GOVERNANCE IN MALAWI

Impact evaluation of the ‘Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’mbomba Ang’ono Project: Enhancing Communities’ Capacity in Tracking Development Resources at Local Council Level’

Effectiveness Review Series 2017/18

Photo caption: Women and men working on a map of their village in TA Mwankhunikira in Rumphi district in Malawi

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EMERALD NETWORK LTD for OXFAM GB

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- Project change agents, comprising Radio Listening Clubs (RLCs), STAR circles and data collection teams for providing information of change processes that inspired the generation of focal outcomes.
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Emerald Network Evaluation Team: Emerald Network works with multi-level, multi-stakeholder systems change for just and sustainable development through policy influencing, research, evaluation, design, process facilitation and social innovation. Our leading-edge practice is informed by complexity and systems perspectives and transformational learning approaches, bringing together scholar-practitioners with in-depth experience and a wide range of skills to support the design and implementation of interventions.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>Area Development Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALGA</td>
<td>Citizen Action for Local Governance and Accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCJP</td>
<td>Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDF</td>
<td>Constituency Development Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>CISANET</td>
<td>Civil Society Agriculture Network</td>
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<td>CSC</td>
<td>Community Score Cards</td>
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<td>DC</td>
<td>District Commissioner</td>
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<td>DCA</td>
<td>Danish Church Aid</td>
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<td>DCT</td>
<td>Development Communications Trust</td>
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<td>DDF</td>
<td>District Development Fund</td>
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<td>DDP</td>
<td>District Development Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>DoF</td>
<td>Director of Finance</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPD</td>
<td>Director of Planning and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELBAG</td>
<td>Economic Literacy and Budget Accountability for Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GVH</td>
<td>Group Village Headman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEC</td>
<td>Information, Education and Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Local Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGAP</td>
<td>Local Government Accountability and Performance Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDF</td>
<td>Local Development Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>MALGA</td>
<td>Malawi Local Government Association</td>
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<td>MEJN</td>
<td>Malawi Economic Justice Network</td>
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<td>MHEN</td>
<td>Malawi Health Equity Network</td>
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<td>MHRRC</td>
<td>Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre</td>
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<td>PET</td>
<td>Public Expenditure Tracking</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
PIC  Project Implementing Committee
PO   Project Officer
RLC  Radio Listening Club
SIG  School Improvement Grant
TA   Traditional Authority
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNV  United Nations Volunteers
UP   United Purpose
VDC  Village Development Committee
WACRAD World Alive Commission for Relief and Development
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oxfam GB’s Global Performance Framework is part of the organization’s effort to better understand and communicate its effectiveness, as well as enhance learning across the organization. Under this Framework, a small number of completed or mature projects are selected each year for an evaluation of their impact, known as an ‘Effectiveness Review’.

During the 2017/18 financial year, one of the projects selected for an Effectiveness Review was the Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’mbomba Ang’ono project under the ‘Policy Influencing/Advising and Citizen Voice’ [Governance] thematic area. This project was carried out in the Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts in Malawi between April 2016 and June 2017, by Oxfam together with two local partner organizations, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the Development Communications Trust (DCT).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’mbomba Ang’ono project, which contributed to the changes that are of interest in the study, was jointly implemented by Oxfam and two local partner organizations, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the Development Communications Trust (DCT), over a period of 15 months (2016–2017). It was implemented in Phalombe, Dowa, and Karonga districts towards gender-sensitive, responsive, inclusive, effective, transparent and accountable utilization of the Local Development Fund (LDF), District Development Fund (DDF) and Community Development Fund (CDF). These three districts are in the southern, central and northern regions of Malawi respectively and represent the socio-cultural diversity of the country, which appears to have a bearing on how decentralization is playing out. The contextual developments in Malawi that gave rise to the project include growing citizen poverty and inequality; high incidence of corruption, fraud and financial mismanagement among duty bearers; district secretariats’ monopolization of decision-making power over the allocation and use of public resources; and low citizen and civil society capacities to exercise their rights as rights holders.

The overall goal of the project was that by June 2017, district councils in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts should be more accountable, responsive and inclusive in managing development resources, particularly the Local Development Fund, District Development Fund and Constituency Development Fund. The project was jointly developed and implemented by Oxfam and two reputable local partners in each district, the Development Communications Trust and Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace of Blantyre, Lilongwe and Karonga dioceses. The specific challenges to which the project responded included non-participation of communities in budgeting and use of public funds, inappropriate use of funds and corruption, which undermined effective service delivery and community development. The specific traditional authorities (TAs) in which the project was implemented are Nazombe and Jenala in Phalombe, Msakambewa and Chakhadza in Dowa, and Kilipula and Kyungu in Karonga. At national level, the project conducted advocacy on mainstreaming gender in public expenditure tracking (PET). The main strategies adopted by the partnership were:
1. Mobilizing communities into action groups such as STAR circles\(^1\) and Radio Listening Clubs (RLCs) to plan, learn and act together as rights holders and engage local government as a duty bearer.

2. Strengthening the capacity of women and men in selected traditional areas in the three districts – focusing on those in STAR circles, RLCs, Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Area Development Committees (ADCs) on PET and gender analysis around LDF, DDF and CDF.

3. Mentoring and accompanying PET coordinating groups comprising VDCs, ADCs, RLCs and STAR circles in the respective traditional areas and districts to document and analyse data generated through PET processes and use if for engaging duty bearers.

4. Working with media and other actors to conduct advocacy work towards gender-sensitive, transparent and accountable utilization of LDF, DDF and CDF beyond the districts in which the project was implemented.

5. Ongoing monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) at local, district, and inter-district levels.

**EVALUATION DESIGN**

This review investigates a set of concrete outcomes selected and agreed between Oxfam Malawi and Oxfam GB:

**Outcome 1:** Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga district councils are accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective in managing the Local Development Fund, District Development Fund and Constituency Development Fund and their results.

**Outcome 2:** Women in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts are meaningfully empowered to participate in decision-making structures and processes.

The evaluation was completed in October 2019 and all findings and supporting quotes are valid at the time of completion.
# RESULTS

## Contribution Scores Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Short commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga district councils are accountable,</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>We gave this outcome a score of 4, reflecting our interpretation that while the outcome was realized only in part, our evidence was that the intervention made a crucial contribution. In support of this rating, we found strong evidence for overall improvement in both Phalombe and Dowa districts, while the evidence for improvements in Karonga district was more incomplete. Specifically, while there was good evidence in Karonga of increased inclusiveness in managing the LDF, DDF and CDF, evidence of increased accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness was more incomplete, with progress in some aspects, but not in others. In terms of contribution, while we found some evidence that other actors within these districts may have made complementary contributions to this outcome, particularly in Dowa district, the contribution of the Oxfam-led consortium appears to have been primary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>responsive, inclusive and effective in managing the Local Development</td>
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<td>Fund (LDF), District Development Fund (DDF) and Constituency</td>
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<td>Development Fund (CDF) and their results.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2: Women in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts meaningfully</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>We gave this outcome a score of 3, reflecting our interpretation that the outcome was realized in part and that the intervention made an important contribution alongside others. In support of this rating, our evidence indicates that this outcome was strongly realized in Dowa district and partially realized in Karonga and Phalombe districts. In Dowa district the Oxfam-led consortium appears to have made a strong contribution to this outcome, with possibly a dual, complementary role by CCJP as a member of both the Oxfam and DCA-led consortia.</td>
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<td>empowered to participate in decision-making structures and processes.</td>
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## Scoring key: Specific contribution of intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Outcome realized in full</th>
<th>Evidence that intervention made a crucial contribution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Outcome realized in part and evidence that intervention made a crucial contribution</td>
<td>Outcome realized in full and evidence that intervention made an important contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Outcome realized in part and evidence that intervention made an important contribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outcome realized to a small degree and evidence that intervention made some contribution</td>
<td>Outcome realized to a small degree and evidence that intervention made an important contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Outcome realized, to any degree, but no evidence that intervention made any contribution</td>
<td></td>
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Outcome 1: Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga district councils are accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective in managing the Development Fund (LDF), District Development Fund (DDF) and Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and their results.

The Oxfam-DCT-CCJP partnership project to foster public expenditure tracking and social accountability in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts was a response to challenges in public resource management, which resulted in 30 percent of the national budget being lost in 2014; poor oversight by the National Audit Office, parliament, and the National Local Governance Finance Committees; and citizens who had no capacity to hold duty bearers accountable. A key strategy of the Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’aboma Ang’ono project under review was to work at multiple levels – micro, district and national – to strengthen accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness and effectiveness by Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga district councils in managing the LDF, DDF and CDF and their results. At the micro level Oxfam and its partners facilitated dialogue between citizens and local duty bearers during interface meetings using information generated by RLCs and community data compilation teams. At the district level, Oxfam and its partners took up the concerns raised in TAs and engaged with the district-level governance institutions – the district secretariat, councillors and MPs. And at a national level, findings from the district data compilation teams fed upwards to the national data compilation team, enabling the experiences, insights and emerging positive impact of the project work in the three districts to be cascaded into the national system through media. Furthermore, social accountability work did not end when the partnership project was completed in 2017. For example, in the run-up to the 2019 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections, and in order to reinforce its interest in promoting the effective use of local government resources, Oxfam is implementing an anti-corruption project to encourage citizens to consider corruption when choosing people to vote for. We also noted that there is a long history of Oxfam working in partnership with local partners to enhance effective and gender-sensitive use of public resources in Dowa.

Based on the information collected from interviews and from the documents reviewed, we found strong evidence for the materialization of outcome 1 in both Phalombe and Dowa districts, that is, for an overall improvement in the responsive, inclusive, effective and accountable utilization of the LDF, DDF and CDF in these two districts. Some examples from Phalombe district serve to illustrate this. For example, we found evidence of increased responsiveness in the way that the Phalombe district council secretariat responded to pressure from the Jenala TA RLC to organize interface meetings for duty bearers and community stakeholders, which in turn led to increased compliance with guidelines for each of the three funds by all the people who had responsibility. In terms of increased inclusiveness, councillors felt that the project had empowered them and that as a result they were now more regularly included in decisions being made by the secretariat. We also found evidence of increased inclusiveness of community members in local governance, for example through participation in the implementation of projects. We found several lines of evidence demonstrating increased accountability both by the district council secretariat and by Phalombe district councillors. For example, the secretariat now provides explanations on issues raised by community members related to specific projects when called upon to do so during interface meetings. In another example, there have been some efforts by the secretariat to widely publicize advertisements for contractors. Finally, we found significant evidence to suggest improved effectiveness as a result of actions by the secretariat and/or councillors. For example, as the secretariat is at the centre of managing the implementation of projects approved by the council, the evidence we found of successful completion of projects following interface meetings implies a central role in effective delivery by duty bearers including the secretariat. According to Oxfam,
several stalled projects were restored and completed. The RLC for Jenala TA also observed that several projects that had stalled, were restored and completed as a result of the project.

By contrast, the evidence for Karonga district indicated a more partial achievement: while there was good evidence of increased inclusiveness in managing the LDF, DDF and CDF, evidence of increased accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness varied, with progress in some aspects but not in others. One illustration of this partial progress in Karonga district is in the behaviour of the district secretariat, who sometimes failed to honour their commitments to attend key interface meetings, thereby avoiding enacting increased responsiveness and accountability. By contrast, attendance by the district secretariat at interface meetings in Phalombe and Dowa districts was reliable, demonstrating improved responsiveness and accountability, and leading to increased effectiveness in the utilization of LDF, DDF and CDF.

Our contribution analysis revealed a range of different sources of potential contribution to these outcomes, including contributions from the focal Oxfam-DCT-CCJP partnership project, from other partnership projects within Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts, and from projects in other districts, as well as contributions from national actors. Furthermore, there was a significant dynamic interaction between projects focusing on building social accountability at district level, and national developments, with the former having a significant influence on national developments. However, changes at a national level – for example in commitments to address concerns about the improper use of public funds, and public audits reflecting these commitments – have yet to shape changes at the district level – although there is strong potential for them to do this in the future.

We were also able to rule out influences on Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts from outscaling of developments in other, sometimes neighbouring districts, where there is significant work being undertaken on the effective and accountable use of public resources. This led us to conclude that it was primarily actors who were active within Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts who contributed to making local government in these three districts (more) accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective in managing the LDF, DDF and CDF.

However, the combination of actors who contributed to this focal outcome varied between the three districts. In Phalombe, where there was strong evidence of improvements in focal outcome 1, it appears that the primary contribution was from the Oxfam-led consortium, particularly in the light of the strong leadership by DCT in this district and the effectiveness of the interface meetings associated with the project. Furthermore, having investigated the possibility of contribution by three other actors in Phalombe – Danish Church Aid (DCA), Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre (MHRRC) and Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), we found no evidence of contribution by any of these actors.

In Karonga, where there was limited, and in some cases mixed, evidence of improvements in focal outcome 1, it seems likely that the main contributions to these partial improvements were from the Oxfam-led consortium, particularly as the limitations in improvements seem to have been associated with interface meetings, which were avoided by the secretariat, rendering them only partially effective. While other consortia, such as that led by DCA and involving both CCJP and MHRRC, have also been active in Karonga, we did not gather enough evidence to be able to comment significantly on whether there was a systemic contribution to focal outcome 1 by multiple consortia. We attempted to ask stakeholders about other projects, but responses were sketchy.
What evidence we did gather suggests that where the Oxfam-led project was not implemented there was very little PET activity.

However, in Dowa, where there was also strong evidence of improvements in focal outcome 1, we concluded that three different consortia had likely made a contribution. Besides the Oxfam-led consortium these include two consortia led by DCA – one, mentioned above, comprising DCA, CCJP and MHRRRC, and a second, known as Citizen Action for Local Governance and Accountability (CALGA), comprising DCA and MHRRRC only. Notably, all three consortia were funded through the Tilitonse Fund. Finally, MEJN was also active in Dowa, implementing a short Trocaire-funded PET project. Together, these four initiatives worked across multiple TAs in Dowa district – Oxfam and partners in Msakambewa and Chakhadza TAs, DCA with CCJP and MHRRRC in Kayembe and Dzoole TAs, and DCA with MHRRRC (CALGA) in Chiwere and Kayembe TAs, thus increasing the potential jointly to contribute to focal outcome 1. Furthermore their contributions were different but complementary, with MEJN primarily focused on budget tracking, making information available in the local language and capacity building, MHRRRC’s main contribution focusing on the development of service charters (standards), which are used for monitoring public work in different sectors, and the Oxfam-led consortium focusing on building community capacities to demand their rights over public resource budgeting and use. On balance, however, our assessment was that the strongest contribution to focal outcome 1 was from the Oxfam-led consortium, with the contributions from MEJN and the two other consortia taking a supportive and enabling role.

**Outcome 2: Women in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts meaningfully empowered to participate in decision-making structures and processes.**

Our primary focus in the evaluation was on focal outcome 1, since the two outcomes are closely interlinked, with outcome 2 a subset of outcome 1. Nonetheless we were able to gather substantial evidence in some districts, which has enabled us to develop a partial contribution analysis for this outcome. We found evidence to suggest that women in all three districts have been empowered to participate more meaningfully in decision-making structures and processes through various public sector resource planning and utilization processes. The evidence suggests that women’s representation in such structures was not the main issue, particularly given that the project took place after women leaders were selected, and given the short project duration, which means that we would not expect to see any changes in women’s representation within this time period. Rather, what we looked at under this heading were changes in the extent to which women were able to wield power to make decisions in local government governance structures, particularly as a mechanism or means for increasing women’s agency and thereby improve public services for the benefit of all, including for women and girls. This is what is meant by the term ‘meaningful’ in the articulation of focal outcome 2 – that women’s agency is developed to influence more effectively public service decisions and their distributional impact. The processes through which women participated in decision-making processes within the district included district and project planning, budgeting and supervision of community development projects, monitoring of public projects and demanding accountability, as well as decision making through ADCs and VDCs.

Our main findings were that women’s agency increased in different ways, and in different contexts, in the three districts being evaluated. The evidence was strongest in Dowa district, where there was good evidence for increased participation in decision-making structures through a gendered approach as well as increased representation. In Phalombe the strongest evidence concerned instances of increased individual agency on the one hand, and of increased levels of women’s
influence through RLCs and interface meetings on the other. Increased individual agency reflects the understanding that funded projects are not ‘gifts’ but come from funds that should be managed by the community. Likewise, in Karonga there was an increase in women’s participation in monitoring and holding duty bearers to account: women felt more supported to speak out and demand accountability, both through their involvement in STAR circles and through the evidence provided through the PET process. In summary, across all three districts, while there has been an increase in representation and mobilization that can influence decisions at a district level, women are not necessarily yet in positions of power or decision-making positions at district level.

In terms of contribution, in Dowa district, where outcome 2 was strongly realized, we found evidence for a significant contribution to this by the Oxfam-led consortium, and possibly a dual and complementary role by CCJP as a member of both the Oxfam and DCA-led consortia. In Karonga, there was also some limited evidence that CCJP made a contribution to empowerment of women in decision-making structures and processes, although only at the local and not at the district level. Again, through the DCA-led consortium, CCJP’s other community structures, such as the justice and peace committees, clearly played a role in building core relationships with certain village structures, which still continue. For example, the chairperson of the Lupembe STAR circle also belongs to a CCJP justice and peace committee and relies on CCJP for advice when dealing with duty bearers whom she suspects of corruption. Her value system is also deeply influenced by her involvement with the church and church structures. In Phalombe we found only weak evidence of improvements in women’s participation in decision-making structures and processes. However, we did not collect any evidence to demonstrate who might have contributed to this.

PROGRAMME LEARNING CONSIDERATIONS

After careful analysis of the available evidence and subsequent reflection on the findings, the following project learning considerations emerge. These are intended to provide a basis for further discussion and reflection, and to inform current and future programming.

A carefully crafted approach to citizen empowerment and local government accountability through developing technical and agentic capacities in PET

The design and implementation of the Oxfam-led Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’mbaboma Ang’ono project was distinctive in its approach to relating with power in and around local government (public) resource budgeting and utilization. It deliberately set out to work on the side of the historically powerless, uninformed and excluded [community members, women and youth, and female councillors and MPs] whose participation and benefit was essential, while at the same time working with those who provided the public resources and for whom accountability for proper and effective use of such resources was required [men and women councillors in the selected traditional areas and districts, all MPs and councillors across the nation, media and the National Local Government Finance Committee].

Focusing on developing the agency of these two overlapping stakeholder groups appears to be an effective way of increasing local government accountability. The agentic capacities of community members, councils and female MPs were developed through addressing lack of knowledge,
authentic participation and power with others and power to perform (and not power over).
Knowledge of rights holders and their representatives was partly developed through input from the
national oversight structure – the National Local Government Finance Committee, which must have
provided reassurance and trust into the intervention process. The new knowledge on PET enabled
rights holders to understand who owned public resources and towards what ends it should be used,
which served as an important stimulus while the prospects of change identified through
participating in PET processes served as a potential reward for demanding accountable, responsive,
inclusive, gender-sensitive and effective management of LDF, DDF and CDF.

From a systems and complexity perspective, it was the capacity development not just of individual
men and women that generated the agent capacities needed, but also and especially in developing
the collective agency of ‘permanent’ institutional structures, which included the VDCs, ADCs and
PICs at local level, and the Women Parliamentary Caucus and Group of Women Councillors at
national level. It was this that created capacities for transforming power relations and desired
changes. Furthermore, working with media helped to escalate the voices of rights holders in the
selected traditional areas and among the women councils and MPs, thus increasing its agentive
potential. In both Phalombe and Dowa districts, we also have evidence that these systemic
changes are being sustained, for example in the continuation of PET processes in Phalombe and in
VDCs and ADCs continuing to hold duty bearers accountable.

The evaluation findings also support the logic of the consortium in not working directly through
VDCs, ADCs and TAs as frontline agencies of change, recognizing that these were interested parties,
who may have been benefiting from the status quo, which they would then be inclined to
perpetuate. A significant argument for focusing on STAR circles and RLCs was that these were neutral
structures (i.e., not politically aligned), which potentially enabled them to be more effective in keeping the
various local duty bearers – VDCs, ADCs, traditional leadership – accountable.

