IEE and the promotion of CA, which often sees a reduced use of fertilizers but a greater use of herbicides. As access to ground cover (mulching material) is limited, this provides a limitation on the expansion and success of CA. More thorough technical support in Integrated Pest Management would also be relevant and appropriate, but requires much more in-depth technical support.

Overall, the program has performed very well on monitoring environmental impact identified during the IEE.

5. Program Processes

5.1 Program Management

The final evaluation team found that CATCH is managing this substantive Title II MYAP generally well, especially in terms of guiding the seven PVOs towards the standardized implementation of a comprehensive food security and nutrition program based on the final MYAP proposal and detailed implementation plans.

There are various aspects to the program that were novel to the WALA grant recipient and PVOs. These include the standardized approach and central support structure guiding the implementation, and the administration of CATCH as a separate administrative and management entity responsive to the donor, distinct from the CRS Country Office. While other Title II programs use a similar structure (e.g., Bangladesh) this was new to Malawi. The final evaluation team feels that the size and scope of the program and the number of PVOs involved (varying substantially in capacity levels) have justified this decision.

CATCH has delivered on perhaps its greatest responsibility, overseeing the implementation of a uniform program approach, at scale, with more than 80 percent of the ambitious targets set out at the start likely to be achieved by the end of the program in 2014. This is recognized by all PVOs, who have acknowledged that managing seven different partners with distinct identities is no small accomplishment. They also acknowledged that most have profited from backstopping services in such areas as program administration, M&E, commodity management, and technical support under each of the SOs. This holds true for the systems support (e.g., financial and administrative systems, commodity management, and M&E) provided to smaller-sized PVOs. CATCH has invested significant resources in building up critical capacities, which justifies the inclusion of these PVOs as a means to strengthen local capacity in Malawi. These requests for support often occurred on an ad-hoc basis when systemic weaknesses surfaced.

Consequently, CATCH is considered a success (answering one of the questions raised by the MTE). The final evaluation team agrees with the MTE findings that the management responsibility for such a large and comprehensive program rests with the grant recipient, giving the responsible party control over the means of program delivery so that they can be held accountable for their actions. Similarly, it has proven beneficial to the group that the technical leads are together in CATCH (Blantyre), in close proximity to the field, which facilitates frequent face-to-face interaction between CATCH, PVOs, and local partners such as the GoM. Face-to-face communication is still considered a key ingredient for in-depth exchange of knowledge, experiences, and opinions.

After laying out the framework for community engagement and the implementation strategies for PVOs to roll out the program, CATCH has focused on the implementation of the program and monitoring thereof, aiming to reach the targets set at the beginning of the program. An important achievement is the establishment of efficient and effective coordination and communication structures that allow for a frequent exchange of information with the PVOs, with a clear focus on program management and technical backstopping of the sectors.

CATCH and the PVOs have also utilized and promoted exchange visits between various geographical entities to improve learning. This has been used for the Advisory Board meetings during the second part of the program, as well as the TWG meetings. During each of those meetings, PVOs host the sessions and receive an opportunity to focus on their realities in the field, strengths, weaknesses, and particular challenges. These meetings have been greatly appreciated by all involved and are seen as an essential learning tool. While these exchanges also have occurred closer to the

field, the final evaluation team believes that this learning tool could be used even more consistently, especially to share good practices and success stories.

5.2 Staffing

The MTE report noted the significant staffing challenges over the life of the program. CATCH has seen transitions in all positions. The competitive labor market in Malawi is most often mentioned when explaining the frequent staff turnover. A large number of NGOs are active in the areas of food security and MCHN in Malawi, and experts in administration, finance, and M&E are in demand. While CATCH management produced a note on staff retention towards the end of 2013, this seems fairly late in the program cycle to have any impact on the staffing levels for the remainder of the program. It may still have some effect on keeping staff in place until the end of the program, although no plan has been adopted yet for adopting financial incentives.

Perhaps most notable have been the changes that occurred in key positions in CATCH, including all of the senior management positions (Chief of Party, Deputy Chief of Party for Program, Deputy Chief of Party for Finance and Administration, and M&E Coordinator), and TQCs for agriculture and MCHN. Appointments in TQC positions for DRR and livestock and the lead person in knowledge management were significantly delayed. These staff changes and delays have had an impact on program performance, perhaps most visibly in the late start of the DRR and livestock/fish farming components, which have also therefore seen limited impact on the ground.

One obvious reason for delays has been the decision in the original design to award PVOs with the responsibility for hiring certain TQC positions associated with particular expertise. It is suggested that in the future CATCH have the power to recruit according to vision and plan, while PVOs be included in selection panels for senior positions. It is important that the technical supervisory team is constituted in Year 1 to ensure consistency of preparations, rollout, monitoring, and backstopping. Similarly, the program has shown that in some instances the dependency on individual staff members such as TQCs for backstopping of the program is a risk given their mobility in the Malawian labor market.

WALA has an excellent example in the area of irrigation of how to mitigate the risks arising from turnover of technical staff. Already under I-Life, the irrigation component had outsourced most of its technical backstopping to an international contractor with local offices, who has a team of experts ready to provide services. Given the high stakes involved in implementing such a large program and its dependency on a complex and sequenced implementation program cycle, as well as the short time period to achieve results (i.e., to reach all households with a gradual rollout), such arrangements may be considered for other technical components in the future as well. This also addresses an important point of local capacity development that emphasizes strengthening the capacities of institutions rather than individuals. CRS/WALA has drawn on various partners for their specific technical expertise. Examples include WOTR in NRM; Conservation Farming Unit in CA; a number of research stations were pulled in under agriculture; and Chancellor College and Bunda College provided support under MCHN.

