

# Food and Nutrition Security, Food Systems Transformation

## German Development Cooperation in Malawi

### The challenge

Hunger and malnutrition remain critical challenges in Malawi, particularly in rural areas where many households face seasonal food shortages and rely heavily on a maize-based diet. This lack of dietary diversity leads to serious nutritional deficiencies. According to the latest Demographic and Health Survey (DHS, 2024), 18% of children in Malawi are stunted, meaning they face long-term physical and cognitive impairments due to chronic undernutrition and poverty.

A major factor driving malnutrition is the structure of Malawi's food system, which faces persistent challenges such as low agricultural productivity, limited crop diversification, and weak market integration. Smallholder farmers, who produce most of the country's food, struggle with increasing pressures from climate change, soil degradation, and rising input costs, making food production less stable and less diverse. As a result, nutritious foods remain inaccessible or unaffordable for many Malawians, further exacerbating malnutrition.

To tackle these challenges, building a more resilient and inclusive food system is essential to improve sustainable food production, dietary diversity, and access to affordable, healthy diets. This requires stronger coordination and capacity development of all stakeholders, including farmers, government institutions, the private sector, and civil society. Effective collaboration across sectors such as agriculture, health, and trade is key to addressing nutrition and food security challenges holistically.

While economic and ecological crises are placing increasing pressure on limited resources, investing in improved nutrition remains critical. Poor nutrition weakens resilience, productivity, and long-term development, making it even more urgent to strengthen institutional capacity, support smallholder farmers, and foster multi-sectoral partnerships. These investments are not only essential for public health but also for economic stability: globally, every dollar invested in nutrition generates up to 16 dollars in returns through higher productivity, reduced healthcare costs, and stronger human capital development.

### Our approach

Germany supports Malawi's efforts to improve nutrition and food security and transform its food systems through a combination of technical and financial cooperation under a multi-level approach.

- At the household level, financial cooperation focuses on increasing access to and availability of diverse, nutritious foods.
- At the district and national levels, both financial and technical cooperation aim to strengthen governance, enhance coordination, and build institutional capacity for sustainable food systems.

Two key initiatives under technical cooperation implemented by GIZ - STEP UP! and the Transformative Initiative (TI) for Food Systems - work together to foster multi-sectoral collaboration and strengthen stakeholder engagement, particularly at the decentralized level. Their aim is to contribute to the transformation of Malawi's food systems, making them more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient to both emerging and ongoing challenges such as climate change, economic shocks, and food insecurity.

The STEP UP! Programme (Sustainable Transformation of Food Systems, Empowering Pathways Bottom-Up) focuses on strengthening institutional capacities for better food and nutrition governance. It supports district and national authorities in planning, coordinating, and implementing effective food security and nutrition strategies as part of a broader effort to transform food systems. By enhancing multi-sectoral collaboration and integrating nutrition considerations into local development plans, STEP UP! ensures that food and nutrition security remain a political and operational priority. Additionally, learnings and experiences from district-level implementation are fed into national-level policymaking, helping to refine strategies and improve coordination across all levels of governance, ultimately contributing to a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food system.

left: *Child receiving Vitamin A supplementation for its healthy development*

right: *Diverse diets are the basis for well-nourished and healthy families.*



The Transformative Initiative (TI) complements this by building inclusive, community-driven approaches to food systems transformation. It strengthens the role of civil society organizations and other local actors in shaping food systems policies and through advocacy efforts. Through policy engagement, networking, and capacity strengthening, the TI promotes evidence-based decision-making and inclusive governance, ensuring that food systems transformation is both locally owned and nationally aligned.

By reinforcing governance structures, fostering collaboration across sectors, and strengthening local implementation capacities, Germany contributes to a more effective, inclusive, and resilient food system in Malawi—ensuring that nutrition and food security strategies are better coordinated, implemented, and sustained.

From 2015 to 2025, the Food and Nutrition Security Programme (FNSP) contributed to the objective of improving food and nutrition security in Malawi through both supporting households with improving their diets, districts with improving their implementation and monitoring of nutrition activities and national level with the overall policy framework.

Germany’s financial cooperation, implemented through KfW and channelled via UNICEF, has supported Malawi’s Department of Nutrition in implementing the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Initiative. With a special focus on the critical first 1,000 days (from conception to two years), Germany’s multi-sectoral approach integrates health, agriculture, education, social services, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) to address malnutrition at its roots.

German financial cooperation has supported strengthening district capacity to coordinate and implement multi-sectoral nutrition programmes while promoting nutrition behaviour change communication for optimal maternal, infant, and young child nutrition using a community-based approach.

Recognising the impact of external shocks such as cyclones and drought, Germany’s support has also helped enhance community resilience, ensuring continued access to essential nutrition services in times of crisis. By coordinating with other donors implementing nutrition programmes, Germany ensures the full SUN package is delivered across supported districts, leaving no one behind.

## The benefits

Germany’s technical and financial cooperation has played a key role in enhancing knowledge, skills, and practices among caretakers on optimal maternal and child nutrition, while also strengthening community leadership and engagement in promoting better nutrition. Beyond immediate health benefits, Germany’s support has had far-reaching macroeconomic impacts, including lower future healthcare costs, increased economic productivity, and reduced poverty risks in rural areas.

By preventing nutrition-related illnesses, mothers experience a reduced disease burden, allowing them to dedicate more time to productive activities such as farming, ultimately contributing to household income and wealth generation. These efforts not only improve overall well-being but also advance gender equality, empowering women to participate more actively in economic and social life.

From 2015 to 2025, the Food and Nutrition Security Programme (FNSP) has reached 54,242 women of reproductive age and 28,200 children (6–23 months old) in Dedza and Salima, improving their nutrition status by promoting dietary diversity and better nutrition practices. 33,000 food insecure households benefited from different nutrition-sensitive social protection measures, aimed at improving access to nutritious foods. The programme also engaged approximately 29,000 men in gender-related activities to foster an enabling environment for the adoption of nutrition and sanitation interventions. Through a multi-level approach, 822 extension workers from various government departments were trained to strengthen the effectiveness of the care group model. At the national level, FNSP played a key role in shaping food and nutrition security policies, promoting greater alignment across sectors. To enhance effective nutrition leadership, the programme engaged the Africa Nutrition Leadership Programme to train all 28 Principal Nutrition and HIV/AIDS Officers in leadership, sensitising them on a food systems approach as a comprehensive way of improving better nutrition outcomes. By integrating efforts at community, district, and national levels, FNSP has contributed to stronger, more sustainable food systems that support improved nutrition outcomes for Malawians.

The SUN programme has strengthened nutrition intervention capacities and structures at district level leading to better transfer of knowledge and skills for complementary feeding, hygiene and sanitation to caregivers of children under 5. In order to increase access to a variety of food, over 37,000 households in Lilongwe and Dowa districts have established backyard gardens; and 60,000 households have small livestock. Further, more than 350,000 children under 5 are receiving Vitamin A supplementation and deworming which are essential for micronutrient deficiency control. In communities, screening of children for acute malnutrition has led to early detection and increased chances of recovery.

### Funds for Food and Nutrition Security, Food Systems Transformation in Malawi

#### Bilateral

Volume of ongoing programmes:	EUR 2.3 million (technical cooperation) EUR 47.96 million (financial cooperation)
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#### Multilateral support:

In addition, Germany is also a major contributor to food and nutrition security through its financial contributions to the European Union, World Bank, and United Nations.