Using a unique combination of project partnership mechanisms to
generate desired change progressively over time

Using a process tracing approach helped the evaluation to reveal the catalytic and transformative
role of partnership mechanisms (RLCs, data compilation teams, STAR circles and interface
meetings) as tertiary tools that enabled double and triple-loop learning while at the same time
stimulating the materialization of outcomes. We identified the process-wise (project value chain)
nature of these mutually reinforcing mechanisms, which we believe to be unique in Malawi, as an
enabler of cumulative, inclusive, gender-sensitive, accountable, just and effective use of local
government resources. The sequencing of contributions from recording, editing and disseminating
data generated through situational analysis, project planning and budgeting, implementation and
monitoring by RLCs helped connect efforts along the project’s value chain, with use of radio further
strengthening this process. This was augmented through the collection, analysis and interpretation
of financial and performance data concerning CDF, DDF and LDF by District Data Compilation Teams.
Throughout the data generation, analysis and sense-making processes, power relations and
gender justice considerations were made visible through the participation of STAR circles
comprising women-only groups.
Similarities and differences between districts – the strengths and limitations of the Oxfam-led consortium’s approach

One of the most significant changes observed across all three districts is the growth in communities’ knowledge of the funds and the way in which they view these. There has been a significant shift in the discourse around the funds, from projects being seen as a gift from duty bearers to an understanding that the funds belong to communities and should, therefore, be managed by communities. This is one of the most significant impacts of the project in the areas where it has been active. The mechanisms that have led to this shift in discourse can be traced back to the approach to capacity building, which involved providing and working through the guidelines, and collaboratively monitoring the funds at multiple levels and through different neutral community structures.

The observed differences in outcomes between the three districts, Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga, helped to highlight both the strengths and limitations of the Oxfam-led consortium’s approach. In contrast to the overall effectiveness of the consortium’s approach in Phalombe and Dowa districts, we identified more partial outcomes in Karonga. These differences seem particularly to have reflected differences in the effectiveness of interface meetings, with the district secretariat and councillors in Phalombe and Dowa using these as platforms to demonstrate their responsiveness and accountability, whereas in Karonga they were often used by councillors and others as loopholes that enabled them to continue to mismanage development funds. These in turn may reflect differences in the standing and approach of the consortium in the three districts, with DCT playing a particularly strong role in Phalombe, where it invested successfully in relationship building with the secretariat, and as a result was respected, whereas in Karonga its role may have been weaker. Other possible explanations for these different outcomes in Karonga are that the project ended prematurely with stakeholders not yet equipped to play the role that the data compilation teams did and that the project was not implemented across the entire district, which meant that isolated communities were trying to hold district level duty bearers accountable. However, this did not prevent project successes in Phalombe and Dowa. These patterns may also be reflective of a more significant gap in project design and implementation, which was the failure to treat the district councillors as one collective and to support them accordingly (see Section 1.4.4 below).

It is also important to point out here some of the unintended outcomes of the project. On the positive side, in Phalombe we found evidence of improved functionality VDCs and ADCs, and of citizens looking beyond CDF, LDF and DDF to the accountability of other funds, such as school improvement grants. The latter was also observed in Karonga, where one of the STAR circles is now following up on a health committee to see how they are spending their funds. By contrast, the main unintended negative effects were identified in Dowa, where the project appears to have raised citizen expectations but not created enough time for follow through. As a result, concerns have been raised regarding demand for the wrong kind of information using inappropriate channels associated with not knowing enough about how district councils operate. From a group development perspective, in Dowa the Oxfam-led PET project appears to have ended when relations in the district council had reached the ‘storming’ stage that is riven by unresolved conflicts. In the process, the project is reported to have created the impression of witch-hunting and has resulted in a certain level of backlash on CSOs, and even on some community members.
Thinking and designing systemically 1: What should we do differently in future and what should we leave others to do?

Perhaps the most striking insight arising from contribution analysis in this project lay in seeking to clarify the reasons for lack of inclusive, transparent, gender-sensitive, accountable and effective performance among some duty bearers, especially council officers in Karonga (see above). The contribution analysis revealed that while the Oxfam-led partnership excluded the technical capacity development of council officers in the three districts in which they operated, partnerships involving MHRCC, and particularly MEJN, in the same districts (and ActionAid in other districts), trained both the duty bearers and rights holders. This approach, which Oxfam and its partners may wish to consider in future, had the effect of trust building between district officers and partnership members as well as between local rights holders and the district officers. This kind of relational agency between rights holders and duty bearers has the potential to sustain impact.

The contribution analysis also revealed, however, that it is the combination of approaches in a district that matters, not what each consortium does on its own. A key design question for Oxfam and its partners in future interventions might therefore be: How should we play to our strengths in this district, and what can we leave to others? However, this approach is only likely to work if there is some coordination in both the design and the implementation of initiatives. Coordination requires activities like joint mapping by partners ahead of project design – or there needs to be some mediating organization – such as Tilitonse – that takes this role (see Section 1.4.6 below).

Using project partnership mechanisms to generate desired change progressively across scales

The process tracing also helped to reveal a picture of system-wide change from local interventions through multi-scale (vertical) project mechanisms towards effective and socially just use of local government resources. Using processed information generated through RLCs, data compilation teams and STAR circles, district interface meetings served as a process and places for engagement, negotiation, accountability and commitment building, connecting the local to the district levels in each of the three project districts. The scaling up and out of issues, progress and lessons from the districts to the national level then occurred through the following pathways:

- Partnership with media, which reported PET issues on national radio stations and in newspapers.
- Project partnerships’ joint reflections and reports, which fed into media and national government.
- Tilitonse-funded joint project partnerships’ reflections and reports, which fed into media and national government.
- Documentation and reporting of gender issues and women’s achievements in all districts coordinated by women councillors and MPs through the Women Parliamentary Caucus and Group of Women Councillors.

The contribution analysis also revealed a potentially significant dynamic between the district level changes and changes at a national level, with substantial national-level developments as a result of the influencing activities of a wide range of initiatives, including the Oxfam-led consortium, but
with little evidence as yet that these national-level changes have begun to impact locally. We can, however, reasonably expect this top-down dynamic to emerge soon, which could lead to a reinforcing effect to the widespread groundwork that has been laid by CSOs – hopefully an emergent dynamic of the next phase of responsiveness, inclusivity, accountability and effectiveness in managing local development funds. If this turns out to be the case, then the upward influencing of organizations like the Oxfam-led consortium and others will have played a dual role in contributing to this transformation in democratic practices.

Thinking and designing systemically 2: Seeing the bigger system

In conclusion, we identified a significant set of lessons for improving future project design:

• Mapping and seeing the bigger, multi-scalar system-of-interest, working perhaps with intermediary organizations, such as Tilitonse.
• Addressing issues of scale through design approaches which prioritize collaborative learning, planning and action with other partnerships involved in promoting accountable, just and effective use of local government resources from district to national levels.

At district level, this space is afforded by the District Executive Committees – technical advisory bodies of the council that coordinate district development. At national level, existing sectoral or new issue-specific civil society structures and spaces could be established for mutual learning and action.

These learning considerations point to the richness of insights that can be gleaned from careful analysis and reflection on an innovative project of this nature.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 EVALUATION PURPOSE

This report presents the findings of an Effectiveness Review of the Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cham’mbama Ang’ono project – an Oxfam-led, Tilitonse-funded project on Enhancing Communities’ Capacity in Tracking Development Resources at Local Council Level in Malawi. It discusses the project background and objectives before delving into the evaluation design, context and project description and discussing the findings, conclusions and insights in subsequent sections. An executive summary, which precedes the main report, captures the essence of the evaluation findings, conclusions and insights while appendices elaborate on certain aspects of the evaluation process and results.

The immediate purpose of the evaluation is to establish the effectiveness of the ‘Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’mbama Ang’ono’ intervention through the following:

1. Identifying and agreeing up to two significant intermediate and/or final outcomes that were the focus of the project in relation to outcome-defined systems change. Systems change takes place in human and institutional attitudes and behaviour, their inter-relationships, and feedback loops between these,

2. Investigating the processes by which the outcomes were generated, and in the light of other contributing factors,

3. Assess the significance of Oxfam’s contribution to the jointly selected realized outcomes.

The broader purpose of the evaluation is for Oxfam Global and the Malawi Country Office to develop a deeper understanding of how impact is being generated through their contribution so as to support programmatic learning, which has design and process dimensions within Oxfam and among its stakeholders. This broader intention is connected to Oxfam’s growing interest in working with and learning about how process tracing can generate insight into impact.

The evaluation was conducted by Emerald Network Ltd from May to September 2018, about a year after the project had ended. This was, therefore, a post-project evaluation, which is ‘key to learning about the quality of design and implementation strategies and...potentially valuable in terms of making improvements in both. Post-project evaluations can also reveal the elements of a project that were sustained after project closure; planned, unexpected and emerging outcomes; and how changes may have spread, diffused, replicated or been adapted through anticipated and non-anticipated pathways. The evaluation report was completed in October 2019 and all findings and supporting quotes are valid at the time of completion.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’mbama Ang’ono project under review was developed within two main contexts: the broader Malawi context; and Oxfam’s [Malawi] Country Strategy (2015–2020), itself nested within the Global Oxfam Strategy. The project proposal cites the following country contextual considerations as having informed the project:
• The worsening of poverty and vulnerability of Malawi citizens.
• High incidence of corruption, fraud and financial mismanagement by politicians and council secretariats in district councils of Malawi.
• District council secretariat monopolization of power and control over planning, budgeting and public development information and associated poor culture of governance and accountability.
• Incoherent policy provisions on local government and decentralization.
• Low citizen and civil society capacities to exercise their rights as rights holders.
• Increasing inequality among citizens, especially between men, women and young people.

The vision of the Oxfam Country [Malawi] Strategy, which reflects its Global Strategy, is ‘Malawian women, men and boys and girls are more equal, have improved livelihoods and as active citizens have greater influence over decisions that affect their life.’ Four interconnected goals underpin the Oxfam Country Strategy, and these are: ‘Malawian women, men and young people who:
1. have improved capacity to demand accountability and transparency of public service providers,
2. have more sustainable livelihoods, and are more economically empowered,
3. enjoy lives free from violence and are active participants and leaders in their society, and
4. can better cope with, manage and overcome different shocks.’

With funding from Tilitonse, the overall goal of the Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’maboma Ang’ono project was to enable Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga district councils to become more accountable, responsive and inclusive in managing development resources – particularly LDF, DDF and CDF – and service delivery for its rights holders by 2017. To achieve this, the project sought to strengthen the capacity of citizens, including women, to track the sources, receipt, utilization and impact of LDF, CDF and DDF for development initiatives as well as to mobilise communities, CSOs and action groups to demand accountability in the allocation and management of local government development resources (see Figure 1). The project adopted a public expenditure tracking system (PETS).

1.3 THE CONTEXT: PUBLIC GOVERNANCE SYSTEM, LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDS AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES

Malawi has 28 district councils with elected local bodies. The Malawi Constitution of 1995 provides for decentralized governance, while the Local Government Act of 1998, amended in 2010, and the Decentralization Policy of 1998, reinforce this constitutional provision. The Local Government Act provides for the roles of local government as covering education, science and technology; health and population; transport and public works; land and land planning; agriculture and irrigation; water development and distribution; gender, youth and community services; natural resources management; commerce and industry. Local governance refers to processes of local decision-making and ways in which power is exercised at local level through institutions, mechanisms and processes that citizens and citizen groups express their interests and needs, mediate their differences and exercise their rights and obligations at local level.6 Two directly relevant objectives of the Decentralization Policy are to:
• Create a democratic environment and institutions in Malawi for governance and development in order to facilitate the participation of grassroots in decision-making.
• Promote accountability and good governance at the local level in order to help government to reduce poverty.

Local government authority comprises the council, which is made up of elected members and is headed by a chairperson, and the secretariat, which is headed by a chief executive in urban areas or district commissioner in rural areas. Council duties include decision-making, oversight and monitoring of implementation, and implementation of council plans and decisions respectively. The council is run through several committees, the following of which are mandatory: finance, development, education, public works, health and environment, and human resources. Council members comprise elected councillors, MPs and interest groups, with support from the secretariat. CSOs constitute part of the District Executive Committees – technical advisory bodies of the council that coordinate district development. The arena for participation and articulation of sectoral and gender interests is found in the full council and its committees.

1.3.1 Local Development Fund

The Local Development Fund (LDF) is an inter-governmental fiscal transfer mechanism that is meant to allow for harmonized national resource mobilization, equitable allocation of development resources, effective development implementation capacities, and accountability of results. As a fiscal instrument, the LDF is meant to provide a nationwide, harmonized, transparent and sustainable local development financing mechanism for poverty reduction at local council and community levels. The LDF delivers its operations through four windows – the Community Window, the Local Authority Window, the Urban Window, and the Performance Window. The LDF is being implemented within the framework of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) and the Decentralization Policy and is managed by a technical support team under the Ministry of Finance. The mission of the LDF is to improve community livelihoods and local service delivery through mobilization and financing of socio-economic development interventions and local capacity enhancement at the local council and community levels.

The LDF became operational in 2009, with seed resources of $50m from the World Bank. It is currently [2015] funded from four sources:

1. Government’s annual commitments, with the current commitment at $8m;
2. The World Bank with funds amounting to $107m;
3. The African Development Bank through the Local Economic Development Project ($25.7m); and
4. German support through Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (German Development Bank) [$15m].

The LDF has seven key objectives that drive the operation of the LDF funding mechanism:
• Support planning and management of development resources at local authority (LA) and community levels.
• Facilitate the implementation of the Integrated Rural Development Strategy.
• Provide resources which ensure that development investments respond to prioritized community development needs.
- Protect financial resources for pro-poor development activities and service delivery at LA and community levels.
- Enhance the accountability of local authorities to their constituents.
- Finance capacity enhancement of local governance institutions at national, LA and community levels.
- Advance government of Malawi Decentralization Policy objectives.

### 1.3.2 Constituency Development Fund (CDF)

Created by the parliament of Malawi in 2006, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) comprises funds transferred from national government to local government to enable MPs and constituent members to develop and implement projects that improve community social and economic welfare, covering short-term and intermediate community development needs. CDF is specifically intended to do the following:

1. Present opportunities for community participation in decision-making during project identification.
2. Support community-driven projects.
3. Support planning and management of CDF at the constituency level.
4. Provide resources to address priority local needs.

It is also intended to help develop the country more evenly in line with the Decentralization Policy. The use of CDF is governed by the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA 2003), the Public Procurement Act (PPA 2003), and the Corrupt Practices Act (CPA 1995).

### 1.3.3 District Development Fund (DDF)

The Local Government Act (LGA) of 1998 Section 6 (1c) mandates district councils to promote infrastructural and economic development through the formulation, approval and execution of District Development Plans. The district development planning system includes the production of the District Social Economic Profile (SEP), which provides information required for a situation analysis and the formulation of the District Development Plan Framework (DDPF). The DDPF provides a comprehensive policy direction and guidance for development planning in the district. The DDP is produced from the DDPF and appraised projects from VDCs. The DDP is a medium-term plan covering a period of five years, given in annual phases containing budgetary and technical specifications.

The DDF was established to finance the prioritized projects in the DDP. The National Local Government Finance Committee (NLGFC) transfers billions of kwachas to the district councils for development projects under the DDF. The DDF is largely for infrastructure development projects benefiting many people, such as construction of schools, health facilities, irrigation infrastructure, etc.

According to the guidelines, 5 percent of the funds allocated for each project can be used by the district council secretariat to meet the operational costs for supervision and monitoring of the implementation of the approved projects. The District Commissioner is mandated to manage the DDF.
1.3.4 Issues concerning local government resources

Corruption is a deep-seated challenge in Malawi and within the public sector; it only became part of the culture after the end of President Banda’s era, in the early 1990s. These practices have been attributed mostly to an incoherent legal framework for the operations of local government and failure to fully institutionalize the Decentralization Policy; the failure of Malawians to join together to work in their common interest toward a shared goal that can produce benefits for the society as a whole, other than for individual members; and the monopolization of power and control over planning, budgeting and public development information by district council secretariats. And yet, citizens are the rights holders and councillors and MPs are their chosen representatives. This situation negatively affects the design, implementation and impact of public services for citizens in general and more especially for women.

Another reason for corruption in district councils is the skewed power relations between councillors and council officers in favour of the latter. We established two main explanations to this:

1. The absence of councillors in district councils for about 10 years during which none were elected, and council officers worked without being overseen or accountable for such power.
2. Inadequate knowledge and experience among councillors in local governance and running local government affairs and performing councillors’ duties.

Part of the reason for the ‘routinization’ of corruption is the obedience culture of most communities in the country, who do not question power, that is, those in power and ‘high offices’. In terms of gender, it was observed that even though 60 percent of rural households in Malawi are matrilineal, men dominated in decision making in the public sector and in communities and families as well. The uncles wield the power and not the husbands in the matrilineal communities. ‘Household-level decision-making is dominated by men, with 68 percent of women whose husbands have cash earnings reporting that their husbands alone decide how to use the money and 45 percent of women stating that they do not have any decision-making power regarding their own healthcare...While on average, more girls than boys enrol in school they are less likely to complete it...contributing to increasing female illiteracy levels.’[11] Women’s representation in public sector decision-making structures is low compared to the rest of southern African countries. For example, between 2000 and 2014 it rose from 8.1 percent to 13.4 percent (the SADC average for women’s representation was 24 percent in 2014).[12] Current women’s representation in public sector decision-making structures is low and is only 16.6 percent in parliament, 11 percent in councils and 20 percent in the cabinet.[13] A major constraint for women councillors is a lack of understanding of how local government works, and relatively low levels of education, which makes it necessary to have interventions that “build women’s political leadership capacities, train women in “how things work”, and build a network of social and political relationships.”[14]

The other relevant local governance challenges, which are closely related to those identified by the project under review, are as follows:

- A lack of a harmonized approach to district development financing.
- The absence of robust vertical transparency and accountability mechanisms, that is, between councils and citizens.
- Inexperienced councillors with limited understanding of how council works (including of financial matters) and what to demand from district officers, who end up have too much power.
• Limited number of CSOs with capacity to support citizens and councils to track public expenditure and exercise financial oversight.
• The tendency of ADCs and VDCs to focus on visible local projects without meaningful control over council finance, procurement and other forms of expenditure, which is worsened by finance and audit committees that lack financial management/oversight capacity.
• The gender-neutrality of the Local Government Act and Decentralization Policy.16

1.4 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The overall goal of the Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’maboma Ang’ono project by June 2017 was for district councils in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts to be more accountable, responsive and inclusive in managing development resources, particularly the LDF DDF and CDF. These districts are in the southern, central and northern regions of Malawi respectively, and represent the socio-cultural diversity of the country, which appear to have a bearing on how decentralization is playing out. The project was jointly developed and implemented by Oxfam and two reputable local partners in each district, namely, the Development Communications Trust (DCT) and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) of Blantyre, Lilongwe and Karonga dioceses. The specific challenges to which the project responded included non-participation of communities in budgeting and use of public funds, inappropriate use of the funds and corruption, which undermines effective service delivery and community development. These challenges stem from those already discussed in Section 1.3.4 on context. The specific traditional areas in which the project was implemented are Nazombe and Jenala in Phalombe, Msakambewa and Chakhadza in Dowa, and Kilipula and Kyungu in Karonga. At national level, the project conducted advocacy on mainstreaming gender in PET. The main strategies adopted by the partnership were as follows:

• Mobilising communities into action groups such as STAR circles and Radio Listening Clubs (RLCs) to plan, learn and act together as rights holders and engage local government as a duty bearer.
• Strengthening the capacity of women and men in selected traditional areas in the three districts – focusing on those in STAR circles, RLCs, Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Area Development Committees (ADCs) on PET and gender analysis around LDF, DDF and CDF.
• Mentoring and accompanying PET coordinating groups comprising VDCs, ADCs, RLCs and STAR circles in the respective traditional areas and districts to document and analyse data generated through PET processes and use it for engaging duty bearers.
• Working with media and other actors to conduct advocacy work towards gender-sensitive, transparent and accountable utilization of LDF, DDF and CDF beyond the districts in which the project was implemented.
• Ongoing monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) at local, district, and inter-district levels (Figure 1).

The project did not have an explicit theory of change, especially one that is diagrammatic. However, it described most of the elements of a theory of change and our inference is summarized in Figure 1.16
Figure 1 Inferred theory of change for the Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m'maboma Ang’ono Project
2 EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation design outlines the evaluation process and selection methods of focal outcomes, evaluation sites and participants, conducting field research and associated reflexivity, how we reached conclusions and judgements, and the strengths and limitations of our conclusions. It was underpinned by process tracing and contribution analysis, the primary methodology used by Oxfam GB in its annual Effectiveness Reviews of policy-influencing projects.