5.3 Program Coordination

The final evaluation team has identified overall program coordination in CATCH and integration between the various elements as an area that could be improved upon. The Team's views are based on the following observations:

(1) Data from the endline survey suggest that participation in WALA activities does lead to greater gains; however the data suggest that the returns diminish as the number of activities increases. This could indicate an implementation problem whereby the program lacks resources to go in-depth, starting up activities that may not always reach fruition. This may also point to a lack of oversight on the quality of multiple interventions implemented simultaneously. It is disappointing that one of the key assumptions – increased program

engagement leads to positive outcomes – could not be validated due to the size of this integrated program.

This is not to say that no associations or synergies have been identified or promoted by the program. Far from it: essential linkages between successful program elements have been made. Examples include the engagement of successful VSL groups to invest in livestock, small stock, and fish farming; and engagement between SO1 and SO2, for example, with lead farmers and FEFs advising Care Groups on the establishment of homestead gardens.

(2) CATCH has purposefully devolved the monitoring of qualitative performance to individual PVOs (using QIVC forms that few actually manage to analyze), leaving CATCH with relatively few inputs. For its updates, CATCH depends mainly on the TQCs and their interactions with the PVOs through their quarterly meetings. The result is that CATCH focuses perhaps too much on the monitoring of numerical targets.

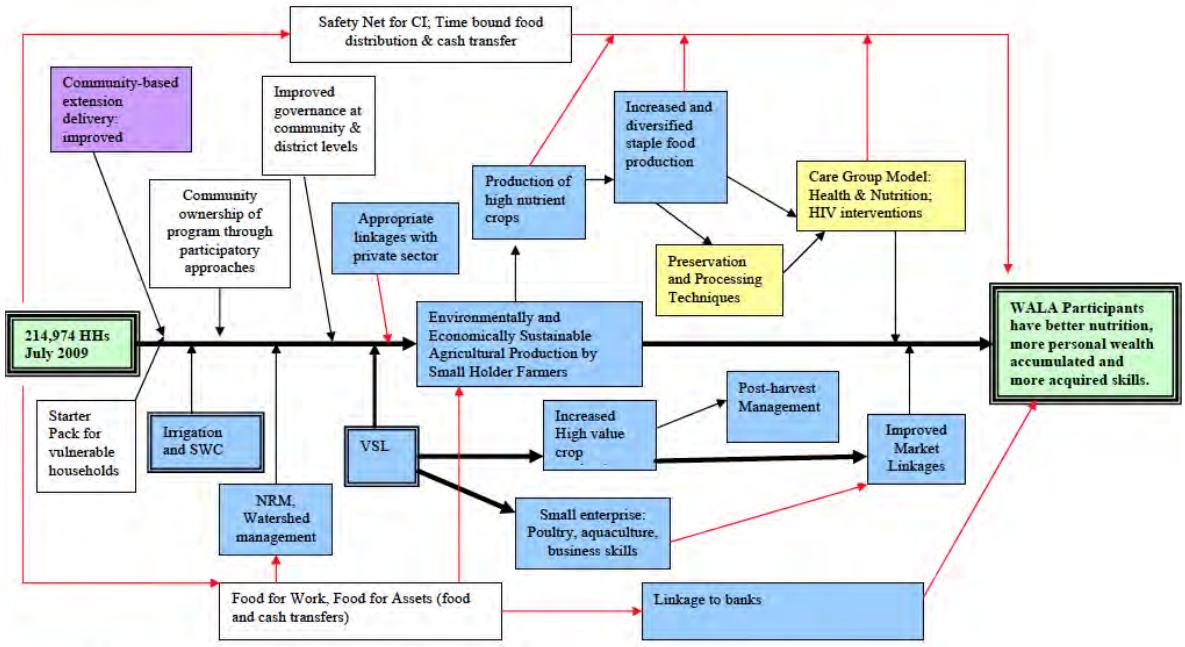
(3) CATCH has not invested enough in understanding and documenting the linkages and relationships between the various components of the WALA model at the various units of analysis, or in investigating various development pathways. [52] Perhaps it should have allowed for some flexibility as to the modes of implementation, learning about what does and does not work in a particular context, and documenting an evolutionary WALA model that could inform future programs in Malawi. The MTE had shared a similar concern that there had been "limited opportunities for discussions on the bigger picture of the WALA strategy" (MTE report, p.45).

It seems a missed opportunity that the WALA flow chart (Figure 9) provided at the start of the program has not been reviewed more extensively, especially as WALA represents a second-generation program design where questions of opportunities for scaling up may be legitimately asked.

It is likely that staff changes in CATCH affecting senior management and technical leads including for knowledge management may have affected performance in these areas – particularly as this has not been explicitly programmed. While the implementation of a program this size has to be management's first concern, some of the learning opportunities have been missed. Perhaps a late effort in incorporating lessons learned into the WALA model may still yield significant results.

[52] This is certainly something that FFP has sought to prioritize in its recent Request for Applications (RFA) for the next generation of Development Food Assistance Programs starting in Fiscal Year 2014. The RFA specifically talks about the fact that "FFP seeks to implement effective models, build capacity, and create an enabling environment adapted to the Malawi context. Therefore, applicants must provide an overall development strategy that seeks to create, when possible, self-financing and self-transferring *models* that will continue to spread under their own momentum both during and after the project." (p.3) FFP, 2013.

Figure 9: WALA flowchart: WALA conceptual framework of critical linkages between program activities and by SO



Source: Final WALA Proposal.

5.4 Knowledge Management

Practical implementation of knowledge management in WALA has been concerned with documenting and disseminating experiences and achievements generated within the program and ensuring that approaches, methods, and lessons learned have been recorded in a way that facilitates present and future reference.

In practice, the knowledge management strategy has focused on knowledge communication and related activities, including:

- Writing a biannual newsletter that documents experiences and presents accessible stories about the program. This approach has now evolved to the point where the stories are based on chosen themes relevant to program approaches, such as the present one on synergy.
- Participating in special studies that are identified as required including, for example, case studies on integration of WALA activities.
- Producing well-written program success stories.
- Information leaflets about WALA for publicity and other purposes.
- WALA reviews quarterly PVO reports for consistency and accuracy and provides feedback to the PVOs and to CATCH management before finalization.
- The production of videos (specifically on chili production and marketing and on the role of men in maternal and child health made for a couples' conference held by the program).

The knowledge management strategy of the program dated December 2011 explicitly recognizes (on pages 5-6) that attention to development of a strategy that would cover all aspects of knowledge management had not been emphasized from the start of the program. In the meantime, program activities had generated a great deal of explicit and tacit knowledge that was not being systematized or made available for effective lesson learning.

Nevertheless, although it does not do so explicitly as part of the knowledge management activity, WALA has made good use of externally generated material and technical support, not only from past allied programs but directly from organizations at the forefront of the fields in which WALA is working.

5.5 Monitoring and Evaluation

The evaluation team concurs with the positive view that has been generated about the design of the WALA M&E system. The main components of the system and its most important reporting outputs are described in Annex 18, Tables 19 and 20.

The C-MIS is updated rigorously. It includes data quality analysis exercises that are apparently carried out with sufficient regularity to ensure satisfactory accuracy of the targets. Errors have been caught and corrected including, for example, an anomaly that was discovered in the achievement of target numbers of household enrolled in VSL groups. This had been completed based on Portfolio Forms, the content of which are recorded in the VSL-MIS. However, it became apparent that, since the Portfolio Forms record data, specifically the numbers of members at the level of individual VSLs, simply adding together all the members resulted in double counting households that have both husband and wife as members of (usually[53]) different VSL groups. This has now been corrected, and it explains the fall in achievement levels in some of the tables that report VSL membership over time.

The annual survey has also been carried out regularly since the baseline was completed: it was carried out in 2011 and 2012, resulting in written reports. The M&E section runs the survey according to best statistical practice with the assistance of PVO M&E offices. In order to encourage objectivity, the PVO staff do not work on the survey in their own area but in those of other PVOs. In 2013, the questions were combined with the final evaluation Endline Survey (although there is no plan to produce a separate report this year since it is considered redundant alongside the report of the final evaluation).

These instruments are quite complex and they took time to develop and implement, so they were not rolled out immediately. In the case of the C-MIS, this led to a backlog of data that needed to be entered into the database, but this problem was overcome. In general, the principal instruments necessary to report on the achievement of targets have been well designed and well implemented.

The other instruments used for reporting on quality of interventions have also been well designed. The QIVC and the MCHN data forms all include data that reflects the depth and quality of outcomes from program activities, as does the Indicator Tracking Table (ITT) [54]. In addition, the VSL-MIS was designed based on experience elsewhere in the world and concentrates on the most important variables that describe the contribution of VSLs to village livelihoods.

In the case of the VSL-MIS, regular reporting is required for external use by CRS in addition to the TQC in CATCH, who regularly aggregates the data from all the PVOs. These are thus also kept broadly up to date, and they contain generally good information.[55]

It is also generally up to PVOs to collect the data and complete forms covering qualitative and performance issues. These are intended to be principally for PVOs to monitor their own activities,

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[53] The study of gender issues in VSL groups that was being undertaken concurrently with the Final Evaluation has apparently seen evidence that some families have both husband and wife as members of the *same* VSL group in some cases. The final evaluation team did not see this, so it is leaving it to the gender study to confirm whether this does in fact occur.

[54] The M&E manager succinctly defined the ITT as "an extended version of the IPTT in which all routine monitoring indicators are captured and aggregated. (It) is a program monitoring tool developed by CRS and its use has been recommended by TOPS for Title II programs."

[55] An exception to this is the question that refers to how many loans made are for productive investments. The final evaluation team observed firsthand that it is often completely arbitrary whether a loan is specified as productive versus for "business." This problem is well understood by program staff and the productivity of loans reported by CATCH relies not on the Monthly Portfolio Forms but on questions in the annual surveys.

however, and while they are generally complimentary about the design of the ITT and QIVC forms, external pressure to complete them regularly is less, and implementation suffers when work pressure builds up. The inconsistent implementation of these forms means the data they provide cannot be used to show progress across all the PVOs and over time.

Similarly, the transmission of MCHN data has not been as planned. In fact, monitoring of MCHN activities has been generally inconsistent and although the form mentioned was well designed for use by CGVs with support from health promoters, it is not uniformly completed, entered into C-MIS, or regularly analyzed. It may be that data are being collected, but it does not appear that they are optimally used to assess progress or inform decision-making.

The overall view therefore is of a very well designed system that is well implemented for reporting of targets, but less so in reporting on quality issues where the pressure to collect data regularly has been more relaxed.

5.6 Partnerships

Partnerships represent an important part of the means to achieve program results. An inclusive approach toward national and international partners often leads to having the best technical skills and know-how available. Networking with other partners also provides an excellent opportunity for a learning culture and for capacity development. It also facilitates sustainability, as the program does not depend purely on a time-bound program entity but has advocates that will remain in place after the program has ended. Consequently, the success of the program can also be measured through gauging the interaction that has taken place with national and international partners.

The first level of partnership extends to the eight PVOs and CATCH, which are the principal delivery channel for program interventions. CATCH (a CRS entity) provides the oversight function while the other seven PVOs are responsible for implementation. As stated earlier, the collaboration between PVOs and CATCH has been fairly efficient and effective, using established coordination and communication structures.

The program has been implemented in a standardized manner despite some differences in capacities between PVOs. All PVOs say they have benefited from participating in this program, particularly the smaller ones. Perhaps surprisingly, the results from the quantitative survey and qualitative data collection tools do not show a clear pattern that points to a clear stratification in terms of success indicators among the PVOs.