2.1 PROCESS TRACING AND CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

Process tracing is a methodology that has been adopted by OGB’s Global Performance Framework since 2012 to support impact evaluations under the Policy Advising and Citizen’s Voice thematic area. Process tracing is a qualitative method that seeks to evaluate impact through establishing confidence in how and why an intervention worked and for whom. A distinctive feature of process tracing is that it draws on a generative framework to provide a detailed description of a causal mechanism that led to a specific effect, and by doing so demonstrate the causal relation. Guidance was developed by OGB in 2013 to set out their process tracing approach.

As set out in the OGB guidance, in process tracing, the purpose of the evaluation is not simply to focus on just one explanation for an observed outcome-level change. Rather, the approach is more nuanced and should accomplish three things:

1. Shortlist one or more evidenced explanation for the outcome in question.
2. Rule out alternative, competing explanations incompatible with the evidence.
3. If more than one explanation is supported by the evidence, estimate the level of influence each has had on bringing about the change in question.

While not intended to be a mechanical sequence of linear steps of how the research exercise should proceed, the following eight steps form the core of the OGB process tracing protocol.

1. Undertake a process of [re]constructing the intervention’s theory of change, in order to clearly define the intervention being evaluated – what is it trying to change (outcomes), how is it working to effect these changes (strategies/streams of activities) and what assumptions is it making about how it will contribute to these changes (key assumptions).
2. Work with relevant stakeholders to identify up to three intermediate and/or final outcomes considered by stakeholders to be the most significant for the evaluation to focus on (central to the intervention’s theory of change, and useful for learning/forward planning).
3. Systematically assess and document what was done under the intervention to achieve the selected targeted outcomes.
4. Identify and evidence the extent to which the selected outcomes have actually materialized, as well as any relevant unintended outcomes.
5. Undertake ‘process induction’ to identify salient plausible causal explanations for the evidenced outcomes.
6. Gather required data and use ‘process verification’ to assess the extent to which each of the explanations identified in Step 5 are supported or not supported by the available evidence.
7. Write a narrative analytical report to document the above research processes and findings.
8. Summarize aspects of the above narrative analysis by allocating project/campaign ‘contribution scores’ for each of the targeted and/or associated outcomes.

Strengths of the process tracing approach are that it offers a rigorous approach to assessing causal change and the potential for examining causality in programmes where attribution is difficult, by providing evidence on how and why an intervention led to change.23 However, there are limitations to this approach that must also be taken into account, in that there is less under the control of the evaluator, resulting in a process that is more unpredictable and context dependent. As a result, in spite of best efforts by the evaluation team, results might still be inconclusive if the evidence collected cannot fully support a causal sequence. To thoroughly test alternative hypotheses, the evaluator needs to have access to a range of stakeholders and to published and unpublished material.

Process tracing is a theory-based evaluation methodology, which involves understanding the often-implicit theory of change underpinning the project. The methodology also recognizes that, in the absence of a ‘signature’ – something that unequivocally supports one hypothesized cause of a policy change or outcome, there is need to acknowledge and identify other actors and projects that may have contributed to such a change.24 Contribution analysis seeks to produce plausible evidence of a programme’s contribution to desired results based on observed outcomes by proving attribution, which involves drawing causal links and explanatory conclusions between observed changes and specific interventions. It generates evidence on the contribution made by specific resources, events and actions towards outcomes through developing the results chains, identifying and assessing alternative explanations for outcomes.25 Against this background, Oxfam identified the following process tracing steps that guided our evaluation design as reflected in Figure 2.26

Figure 2: The logic and underpinning questions of OGB’s process tracing approach

2. Process tracing – logic and questions

1. What are the focal outcome(s) – and therefore the change system – we want to investigate?

2. What was done under the project to achieve these outcome(s)?

3(a) To what extent have these targeted outcome(s) materialized? What can we learn from this?

3(b) To what extent have unintended outcome(s) materialized? What can we learn from this?

4(a) What other interventions might have contributed to the targeted outcomes?

4(b) What is the significance and distinct value of Oxfam’s contribution in the context of these other interventions? What can we learn from this?

5. Write a narrative analytical report documenting the research process, quality and limitations of evidence, and quality and limitations of the findings.

6. Allocate project ‘contribution scores’ for each of the targeted and unforeseen outcomes, to be included in the report.
However, some evaluators have made an important distinction between attribution analysis and contribution analysis, which we noted and worked with. Attribution analysis looks for causal effect (has the programme caused the outcome, to what extent and how much?). Contribution analysis looks for ways in which an intervention influenced outcomes (Has the programme made a difference? How much of a difference has the programme made? How much of has it contributed to an outcome?) (Mayne, 2011, p. 64).27

2.2 SELECTING THE FOCAL OUTCOMES

The evaluation team initially identified focal outcomes at the national level based on early dialogue with Oxfam in Malawi and Oxfam GB, and subsequent document analysis. These were then presented at an inception meeting for discussion and altered to show a focus on district-level changes, on which relevant data was feasible to obtain, and on systemic change, which also reflected contribution analysis framing. The latter called for analysis of the linkages between national, district and community structures and processes. The two focal outcomes selected were therefore as follows:

**Outcome 1:** Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga district councils are accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective in managing the Local Development Fund (LDF), District Development Fund (DDF) and Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and their results.

**Outcome 2:** Women in Dowa, Phalombe and Karonga districts are meaningfully empowered to participate in decision-making structures and processes.

We also agreed that the primary focus should be on outcome 1 since the two outcomes are closely interlinked, and outcome 2 is a subset of outcome 1.

2.3 SELECTION OF EVALUATION PARTICIPANTS & SITES

We used purposive stratified sampling to decide which participants to engage and which sites to visit. In selecting evaluation participants, we ensured that each project stakeholder group was represented in the sample: duty bearers, rights holders, men and women, and PET promoters. We decided to conduct the evaluation in all three districts in order to take into account the different socio-cultural differences between the three regions in which they are found. Of the six traditional areas in which the project was implemented, four were visited: one in Phalombe, one in Dowa and two in Karonga. At district level, we identified and engaged the following stakeholder groups:

- Members of ADCs and VDCs as local citizen action groups and rights holders whose PET and gender analysis capacities were developed.
- District councillors as community representatives in local decision-making structures and whose PET and gender analysis capacities were developed.
- Traditional leaders as one major group of duty bearers.
- Council secretariats as duty bearers whose performance and accountability needed improvement.
- Members of RLCs and STAR alliance project mechanisms for developing community knowledge and agency on PET and gender analysis.
- Project partners who facilitated the change processes in the districts and across (Table 1).
Table 1: Summary of evaluation participants in the three project districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Phalombe District</th>
<th>Dowa District</th>
<th>Karonga District</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADCs and VDC members</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>District councillors</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Council officers</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>RLC members</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Community members</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member of parliament</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project partner members</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other CSOs operating in the district</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above district level, and in order to understand contribution to systemic change, we engaged the following groups of actors:

- Tilitonse as the provider of funding, which also had an interest in change processes and results that were going on beyond the project under review (2 men).
- Other CSOs, donors and media involved in public resource management improvements (8 men).
- Ministry of Local Government structure tasked to manage, direct and/or control the utilization of local government resources (1 man).
- National women governance structures – Women Parliamentary Caucus and Group of Women Councillors – whose capacities in PET and gender analysis were developed and whose work was publicized to show that women leaders are effective (2 women).
- Project partners (2 women – Oxfam).

Despite our efforts to get more contributions from both women and men stakeholders, only 30 percent and 27 percent of the district and above district levels were women. This is largely explained by the fact that the vast majority of people in PET-promoting organizations, in
councils, parliament, council secretariats and among traditional leaders, are men. We addressed this limitation through working with a gender equality lens, even when engaging with men, and through ensuring that we got the perspectives and inputs of high-level women decision-makers who also served at a constituency level: the chairpersons of the Group of Women Councillors and the Women Parliamentary Caucus. We also drew on gender studies that have been conducted on local governance and public resource use in Malawi.

2.4 CONDUCTING FIELD WORK AND ASSOCIATED REFLEXIVITY

We employed the following data generation methods:

- **Inception meetings:** The evaluation team and Oxfam held two inception meetings near the beginning of the assignment to agree on the focus, scope and process of the evaluation.

- **Document analysis:** We analysed project documents as well as documents on related interventions and studies to obtain the necessary background, contextual performance and challenges information. We used the information to frame our evaluation and some of the evaluation questions.

- **Evaluation meetings:** We held three types of evaluation meetings with women and men: STAR circle members, RLC members, members of the data collection teams, VDC and ADC members, traditional and district councillors. The discussions will be guided by a set of questions and generated information on the project, including the changes it made.

- **In-depth interviews:** Guided by sets of questions, which we adjusted and refined in the field, we interviewed the following groups of key informants to generate information, experiences and perspectives relevant to the focal outcomes and associated contributing processes: OGB, CCJP and DCT personnel at district, regional and national levels; PET-promoting CSOs, donors and media; traditional leaders, National Local Government Finance Committee, district council officers, and national women leaders representing women parliamentarians and councillors.

- **Feedback and reflection spaces:** As a team of evaluators, we conducted periodic e-based joint reflection meetings and field-based reflection meetings to share insights and challenges, critique our data generation tools and our individual draft field reports, improve our data generation and analysis and reschedule our activities where necessary. In terms of working with reflexivity with the client, we used the inception meetings, feedback on the Evaluation Plan, Progress Report, Draft Reports and the feedback meeting. These interactions enabled us to share, discuss and refine our evaluation process and products and potentially increase the utility of the report.

The field work was conducted in the following distinct stages, one feeding into the other.

1. The first field visit was conducted by two evaluators in two traditional areas of Phalombe District 11–15 June 2018. The field visit served two purposes: to test the tools for data generation and analysis using process tracing and to generate data for the effectiveness evaluation report. At the end of the visit a report was jointly produced by the consultants, and the findings and insights shaped the subsequent framing of data generation questions.

2. The second field visit was conducted by one evaluator and covered Dowa district and national actors in Lilongwe, 2–5 July 2018. At local level, the interviews were conducted in two traditional authorities (TAs) and mostly in one of these. A draft report on the visit was produced ahead of the second field visit and it provided useful insights on questions to ask, data analysis and report writing. Consequently, there was no need to go back to the district
to generate further data as was originally planned. The data generation questions for Dowa stakeholders were discussed by the team and refined ahead of the visit. Systemic change questions had a strong interest in policy, structure and scaling of changes associated with the focal outcomes in the three project districts. Reflections took place in a meeting between the Dowa evaluator and the two evaluators who were to conduct the field work in Karonga. The meeting, which was held in Lilongwe on 7 July discussed insights on the Malawi context, especially on gender, corruption and regional differences. Methodological reflections on data generation were also shared and a short report on the meeting was produced for the evaluation team.

3. Field work in Karonga district was conducted 9–12 July 2018 to test early findings from Phalombe and Dowa and generate in-depth data on project work in Karonga. At the end of the evaluation fieldwork, the two evaluators held a reflection meeting and produced a report, which was shared with the rest of the evaluator team.

4. The whole evaluation team held a Zoom-based Reflection Meeting on 25 July 2018, nearly two weeks after the last field visit, and following preliminary report writing. The meeting identified new insights and ideas emerging from fieldwork, and implications for the way forward. A Progress Report was produced and shared with Oxfam GB and Oxfam Malawi. They provided feedback in September, which necessitated an interview with Karonga district officers whose contributions are included in this report.

We analysed data inductively according to the focal outcomes, at district as well as systemic levels, and made abductive inferences that were guided by process tracing and our theory of change. We drew evidence from a range of stakeholders as well as from secondary sources as a way of triangulating. Our main validation method resided in the feedback that we got from the client and their partners. However, in the case of Karonga, we conducted another layer of stakeholder engagement to validate and strengthen our district-specific conclusions. We found our discussions on the scoring of performance illuminating and helpful in revealing gaps and biases as well as resolving many of these. Therefore, the main methodological limitation on validation was that we were unable to involve the actors who participated in the provision of data in the validation stage – a limitation that arose from lack of resources and the time to do so.

2.5 HOW WE REACHED JUDGEMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

After agreeing on the focal outcomes with Oxfam, we proceeded to identify a primary and three plausible alternative hypotheses on actors who might have contributed to their materialization. The primary hypothesis that we investigated first, and most was that Oxfam and its partners contributed (most) significantly to the focal outcomes. The three alternative hypotheses were based on initial document analysis and conversations with Oxfam. After fieldwork, in the process of data analysis and report writing, we returned to the alternative hypotheses and tested them for their congruence with data generated from the field. We found it essential to revise them and ended up with more nuanced set of alternative hypotheses:

1. An actor or actors within the district, but other than the Oxfam consortium, played a primary role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and/or 2. This could include members of the Oxfam consortium acting in an independent role (outside the consortium).

2. An actor or actors from a different district or districts played a primary role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and/or 2, through a process of outscaling.

3. An actor or actors at national level played a primary role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and/or 2.
4. No single actor played a primary or leading role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and/or 2; rather these were shaped through a combination of actors, potentially including both the Oxfam consortium and actors beyond it (i.e., including some combination of 1, 2 and/or 3).

We reached conclusions in a stepwise process, by generating some data, making hypotheses, generating more data from a wide range of actors and sources, and testing the initial hypotheses and changing them. We later shared a draft report, and subsequently held a feedback meeting with Oxfam Malawi and Oxfam GB and project partners in Malawi. Our judgements and conclusions on the relative significance of the Oxfam consortium’s contribution and those of alternative hypotheses were based on the strength of evidence available to us; and subsequently on the scores made by the Oxfam consortium during the feedback meeting.

2.6 DATA VALIDITY AND LIMITATIONS

We analysed data inductively according to the focal outcomes, at district as well at systemic levels, and made abductive inferences that were guided by process tracing and our theory of change. We drew evidence from a range of stakeholders as well as from secondary sources as a way of triangulating. This was also intended to manage the biases of actors with vested interests in the findings of the evaluation. Our main validation method resided in the feedback that we got from Oxfam and its partners. Therefore, the main methodological limitation on validation is the non-participation of actors who participated in the provision of data – a limitation that arises from lack of resources and the time to do so.
3 RESULTS

3.1 OUTCOMES

The focal outcomes of the evaluation of the Oxfam-led project on Enhancing Communities’ Capacity in Tracking Development Resources at Local Council Level in Malawi that were assessed in all three districts in which the project was implemented are as follows:

- **Focal outcome 1**: Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga district councils are accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective in managing the Local Development Fund (LDF), District Development Fund (DDF) and Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and their results.

- **Focal outcome 2**: Women in Dowa, Phalombe and Karonga districts meaningfully empowered to participate in decision-making structures and processes.

Since focal outcome 2 can be seen as a subset of outcome 1 – i.e., that women’s empowerment was in the context of accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective use of funds – these are considered in sequence below.

3.1.1 Materialization of Outcome 1

Based on the information collected from interviews during the three field visits and from the documents reviewed, there is strong evidence of an overall improvement in the responsive, inclusive, effective, transparent and accountable utilization of the LDF, DDF and CDF in two of the districts, Phalombe and Dowa, whereas the evidence for Karonga is more mixed. In the latter case, while there was good evidence of increased inclusiveness in managing the LDF, DDF and CDF, evidence of increased accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness was more partial, with progress in some aspects but not in others.

**Phalombe district**

The evaluation found strong evidence of an overall improvement in the responsive, inclusive, effective, transparent and accountable utilization of the LDF, DDF and CDF in Phalombe district.

**Responsiveness**: We found evidence of improved responsiveness on the part of both the secretariat and the councillors. For example, pressure from the RLC forced the secretariat to organize a number of interface meetings for duty bearers and community stakeholders:

‘When we had a massive interface meeting and got everyone’s voices, we went to the DPD. We wanted the district commissioner to listen. The DPD responded, organizing a big meeting for duty bearers to come here.’ 6VH Kasongo

The RLC from Jenala TA reported increased compliance with guidelines for each of the three funds by all the people who had responsibility, which included the secretariat:

‘Since the first interface meeting, that brought together MPs, Phalombe district councillors, ADC and TA, the district secretariat and others, people who had responsibility made sure they were following the guidelines. Also, now many successful projects have been completed. For example, Kongoloni, Nancholi and Tcheleni bridges, Saidi Police, two teachers’ houses and the CBCC at Saidi – these projects that had stalled are now completed.’ Radio Listening Club Jenala TA
Councillors reported improved responsiveness by the secretariat as evidenced by improved collaboration between the council and people they represent:

‘One thing, now, is working well. There is close collaboration between the council and people they represent. The community is able to participate in the implementation of projects. Secondly, directors cannot implement any activity without councillors’ decision.’ Phalombe district councillor

‘Roles between the district council secretariat and councillors have been clarified. At first there was chaos. As councillors we got more training, things got better, we now understand our roles.’ Phalombe district councillor

‘We were not aware how to track public funds. Now we’re able to use what we are mandated for because of this project.’ Phalombe district councillor

‘The standing committees interact with the secretariat directors. Any issues are taken to the full council and the district council. Where cases are serious, we ask people to be removed.’ Phalombe district councillor

Senior members of the secretariat also noted that they had become more responsive to guidance and queries by the councillors. For example, when the district experienced floods earlier this year; councillors guided the secretariat to look for blankets that could quickly be distributed to flood victims. Stores selling blankets were identified; blankets were purchased and then distributed to flood victims.

‘Councillors are supporting or guiding the secretariat differently – each one wants to make sure that the council is giving its best service. e.g., we had floods earlier this year – councillors reminded the secretariat that there were blankets in stores – let’s look for them. This happened through our councillors.’ Phalombe district council secretariat.

Early in the project period, a number of senior secretariat officials – the CD, the DPD and other senior officials – were fired and then transferred to other districts because of the many issues raised against them and reported at national level by the district PET data collection team. The ADC member we interviewed observed that the secretariat has been more responsive following the removal of these senior officials from the district.

‘Because of this programme, we have seen some changes in the district council. The DC, the DPD and other senior officials have been moved out of the district.’ VDC – TA Jenala

‘...we believe we might have contributed to removal of the DC – the hot debate around gaps in management...It was at district level but then came to the attention of the national level.’ Oxfam Malawi.

Councillors: The project contributed to clarified boundaries between the roles of councillors and the secretariat. Together with improved capacity this has fostered councillors’ responsiveness:

‘We were not aware how to track public funds. Now we’re able to use what we are mandated for because of this project.’ Phalombe district councillors

Councillors have also been able, several times, to summon the secretariat to discuss issues with them. In other words, the project has empowered them. However, both councillors and secretariat noted that on CDF, the guidelines were not being followed by all MPs, with some MPs effectively bending the rules for use of the CDF to suit their own purposes.
Inclusiveness: We found evidence of increased inclusiveness both by the secretariat and by councillors:

Secretariat: There was strong feeling that the secretariat was more inclusive, particularly when dealing with councillors. In this regard, the councillors felt that the project had empowered them:

‘Councillors have also been able, several times, to summon secretariat to discuss issues with them. We have felt empowered by this.’ Phalombe district councillors

‘Directors at the secretariat cannot implement any activity without the councillors’ decision.’ Phalombe district councillors

‘.... recently we had issues with LDF not allocated 100 percent. The councillors would come to me every day. Now we have the funding – what are we doing about it?’ Phalombe district council secretariat

Councillors also reported that the standing committees interact with the secretariat directors. Any issues are taken to the full council. Where cases are serious the council requests that the people concerned be removed from the secretariat.

For the LDF and DDF projects, councillors play different roles at different levels. They participate in the appraisal of projects as part of standing committees of the district council – development committee, finance committee, etc; they approve the projects as part of the full council and they have the responsibility of informing local government structures (ADC) about the projects that are approved – description of the project, how much it will cost and activities that it will focus on.

Councillors: We also found some evidence of councillors’ roles promoting inclusiveness, with the clarification of roles between the councillors, secretariat, local government structures and MPs and the people fostering inclusiveness through improved collaboration between councillors, the secretariat, the local governance structures and people they represent. As a result, the community is able to participate in the implementation of projects. Directors cannot implement any activity without councillors’ decision.

‘There is close collaboration between the councillors and people they represent. The community is able to participate in the implementation of projects.’ Phalombe district councillors.