The second level extends to the GoM, which has both provided technical expertise and been targeted for training. Other public and private partnerships in Malawi have been formed to provide specific training and technical assistance. Examples include Agricane in the field of irrigation and ACDI-VOCA in agribusiness. Their performance has been discussed in Chapter 4. CATCH has made an overview of its engagement with partner organizations, included as Annex 19. Overall, WALA provides a good example of program implementation through a partnership model.

5.7 Financial Management

Financial Management

WALA's funding comes from three sources: monetization, 202(e), and ITSH. As of September 2013, expenditures against a revised current budget of $56,135,526 were 72 percent of the LOA budget. WALA does not foresee a high unused balance at the end of the program, although the continuing depreciation of the Kwacha and the timing of the approval of the remaining 20 percent of 202(e) funds are two factors that may affect WALA's projected cash balance at the end of June 2014.

Table 12: Life of program budget data

Budget/Expenses	Monetization	Section 202(e)	ITSH	Cost Share	Total
Original LOA budget	34,886,839	10,276,263	6,318,531	886,596	52,368,229
Current LOA budget	30,186,673	18,311,600	6,750,657	15,161	56,135,526
Expenses as of end of Year 4	23,494,365	11,259,730	5,080,609	795,336	40,630,040
Percent LOA budget spent end of Year 4	78%	61%	75%	90%	72%

WALA undergoes multiple annual audits including a CRS internal audit, an external audit for non-US sub-recipients, and the USAID annual A-133 report. WALA was also included in a US government Office of the Inspector General audit of USAID agricultural programs in Malawi in 2013. In addition, two of the PVOs are reviewed by their own organization's internal auditors. There have been no major issues identified in the WALA audits, in spite of a lot of turnover among finance staff including the departure of the Deputy Chief of Party (DCOP) for Finance, Administration and Human Resources and the arrival of a new DCOP in July 2013. An example of program financial controls is that an instance of fraud in one of the partners was detected through CATCH's routine internal review of PVO expenditures, at a time when the loss was quite small in terms of financial impact.

There have been no delays in fund transfers from the donor or major budgeting shortfalls. Some PVOs noted that there have been some persistent delays in cash flow throughout the life of the program. The delays are less of a problem for larger PVOs but can be a constraint on operations for small partners. This is attributed in part to the multiple organizational layers in multiple locations that funding requests must pass through in both CRS and partner PVOs for approval, as well as errors in reporting that delay approvals. A significant factor has also been how three-month funding advances to PVOs and reconciliations with CATCH were structured. CATCH has recently restructured this system to eliminate a built-in funding gap, and moved from a quarterly to a monthly reimbursement system, which should help ensure few interruptions in the flow of cash to PVOs.

PVO partners report good communication and support from CATCH. CATCH assists PVOs to prepare for external audits and respond to audit findings. CATCH personnel visit PVO offices on a quarterly basis and hold an annual meeting with all PVO finance staff. CATCH has conducted three trainings for PVOs on US government regulations and a financial training for non-financial managers to better ensure WALA's ability to meet USAID requirements. CATCH's oversight includes conducting a financial risk assessment to identify any areas of weakness in a partner, and following up by ensuring that each PVO has an institutional plan to strengthen its financial accountability.

5.8 Commodity Management

The commodity management system in WALA is a comprehensive system incorporating a number of checks to ensure that Title II commodities are delivered to beneficiaries in a consistent and reliable manner with no pipeline breaks, few delays, and losses below one percent. There have been a few incidents of fraud, which the program detected before large losses occurred. It has performed consistently well over the life of the program, and while the total amount of commodities is relatively small for a Title II program, WALA has the additional challenge of importing commodities through a port in Mozambique, and the overall system requirements are no less. This was confirmed by the US Office of the Inspector General audit in 2013, which found few problems with commodity management. One PVO reported that its internal auditors found that routine warehouse issues had already been addressed because of the close communication with CATCH.

WALA has paid close attention to training, establishing tracking systems, and monitoring. Commodity staff in CATCH conduct monthly monitoring visits to PVOs, which include verification of warehouse conditions, review of accounts, and training. PVO partners report that they receive good support through regular visits and TWG meetings, and that CATCH maintains good

communication. Commodity staff are well trained in comprehensive commodity management systems, skills that will remain in Malawi after WALA ends.

At the beginning of the program, commodity management training was provided to PVO partners. Training covered the entire commodity procurement and delivery system to ensure that staff have a comprehensive understanding of the system. Refresher trainings are given annually for each PVO, along with individual trainings in specific areas of weakness for individual PVOs. WALA provides comprehensive guidance for planning, programming, and managing commodities through CRS' Food Assistance Commodity Management Manual (2011) and Guidelines for Food for Work and Food for Assets (2010). The main warehouse and all PVO warehouses were visited and found to be clean and well organized.

High staff turnover among CATCH commodity management staff (including the departure of half of the staff in 2012) and the PVOs has required frequent retraining, and meant that new staff lacked familiarity with systems. This has resulted in some gaps in consistent application of internal controls – as noted by the Office of the Inspector General –, which WALA has sought to address through its frequent visits. PVOs pointed out that staff changes have led to different guidance on some tasks that have caused some minor frustration among partners.

The reliable and timely supply of food in WALA has facilitated the implementation of the safety net, SFP, and FFW activities, which is important to the objective of restoring the health of food aid recipients and to the motivation of FFW beneficiaries and achievement of goals.

5.9 Monetization

WALA has handled the monetization of commodities well over the life of the program, Several factors affected monetization plans in Years Four and Five that presented unique management challenges, consumed large amounts of management time, and delayed sales and finalization of the Year 5 budgets for PVOs. The most significant challenge was the 49 percent devaluation of the Kwacha in 2012 that made arranging a sale difficult due to daily currency fluctuations. CATCH was able to arrange a payment schedule with a buyer that protected the program from currency losses, a notable achievement given that few countries have had experience with such a dramatic fall in the value of its currency. CRS also received approval from FFP to spend down the monetization money (in Kwacha) and replenish it with US dollars from US-government-funded and other programs. This also helped reduce WALA's exposure and risk. A second major challenge in Year 5 was when unsatisfactory commodity prices prompted the program to remove Crude Degummed Soy Bean Oil (CDSO) from the monetization list (with FFP approval) in favor of Hard Red Winter Wheat, only to revise the decision due to a subsequent low market price for HRRW. The CDSO was contracted to be sold, but before this occurred CRS was notified that the commodity would not be available for monetization due to an increase in ocean freight rates. CATCH then entered into discussions with FFP to provide 202e funds instead, which have been approved. The negotiation process over 202e funds took time, as did the issuance of the authorization letters for 202e funds, which delayed the finalization of Year 5 budgets with PVOs until late September. As of late October 2013, CRS was waiting for USAID to obligate the remaining 20 percent of the 202e funds. Overall, CRS has managed several significant changes in its operating environment in Years 4 and 5 well, avoiding financial loss to the program and undue disruption to its PVO partners.

6. Evaluation Findings

Findings SO1 – MCHN

WALA has responded to the majority of the key MCHN issues facing the community. All those interviewed felt that issues of frequent disease, maternal and infant death, and child malnutrition had been significantly addressed by the activities. The quantitative data reveal impressive improvements in child under nutrition prevalence rates. However, some communities are restricted in adoption of behavior changes due to lack of access to water, particularly hygiene and sanitation practices and the

cultivation of kitchen gardens for enhancing availability of nutritious foods. Food security and access to the six food groups were cited as on-going challenges despite the engagement of the majority of caregivers in other WALA activities.

Hygiene and sanitation promotion and CCFLS for training of caregivers on food processing, as well as the promotion of fuel-efficient stoves, were the activities consistently stated as most adopted and preferred by communities. The quantitative data confirm this, with results of high uptake of stoves and improvement in complementary feeding practices.

In "model" sites, good coordination has been achieved with HSAs, who feel their work burden has been reduced due to improved community practices. They strongly appreciate WALA's ability to reach all pregnant mothers and children under five in their catchment areas at the household level with consistent messages, which is beyond the scope of MoH staffing and resources. For example, WALA helped bring GMP to the community through CCFLS.

However, WALA has not managed to orient and fully engage HSAs everywhere, which has proved a constraint to programming in some areas. The MTE recommended training HSAs to the same level as health promoters. While WALA has tried to orient as many HSAs as possible, a comprehensive training for all has not been considered possible due to time and financial constraints. This is one consequence of the program being spread over such a wide area: there are too many HSAs to train.

Village Health Committees (VHCs) have received minimal, if any, orientation and are inadequately engaged in WALA. PVOs were not asked to engage VHCs until very late in the program, despite the program's original intention to build their capacity. This has been a missed opportunity and leaves a gap at the time of handover, when they could be a highly useful resource for ensuring sustainability of the activities and outcomes.

At district level, good collaboration and engagement in WALA were reported consistently by MoH staff, with sharing of plans and information, coordination, and opportunities for joint supervision. WALA follows MoH guidelines on IYCF and UNICEF/WHO key practices guidance, and has worked closely with MoH in developing training modules to ensure consistency of messaging.

Despite working through several layers, the training-of-trainers model was considered effective by all involved in the program. The evaluation found that accurate messages have reached a wide number of people. The modules are an important resource for CGVs and have been well received, with the messages considered appropriate and useful by the community.

The majority of CGVs have volunteered for up to five years with few incentives. The issue of small, non-financial incentives for CGVs was raised in the MTE as a recommended action, however very little has been done to address this and it has remained a challenge throughout the program. PVOs state resource constraints as the major obstacle.

The slow rollout of modules, largely due to TQC turnover and delays in finalizing and printing modules, has been a challenge and has meant that instead of finishing in Year 3 as planned, the last module is still being rolled out in the final year. This has negatively affected plans to graduate CGVs (which has not happened yet) and to support a gradual handover to the communities and the MoH.

Findings SO2 – AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming, VSL and Agribusiness

Design

- CA is viewed by beneficiaries and agricultural experts interviewed to be appropriate for the setting and context of southern Malawi, although a shortage of feed and mulching material is clear based on the evaluation team's observations.

- Initial targeting of very poor households with chronically ill and/or OVCs has moved toward more inclusive self-selection of all households in selected districts. The endline data show that WALA beneficiaries had higher acreage than non-WALA respondents.
- By design, some communities receive substantially more assistance than others do. One community may receive direct investments in irrigation plus FFW schemes in night reservoirs, fishponds (training, fingerlings), and watershed development, while other communities only receive training in AgNRM.

Implementation

- The use of the volunteer (Care Group) model has mobilized a large number of people in the target areas. It has been fairly efficient, although more support for lead farmers could have been envisaged.
- Due to late recruitment of TQCs for livestock and fish farming and three changes in AgNRM TQC, there were delays in producing manuals (Standard Operating Guidelines) and clear instructions to PVOs.
- The TWGs for AgNRM, irrigation and livestock/ fish farming are functioning well, with frequent communication and exchange of experiences.
- WALA collaborates well with counterparts in MoAFS (e.g., in extension, irrigation, livestock and research stations, and NAC).

Achievements

- Close to 80 percent of the targeted households have received training in new agricultural technologies. The adoption rate has been below target, although progress was made.
- Popular technologies adopted by WALA beneficiaries include: ridge realignment and *Sasakawa* (One-One); inter-cropping/ mixed cropping; pit/basin planting in combination with compost manure; and mulching in combination with minimum tillage.
- From WALA beneficiary households, six percent benefited from livestock and fish farming activities; three percent from the irrigation component, based on more than 400 hectares of newly irrigated land; and six percent from soil and water conservation treatment activities (over 2000 hectares total). There is clear overlap between the communities that profit from livestock and fish farming, irrigation and watershed development activities, and FFW.