‘Another example recently – we are funding two water schemes. Big contractor removing old pipes and putting in new ones. Old pipes in front of their house. Are they stealing them? Councillor had to sort this out.’ Phalombe district council secretariat

Accountability: We found several lines of evidence demonstrating increased accountability both by the district council secretariat and by Phalombe district councillors:

Secretariat: The secretariat has been providing explanations on issues raised by community members related to specific projects when called upon during interface meetings.

‘In TA Nazombo, a DDF project, where there was delay in the building of a school block, people raised issues. The committee and secretariat then went to the community to explain.’ Phalombe district councillor
In another example, recounted by the RLC, the district officers read out the guidelines for CDF, LDF and DDF at a public meeting, complimenting the efforts of the RLC who had been sensitizing the communities on the guidelines for the three funds.

To some extent also there was improvement by the secretariat on disclosure of budgets and expenditure – both CCJP and DCT were able to collect budget and expenditure data from the secretariat.

‘At the district level it took us time to find out the budget – it took time – but they gave us. Now there is change. Previously only the MPs could access for themselves. Now councillors can access; and relationship between councillors and MPs has improved.’ CCJP Blantyre

Following queries by communities about how the secretariat was picking contractors, there have been some efforts by the secretariat to widely publicize advertisements for contractors.

‘We publicize advertisements and budget for the council on the notice board. But we need to extend our visibility to put them in the community notice boards – for example, currently we are calling for expression of interest to run a council lodge – we advertised on the council board on top of that we sent the advert to TAs offices. The new guidance requires advertising the intention to award contract in the newspapers.’ Phalombe district council secretariat

It was noted, however, that on procurement, accountability remains the main issue. VDC and ADC members argued that they did not know who went to buy materials for projects, where, and for how much.

_Councillors: _There has been increased compliance by councillors on their responsibility to inform local governance structures, particularly about the DDF and LDF projects approved, including their cost and activities. Councillors observed that previously information sharing on LDF and DDF was a challenge; but now as a result of the project information is going to communities via the ADC. The RLC for Jenala TA noted that the councillors have taken on full responsibility for informing ADCs about approved projects, particularly for LDC and DDF projects.

_MPs: _Some MPs do not inform councillors and local governance structure about CDF, but others do. As a result of the project, some communities have secured commitment from their MP to abide by the guidelines of the three funds as demonstrated by the following account by a member of RLC for Jenala TA:

‘So many people came to the interface meeting. They were able to make this MP sign an agreement to assure people that the three funds will be managed together. The issue here was that LDF, CDF, and DDF was mostly run by the politicians.’ Radio Listening Club, Jenala TA

The councillors have also requested audits of CDFs following reports to check if there are mismanaged CDFs, even at the national level.

 Traditional leaders: The shift from identification of beneficiaries of LDF projects by traditional leaders to identification of project beneficiaries in an open community forum as reported by the VDC/ADC members at Kasongo is evidence of increased accountability by traditional leaders.
**Effectiveness:** There was significant evidence to suggest improved effectiveness as a result of actions by the secretariat and/or councillors:

*Secretariat:* As the secretariat is at the centre of managing the implementation of projects approved by the council, the evidence we found of successful completion of projects following interface meetings implies a central role in effective delivery by duty bearers including the secretariat. According to Oxfam, several stalled projects were restored and completed. The RLC for Jenala TA also observed that several projects that had stalled were restored and completed as a result of the project:

‘*Kongoloni, Nancholi and Tcheleni bridges, Saidi Police, two teachers’ houses and the CBCC at Saidi – these projects had all stalled and are now completed.*’ Radio Listening Club, Jenala TA

Ensuring the smooth running of the wider governance system of the district, including removal of corrupt officials, can also be taken as evidence of improved effectiveness:

*Councillors:* We heard of two cases – and there were likely more – in which councillors complained and as a result, the DPD and the Director of Public Works were transferred out of the district.

‘*The standing committees interact with the secretariat directors. Any issues are taken to the full council and the district council. Where cases are serious, we ask people to be removed.*’ Phalombe district councillors.

*Community:* The project has empowered not only the structures which participate directly in its implementation, but also members of the community as a whole to participate in the management of the funds:

‘*What is emerging, everybody in this community has a responsibility to follow up on a project. For example, the issues of the 35 bags of cement...*’ ADC member for Jenala TA.

In summary, we were impressed by the overall levels of improvement we identified in Phalombe district, in terms of movement towards more responsive, inclusive, effective, transparent and accountable utilization of the LDF, DDF and CDF. These improvements take on further significance in view of the earlier transfer of senior councillors out of the council, and when contrasted with the much more partial improvements observed in Karonga district (see below).

**Dowa district**

As for Phalombe district, the evaluation found strong evidence of an overall improvement in the responsive, inclusive, effective, transparent and accountable utilization of the LDF, DDF and CDF in Dowa district. Furthermore, these improvements impacted on other public resources, such as school improvement grants (SIGs) and in the budgeting of the newly introduced Community Social Projects Fund.

**Responsiveness:** Community members were taking a more active part in the identification of infrastructural projects to complete or initiate under the LDF and SIGs, and in the development of District Development Plans (DDPs) for resourcing by DDF and community projects for funding by CDF. Their participation was effected through VDCs and ADCs, who had become aware of their rights to participate in making decisions on the use of local public resources and of the obligations of local government as a duty bearer. Below are some statements suggesting responsiveness:

‘*We have to consult the communities when we plan, and our district plans are based on Village Action Plans.*’ Dowa district officer
‘Communities have been empowered to choose the projects they want to do. They understand the budgeting and expenditure process.’ Dowa district councillor

‘At Chingudu Primary School, the VDC members went beyond the tracking of LDF, DDF and CDF to monitor the use of SIGs.’ ADC member

**Inclusiveness:** The main citizen structures that now participate in decision-making structures and processes at multiple levels in Dowa district are VDCs, Project Implementation Committees (PICs), ADCs and councillors. For example, VDCs guide the development of Village Development Plans that feed into the DDP. PICs decide on who to employ in funded projects, while councillors participate in decisions through thematic district committees as well as through the full council. Inclusiveness is illustrated in the following conversations with evaluation participants:

‘How do you ensure that community needs get prioritized?’ Evaluator

“We convene meetings in the communities, in villages. During the meetings we ensure that different groups are formed to raise concerns and needs according to their perspective. The groups that we commonly use comprise: [i] adult men, [ii] adult women, [iii] youth, [iv] people with disabilities and [v] people living with HIV. We start by choosing needs that are found across the groups and often reach decisions through consensus-building.’ Radio Listening Club member, Msakambewa

‘What is the role of council and councillors in a district?’ Evaluator

‘As councillors, we serve as the bridge between the community and the district council. As a collective, council [i] makes by-laws, [ii] oversees district development, [iii] approves district budgets, [iv] supervises projects and [v] ensures that the council officers perform their duties.’ Dowa district councillor

‘In my ward, we discovered that the MP and some people had already filled in the application form for newly [2018] introduced community projects fund without consulting us and the ADC. We said no to the already-filled-in-form and used proper structures and channels to fill in the form. We will soon be electing a PIC for the new fund.’ Dowa district councillor

**Accountability:** Duty bearers – council, councillors, council officers and traditional leaders in Dowa – have become more transparent and accountable in the use of public resources. This is partly because communities know and demand their rights, councillors have become better able to exercise their oversight role, and civil society support and media reports on the abuse of public resources have made the public become less tolerant of corruption. However, this transparency and accountability may be short-lived due to fragmented CSO support, increased sophistication of corruption and unpunished offenders.

‘I am finding it difficult to understand who is responsible for which funds within the districts...’ Evaluator

‘There is an understanding within the districts that these funds are managed by different actors. Councillors are understood to manage the LDF, the MP manages CDF, and the secretariat manages the DDF. Then there is also local revenue, which is often poorly accounted for by the secretariats in many districts across the country.’ DCA manager

‘The secretariat knows that the honeymoon is over. Business as usual is over. Councillors are here. CSOs are here too. It has instilled fear in public officers and representatives who are involved in malpractice, including MPs and traditional leaders. As a result, there has
been increased transparency and accountability by district councils.' Dowa district councillor

‘The [PET] approach has helped in promoting transparency and accountability in the Traditional Authority...Community decisions are made in a more transparent manner. Traditional leaders are working well with other community structures, especially the VDCs and ADCs. In the past they used to work in isolation.' Dowa ADC member

‘Communities have also set standards that have to be met for each sector, which are then used for monitoring and supervising,’ Dowa district officer

‘As a village headman, I used to give myself and my family members more than they should get from public resources. For example, if my villages were allocated 20 coupons, I would keep 15 for my own use and for use by my relatives and give the remaining five to members of the community...I was approached by members of the Radio Listening Club. They made me aware that I was abusing public resources. They talked to me about the effects of corruption on community development and made me feel guilty. I decided to change and be a good community leader.’ Dowa ADC member

‘Two members of the secretariat, who occupied key positions concerning the management of public resources, had to be transferred because they were implicated in the inappropriate use of public funds.’ Dowa district councillor

**Effectiveness:** The improved budgeting and expenditure of public resources has been effective in that it has contributed to improving the living conditions of communities through addressing community-priority projects, completion of stalled infrastructural projects, such as bridges and roads, gainful employment of community members (women, youth and men), and provision of health, water, education and agricultural services.

‘What major changes have been caused by community participation in budgeting and public expenditure tracking?’ Evaluator

‘Water and sanitation has improved, and this has created more time for women to do other things. The incidence of water-borne diseases has fallen. More roads and bridges have been constructed and completed, and more school blocks too.’ Dowa district officer

‘As councillors, we have also been empowered to use PET to ensure that local government public services reach the people. For example, after attending a PET training in Lilongwe in which the issue of pilferage of drugs in public hospitals was raised, we came back and caused this to stop through the Health and Environment Committee.’ Dowa district councillor

**Karonga district**

In contrast to the other two districts, we found only limited evidence of increased responsiveness and effectiveness by Karonga district council in managing LDF, DDF and CDF and their results; more promising, but still limited, evidence of increased inclusiveness; and only partial evidence of increased accountability, demonstrating increased accountability on some cases but not on others. Although there are some significant examples of particular projects that the district council has set up or influenced to completion, this response needs to be understood within the broader context of community members’ experiences of the responsiveness, accountability and effectiveness of the district council. The evidence suggests that there has been limited institutional change within the district council itself. Most change
can be attributed to pressure by community structures leading to increased accountability in some cases.

**Responsiveness:** While we found some evidence of increased responsiveness by the Karonga district council secretariat, in the case of interface meetings this was variable. We also found some evidence for increased responsiveness by Karonga district councillors and MPs.

**Secretariat:** One example of increased responsiveness concerned the Syasya Chilambo Fisheries project in Mbande area, which had been at a standstill because the equipment and materials for constructing the fishpond were not delivered by the secretariat. After investigating and collecting all the relevant data for the project, the data compilation team invited the District Fisheries Officer, the councillor, ADC and VDC chairperson and representatives of the secretariat to a meeting. Consequently, the secretariat delivered the materials, and the fishpond construction was completed.

Another case, concerning the construction of a teacher’s house, is perhaps more illustrative of perseverance than responsiveness. Although Oxfam Malawi staff reported this as evidence of the district council’s increased responsiveness, evidence from interviews with the STAR circles and community members indicates that a small amount of work would be done and then come to a standstill. There would be a push from the STAR circle and work would start up again for a short while but then stop. Eventually the secretariat reported that construction of the house was finished, but when the STAR circle group visited the house, they found no kitchen and no ablutions facilities, and the doors being eaten away by termites. Again, the STAR circle pushed for a response and the kitchen and ablutions facilities are now almost finished. The cost of the house also kept increasing. The STAR circle asked for an explanation about the increase in cost, but to date, have not been given an adequate reason for the increase or what the money is being spent on.

In the case of interface meetings, when these were organized by the STAR circle in the Lupembe area, some members of the secretariat attended. However, often the most crucial member required to answer the queries raised by the community did not attend the meeting. It is suspected by community members that one member will stay away so others can avoid answering questions and blame the person who is not present (as they are the one whose job was not done properly). Sometimes the secretariat did not respect their commitments to attend interface meetings. One STAR circle leader reported how the DC and senior members of the secretariat avoided attending an agreed-upon interface meeting:

‘When I invited the DC to an interface meeting, he told me that I don’t have the mandate to call an interface meeting that was the responsibility of the ADC. He advised that I should go through the ADC. I told them that this issue has already been discussed with the ADC and the traditional leaders. I insisted that we needed the DC to intervene. The DC said if the ADC can’t sort out the issue, then it is inefficient. The DC agreed to come for the interface meeting, but every time we arrange for a meeting, he keeps giving excuses.’ STAR circle leader, Lupembe

On the day of our evaluation interview a planned interface meeting failed because the DC, DPD and Director of Finance (DoF) had all travelled out of the district to Lilongwe. The duty bearers had committed to attending the meeting, but on the day were unavailable. The evaluators also had a meeting scheduled with the DC and DoF on this day, which had been postponed from the previous day. Although both the DC and DoF said that they would be available to meet after they had postponed the meeting from the previous day, this meeting also did not take place as when the evaluators arrived at the district council offices both the DC and DoF had gone to Lilongwe.
The district council secretariat confirmed that sometimes they did not adequately respond to the issues raised by communities during the interface meetings. They argued that this happened due to staffing issues but also sometimes they could not respond because they felt ambushed. The following quotes give evidence of this:

‘...at times the communities call interface meetings and we have not been able to go to respond to some issues. One of the reasons is issues of staffing – at times the positions are acting and then people are overwhelmed with work, and you won’t see us in the offices because of a shortage of staff but we are still trying with staff that is available whenever time is available.’ Karonga district council secretariat

‘What I mean is when the interface meetings are organized CCJP will engage more the communities, empower them and leave us behind and then we will be ambushed. We will be told tomorrow is an interface meeting without giving us time to prepare an adequate response or helping us to respond. So, it was one sided. We mentioned this to them that there should be a balance that duty bearers need to be engaged so we can prepare not only engaging the community – otherwise empowerment is only on one side, and we are being left behind. This is why sometimes we could not respond as we felt ambushed instead of giving us enough time to respond and understand.’ Karonga district council secretariat

The secretariat argued that CCJP should have been adequately preparing them for interface meetings by briefing them on the areas the community would be engaging them on. This would enable the secretariat prepare responses and prepare a team to interface with the community. CCJP could also have built the capacity of the secretariat on how to engage in this kind of forum – the interface forum. ‘Otherwise, the interface meetings ended up being confrontational instead of being properly facilitated by a neutral facilitator.’

Councillors: The councillors recounted that a month previously, when it was reported on the radio that MK26 million had gone unaccounted for by council, the councillors raised this issue with the DC. The DC told them that the head of sectors had misused the money. The councillors argued that it was the people’s money and that the councillors needed to pay it back. The DC then explained that it was a mistake of the bank. All the money for all the projects goes into one bank account and the MK26 million comprised bank charges for all the projects which was taken off one project:

‘We said we want the money back and called the financial service committee.’ Karonga district councillor

One of the councillors also reported that what he does sometimes, if the MP doesn’t want to involve him in CDF, is that he goes to mobilize the people and tell them that this is their money, generated from their tax, and contractors must come up with bills of quantity.

MP: In Mbande area, the MP informed the community that he would construct Nkhando and Towo school blocks. When the RLC made a follow up, they found that the MP had only delivered sand. As a result of this the RLC followed up with the MP; after this all the materials for the school blocks were delivered and the construction of the school blocks was completed.

Inclusiveness: The most promising evidence we found of increased inclusiveness was on the part of MPs and traditional leaders. We found only limited evidence of the secretariat and councillors promoting inclusiveness.

MPs: In Karonga central constituency, the MP has fully delegated the responsibility of managing the CDF to the ADC. A VDC member, found at Mwenilondo Health Centre, reported that the
management of the construction of the health centre was in the hands of the community led by the ADC. The MP kept out of it.

*Traditional leaders:* In Lupembe area, a member of the STAR circle reported that their group has been empowered by the traditional leadership and ADC/VDC to take the lead in organizing interface meetings with the various duty bearers including the secretariat, MP and councillors:

‘We mobilize all stakeholders to the interface meetings – secretariat, MP, councillors, ADC and GVH because we got authority and power to mobilize from the VDC/ADC and the Traditional Authority. In other communities they don’t have this mandate. This is because the STAR circles were introduced to the TA giving them credibility.’ STAR circle leader, Lupembe

*Secretariat:* According to the Lupembe ADC chair, the role of identifying and prioritizing projects for CDF and LDF has now been left in the hands of ADC and VDC. However, DDF projects are extracted from the DDF. For the DDF project the communities were not making requests from the district council, rather, what the council did was to go to an existing DDF document and then come to the community and present this e.g., the headmistress’s house; and all the DDF projects. Communities complained they did not have any control over project prioritization, instead the secretariat assumed full control. According to a school staff member the school was not consulted on whether the house was necessary. If they had, they would have suggested that such an expensive house was not needed as both the community and the school would have preferred to have a few smaller houses built for the same amount of money as the one house. As mentioned above, both the STAR circle and the school have questioned the cost of the house and why this cost keeps rising. They have compared it to what other houses cost and can find no explanation for why this particular house is so expensive to build.

*Councillors:* CCJP reported that when councillors had suspected abuse of funds, they had approached CCJP with evidence which supported this.

*Accountability:* We found mixed evidence of increased accountability by the secretariat of Karonga district council, with increased accountability in some cases but not in others. We also found some evidence of increased accountability by councillors and mixed evidence of increased accountability on the part of MPs, ADC and traditional leaders.

*Secretariat:* Members of RLCs and STAR circles in Mbande and Lupembe areas of TA Kyungu reported that the secretariat was giving them lists of approved projects, budgets allocated to them and the status of expenditure. This information formed the basis for these groups to track these projects. The councillors also reported that the secretariat is currently disclosing every approved project. This means that the secretariat cannot go into a community with a project without the councillor and the ADC knowing about it.

Councillors also reported that during financial service committee meetings the director of finance is called upon to explain the financial report, which councillors find complicated and not transparent.

For CDF and LDF, councillors reported that currently budgets for specific projects are given to ADCs who in turn inform the communities. In Lupembe the funds now seem to be entirely managed by the ADC with very little intervention by the MP.

In Lupembe, it was reported that there is an approved market project where a contractor was fully paid but very little work was done on the ground. When additional funds were allocated for the project, the secretariat wanted the same contractor to continue with the project. The ADC
refused to allow the same contractor to continue with the project and instead asked the DC to sign an agreement to allow them to interview other contractors for the project, which he did.

The DC recently organized a media tour to allow members of different media houses to interact and ask questions to the various community stakeholders where LDF, DDF and CDF projects had been implemented. In addition, they had a press briefing to look at how much had been allocated, how much had been spent and shared the results. Communication of budget and expenditure information to the public also happens through the posting of all the budgets and proposals on the notice boards. These, according to CCJP, demonstrated increased accountability – or at least transparency – on the part of the secretariat.

However, sometimes the secretariat does not give out information or there are inconsistencies in the information disclosed. Several reported instances provide evidence of this claim:

1. In the case of the missing MK58 million, when the councillors demanded accountability on how the money was spent, the secretariat refused to produce the report. Consequently, a full council meeting was convened which gave approval for the matter to be reported to police and central government and thereafter arrests were made. While this reflects badly on the secretariat, it also demonstrates how PET is being effectively applied if the councillors’ demands were based on the training and mentorship, they received from this and other PET projects.

2. For the Lupembe Community Day Secondary School DDF headmistress’s house project, members of the STAR circle reported how the secretariat changed the figures on the cost of the project. First the secretariat said the project cost was MK16 million, but later they said the project cost was over MK20 million.

3. A STAR circle member from Lupembe commented on the media campaign saying she heard the DC speak on the radio and he reported that certain projects were complete when they were not. This included the Lupembe Community Day Secondary School DDF headmistress’s house project.

4. People from GVH Mwenelupembe argued that there is poor accountability for the DDF projects:

‘Everything is done at council level, and we feel robbed. They reported bricks were bought but the bricks were a contribution from the community, so someone has robbed from us.’
VDC member, Lupembe

‘When the price of the house went up the council claimed this was for the transport of the bricks, yet community members made a contribution of MK20,000 to take the bricks to the site.’ GVH Mwenelupembe

5. CCJP staff reported that there is very little accountability and transparency in the secretariat. An example given was how when the district commissioner’s office was being audited a computer with vital information on it went missing.

Stakeholders suggested several reasons why they were unable to affect accountability at the secretariat level:

• The programme was not implemented across the entire district, which meant that isolated communities were trying to hold district-level duty bearers accountable. This would be more successful if there was grassroots mobilization across the entire district.

• The programme ended prematurely with stakeholders not yet equipped to play the role that the data compilation teams did. The gap was felt both in terms of having evidence of the mismanagement of funds, insisting on the secretariat’s participation and having access to the media.
• The secretariat managed to avoid responsibility by not attending interface meetings.

These accountability obstacles may also impact the long-term sustainability of the project at a district level.

Councillors: The members of STAR circle reported that their councillor had become financially transparent through providing information on LDF projects, how much has been allocated and where it will be implemented. However, for DDF projects, while the councillor informed the community about the approved DDF projects the information provided did not include the value of the project. The secretariat claimed full responsibility on management of DDF.

Councillors reported that they advise communities to register the materials they have received, and they give register books to communities with approved projects. This forces the person delivering to sign for the delivery even if they do not have delivery notes.

The councillors also reported being more actively involved in procurement control by asking the secretariat to come up with bills of quantity, which they use to verify prices of the suppliers. For example, they discovered that while the secretariat was paying MK7,800 for a bag of cement the real price was MK6,000 and the secretariat paid MK40,000 for a wheelbarrow while the real price was MK30,000. The councillors asked the secretariat to provide explanations for these discrepancies.

Councillors also reported that they asked the council chairperson to commission an external audit when they noted that when the Auditor General’s team came to the district but only worked with the secretariat without engaging the councillors. However, the DC informed them that there was no money for the external audit.

Finally, councillors demanded accountability for the missing MK58 million, and they called for a full council which approved that action be taken against the suspects.

MPs, ADC and traditional leaders: In Lupembe, the ADC chair and members of STAR circles claimed that their MP was giving them all the information about CDF projects. The ADC chair also reported that for the 2018/2019 budget they had already been informed by their MP about the funding that has been allocated to them by parliament and they had already requested the secretariat provide the bill of quantities. However, the community in GVH Mwenelupembe argued that while the ADC has been given that responsibility by the MP, it is not fully accountable on materials delivered to project sites as the following revelation shows:

‘I was on the project site to witness delivery of materials, but when I asked for a delivery note, I was told that the delivery note was with the VDC chair; when I followed up with the VDC chair he said it was with the ADC chair; when I followed up with the ADC chair he asked: Do you need materials or delivery note? We were forced to receive materials without a delivery note because we did not want our community to lose.’ VDC member, Lupembe

The councillors reported that there is currently increased accountability by ADCs and GVH during selection of beneficiaries for LDF projects as the selection process is done publicly in an open space involving community members, councillors, secretariat, VDC, ADC and traditional leaders. At village level however, village members complained that the GVH still favours family members or closely connected members of the community when it came to job allocations. The community members were aware that jobs were supposed to be allocated to the most vulnerable members of the community but claimed that in reality this did not happen.
**Effectiveness:** While we found some limited evidence that the actions of MPs – and one of the VDCs – had contributed to increased effectiveness in the management of the funds, we found very limited evidence of increased effectiveness resulting from the actions either of the secretariat or the councillors.

**MPs:** Under pressure from community structures, several approved or stalled projects were completed including Nkhandu and Towo school blocks in Mbande area:

‘The school block was not constructed, and the MP came to us. We thought he was constructing the school block for us. The MP reported the block constructed but it was not, and the materials were not on site. After they followed up with the MP all the materials were delivered. If it was not for the RLC’s intervention the school would not have been built.’ Radio Listening Club, Mbande

Furthermore, a VDC member explained how they had managed to build their own health centre at Mwenilondo at a cost of MK25 million:

‘Our VDC has managed the whole thing. The MP kept out of it. It shows when the MP keeps out things work well. We used local artisans. They are now involved in building a preschool and marketplace.’ VDC member, Lupembe

**Secretariat:** The secretariat reported that in the 2017/2018 financial year all approved projects were completed because of improved engagement between secretariat, communities and councillors.

‘I will start with development projects and DDF for 2017/18 – all projects were completed in time. This is because of proper engagement with communities and councillors – we are now able to bring in credible contractors. And proper strategies on how we can implement and complete the projects. One was the issue of engaging with contractors who have the capacity – they will get first payment after 50 percent of project and then 100 percent after full completion. This we are very strict on, after engagement with communities and councillors, so 2017/18 all completed and no abandoned projects.’ Karonga district council secretariat

**Secretariat:** Mbande ADC chair reported that corruption came down at council level when six members of the secretariat staff were arrested and one transferred; but he observed that corruption is coming up again because the secretariat is currently not monitored.

**Councillors:** Councillors noted that while cases of abuse involving contractors were going down, the number of abuse cases on revenue collected by the council remains high.

### 3.1.2 Materialization of Outcome 2

There is evidence to suggest that women in all three districts have been empowered to participate more meaningfully in decision-making structures and processes through various public sector resource planning and utilization processes. The evidence suggests that women’s representation in such structures was not the main issue, particularly given that the project took place after women leaders were selected, and given the short project duration, which means that we would not expect to see any changes in women’s representation within this time period. Rather, what we looked at under this heading were changes in the extent to which women were able to wield power to make decisions in local government governance structures, particularly as a mechanism or means for increasing women’s agency and thereby improve public services for the benefit of all, including for women and girls. This is what is meant by the term ‘meaningful’ in the articulation of focal outcome 2 – that women’s agency is developed to influence more effectively public service decisions, and their distributional impact. The processes through which...
women participated in decision-making processes within the district included district and project planning, budgeting and supervision of community development projects, monitoring of public projects and demanding accountability, as well as decision making through ADCs and VDCs. Our main findings below are that women’s agency increased in different ways, and in different contexts, in the three districts being evaluated.

**Phalombe district**

The secretariat of Phalombe district council reported that there has been increased participation of women in LDF projects including in leadership positions. An ADC member also reported that in their area they now ensure that in all committees there is equal numbers of men and women.

‘*In committees now, we ensure equal numbers of men and women, the same in project committees.*’ ADC – Jenala TA

‘*An example, there are five women and six men in our VDC now.*’ VDC – Jenala TA

‘*In my area I’ve been summoned by a group of women to brief me, ask me to consider them, and inform me about all the different projects, LDF, CDF, DDF, and ensure their involvement, and the structures have shifted from 40/60 to 50/50.*’ Phalombe district councillor

‘*The development committees were mostly dominated by men. Now they’re 50:50. Also, now 50 percent or more of women participate in development projects. For example, for the CBC it is chaired by woman.*’ Jenala TA Radio Listening Club.

Youths have also started playing active roles in the management of the funds. The district commissioner gave an example of youth centre projects where youths have petitioned the DC that they are not comfortable with the contractor who was engaged. CCJP Blantyre also reported increased youth participation:

‘*At first we found out that the youth are there but not used very much; the women not taking part; only the men but due to project – now youths are accepted in society – given something to do.*’ CCJP Blantyre

In summary, the evidence from Phalombe yielded little insight into increases in women’s agency, as it focused mainly on representation (but without clarifying the time period over which these shifts in representation have taken place). However, the quote by the councillor did point to increased agency by women demanding accountability. From our interview with the Jenala TA RLC we were also particularly struck by the increased expectations of the women in this group, and by the development of their sense of agency from having participated in successful interface meetings, as well in data compilation teams. Furthermore, one of these women felt sufficiently empowered that she was now considering running for election as a councillor.

**Dowa district**

In Dowa district, there is good evidence to suggest that women have been empowered to participate in decision-making structures and processes and are wielding power to make decisions in local government governance structures, while at the same time benefiting from public funded projects, activities and services. These benefits also accrue to children. This empowerment reflects these women’s representation on VDCs, ADCs and other committees, but this representation had not been shaped by the
project itself, reflecting instead national gender policy that was being enacted before the start of the project.

‘Our PET work was gendered. We aimed at making LDF, DDF and CDF supported processes more engendered through working with women. CCJP’s contribution in the project was gender-based. In fact, this explains our work with women MPs and councillors, two of whom you have already interviewed.’ Oxfam programme manager

‘There is now better involvement of women in social audits in the districts where we worked... CCJP focused on women’s participation in decision-making processes and structures such as VOCs, ADCs and council; and in community projects using STAR circles as the main mechanism.’ CCJP, Blantyre

‘Three of the 18 councillors are women [elected in 2014 before the project commenced]. The vice chairperson of the council is a woman. But the most important site for women’s empowerment lies in community level structures, such as the PIC, VDC and ADC where there is a requirement for 50:50 representation in the committees.’ Dowa district officer

‘I have read a report that suggests that the vice chairperson position is often given to women, but it comes with no power and responsibilities and often the vice chairperson is there for window dressing. How far true is this in your ADC?’ Evaluator

‘Yes, that is the way it used to be even in this area. But the PET project helped us go beyond merely having women’s representation to ensuring that women take on serious leadership roles and also directly benefit from LDF, DDF and CDF. As a result, the vice chairperson has taken a lead role in the supervision and monitoring of a project at the Rupatanzombo School.’ Dowa ADC member

‘In the households, including in mine, women take part in making decisions about the sale of family produce and the use of income from the sales. This was not the case in the past. Within the communities, women have become less afraid of speaking in the presence of men... Now they take them to task.’ Male member of Dowa Radio Listening Club

‘In public sector projects such as MASAF-4, employment has become 50:50 for men and women. And perhaps even more important, within community projects women have taken on roles that were reserved for men, such as being a foreperson, allocating work to workers from the community. For example, I am responsible for keeping the register of people who come to work.’ STAR circle member

‘One of the advantages of putting public projects under community supervision is that the problem of ghost workers is overcome. As a woman, I am in charge of allocating people work do to and I do not tolerate that [ghost workers]. Such a role used to be the preserve of men. One of the advantages of putting public projects under community supervision is that the problem of ghost workers is overcome.’ Female member of a Radio Listening Club

‘District councils have put a lot of their resources to make potable water more accessible thus reducing time spent of fetching water. This has also improved the security of women who no longer have to wake up as early as 4.00 am to go and draw water far away from their homes.’ Chairperson of the Women Caucus in Parliament

Karonga district

We found some evidence that women in Karonga district are increasingly becoming engaged with how the CDF, LDF and DDF are being implemented and thus holding duty bearers
accountable. Women expressed how the project’s capacity-building process has been empowering:

‘We women are behind how funds are being managed. We did not know what DDF meant. We had a slight idea about what CDF was but thought money came from the personal account of the MP. The project opened our eyes. We now know the CDF fund does not come from the MP. It is our money as well as the other funds. We learnt through the project that CDF we get through the MPs and LDF. Now I can explain how these funds work and when projects go bad, we can track it.’ STAR circle chair

Through the project women also took up leadership roles, particularly through the STAR circles. CCJP also provided training in gender responsive budgeting:

‘The strength of the project has been the inclusion of women as they are the most marginalised at village and council level and suffered most in corruption. As the project empowered them to be at the forefront, they took it as their own and worked hard to see it through.’ CCJP, Blantyre

‘The STAR circles are our eyes, and we are helping each other. When there is a project at a site, if I don’t know about it, they will phone me and tell me.’ Karonga district councillor

A particularly active STAR circle is the one established by CCJP in Lupembe. There are three reasons given for the leadership role of this women’s group in the community:

1. The STAR circle was established for the project. In other areas STAR circles already existed and women are often more involved in health issues than public sector resource planning and utilization processes.
2. The STAR circle was introduced to community leadership structures who endorsed the STAR circle’s role in the community.
3. The leader of this particular STAR circle belongs to other structures within CCJP and so draws on the CCJP for support in making decisions about what action to take to keep duty bearers accountable.

Women are being given supervisory roles in development projects and have leadership roles. There is a direct comparison between the way in which women would only be able to carry water for building sites in the past to how now women are supervisors of projects. At one community focus group meeting a woman argued how women can monitor projects as well as provide labour:

‘This ADC chair is a woman and there are VDC chairs that are now women. LDF used to recruit more men but this time around there were more women than men as women are more responsible. Men spend their money on alcohol. Women use it for their home.’
Karonga district councillor

‘When the school blocks were being built all the women could do was bring water for construction and offer labour, now things are different. When we are taking water to the site, we know how long the project should take and how much it is supposed to cost. There are a lot of projects implemented in the area where we could only be casual workers such as public works. Now we can tell them before they start how to set it out and say on this project, there are four men we want four women. Contractors usually only take men as
supervisors, but we want women to be supervisors as we are also trained.’ STAR circle chair

There is increased support and solidarity between women who were part of district STAR circles and community-based STAR circles. For example, businesswomen at district level assisted a woman growing legumes to access some markets. However, at two of the village meetings we convened there was a feeling that women’s roles had not improved. Women were not included in decision-making or given job opportunities. There was a feeling that women’s needs were also not prioritized when it came to deciding what projects to implement at a village level. Women were angry now that they realized that the projects were coming from funds that communities should benefit from but did not express any significant change on the ground. This does not mean that these women were not feeling more empowered or not taking action. It means that these are not easy battles and there are more obstacles to overcome than holding duty bearers accountable. It suggests in turn that the project was too short to bring about this level of change, given how difficult it can be to shift women’s position in society in any meaningful or systemic way.

3.1.3 Summary reflections on similarities and differences between the three districts in the materialization of outcomes 1 & 2

Materialization of outcome 1

- Strong evidence for overall improvement in the responsive, inclusive, effective and accountable utilization of the LDF, DDF and CDF was found in both Phalombe and Dowa districts.
- The evidence for Karonga district was more mixed: while there was good evidence of increased inclusiveness in managing the LDF, DDF and CDF, evidence of increased accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness varied, with progress in some aspects but not in others.

Materialization of outcome 2

- There was also evidence to suggest that women in all three districts have been empowered to participate more effectively in a range of decision-making structures and processes either at district council level, through VDCs and ADCs, through planning, budgeting and supervision of community development projects, or through monitoring of public projects and demanding accountability. The evidence for this was strongest in Dowa district, where there was good evidence for increased participation in decision-making structures through a gendered approach as well as increased representation.
- In Phalombe the strongest evidence concerned instances of increased individual agency on the one hand, and of increased levels of women’s influence through RLCs and interface meetings on the other. Increased individual agency reflects the understanding that funded projects are not ‘gifts’ but come from funds that should be managed by the community. Likewise, in Karonga there was an increase in women’s participation in monitoring and holding duty bearers to account: women felt more supported to speak out and demand accountability both through their involvement in STAR circles and through the evidence provided through the PET process. In summary, across all three districts, while there has been an increase in representation and mobilisation that can influence decisions at a district level, women are not necessarily yet in positions of power or decision-making positions at district level.
3.2 SALIENT CAUSAL STORIES 1: THE OXFAM CAUSAL STORY

We identified several causal explanations of interventions that contributed to the two focal outcomes on increased accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness and effectiveness in managing the LDF, DDF, and CDF, and women’s empowerment in decision-making structures and processes in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts. The first of these is the causal story of the Oxfam-led consortium. However, we do not judge the relative weight of this contribution at this point.

In Section 4.2.1 we consider the variety of interrelated mechanisms that the Oxford-led consortium drew on to contribute to the two focal outcomes. Wherever we can, we draw out differences between the three districts in how these mechanisms were applied and how effective they were (see also Section 4.2.5). One limitation of this section, caused by time restrictions and the nature of data collected, is that we have been unable to fully illustrate or validate reconstructed pathways of change in each case, which might offer further insights into similarities and differences between districts in how the focal outcomes were shaped.

However, an important insight gained through this evaluation into the (reconstructed) causal pathways developed by the Oxfam-led consortium is that the strength of these pathways – where they worked well (as in Phalombe and Dowa councils) – lay in the sequencing of the different mechanisms described below, so as to create a value chain approach. Thus, the sequencing of contributions from recording, editing and disseminating data generated through situational analysis, project planning and budgeting, implementation and monitoring by RLCs helped connect efforts along the project’s value chain. This was augmented through the collection, analysis and interpretation of financial and performance data concerning CDF, DDF and LDF by District Data Compilation Teams. Throughout the data generation, analysis and sense-making processes, power relations and gender justice considerations were, in turn, made visible through the participation of STAR circles comprising women-only groups.

3.2.1 Mechanisms

The Oxfam-led consortium used a variety of interrelated mechanisms to contribute to the two focal outcomes:

- **Partnerships with local organizations:** At the highest level, the consortium worked through its partnership with reputable local partners, namely, the Development Communications Trust (DCT) and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP). Together with these partners, Oxfam conducted mutual planning, allocation of TAs to operate in, implementation, learning and monitoring. The partners established and utilized Radio Listening Clubs, STAR circles, Data Collection Teams, interface meetings and built media relations as learning and agency development mechanisms to work with local governance structures [VDCs, ADCs, and district council and council committees on gender, finance, development, health and water, etc.] to conduct PET from source, allocation, receipt, budgeting, utilization and results.

- In Phalombe district the project worked in two of the six Traditional Authorities (TAs) – Jenala and Nazombe. Jenala TA consisted of more than 10 communities [at group village headman level] and Nazombe TA of more than 20 communities. In Dowa district the project worked in two of the nine TAs – Chakhadza and Msakambewa. In Karonga district the project worked in two of the five TAs – Kyungu and Kilupula. [The remaining TAs, Wasambo, Mwilang’ombe and Mwakaboko, were covered by a similar project implemented by Danish Church Aid in...
partnership with CCJP Karonga Diocese.] Within TA Kyungu the project worked with two ADCs – Mbande and Lupembe – and with one ADC in TA Kilipula.

- **Radio Listening Clubs (RLCs):** These were DCT’s main intervention mechanism in the project. RLCs comprise an equal number of trained men and women (including youth) in a particular area (set of villages) and are the brainchild of the Development Communications Trust. RLCs were recruited from communities in each of the focal TAs (Jenala and Nazombe in Phalombe district; Chakhadza and Msakambawa in Dowa district; and Kyungu and Kilipula in Karonga district) using an open and transparent process. The process of using RLCs involved recording, editing and disseminating data generated throughout a situational analysis, project planning and budgeting, implementation and monitoring. At the outset of the project RLCs in each focal TA were trained in basic issues on how the district council (DC) operates, and where its funding comes from; the guidelines of LDF, DDF and CDF; the need to track DC resource use, as it is their right; how they will be using digital recorders to feed information into radio programmes; and public expenditure tracking (PET) tools. Following this, each RLC across the three districts/six TAs followed a similar process: (i) holding public resources and expenditure tracking awareness meetings in the communities, and seeking out community challenges related to public resources (ii) sharing the identified challenges with the responsible duty bearers in council and obtaining their responses, (iii) holding interface meetings with duty bearers and rights holders to discuss the challenges and responses based on recorded evidence from public resources and expenditure tracking meetings and (iv) documenting interface meeting discussions for subsequent follow-up. It was clarified from the outset that the RLCs would have a close relationship with the community-based data compilation teams (see below) as data on LDF, DDF and CDF would be collected and compiled by these teams and would then be available to the RLCs in helping local communities identify issues on the ground.

- A critical part of the role of the RLC was its use of radio. This meant that dialogues with duty bearers (for example in interface meetings – see below) were recorded and later broadcast. This had the potential to increase the effectiveness of these meetings, as in most cases, the dialogue would be the basis for asking duty bearers to commit to a set of (more transparent) actions. The role of RLCs in Phalombe and Dowa was probably an important part of the effectiveness of the consortium’s activities in these two districts. By contrast, the presence of radios could also result in duty bearers staying away from dialogues for fear of being caught on record – and this may explain why duty bearers in Karonga sometimes avoided meetings, including interface meetings.

- **A district data compilation team:** These comprised community data compilation teams, councillors and CSO representatives and were established in each district to collect, analyse and make sense of financial and performance data concerning CDF, DDF and LDF. Project information was collected through site visits and observation and documented with the aid of checklists while financial information was sought from council officers. Oxfam and its partners fulfilled the roles of training, mentorship and supplementary support.

- Community-based data compilation teams were elected by the local chief, using an open and transparent process. In Phalombe district these data compilation teams consisted of 10 people, including two members of the RLC, a VDC representative and an untrained project supervisor. Each team was appointed a chair, secretary, treasurer and monitor – the latter a member of the RLC – a citizen journalist with a digital recorder. At the outset of the project, community-based data compilation teams received a similar training to the RLCs, but with a stronger focus on tools for PET. Likewise in Karonga, community-based data compilation teams were formed by bringing together representatives of STAR circles, the RLC, the ADC and the VDC.