Behavior Change

- Behavior change in the promoted agricultural technologies has been observed although adoption is slower than anticipated. This conforms to expectations, as it takes time for benefits to show a clear payoff. The knowledge transfer is there, but adoption is often only partial – adopting one or two technologies that are easy to integrate in traditional practices, such as intensification of crop cultivation through 75cm spacing of ridges (instead of 90cm or 1 meter) and applying "*Sasakawa*."

Capacity Development/ Extension

- The extension model includes a training-of-trainers (TOT) model that targets FEFs as trainers, though they mostly do not interact with beneficiaries directly. FEFs are in return requested to provide the real TOT to lead farmers who will interact with the beneficiaries with very few resources. This "TOT in the second level" is a watered-down approach and seems to have been adopted for the program to reach the high targets.
- There is a lack of suitable IEC material (including posters, flipcharts, etc.) for FEFs and lead farmers. Much of the training material is targeted to better-educated readers and is in English.
- Frequent staff changes have occurred in CATCH and PVOs at expert and management levels, which has delayed program implementation.
- Demonstration plots are used as the main learning tool for FEFs and lead farmers during the rainy season, but are said not to be utilized to their full extent due to lack of (free) seeds. The 2012 dry spell and economic crisis may have exacerbated this.

- While training in PHHS has been provided, the evaluation team (similar to the MTE Team) observed that most of the proposed interventions were deemed unaffordable to WALA beneficiaries.

IR 2.2 – VSL

- The VSL system is very popular within the program and among the members taking part.
- Most of the official indicator targets (total amount saved, use of loans for productive purposes and number of clients) are on course to be broadly met.
- The target number of men included has not been, and will not be, met. A special study on gender in the VSLs is being implemented separately from this evaluation.
- The introduction of PSPs has been generally successful.
- There is broad satisfaction amongst VSL members with their PSPs.
- The establishment of PSP networks has taken place.
- VSLs provide significant income (although small in absolute amounts) and have significant livelihoods impacts on households.
- VSLs may not be appropriate for the poorest of households that do not have sufficient resources that will allow them to save, even in small amounts, on a regular basis.
- There is some variation in the quality of the VSLs, the way they keep their records, and the extent to which they comply with recommended best practice.
- During the evaluation fieldwork, some VSL members indicated that they felt pressured to take out loans that they do not really need.
- EASPM responds to a real need and is well directed. Members seem to have taken on board the simple messages that the EASPM training provides, though it was difficult to ascertain the extent to which it is put into practice.
- This activity is sustainable.

IR 2.3 – Agribusiness

- The agribusiness indicators referring to cultivation of at least two priority products and number of individuals enrolled in marketing groups are either nearly or fully achieved.
- The indicator for participation in collective marketing will likely be slightly under-achieved.
- The agribusiness component has focused mainly on training small farmers to carry out farming as a business, providing training and demonstration of the advantages of collective marketing, and the collective purchase of inputs.
- The field work suggests that collective marketing has been noticeably less successful in remote areas.
- Although the scope of the training may have been a little less than originally foreseen, in practice it was generally appropriate and many farmers stated that they had absorbed the messages.
- There is broad acceptance and satisfaction among farmers with the collective marketing message but there were some notable exceptions. These included farmers who were disappointed by the chili marketing efforts in 2013 and some in clubs that experienced problems marketing other crops as successfully as hoped.
- Many farmers who were disappointed with collective marketing in 2013 have shown resilience, understanding the dangers of participating in markets and continuing to be motivated – not only for collective marketing but also specifically for chili production.
- Marketing fairs provide one of the main formal means of putting farmers and buyers in contact.
- They have evolved appropriately over the life of WALA and proven popular amongst the farmers.
- No way of assuring the future of marketing fairs has yet been identified.
- The introduction of ASPs is a worthwhile attempt to encourage sustainability of assistance to marketing clubs and clusters.

- WALA will have to work hard to bring all ACAs up to ASP status and even harder to ensure that ASPs are consolidated in their work before the program withdraws. It would have been better if there had been more time for this system to be introduced, implemented, and consolidated.
- ASPs have a more complicated job than PSPs and probably needed more time than PSPs to be introduced. In practice, they have had less.
- The development of a network for ASPs is also well behind that for the PSPs.
- Clubs and clusters are more likely to be sustained if they are successful in delivering to their members access to cheaper inputs and to collective marketing. The attempt to formalize them into cooperatives may help this process, but it is the quality of the work done by the members and their leaders that will be the final determinant of success.

Findings SO3 – Disaster Risk Reduction

Strengthened Mechanisms for Disaster Response

- DRR has strengthened the capacity of local government structures and led to an organized approach to preparedness and response at the community level.
- Revitalized ACPCs are confident of their training skills, engaged in training VCPCs, and able to respond to VCPC reports of disasters.
- District-level DRR personnel have higher-quality DRR training materials than they could produce on their own because of the program.
- WALA is an active contributor at the national level to disaster assessments and maintains good communication at all levels.
- All VCPCs engage in a messages and activities recommended in the training.
- The stronger VCPCs are well linked with other WALA technical groups, which helps them integrate DRR-specific messages into agriculture and health activities.
- Weaker VCPCs tend to work in isolation from other groups.
- Assistance to help VCPCs broaden their scope of activities will aid sustainability by keeping their contributions to the community fresh and up to date.
- The late start has not allowed VCPCs enough time to develop as organizations.
- Funding levels for DRR activities were significantly less than other SOs and constrained implementation and the provision of training materials to VCPCs and ACPCs.

Food insecure households have enhanced capacity to withstand shocks and stresses.