- There was sharing between district data compilation teams and community data compilation teams. The district team filled in the gaps of the PET from a community level, as the former
had the technical capacity to collect some of the data that the community team could not. The district team also provided feedback to the community team.

- The district data compilation team also provided a leadership role for the community data compilation teams, STAR circles and Radio Listening clubs when engaging with the district secretariat.

- **Linkages between community-based data compilation teams, district data compilation teams and the national data compilation team:** DCT played an important role in vertical integration, ensuring that findings from the district data compilation teams fed upwards to the national data compilation team. This was significant, in that the experiences, insights and emerging positive impact of the project work in the three districts of Malawi cascaded into the national system through media. All findings were subsequently compiled in the final project report, which were then presented to the secretariat of each district council to validate.

- **STAR circles:** These are women-only groups whose establishment and training was facilitated by CCJP to ensure that women-specific interests and needs were factored into the budgeting and utilization of public resources. Within the Oxfam-led intervention, STAR circles were an adaptation and evolution of Societies Tackling AIDS through Rights, which have been effective in tackling HIV/AIDS. The mechanism also sought to ensure that women meaningfully participate in decision-making structures and processes in the district.

  ‘STAR’s main role is to build the capacity of women to take up issues and have them addressed. We operate in five centres in this Traditional Authority and each centre has 20 members.’ STAR circle member, Dowa district

- In Phalombe district, CCJP set up 10 STAR circles in Genala TA and 10 in Nazombe TA at GVH/VDC level, for example recruiting women who were members of a local coalition of women farmers [COFAS], or in other cases, were already members of CCJP. In Phalombe district STAR circle platforms were established in both TAs that brought together representatives of the different STAR circles at GVH/VDC level. RLCs and STAR circles worked together during interface meetings (see below). The STAR circles focused predominantly on sensitization of the community to gender issues and facilitated round-table discussions at community level to discuss the findings of gender analysis. RLCs, on the other hand, focused on following up and conducting investigations on PET.

- In Karonga district, CCJP had previously facilitated the formation of STAR circles in 2006 at GVH/VDC level in the project impact area. In Lupembe area STAR circles of 20 members each were formed for GVH Kayuni and Mwenelupembe. In Mbande area, STAR circles were formed for several GVHs that participated in the project. In both Lupembe and Mbande areas, some of the VDCs did not participate in the project implementation – for example in Mbande area the project did not reach out to GVHs Mwahimba and Kakolola. The STAR circles in Lupembe area were reaching out to other VDCs in Mulale area.

- As in Phalombe district, the Karonga district STAR circle structure encompassed VDC, ADC and district levels. The women in the district-level STAR circle included professional women and those running their own businesses and were able to encourage women at community level in good business practices, such as linking women who grow legumes to the market. The district level STAR circle was well positioned to challenge the secretariat on how they spent money on some projects.

- In Lupembe area, however, STAR circle women took a leading role in managing funds. They mobilized RLCs, VDCs, ADCs, traditional leaders, councillors and MPs and went as far as arranging interface meetings with the secretariat. While the STAR circles in Lupembe were very active and took a leading role, in Mbande it appeared the RLC was more active. In terms of roles, both STAR circles and RLCs
seemed to focus on both PET and gender issues and were part of the community data compilation team.

• **Interface meetings** served as a critical mechanism for the interaction of councillors, MPs and district officers on the one hand, and traditional leaders, ADCs, VDCs and community members on the other. Through interface meetings, citizens engaged duty bearers to account for plans and commitments made and for finding explanations to the state of affairs. RLCs and STAR circles often co-organized the interface meetings, with Oxfam and its partners helping with preparation, documentation and analysis of information, before, during and after the event.

• In Jenala TA (Phalombe) more than ten interface meetings were convened during the project period, and one since the project ended. Triggered by the anger and motivation of the communities that the RLCs were working with, the RLCs used these meetings to conduct evidence-based interrogation of duty bearers – VDCs, ADCs, extension workers, councillors, MPs and the secretariat. Our assessment is that these interface meetings, supported by radio, were key to the achievement of focal outcome 1 in this district.

• In Karonga district several interface meetings were convened during the project implementation period – some with concerned duty bearers in the communities and others at district level focusing on different projects – with some additional interface meetings taking place in Lupembe area after the project had ended. While all interface meetings aimed to bring together a full spectrum of stakeholders from district and community level, in practice some of the interface meetings were between STAR circles or RLCs with specific duty bearers such as councillors, MPs and health committee members. For example, in Mbande area there were interface meetings convened by the RLC bringing together the MP, councillors and one of the VDCs.

• It was notable that both during the project and since, there was a tendency for some secretariat members and councillors to evade the sessions. This may have reflected a fear of being caught on record by the RLCs and contributed to the more partial changes in the context of outcome 1 in this district.

• **Village Development Committees (VDCs), Area Development Committees (ADCs) and Traditional Authorities**: As well as the interface meetings, the RLCs and STAR circles worked directly with the VDCs and ADCs – primarily through the participation of VDCs and ADCs in the data compilation teams. VDCs, ADCs and traditional leaders also attended interface meetings.

• VDCs, ADCs and traditional leaders can be classified as both duty bearers and rights holders. The STAR circles were able to conduct interface meetings with these institutions to hold them accountable on issues related to management of the three funds. In Lupembe (Karonga district) traditional leadership mandated the STAR circles’ role within the community which gave the women confidence to call interface meetings on behalf of the community.

• **Partnership with the media**: Working with the media was an extension of the RLC mechanism and also a mechanism in which Oxfam played a key role because of its long history of conducting campaigns in Malawi and beyond; this was also connected to the Oxfam Media Strategy. This partnership with the media – newspapers, radio and television – was intended to document PET findings and produce information, education and communication (IEC) materials to mobilize citizens to understand and act on governance concerns at district and national levels. The IEC produced by DCT, CCJP and Oxfam for media comprised position papers, press briefings and press statements. At the same time the mechanism was used to bring journalists to the project sites to get first-hand information from citizens and duty bearers. This mechanism was also utilized to showcase the work of women councillors and parliamentarians and demonstrate their effectiveness as decision-makers. Partnership with the media was a critical mechanism for linking the local and national spaces and actors.
‘We also used print and electronic media extensively, partly as a mechanism for awareness raising and partly for advocacy. That was one of the advantages of having a media-based organization, DCT, as a partner within the project. Media coverage helped trigger responses at national level.’ Oxfam Malawi Programme Manager

‘As media, last year (2017) we investigated the use of local government resources based on findings that were shared by some civil society organizations that had used the PET approach.’ A journalist at The Nation newspaper

‘Their [Oxfam] use of media, especially radio, was powerful and effective in popularizing PET, especially in districts such as Phalombe. Their district level impact includes making duty bearers produce reports, especially in districts such as Karonga. Perhaps the most important contribution that Oxfam has made is towards improved use of public funds. Their PET findings from the districts they operated necessitated the audit of 16 districts.’ Senior member of the National Local Government Finance Committee

‘They [Oxfam] have boosted the chances of the retention and expansion of female policy makers [as decision-makers] through assisting in the documentation of changes taking place in their respective constituencies... Through the above process, our relations with media and subsequent coverage by media have improved.’ Chairperson of the Women Caucus in Parliament

• In Karonga there was evidence that community-level structures valued their access to the media and felt that this was a gap in their work once the project had ended. CCJP in particular saw the value of the media and since the end of the project has begun to implement a community journalism project based on what it has learnt from the project. It is also encouraging STAR circles and RLCs to use their own radios to keep reporting on issues of public expenditure. Some communities, particularly Lupembe, still report stories to CCJP’s radio for broadcasting.

These mechanisms show that Oxfam and its partners did establish new structures, connections and spaces for democratizing local development in the three districts. Their logic for not working directly through VDCs, ADCs and Traditional Authorities as frontline agencies of change was that these were interested parties, who may have been benefiting from the status quo, which they would then be inclined to perpetuate. A significant argument for focusing on STAR circles and RLCs was that these were neutral structures (i.e., not politically aligned), which potentially enabled them to be more effective in keeping the various local duty bearers – VDCs, ADCs and traditional leadership – accountable.

3.2.2 Sustainability of project focal outcomes and associated mechanisms

Phalombe: After the project came to an end, through the capacities provided, PET processes were sustained in Phalombe district by the RLC, STAR circles and community data compilation teams; interface meetings were conducted occasionally, and announcements were done through RLCs. However, the district data compilation teams ceased to function because of lack of operational funding. Factors contributing to the sustainability of the project may include the following:

• To ensure that the project initiative continued beyond the funding period, towards the end of the project, implementing partners facilitated round-table discussions at community level to enable stakeholders to develop a strategy for sustaining PET processes.
• The implementing partners have continued to monitor the project interventions as well as provide limited support beyond the funding period through new projects implemented in the same area.

• CCJP has also been able to continue following up on the project through its own structures on the ground.

However, members of the RLC felt that they still needed the support of the DCT and Oxfam:

‘We feel that we are not yet there. We need the DCT and Oxfam behind us, helping us to be stronger. Without them, duty bearers may be cajolled and overpower us somehow, because there are some things we don’t know. For example, we had a meeting with the MP, who was shaking. He wasn’t explaining the figures properly.’ RLC member, Jenala TA

**Dowa:** In Dowa district the evaluation noted that RLCs, STAR circles, ADCs and VDCs have continued to apply their PET knowledge and experience to make duty bearers accountable and public resource use effective. However, the generative potential of PET in empowering citizens and citizens groups to demand and achieve improved living conditions from the use of public resources was being constrained by the limited time of implementation (just over a year), and the scale of implementation, which in Dowa district covered only two out of nine TAs. These time and scale limitations undermined the potential for breaking the deep-seated habits and routines of abusing public resources and replacing them with more effective and accountable practices at individual, institutional and societal levels. We observed the same limitations in relation to the sustainability of local mechanisms that were established to mediate the change processes: RLC, STAR circles, DCTs and interface meetings. These observations are implied in the recommendations made during the meeting with the RLC and STAR circle members in Dowa, who want the PET project to: (i) increase their mobility to reach the distant eastern part of the TAs in which they operate, (ii) be extended to other TAs, and (iii) be expanded into other districts and create nationwide impact.

Project partners pointed out that working directly with VDCs and ADCs to support them to help fellow community members to speak for themselves and demand inclusion, development relevance and effectiveness, and accountability would have been problematic because some of them benefit from the status quo. However, they have also been transformed into more citizen-serving structures and have the potential to continue being active in the future with further support and supplementary support. Below are some of the challenges in sustaining project outcomes highlighted during the evaluation.

‘What new challenges are you facing in relation to the budgeting and utilization of public resources?’ Evaluator

‘The main one is that the secretariat is reluctant to share budget and expenditure information with us. In some cases, they fail to explain how some funds have been used.’
ADC member, Msakambewa TA

‘Mobility is a major challenge for those of us who have to go from village to village consulting people, giving them new information or feedback, or training them in PET. For example, I, as the chairperson, have to walk several kilometres from the western part of the Traditional Authority [in Ntawa village] to the eastern [especially to Matekenya, Chiwaya and Tswidi villages], a distance that takes more than a day. It would have been good if the project had provided bicycles for enhancing our mobility.’ ADC Chairperson, Msakambewa TA
Time constraints were so significant that they undermined the potential for joint reflections among civil society actors working on PET in the same district, such as Dowa, as well as across districts.

‘They [Oxfam, CCJP and DCT] should seriously consider extending the project into the future since it was implemented for a very short period of time, one season. This is especially important for ensuring that the gains that have been made at community level are also made at higher levels, where corruption is more serious... Even at local level, there is unfinished business that the [PET] project can help complete or at least advance.’ Dowa ADC member, Msakambewa TA

‘Next time when they are developing a proposal, they need to think about the time that it takes to deal with corruption in a corrupt country. They need to think about the multiple levels at which change is needed. If they think about these things, they will realize that they need at least 3–5 years to do such a project well.’ Dowa district councillor

‘No. There was little or no time to do that [build partnerships with other CSOs or among citizen groups across communities and districts]. And perhaps the willpower was not there either,’ CCJP Blantyre

‘The project period was too short. If there was enough time, and we were not chasing targets, we could have created time to work with other players and gain leverage. We had to focus on delivering on our commitment and not on creative synergies and generating collective agency, which would have been strategic.’ Oxfam Malawi Programme Manager

Karonga: In Karonga district, at community level, STAR circles and RLCs have developed capacities to hold duty bearers accountable and are continuing to follow up on projects. The focus of the project’s training also generated anger amongst community members when they realized that the three funds were theirs. Community members developed an interest to follow up on projects and hold duty bearers accountable. In Lupembe area the STAR circle continues to work with CCJP through another project and is linked to the diocese radio station Tuntufye. The radio station continues to broadcast some of the stories from Lupembe.

In Mbanda area RLCs observed that when the project came to an end, the district data compilation team disbanded and the link that DCT provided to radio stations was cut. There is currently no information being sent to radio stations. In addition, communities see that there is a leadership gap created by the disbanding of the district data compilation team.

‘We need to find who will head the team. We are missing leadership to take things to a district level. The support we were getting from CCJP and DCT is now lacking.’ RLC member, Mbanda

CCJP sees accountability and governance as core to its work. It currently runs a health governance project that is building on the consortium project. This aims to ensure continuation of the accountability initiatives, although this is not happening in the same areas as the consortium project.

VDCs, councillors and CCJP felt the project was too short to lead to sustainable change. CCJP commented that each fund needed to be focused on individually and needed its own project. The design of the project placed a lot of emphasis on capacity building, which meant that there was hardly any time to action the capacity building and reach all the targeted villages. This was validated by focus groups in villages where people had not heard of the project, although they had heard of the funds. The interface meeting at district level happened right at the end of the project, leaving less time to undertake follow ups. Focus groups within villages revealed that
people did not feel they had the capacity to continue the data compilation teams. People struggled to understand reports from the secretariat and expressed a need for ‘leadership’ to guide them here. Although STAR circles and RLCs were able to monitor projects they noticed that duty bearers were becoming craftier and using new techniques to pocket money. They expressed a need for assistance to deal with these new strategies of corruption, particularly around the DDC and procurement generally. However, overall, at grassroots level, in villages reached by the project, there is still a lot of activity around tracking projects. This is particularly the case with the STAR circles in the Lupembe area.

3.2.3 Unintended results

Phalombe: The following were some of the emergent (positive) outcomes of the project in Phalombe district:

- Citizens looked beyond CDF, LDF and DDF to other projects, like the school improvement grants.

- Two members of the RLC we met with in Jenala TAI, a woman and a man, articulated their interest in becoming councillors as a result of what they had learnt through the RLC. While this finding may only be anecdotal, it provides further indication that the RLC process is encouraging and empowering people.

- The project resulted in considerable functionality of land, local government structures, VDCs and ADCs. Previously, they could not hold other duty bearers accountable; now, they are questioning them.

- Citizens are demanding transparency, for example, identification of beneficiaries.

Dowa: In Dowa district the project had a number of unintended negative results. Although relatively few they are potentially significant. The main one appears to be the raising of citizen expectations but not creating enough time for follow through, as reflected in the time constraints discussion in the preceding section. The premature exit or closure of the project appears may leave the communities vulnerable to backlash from those in power. This appears to have been worsened by a PET approach that built the capacity of the demand side only and did not work with the council as a system comprising councils from all the nine TAs (not just two) and council officers whose relational capacities needed to be built. Concerns have been raised regarding demand for the wrong kind of information using inappropriate channels associated with not knowing enough about how district councils operate. From a group/team development perspective, the Oxfam-led PET project appears to have ended when relations in the district council had reached the ‘storming’ stage that is riven by unresolved conflicts. In the process, the project is reported to have created the impression of witch-hunting.

‘The project has raised community expectations and generally made communities become suspicious of public officers. For example, they ask for financial information on projects that a donor has directly paid contractors so that work can commence.’ Dowa district officer

‘Some communities do not know what to demand and what not to demand from district councils. So, they have been demanding the wrong kind of information. And in some cases when they want to get certain information, they do not follow the right protocol.’ Senior member of the National Local Government Finance Committee

‘These CSOs tend to look for the negative information and highlight it to their donors. The good things that we do are often not mentioned. Perhaps this is how they get funds. We
should also have a way of making them account for their resources just like they make us do.’ Dowa district officer

‘Some politicians have politicized our interventions and made them appear as if we wanted to bring certain politicians down.’ Oxfam Malawi Programme Manager

‘There has been a backlash on CSOs and even on ordinary community members in districts. Some have been intimidated or verbally abused by politicians and district officers.’ Oxfam Malawi Programme Manager

**Karonga:** One emergent (positive) outcome of the project in Karonga district is that the work of the STAR circles has gone beyond the three funds. In Lupembe area STAR circles have been following up the funds raised at their health facility from fines imposed on women who give birth at home. The women are fined K10,000 and this goes towards a fund that is managed by a health committee. The STAR circle is following up on how they are spending this money. The health committee was not keeping receipts but now they are as they are afraid of the STAR circle.

In addition, the STAR circle held an interface meeting about primary education and the school development funds from parents’ contributions. Parents were concerned with how these funds were being spent.

As in Dowa, what CCJP described as a design flaw in the project had unintended consequence of raising expectations with communities that have subsequently not been met. CCJP suggested that too much time was spent on capacity building and not enough time embedding what was learnt into practice. It was felt that a project of this nature needed to be implemented over at least a five-year period. As with Dowa, the closure of the project may leave communities vulnerable to a backlash from those in power. As reported in some communities, now when they question procurement processes and ask to see BoQs, the ADC uses the threat of taking the materials away from them to a community that wants them and will not ask for papers. This leads to communities backing down and accepting the materials even if they know they are of an inferior quality or less in quantity. The District Commissioner also does not take the data compilation teams seriously, because when audited, no discrepancies are discovered. CCJP feels there is a need to have an independent audit to keep the DC and the secretariat accountable.

### 3.2.4 Summary reflections on the Oxfam consortium causal story

Overall, our impression is that the partnership between Oxfam, DCT and CCJP worked well because the partners complemented each other in generating changes that contributed towards the two focal outcomes under review. These complementarities were confirmed within the partnership as well as outside. The synergy appears to have been further harnessed through: (i) mentorship that was provided by a Tilitonse-appointed expert (Professor Chiwenzal), and (ii) the provision of joint planning, implementation, and collaborative interactions during interface meetings at district level.

‘We have demonstrated that PET capacities are best built through working with the people, mentoring them and accompanying them on the ground. What made this possible is that we had very good local partners [CCJP and DCT] working with communities. We are good at taking issues of from the ground, analysing them and packaging them for awareness building and advocacy at national level.’ Oxfam Malawi Programme Manager

‘Oxfam managed the whole programme, including the funds. CCJP focused on woman participation in decision-making processes and structures such as VDCs, ADCs and
council; and in community projects using STAR circles as the main mechanism. DCT used Radio Listening Clubs, which cover both men and women, including youth.’ CCJP Blantyre

‘Most of PET actually happened within the districts [such as Dowa where DCA also implemented a project] and that is where changes were made to happen. And at that level, because we work through local partners, our success is dependent on them, and changes are likely to be attributed to them. I must also add that Oxfam is good at advocacy at national level, at making governance issues and public resource use concerns visible to the public.’ Dan Church Aid (DCA) Officer

‘DCT are very good, especially at working with media and conducting campaigns. CCJP have had a lot of impact. For example, they were involved in the compilation of the CDF manual... Oxfam is well-placed for national work. Being a female-dominated organization, at least in Malawi, they are also known for doing good gender work.’ Paniso Kalu, in his professional capacity

The Oxfam causal story also goes beyond these partnerships to include the effective use of district mechanisms that were established and utilized by the local partners [STAR circles, RLCs, DCTs Teams and interface meetings discussed earlier]. These served as catalysts of change across the traditional areas and in building the capacities of local governance structures [VDCs, ADCs, traditional leaders, women leaders and councillors] and decision makers in them, covering both men and women. Strategies that were employed to make the interventions work in the districts include different forms of capacity development: training, information, education and communication materials [IECs], mentorship and supplementary support; engendered data collection, analysis, planning and reviewing; making relevant policies and guidelines accessible to the citizens; and documenting local concerns and progress [in women-led constituencies and wards] for policy influence at national level.

‘The committees [Water Point Committee], including women, are trained before the contractor commences work so that they can effectively supervise.’ Dowa District officer

‘First of all, we were trained on how to follow up on the use of LDF, DDF and CDF. And through the training we learnt that public funds were actually ours. We went into the community to raise awareness regarding public funds and their use.’ Dowa STAR circle member

‘In addition to conducting baseline studies and running workshops, we mentored the groups that we worked with. In fact, mentorship was a strong component of capacity building in PET. We were mentored by others, notably from Dr Chiweza through the Tilitonse Fund... We in turn mentored the Radio Listening Clubs and STAR circles. Beyond that we accompanied the councillors, ADCs and VDCs in conducting some of their work. This meant working with them, providing technical support in data collection and analysis.’ Oxfam Malawi Programme Manager

Finally, across all three districts, one of the most significant changes has been the growth in communities’ knowledge of the funds and the way in which they view these. There has been a significant shift in the discourse around the funds, from projects being seen as a gift from duty bearers to an understanding that the funds belong to communities and therefore should be managed by communities. This is one of the most significant impacts of the programme in the areas where it has been active. The mechanisms that have led to this shift in discourse can be traced back to the approach to capacity building, which was two-fold:

- Providing the guidelines and working through the guidelines.
• Collaboratively monitoring the funds at multiple levels and through different neutral community structures.

3.2.5 Differences between Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts in the Oxfam consortium causal story

While similarities and differences between districts in the realization of the two focal outcomes are set out in Section 4.1.3, here we note a number of differences between the districts in the Oxfam causal story.

Partnership working between DCT and CCJP: Among local partners, we noted the respect that all actors held for DCT in Phalombe, where it provided strong project leadership, with gender-focused support from CCJP. In Dowa and Karonga it appeared that DCT and CCJP played a more balanced leadership role. In Karonga, CCJP’s implementation of the women’s empowerment work was particularly effective. Here it is worth noting here that CCJP have other structures through the church that they draw on to engage with communities and duty bearers. They also have additional facilities, like their own radio and the already established justice and peace committees to keep engagement going. CCJP have also expanded the amount of RLCs to 12, with some outside the district. We discuss this further under the alternative hypotheses below.

Differences in the ability to monitor particular funds: In Karonga, monitoring the DDF appeared less effective compared with monitoring the LDF and CDF, and from reports from CCJP and other stakeholders it seems that more time needed to be spent on unpacking this fund and exploring monitoring strategies.

Differences in the effectiveness of interface meetings: Interface meetings were held most frequently, and appeared to have been most effective, in Phalombe district, with both councillors and secretariat and in some case, MPs attending these meetings. While there was also good attendance of interface meetings in Dowa district, they were initially not well received by the Dowa Secretariat. Nonetheless, communities were creative in finding ways of ensuring that the secretariat attended interface meetings – essentially, broadening secretariat engagement beyond departments that had cases to answer, and thereby avoiding what might otherwise be perceived as witch-hunting. Nonetheless, there were cases where the Dowa secretariat avoided being held to account:

‘Can you give an example of a public resources accountability issue that you have been involved in as a result of your developed capacities in PET?’ Evaluator

‘We took the district council [officers] to task over seedlings that were meant to be planted in the Nachiowe Forest. The plan was to grow 7,000 plants, and as the community, we dug 7,000 planting stations but only 1,500 were made available. Although we raised the issue, it has not yet been resolved.’Nsakambewa ADC member

By contrast, in Karonga district the secretariat managed to avoid the interface meetings. Furthermore, it appears that the arrest of the six district officers on corruption charges had not deterred continuing corruption in this district, merely led to its metamorphosis. This contrasts with the situation in Phalombe district, where the transfer of senior district officers is associated with significant improvements in the responsiveness, inclusiveness, accountability and effectiveness of the secretariat’s behaviour. Again, it may be that these differences reflect differences between districts in the mediating relationships built directly with councillors by the project partners (and especially DCT), leading to a stronger trust-based ‘holding framework’ even as duty bearers’ accountability was being directly challenged by communities through interface and other dialogue meetings.
3.3 SALIENT CAUSAL STORIES 2: OTHER POSSIBLE CAUSAL STORIES

In this section, we focus on alternative causal explanations for the two focal outcomes. Based on our conversations with informants and our review of potentially relevant documents, we consider the four most salient alternative explanations that came up through the investigation.

A. An actor or actors within the district, but other than the Oxfam consortium, played a primary role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and/or 2. This could include members of the Oxfam consortium acting in an independent role (outside the consortium).

B. An actor or actors from a different district or districts played a primary role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and/or 2, through a process of out-scaling.

C. An actor or actors at national level played a primary role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and/or 2.

D. No single actor played a primary or leading role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and/or 2; rather these were shaped through a combination of actors, potentially including both the Oxfam consortium and actors beyond it (i.e., including some combination of 1, 2 and/or 3).

3.3.1 Alternative hypothesis A: Actor(s) within the district other than the Oxfam consortium played a primary role

In each of the three districts we investigated the relative contributions of three other actors, namely: Danish Church Aid (DCA), the Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre (MHRRC) as partners and the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN). We could find no evidence of these other actors playing a primary role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and 2.

For example, DCA’s country programme 2016–2020 focuses on Active Citizenship and Right to Food combined with Humanitarian Action, where deliberate measures to increase women and youth participation and involvement in democratic decision-making processes and structures are focused. Out of the three focal districts for the Oxfam consortium, DCA was active in both Dowa and Karonga. However, we found no evidence that DCA was taking a primary role in shaping the focal outcomes in either district (but see below for the work of CCJP, independently of the Oxfam consortium, carried out as the implementing organization for a DCA programme in Karonga).

Under this alternative hypothesis, we also considered the possibility that members of the Oxfam consortium might have been playing a primary role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and 2, independently of the work of the consortium. However, we could not find evidence to suggest that any of the Oxfam-led partnership members played a leading role, independent of the project, in the generation of one or both focal outcomes in any of the three districts. This is because each partner that operated in these districts, and worked on improving the responsive, effective, inclusive, transparent and accountable use of LDF, CDF and DDF funding, was doing so within the project.

We did, however, investigate the possibility of a dual contribution by CCJP, working both inside and outside the consortium, as it was also partner in another Tilitonse-funded project, led by DCA, which was active in both Dowa and Karonga districts. In Dowa district, where CCJP was the only member of the Oxfam consortium that covered four of the six traditional areas in which PET was being promoted, we concluded that it may have played a leading role in gendering PET in Dowa district (focal outcome 2) interdependently with members of both consortia. A literature
review to test this assumption suggests that the Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre (MHRRC), the other member of the DCA-led consortium, also worked on gender issues between 2013 and 2015, where it implemented a Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) project in two TAs of Dowa (Mponela and Chakhaza) targeting government departments responsible for the then priority sectors of Agriculture, Education, Health and Transport.33 Even more pertinent, under the DCA-led consortium, MHRRC is currently implementing a three-year project entitled Enhancing Citizen Voice and Action on Local Governance and Development (CALGA) in two Dowa TAs (Chiwere and Kayembe). The project seeks to improve citizen participation in local governance through promoting accountability and effective service delivery.34

In Karonga we again found little evidence of CCJP playing a leading role independently of the project. The opposite seems to be more likely where the Oxfam programme has deepened CCJP’s commitment to accountability and governance. CCJP staff expressed how they now saw one of their core contributions as being in the area of accountability and governance. CCJP is also branching out into community journalism and linking community journalists with the professional media.

‘There was no accountability project in CCJP, but we have now taken on accountability and governance as very seriously within all our work. For example, the health governance project has been built on this project.’ CCJP Blantyre

However, regarding focal outcome 2, it is worth noting, as above, that CCJP has other structures through the church that it draws upon to engage with communities and duty bearers. It also has additional facilities, like its own radio and the already established justice and peace committees to keep engagement going. CCJP has also expanded the amount of RLCs to 12 with some outside the district.

As in Dowa there was, however, some evidence of a dual role for CCJP (both inside and outside the Oxfam-led consortium) in shaping focal outcomes 1 and 2 in Karonga district. Specifically, it is currently implementing a Citizen Action for Local Governance and Accountability (CALGA) project (about three years) in three traditional areas (Wasambo, Kyungu and Kilupula), with financial support from the Tilitonse Fund through DCA.35,36 In this project CCJP is using Community Action Groups and Community Journalists as mechanisms for bringing about change, working with ADCs and other structures. However, it is encountering similar challenges with the district council, especially the secretariat, as those highlighted for the Oxfam-led programme in previous sections. Furthermore, in our own interviews with local communities where the Oxfam programme was not being implemented, we found evidence of an awareness of the funds but little awareness of the guidelines or any action in monitoring the funds. Where the CCJP had not been active through the project, there was no evidence of any organization monitoring public expenditure or doing PET. Mostly, community members expressed frustration and anger at the way projects were implemented, but there was very little action being taken to address this. This would need further investigation to confirm what impact the DCA programme has had in Karonga through the CCJP.

3.3.2 Alternative hypothesis B: An actor or actors from a different district or districts played a primary role, through a process of outscaling

Focal outcome 1: One actor with the potential to make a significant contribution to the focal outcome 1 in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts is the USAID and DFID-funded Local Government Accountability and Performance (LGAP) programme.37 The programme, which started in 2016, is being run in eight districts across the country (Mzimba in Northern region; Lilongwe and

 Governance in Malawi: Enhancing Communities’ Capacity in Tracking Development Resources at Local Council Level. Effectiveness Review series 2017/18
Kasungu in Central region; Blantyre and Mulanje in Southern region; and Balaka, Machinga and Zomba in Eastern region) as well as having a national component. Of interest is that a number of these districts border either Phalombe (Mulanje and Zomba) or Dowa (Lilongwe and Kasungu) although none borders Karonga. There is thus potential for immediate cross-border influencing, or for more distal influencing to districts which are not immediately bordering the project districts, and/or through a bottom up then top down influencing route via changes nationally.

There are several parallels between the work of the Oxfam consortium and LGAP. The objectives of LGAP are to:

- Provide capacity-building assistance to public servants, with a focus on solving locally relevant problems rather than broad standardized training.
- Work closely with embedded teams and local change agents to facilitate institutional reforms and improve organizational effectiveness.
- Improve the government accountability system by strengthening existing mechanisms, such as community scorecards and service management committees, while introducing new accountability tools, including public service charters and social audits.
- Create a dynamic space for collaboration with programmes led by USAID and other donors also working in LGAP districts, integrating development activities at the community, district and national levels.

"We are using capacity building of district councils to improve governance through working with the supply side. We are helping them understand their roles, do planning and budgeting. We focused on this because our baseline assessment established that capacity development of district councils had focused on individual councillors and not on the whole council. MPs, traditional leaders and the Secretariats had not been trained and yet they constitute the system that makes decisions at that level. Some of our work has had to cover team building. We also build the capacities of civil society in two main ways: training and provision of grants to CSOs to conduct work on PET and related matters. This includes working with media. Our third strategy is work on policy issues, which link the local and the national, government and civil society. We fund spaces for deliberations on local governance and decentralization." Paniso Kalu, in his professional capacity

"What local governance related changes have you brought about or contributed to bringing about through this project?" Evaluator

"We have helped improve service delivery in the districts where we operate through supporting the operationalization of good public financial systems (FMS). All the eight districts have five-year District Development Plans, whose development we supported. We provided funding for the consultations with citizens. And there are not many districts with such DDPs in the country. In seven of the eight districts, we have supported district councils to develop by-laws. Therefore, the districts are operating using proper guidelines. In addition, we have facilitated citizen and duty bearer engagement through Town Hall [interface] meetings, and through radio and television programmes, which discuss decentralization. We have also supported the development of a Decentralization Roadmap and the development of Devolution Plans. Some of our staff members have been seconded to work with the Office of the President and Cabinet’s Reforms Unit." Paniso Kalu, in his professional capacity

The above evidence suggests considerable potential for outscaling of the influence of the LGAP programme into other districts. However, while we did not question them directly on this (i.e., by naming LGAP as a potential influence), none of stakeholders we spoke to at a local level in any of the three districts mentioned LGAP as influencing changes associated with the first focal
outcome. Furthermore, the fact that LGAP has only been in operation since 2016 would further support the argument that it has as yet had limited influence beyond the eight district councils where it is focusing its attention. Nonetheless, there is a possibility that it may have made a contribution through influencing national actors (alternative hypothesis C or DI).

**Focal outcome 2:** Relevant to focal outcome 2, our research highlighted that Plan Malawi has successfully used Speak Out Clubs in schools for engaging school authorities and duty bearers, and facilitating the formation of mother groups in communities, which lobby for girl child education and an increase in secondary school completion rates. Consequently, over 700 Mother Clubs have been established, with each comprising 14 members that includes 10 local mothers, the village head, chairpersons of the school management committee and parents’ and teachers’ associations. These interventions are important for addressing systemic gender issues that undermine substantive women participation in decision-making structures. Women’s Forums are also used for advancing gender issues, including encouraging women to take up decision-making positions in the community. One of the methods they use is the Reflection Action Circle, with support from circle facilitators and community-based educators. The women and men who participate in Reflection Action Circles are taught about people’s rights and relevant national and international policies, what constitutes infringement and what can be done to address it, while at the same time building the capacity of community members to become ‘real men’ and ‘real women’ through adopting gender equity practices.

However we were unable to detect the influence of this work on focal outcome 2 in either Phalombe, Dowa or Karonga districts.

**3.3.3 Alternative hypothesis C: An actor or actors at national level played a primary role**

In this section we set out the evidence for changes at the national level that might have contributed to focal outcomes 1 and 2 in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts. We were able to identify extensive evidence of relevant changes at the national level but did not marshal any evidence to suggest that these changes – and the actors involved – played a primary role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and 2.

**Changes at the national level relevant to focal outcome 1**

The evaluation found good evidence of an overall improvement in the responsive, inclusive, and transparent and accountable utilization of the LDF, DDF and CDF nationally, as well as evidence highlighting the potential for increased effectiveness. These improvements also impacted on other public resources, such as school improvement grants (SIGs) and in the budgeting of the newly introduced Community Social Projects Fund.

**Responsiveness:** The Malawi NAP of 2016–2018, which seeks to embed good governance of local government resources, can be seen as form of government responsiveness. The NAP, which is led by Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, has committed itself to create awareness and empower citizens towards equal, inclusive and informed citizen participation and increased duty bearer transparency, accountability, good governance and fighting corruption in the use of local government resources. Similarly, the Public Service Management Policy (2018), which seeks to enable effective management and delivery of public services in a multi-party democracy for greater citizen participation, transparency and accountability, can be seen as part of the government’s responsiveness. In particular, it seeks to improve public sector governance through combating corruption and abuse of public resources, using merit in making public sector appointments and promotions, and improve records management.
Similar supportive evidence was generated during the evaluation, and includes the following statements, which show that responsiveness went beyond the sectoral ministry:

‘The Ministry of Finance has responded by introducing Programme-Based budgeting... The Ministry first looks at what has already been committed towards the activity or project in the past. This is a shift from the past where money was just disbursed without checking these details. The Local Government Finance Committee has also been looking for ways of improving the management of LDF, DDF and CDF.’ The Nation newspaper journalist

‘What is the government doing to improve the situation, to address the challenges you have outlined?’ Evaluator

‘The Local Government Act is being reviewed with a view to deepening decentralization. Some changes were proposed, but these were not palatable to some people, and they have not been incorporated. There have also been efforts to change the CDF guidelines and increase community ownership and control (it is currently under the MP’s control), but this has been shelved too.’ National Local Government Finance Committee

**Inclusiveness:** National government has made notable efforts to include the voices of civil society and the private sector in matters to do with the responsible utilization of and accounting for local government resources, such as LDF, CDF and DDF. For example, the NAP and the Public Service Management Policy provide for the participation of CSOs, the private sector and media. The Public Service Management Policy provides for CSOs and media to advocate for changes in public policy, legislation and service delivery, and monitor and report on the public provision of goods and services and maladministration. Some of the participating CSOs who mentioned the NAP and the Public Service Management Policy are CCJP, MEJN and National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE).

**Transparency and accountability:** Although the level of transparency and accountability for local government resources has not been achieved across the nation, national government has been playing an active role in seeking to improve this.

**Effectiveness:** Some of the evidence cited above, including the commitments in NAP (2016–18) and Public Service Management Policy (2018) towards increased duty bearer transparency, accountability and good governance, indicates the potential for increased effectiveness in government policy making. Other initiatives include the following:

‘The loopholes that have been identified in relation to LDF, DDF and CDF have prompted the Minister of Finance to propose another review of the CDF guidelines.’ Senior Officer in the National Local Government Finance Committee

‘We have also supported the development of a Decentralization Roadmap and the development of Devolution Plans. Some of our staff members have been seconded to work with the office of the President and the Cabinet’s Reform Unit.’ Paniso Kalu, in his professional capacity

The newly enacted Access to Information Act has potential to increase transparency by local government, but it currently lacks implementation guidelines. These are being developed.’ Paniso Kalu, in his professional capacity

However, given how recent these developments are, it may be too early to expect to find evidence of increased effectiveness reflected at the district level.
Changes at the national level relevant to focal outcome 2

There is also evidence to suggest that women leaders are being empowered to participate more effectively in decision-making structures whose roles include making and implementing policies and other public sector instruments that guide the budgeting, use and accountability for local government resources. The primary focus has been on the women councillors and MPs. Their capacities to play their respective roles have been built, their ward and constituency work documented and publicized, and their forums strengthened.

Responsiveness: Responsiveness to gender issues has been demonstrated through the support given to the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus and the Group of Women Councillors. This has helped women MPs and councillors to speak for themselves as leaders who have responsibility for community development. Women’s Forums and related mechanisms have also enabled the generation of women’s specific needs and the addressing of them. Gender inequality and women in politics studies have provided evidence of the need for gender-responsiveness. This responsiveness has manifested itself through the advancement of women-friendly policies and legislation, but they have not been as effective in helping bring about women-friendly action partly because party politics is male dominated (see also below).

Inclusiveness: The Women’s Parliamentary Caucus can also be seen as a mechanism designed to promote the inclusiveness of women in public sector leadership:

‘The Women’s Parliamentary Caucus [which has been supported by PET-promoting organizations] exists to support the development of policies and legislation which further women and children’s interests; oversee the tackling of issues to do with women and children; and lobby for an increase of women representation in public sector leadership.’
Representative of the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus

Transparency and accountability: PET supported interventions appear to have made elected women more accountable through supporting them to spend more time with the community members they represent.

‘Oxfam contributed to the operationalization of the concept of decentralization through supporting us as female MPs to visit each other’s constituencies, meet the people we represent, engage citizens in their own homes and languages, have them highlight governance and other issues they are facing, enabled us to engage with traditional leaders. Consequently, they have helped us to become better MPs, who spend time with the people. And people can see that women deserve to be leaders, to be MPs and councillors... In addition, they [Oxfam] helped to nationalize the women’s struggle as a development issue in our country, not just for individual MPs or women leaders in councils or parliament.’ Representative of the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus

Effectiveness: The effectiveness of gender-related changes at the national level is difficult to gauge as there are many factors at play, and one of the major constraints appears to be concerned with the time that it takes to break deep-seated habits and practices, such as corruption and the exclusion and marginalization of women from decision-making structures and process.

One of the major challenges for women leaders in the public sector is that political parties, and I mean all political parties, are ‘boys clubs’. They alienate female leaders... This is also reflected in roles assigned to women party structures, such as the Women’s League, which are relegated to the kitchen. Secondly, getting into politics to become an MP or a councillor is an expensive venture. You need money to get known by people, to get them to vote for you. And often, women lack resources. The other obstacle that women in Malawi
face if they want to assume leadership and decision-making positions in society is education. As you may already know, the literacy rate of women in Malawi is quite low. The marriage institution in Malawi also acts as a major deterrent to women who want to be in local and national government as councillors or MPs. The work demands are huge, and they are even more for women, who, for example, are expected to attend every funeral that happens in their constituency. That is what it means to be a motherly leader. This does not apply to male MPs and councillors. The work also demands that one works odd and long hours. This means being away from one’s family, sometimes at night. If you are a woman, you then become treated as a prostitute. Besides, women who occupy powerful positions in the community, in our society, when they are married, threaten the manhood of their husbands.’ Representative of the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus

There are many systemic issues that may make it difficult for more women to become part of decision-making structures and processes at national level. Political party gatekeepers in Malawi have been identified as the party chairpersons and party general secretaries at local level who determine the entry of women into politics (as councillors or MPs). The party gatekeepers, who are mostly men, tend not to promote the entry of women candidates for contested elected public positions of MP’s and councillors based on their perceived electability or lack of it. This includes the candidate’s economic strength to cover campaign and related costs, popularity and legacy, and cultural norms, which expect women to obey men. Unfortunately, this situation did not change for women even when the country’s first female president was governing. A statistical analysis of MP data in Malawi in 1994, 1999, 2009 and 2014 shows a close and positive relationship between the number of women candidates and that of elected MPs. However, these norms do not apply at lower party structure levels in branch and district committees, where women and youth representation compare well with that of men.