- Safety net rations have enabled some of the most vulnerable to improve their health and livelihood status and reduce reliance on *ganyu.*
- FFW has helped food insecure households and supported infrastructure such as roads and irrigation, which provide economic returns and support resilience.
- Households receiving food rations (and thus more vulnerable) are engaged with other WALA groups that can improve their skills, knowledge, and long-term food security. Perceived reliance on *ganyu* has decreased, while endline data do not reflect a significant change. This may indicate that poor households are less dependent on *ganyu* for daily food needs but still use it for other purchases.
- According to village leaders and beneficiaries, there are many more vulnerable households eligible for safety net assistance than there are food rations available.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions – SO1 MCHN

Design and Implementation

- SO1 was effective in offering a preventative approach to under nutrition while including responsive components (CCFLS and SFP) for children whose nutritional status is deteriorating.

- A key to its success has been the extended reach of the community-based Care Group implementation model, with knowledge, resources, and services accessible to all pregnant women and caregivers of under-5 children in the community.
- The focus on demonstration in CCFLS, on the construction of stoves and hygiene and sanitation infrastructure, and the promotion of community-based GMP, which enabled earlier identification of children whose weight is faltering, have been strong positive elements.
- The quantitative data suggest that the Care Group model may still have some way to go before it will achieve "saturation coverage" in WALA program areas.
- While engagement with the MoH has been strong at the district level throughout the program areas, it has been variable at field level, with HSAs well incorporated in some areas and less in others, and VHCs minimally engaged. This is largely attributed to the broad geographical reach of the program, combined with a lack of financial resources and time to train and incorporate all HSAs in the program areas or extend orientation to VHCs.
- The MCHN sector has had inadequate responsibility for ensuring strong performance of SFP within WALA, and this activity, largely delegated to the commodities team for oversight of food distribution, has been poorly structured and implemented.

Capacity Development and Extension

- Leadership for implementation has been largely delegated to health promoters and CGVs based in their own communities, which has further contributed to the sense of community ownership and sustainability.
- It was noted throughout that the MoH does not have the capacity for intensive household reach, nor to organize CCFLS. In this way, WALA has greatly assisted the outreach capacity of the MoH.

Recommendations – SO1 MCHN

Design and Implementation

- PVOs should aim to start in all sites in the first two years rather than through phased expansion. This would enable consistent rollout of modules across the district at the same time, provide sufficient time for all to take on messages and adopt behavior changes, and facilitate Care Group graduation and MoH-supported handover in Year 5. It might require targeting fewer GVHs/TAs.
- Availability of water for hygiene, sanitation, and kitchen gardens and safe water for household consumption were emphasized as key constraints to effective program implementation and greater impact. A future program should incorporate interventions to improve access to safe water.
- Although the technical elements of SFP remain the responsibility of MoH, WALA should assume greater responsibility for providing technical support to the MoH in SFP, as well as ensure effective performance monitoring of sites where it is distributing SFP food. Ideally, oil should be mixed with CSB as a pre-mix prior to distribution to ensure the child receives the correct ration and that oil is not diverted into the household pot.

Capacity Development and Extension

- A greater engagement of the MoH should be sought from the beginning of the program to ensure ownership, inclusion of HSAs and VHCs in activities and training, and effective and timely handover.
- CGVs should be recognized for their work and commitment and rewarded with small incentives over the course of the program. Suggestions given to the evaluation team include bags, occasional drinks at meetings, and certificates.

Conclusions – SO2 AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock, Fisheries, VSL, and Agribusiness

Design and Implementation

- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* The package of relevant WALA interventions, such as promoting improved seed varieties, crop cultivation and soil conservation technologies linked to CA, is relevant and appropriate for southern Malawi, while there is a clear limitation to its expansion based on shortage of feeder and mulching material.
- *AgNRM:* The component started during the first year but did not progress well due to TQC changes. As a consequence, PVOs initially lacked strategic guidance.
- *AgNRM:* The sheer breadth of activities to implement, at times referred to by WALA staff as WALA's "buckshot" approach, has stretched WALA's capacity on the ground, which reduced potential impacts on program targets.
- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* WALA uses a volunteer support model but has not invested enough in its success through training, repeat-training, and IEC material. This has led to an inability to maximize opportunities for transfer of knowledge and the adoption of promoted technologies and behaviors.
- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* Equity is an issue with different support packages provided to different WALA communities and households. As such, various WALA models and pathways to development can be considered to be implemented. The program has monitored the success of the various support models
- *VSL:* The very poorest households, which are supposed to be a focus of the program, may not be able to benefit from this activity even though the value of shares is already very low in some VSLs. There is not much that is within the power of this component that can be done about this before the end of the program.
- *Agribusiness:* In general, caution needs to be exercised when creating expectations amongst farmers, as did the chili marketing agreement. Where risks are involved, they need to be made clear.
- *Agribusiness:* It would have been preferable if WALA had included a greater number of buyers in its activities so it could reduce reliance on those few with whom it had built relationships.

Achievements

- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* Results are mixed. Some progress has been made in areas such as irrigation and the adoption of new technologies, but the contribution from these components to overall food security status as measured by the two population-based indicators (HDDS and MOAHFP) has been limited.
- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* The external context has likely had a significant effect on the results. Events in 2012 saw crop failures in southern Malawi and an economic crisis – mainly resulting from an immediate 50 percent devaluation of the Kwacha versus the USD, as decided by the GoM.
- *VSL:* In general, this activity has been both popular and successful.
- *VSL:* Most of the targets have been met or almost met.
- *VSL:* The target number of men in groups has not been met and will not be. Nevertheless, when the evaluation team reviewed the possible reasons for this, it concluded that men are in fact interested in this activity and their relative absence from meetings does not detract from its reach or effectiveness.
- *Agribusiness:* The agribusiness activities have made an important contribution to the income of participating farmers in terms of improved prices from collective marketing and reduced costs through collective purchase of inputs.
- *Agribusiness:* The proportion of group member farmers participating in collective marketing is a little lower than targeted but there are one or two special circumstances contributing to this result and the evaluation team does not consider this a serious issue.
- *Agribusiness:* Neither is it surprising that collective marketing is less successful in remote areas.
- *Agribusiness:* Some of the collective marketing disappointments this year have helped to deliver the message of dangers involved in working with the market and taught farmers the need for caution when dealing with buyers.

Behavior Change

- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* Behavior change has been generally slow, particularly on the adoption of certain promoted CA technologies.

Capacity Development and Extension

- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* Staff changes at CATCH and PVO, including changes to TQCs, have negatively affected the rollout and coherent vision for program priorities.
- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* Lead farmers, who are volunteers, have received too little support from WALA to become real agents of change benefitting other smallholder farmers.
- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* WALA is seriously challenged by a lack of IEC material. While several manuals (Standard Operating Guidelines and technical manuals) have been produced, often for each technical area, simple extension tools to help the learning process on the ground (posters, leaflets, drawings) are missing.
- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* Demonstration plots are a good learning tool for hands-on transfer of practical knowledge. Lack of inputs after the first year may have led to a decrease in the effective use of demo plots. The use of demo plots by a FEF and several lead farmers seems to provide a practical solution for engaging volunteers, although it leads to decreased visibility of promoted technologies.
- *VSL:* PSPs are providing a needed service. The system should ensure that the PSPs remain motivated to continue and expand their work with the groups and be motivated to start new groups.
- *VSL:* Although networks have been established, it is likely that they will need some kind of technical backstopping in the future. This is not yet assured.

Recommendations – SO2 AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock, Fisheries, VSL, and Agribusiness

Design & Implementation

- *AgNRM:* WALA should focus on fewer innovations and provide more in-depth support to their adoption. The design should be kept simple, with a focus on an extension program. Consideration should be given to allowing the communities some power of choice over which technologies they favor, to increase chances for success.
- *Irrigation:* In addition to site-specific irrigation technologies such as gravity-fed, river-diverted irrigation and treadle pump, WALA should consider other technologies such as drip irrigation and garden sacks.
- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* A workshop is suggested to discuss the impact and sustainability of various WALA models (e.g., maximum interaction versus minimum interaction models) to inform the content of future Title II programs that build on experiences and lessons learned from WALA.
- *VSL:* It may be appropriate to remind some of the VSL groups about the reason why some best practices, such as maximum individual loan amounts, are recommended, and encourage them to be followed.

Capacity Development and Extension

- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* It should become a priority to develop extension material (e.g., simplified messages from the CAHW training manual). While this would be too late to benefit the current program beneficiaries, it would be ready to use for the next phase of Title II programs or by the GoM.
- *AgNRM, Irrigation, Livestock and Fish Farming:* Outsourcing of essential technical backstopping (similar to support provided under Agricane) may be considered if dependence on individuals becomes a risk to achieving results.
- *VSL:* The program should follow up on leads to establish long-term technical backstopping for the VSL PSP networks.

- *Agribusiness:* WALA should continue to work hard to find an entity that can continue to organize the marketing fairs.
- *Agribusiness:* WALA should continue to work hard to train the ASPs and ensure their comfort within their scope of work and their income-earning activities before the withdrawal of the program.

Conclusions – SO3 Disaster Risk Reduction

Design and Implementation

- Overall, WALA has performed well under SO 3. It has built community capacity in disaster preparedness and response, strengthened linkages among GoM DRR mechanisms, provided reliable safety nets to the most vulnerable households and opportunities to reduce their reliance on *ganyu*, and has facilitated the construction of infrastructure that has positive economic and environmental impacts on communities.
- Many vulnerable households with elderly, chronically ill, or caring for OVCs may find it difficult to find the time to participate fully in other WALA activities as intended without additional support.
- The FFW activities are appropriate and play an important complementary role in DRR and in improving productivity in communities.
- WALA uses a combination of defined criteria for participation and community-based targeting that appears to work well in some of the communities observed, but does not appear to be applied uniformly by all communities. In some communities, it may be that large-scale programs require more people than vulnerable households can supply, and therefore are opened up to wider participation.

Capacity Development and Extension

- The late start in 2012 means that many VCPC groups have not had adequate time to build strong capacity (e.g., carrying out portions of their action plans, mobilizing funds) or change the perspective on DRR among the majority of households in their communities.
- Their future ability to function as effective CBOs depends in part on continuing support from ACPCs and DCPCs. The new national DRR policy provides funding for preparedness and response and prioritizes activities that WALA has been addressing since 2012. With appropriate refresher training, WALA VCPCs should be well positioned to take advantage of the small grants scheme under the new policy.

Recommendations – SO3 Disaster Risk Reduction

Design and Implementation

- The poorest households may not have the additional time to devote to participation in WALA activities. This suggests that the program may need to tailor additional technical and/or material support to the time and labor constraints of the most vulnerable households.
- Keep DRR as an integrated activity but provide for a separate budget for training and community-based risk reduction activities, as well as training materials.
- If funds are inadequate to carry out training and other activities, focus on more disaster-prone areas.
- *Safety Nets:* The next program should consider significantly increasing the number of safety net beneficiaries, especially the chronically ill.
- *Safety Nets:* The program should consider providing support that is more intensive to safety net beneficiaries to help them engage in other program activities that will reduce their vulnerability.
- *FFW:* Work with FFW communities on formulating infrastructure maintenance plans that have an organized approach to maintenance, articulating roles, responsibilities, and a timetable, especially with regard to roads.

Capacity Development and Extension

- During refresher training prior to exit, ensure that VCPCs, including those already trained in proposal writing, have the necessary skills to apply successfully to the small grants scheme that will be funded under the new national DRR policy.
- Refresher training should help VCPCs to find ways to identify and incorporate new recommendations into their repertoire to maintain community interest in their message.
- Prior to program exit, increase the number of DRR training manuals provided to ACPCs.