Secondly, the sustainability of gains made in gender-related interventions on improved public resource budgeting, use and accountability seems to be constrained by the ‘national gender machinery’, which was established to coordinate government interventions that promote gender equality, under the aegis of the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW). This is because it is the most underfunded ministry [received 0.36 percent of the national budget in 2015/16] and cannot deliver on its mandate, does not focus on the strategic advancement of gender equality, and is perceived as feminized, having been always headed by female ministers and deputy ministers – advancing the interests of individual women and certain areas. This has resulted in ‘goal displacement, a pursuit of non-core, peripheral interests and project funding, which make the ministry become less powerful in formulating policies, coordinating activities, and in monitoring of the government’s overall gender policy... It can be argued that the Ministry has become a ‘project implementing unit’ of the development aid agencies. These observations are important given that in Malawi policy changes originate from respective government ministries before they reach parliament. They also suggest that the national gender machinery gaps – of ‘fragmented and ad hoc support mechanisms for gender equality and women’s empowerment’ and shift of its focus from a strategic to an implementing role – identified in 2011, have not been addressed.

However, in districts where local government accountability is taken seriously, and corruption has been an issue, women candidates who are nominated are likely to be elected. This is because women are less likely to engage in corrupt activities, firstly because they tend to be more risk averse than men, and secondly because voters treat corrupt women representatives more harshly than their male counterparts, which increases the likelihood of their being caught and being severely punished if they get involved in corruption, and deters them from abusing public resources. Women also tend to benefit more from the proper use of local government resources than men. Studies conducted internationally suggest that women councillors and MPs are more likely to improve local governance and reduce both petty and grand corruption for two
main reasons. The ‘women’s interest explanation’ is that, because women are more dependent on public services than men, they tend to seek to improve services that benefit women and reduce petty corruption, especially healthcare and education. The ‘women exclusion explanation’ on the other hand is that, because men dominate the inner circles of power and are excluded from decisions that enable with grand corruption, they find it necessary to break corruption structures and systems.\textsuperscript{52}

**Evidence of national contributions to focal outcomes 1 and 2 in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts**

While we were able to establish good evidence of relevant changes at the national level, as well as of some of the constraints holding back change, we found it harder to identify evidence that these national level interventions contributed towards the materialization of the two focal outcomes. First, we looked for evidence that national level developments had contributed to local-level changes countrywide, and then focused specifically on contributions to Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts. While we found evidence of changes countrywide that are consistent with focal outcomes 1 and 2, we were unable to establish a contribution from national government as opposed to that by CSO-supported PET promoters and implementers.

**Focal outcome 1:**

‘Using well-facilitated interface meetings and Citizen Fora Initiatives, communities are becoming more vigilant, summoning duty bearers to give information on projects and/or issues affecting the communities. As a result, duty bearers are becoming more responsive.’ European Union (EU) funded NICE\textsuperscript{53}

‘We also established [through a study] that there are councils that use public resources prudently, appropriately and are performing well.’ The Nation newspaper journalist

However, there is still a lot of work to do:

‘What new local governance, performance and accountability challenges have you encountered in the process of implementing your five-year project [Local Government Accountability and Performance Management (LGAP), which was launched in 2016]?’

Evaluator

‘There seems to be lack of tracking of certain funds, especially the DDF... A lot of the PET work is sectoral, with those in health such as Malawi Health Equity Network (MHENI), and those in agriculture, such as Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET), promoting sectoral interests in budgeting and public expenditure. CSOs and civil society generally find it difficult to access financial information from council, which in turn undermines their chances of PET and making public sector accountable...’ Paniso Kalu, in his professional capacity

**Focal outcome 2:** Notable progress has been registered at lower party structure levels in branch and district committees, where women and youth representation compare well with that of men.\textsuperscript{54} The ground seems to have been laid for their future election and therefore inclusion in local government decision-making structures, especially through the publicity that their work has received and the improvement of accountability systems in some districts. Studies conducted internationally suggest that women are likely to be elected in governments where accountability systems have become strong, and corruption is problematic\textsuperscript{55} (as in Malawi).

Beyond this more women appear to have been deliberately included in benefiting from the use of local government resources through gender-sensitive consultations and projects funded by LDF, DDF and CDF.
Others have argued, however, that women’s representation in community structures is high, not because of PET interventions, but due to the prior implementation of the equal gender representation policy.

‘Women representation is the same as that of men since 2015 in line with Government Gender Policy. Our vice chairperson is a woman.’ Dowa ADC member

Finally, and most significantly from the perspective of alternative hypothesis C, we found almost no evidence demonstrating a contribution – let alone a primary contribution – from national government, specifically to focal outcomes 1 and 2 in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts. The one exception we identified concerned a possible feedback loop from the Oxfam consortium to the national level and back down into Phalombe district. In Phalombe, several stakeholders we spoke with, including Oxfam, the Jenala TA Radio Listening Club and VDC, suggested that the project had influenced national level to respond by removing senior officials of the Phalombe district secretariat – the DC, the DPD and other senior officials – because of the many issues raised against them and reported at national level by the district PET data collection team.

3.3.4 Alternative hypothesis D: A systemic contribution by a combination of actors

Under this hypothesis, no single actor played a primary or leading role in shaping focal outcomes 1 and/or 2; rather these were shaped through a combination of actors, potentially including both the Oxfam consortium and actors beyond it (including some combination of A, B and/or C). Our analysis of the evidence we collected both from fieldwork and from a review of the literature supports this hypothesis, leading us to conclude that different actors, sometimes acting in consortia and sometimes singly, contributed towards making local government in three districts of Malawi (more) accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective in managing the LDF, DDF and CDF, while at the same time reducing gender inequalities. This evidence is summarized in Section 4.4, where we also review the different strengths and roles of these contributions.
3.4 CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS FOR THE FOCAL OUTCOMES

In this final section we undertake a contribution analysis, comparing the evidence underpinning the Oxfam consortium causal story and the three alternative hypotheses, to try to ascertain which story is best supported by the evidence, thereby helping us to understand the relative contributions of the different actors involved to the two focal outcomes under review. We conclude that alternative hypothesis C is best supported by the data. Under this hypothesis a range of different actors, but almost exclusively those active within Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga districts, contributed to making local government in these three districts (more) accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective in managing the LDF, DDF and CDF, while at the same time reducing gender inequalities. We further conclude that the actors’ contributions towards this outcome were not limited to the short period during and after which the Oxfam-led project under review was implemented (i.e., from 2016).

3.4.1 Contributions from within the same district

The Oxfam-DCT-CCJP partnership project to foster public expenditure tracking and social accountability in Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga was a response to the systemic corruption in public resource management, which resulted in 30 percent of the national budget being lost in 2014; poor oversight by the National Audit Office, parliament, and the National Local Governance Finance Committees; and citizens who had no capacity to hold duty bearers accountable. At the micro level, Oxfam and its partners facilitated dialogue between citizens and local duty bearers during interface meetings using information generated by RLCs and DCTs. At the district level, Oxfam and its partners took up the concerns raised in TAs and engaged with the district-level governance institutions. Now, in the run-up to the 2019 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections and in order to reinforce its interest in promoting the effective use of local government resources, Oxfam is implementing an anti-corruption project to encourage citizens to consider corruption when choosing people to vote for.56 We also noted that there is a long history of Oxfam working in partnership with local partners to enhance effective and gender-sensitive use of public resources in Dowa.

To understand the contribution requires both a broad systemic picture during the period of the focal project of interest and an historic perspective over a longer period of time both preceding and following the focal project. Both can be illustrated using the case of Dowa, as Oxfam and other partners have a long history of working in this district.

Dowa was one of the districts in which Oxfam worked with local organizations in the health and governance sectors in Malawi in an Access to Medicines Campaign from 2007 to 2010. The project objectives were to: (i) enhance the capacity of local communities and organizations to demand the right to get essential drugs, (ii) to lobby for increased availability and accessibility of drugs and (iii) conduct budget and resource tracking to increase the accessibility of essential drugs in rural areas and accountability for their provision. Some of the local partners that it worked with were DCT and World Alive Commission for Relief and Development (WACRAD). The campaign used [and possibly refined] the mechanisms that were also adopted in the current project under review, notably RLCs, interface meetings, working with national media, and the Women’s Forum (which serves a similar function to STAR circles), a member of MHEN, which was an Oxfam national partner in the project. One of the legacies of the campaign was the realization that citizens can demand and get accountability from government and that local action on national issues has transformative potential.57

Similarly, CCJP had been working in Dowa on public resource use and citizen empowerment, especially of women, prior to the current project under review. For example, in 2011 CCJP...
conducted a study in Dowa and many other districts of Malawi and established that citizens were frustrated that they did not have clear channels to air their views and input into local government decisions, and that even though citizens were often mobilized to contribute to community projects, they did not take part in selecting them, and those initiatives hardly ever got completed. Some of the recommendations of the study are pertinent to the focal outcomes under review, and these include: [i] reinstate ward councillors, [ii] increase citizen-local government engagement, [iii] provide for robust involvement of citizens, and [iv] take visible and believable steps to curb corruption.58

As already highlighted in a preceding section of this report, MEJN has been also playing an important role in fostering public sector accountability in Dowa – building the technical, relational and performance capacities of the citizens and duty bearers in the utilization of public resources, including PET. At a later point, if necessary, MEJN utilizes media. MEJN has also been a significant actor in building school governance structures [parent-teacher associations and school management committees] to effectively utilize and account for school resources59 in a way that appears to have shaped thinking about the engendered use of public resources. CARE has also worked in Dowa, focusing of the use of Community Score Cards (CSC) that CARE Malawi developed in 2002 to connect citizens, service providers and local government to obstacles to the provision, accessing and utilization of services; co-generate solutions and work together to implement and track effectiveness solutions. It is worth noting that the CSC use with communities underlines the value of separating men, women and youth in generating and analysing data. Synthesis of data from citizens, service providers and local government is conducted during interface meetings at which Action Plans are developed. The CARE Governance Programming Framework that uses CSC seeks to achieve good governance and equitable sustainable development. These mechanisms are similar to those used to generate the two focal outcomes under review.60 DCA-CCJP-MHRRC work in Dowa has also already been discussed and it shows that the pre-2016 work on public resources guidelines, the Local Government Act and Decentralization Policy are important foundations for the outcomes under review, as is their PET work, funded by Tilitonse and implemented in two TAs of Dowa (Kayembe and Dzoole).

**Focal outcome 1:** Coming to the contribution analysis under consideration in this evaluation, and keeping the focus for the moment on Dowa, we looked for evidence that a wider grouping of actors within the district had been involved in shaping focal outcomes 1 and 2. The conclusion that we arrived at is based partly on the feedback from Dowa district officers and partly on the feedback from the three actors (see above: DCA, MHRRC and MEJN) who work in separate traditional authorities of the district – meaning that at least six of the nine traditional areas (67 percent) in Dowa participated in PET processes around the same time.

"Their contributions were different and complementary. For example, MEJN primarily focused on budget tracking, making information available in the local language. MHRRC’s main contribution was on the development of Service Charters [standards], which are used for monitoring public work in different sectors. Oxfam, DCT and CCJP focused on building community capacities to demand their rights over public resource budgeting and use.

Dowa district council officer"

DCA implemented PET in two TAs [Kayembe and Dzoole] of Dowa working in partnership with CCJP and MHRRC under a Tilitonse-funded project covering the same period. Its PET work in Dowa and in other districts [including Karonga] is located within the DCA 2016–2020 Strategic Plan, which has two pillars: [i] Active Citizenship; and [ii] Right to Food. DCA interventions in Dowa were built on its previous work on local governance in which they supported the review of the Local Government Act, the Decentralization Policy and the review of LDF, CDF and DDF guidelines. DCA, like Oxfam, DCT and CCJP, does not work directly with ADCs and VDCs, but rather through District
and Community Action Groups, which it establishes. Given that DCA works with CCJP, it is likely to have contributed to outcome 2.

‘In PET work we seek to empower citizens and citizens groups such as Village Development Committees and Areas Development Committees to demand their rights from duty bearers... We establish District Action Groups (DAGs) at area level as a mechanism for building PET capacity in the local area. Within them, we have Community Peer Educators, who specifically train others. They are similar to lead farmers in agriculture.’ DCA Project Officer

‘Community Action Groups (CAGs) are part and parcel of how we do development across programmes. Besides ADCs often have vested interest ... which would comprise the capacity building role they ought to perform.’ DCA Project Officer

In an article in *The Nation*, dated 25 November 2017, the following observation was made about DCA and MHRRC contributions:

‘DCA through MHRRC has been commended for the financial and programmatic support which led to the formulation of the service charters for health, water, environment, education and agriculture sectors in Dowa district... The council chair commended the Service Charter Task Force and the District Commissioner, Fannie Msimuko, for leading the process of formulating the service charters for the district, which he said the council will commit itself to ensure it works.’

In a separate initiative, MEJN has implemented a short Trocaire-funded PET project in two other traditional areas of Dowa district. However, it has been operating in the same district for several years, during which it established community structures under its Economic Literacy and Budget Accountability for Governance (ELBAG) programme. It primarily uses training, policy translation and mentorship strategies covering both rights holders and duty bearers and brings in media when local methods of resolving issues fail to work. While there have been instances of collaborative work with the Oxfam-CCJP-DCT partnership, some methodological and project phase differences have stood in the way.

‘Our entry point is capacity building and mentorship of both sides [the demand and supply sides] of governance. We seek to demystify and learn the budgeting and expenditure system together, analyse things together and cooperate with them. We allow for time to learn and change. We have come to realise that many of them [duty bearers] actually want things to work; and it is only after we experience lack of cooperation or the change, that we resort to exposing what is not working to the wider public, to media,’ Malawi Economic Justice Network

‘On the ground, we worked with CCJP. We shared information. But we realised two important differences that made on-going collaboration problematic... Firstly, our interventions had different timelines, and secondly, they were at different stages of development. The other difference [methodological] is that we use a quieter approach and spend a lot more time on capacity building and trust building. We thus bring media in towards the end of the process. But Oxfam and CCJP seemingly at times tend to have a strong advocacy thrust through and through, as they tend to involve media much earlier in the process.’ Malawi Economic Justice Network

We have attempted to show these different roles and influences and their contribution to focal outcome 1 diagrammatically in Figure 3. The Oxfam-led consortium, which includes DCT and CCJP as partners, is shown by the light brown circle at the centre of the diagram. This consortium makes a strong contribution [green arrows] to focal outcome 1 [blue squares on the left-hand
side of the diagram) in Phalombe and Dowa districts, where there is strong evidence for the realization of the focal outcome. The consortium also contributes to the partial realization of focal outcome 1 in Karonga district. Shown below the Oxfam-led consortium, there are two other consortia, both led by DCA (blue and grey circles), who make a contribution to the realization of focal outcome 1 in Dowa and Karonga, a contribution that seems to have been considerably weaker than the contribution of the Oxfam-led consortium (dashed and thinner green arrows). All three consortia were supported by the Tilitonse Fund (dark brown system boundary).

Through Trocaire funding, MEJN, focusing on capacity building and using a less confrontational approach, may also have made some contribution to focal outcome 1 in Dowa.

**Karonga:** In Karonga, evidence of increased responsiveness, inclusiveness and effectiveness by the district council was limited, while there was mixed evidence of increased accountability. It seems likely that the main contributions to these partial improvements were from the Oxfam-led consortium, particularly as the limitations in improvements seem to have been associated with interface meetings, which were avoided by the secretariat, rendering them only partially effective [Section 4.2.5]. While the DCA-CCJP-MHRRC consortium has also been active in Karonga, we did not gather enough evidence to be able to comment significantly on whether there was a systemic contribution of actors. We attempted to ask stakeholders about other projects, but responses were sketchy. What evidence we did gather suggests that where the project was not implemented there was very little PET activity. VDC and ADC members and councillors are also supposed to receive training from the secretariat, but it was reported that before the implementation of the project all these duty bearers were confused about their role, and it was only after CCJP’s intervention that they better understood what was expected of them and how to address issues.

In summary, the Oxfam-led consortium influenced changes in Karonga through:

1. Training provided by the secretariat to duty bearers was seen as inadequate and misleading whereas the training from the project led to an understanding of roles and responsibilities.
2. When visiting other villages where the project had not been implemented there was no evidence of any PET activities.
3. During focus group sessions, stakeholders were mostly silent about other actors and implementers.

**Phalombe:** In Phalombe, where there was strong evidence of improvements in focal outcome 1, it appears that the primary contribution was from the Oxfam-led consortium, particularly in the light of the strong leadership by DCT in this district and the effectiveness of the interface meetings associated with the project [Section 4.2.5]. We were unable to identify any contribution by other actors.

**Focal outcome 2:** For focal outcome 2 (blue squares on the right-hand side of the diagram) there is strong evidence of its realization in Dowa district, with a strong contribution by the Oxfam-led consortium, and possibly a dual and complementary role by CCJP as a member of both the Oxfam and DCA-led consortia.

In Karonga there was also some limited evidence that CCJP made a contribution to empowerment of women’s participation in decision-making structures and processes, although only at the local level. Again, through the DCA-led consortium, CCJP’s other community structures, such as the justice and peace committees, clearly played a role in building core relationships with certain village structures, which still continue. For example, the chairperson of the Lupembe STAR circle also belongs to a CCJP justice and peace committee and relies on CCJP for advice when dealing with duty bearers whom she suspects of corruption. Her value system is also deeply influenced by her involvement with the church and church structures.

Governance in Malawi: Enhancing Communities’ Capacity in Tracking Development Resources at Local Council Level. Effectiveness Review series 2017/18
In Phalombe there is only weak evidence of improvements in women’s participation in decision-making structures and processes. However, we did not collect any evidence to demonstrate who might have contributed to this (or perhaps, the evidence is available but has not yet been analysed/articulated).

In summary, for both focal outcomes, this set of contributions constitutes the primary system of contributions to these focal outcomes - coming from within the same district - blue system boundary A.

3.4.2 Contributions from other districts

We identified a wide range of actors active in other districts who have or are contributing to the development of both knowledge and agency on the effective and accountable use of public resources (which include but are not limited to LDF, CDF and DDF). These actors include ActionAid, CARE Malawi, CCJP, CISANET, DAI, DCA, DCT, GIZ, Malawi Local Government Association (MALGA), MHEN, MEJN, MHRRC, NDI, NICE, Oxfam, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Purpose. Examples of CSOs involved in PET and gender work in Malawi are as follows:

- The EU has supported ActionAid and the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) PET work in Nsanje, Phalombe, Mchinji and Rumphi districts and at national level; MEJN and Trocaire PET work in Dowa, Mulanje and Zomba; MALGA – to develop the institutional, technical and management capacities of all district councils; and NICE – to conduct voter education, encourage the participation of women in political and conduct and anti-corruption work.62

- Under its Local Government Strengthening and Investment Programme, UNDP is reviewing the National Decentralization Policy and statutes and building the capacity of district institutes while the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) is providing direct technical support in the management of LDF, and UN Volunteers (UNV) is offering technical assistance to planning and budgeting units in 13 pilot districts.63

- United Purpose (UP), formerly Concern International, has worked in 14 districts of Malawi (mostly in the central and southern region) in partnership with local government and communities and reports that one of its major achievements during the 2011–2016 period was increasing the quality and coverage of community-focused service provision. It contributed towards this change through its own interventions and through supporting communities to lobby for the construction or repair of clinics, roads and secondary schools.64

Other initiatives include those by GIZ, NDI, MALGA and DCA:

‘Which other organisations have contributed to the gender related changes you just outlined? ’ Evaluator

‘NDI, GIZ, MALGA and DCA stand out for me.’ Representative of the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus

Some of these initiatives are shown in Figure 3 within the blue system boundary B. In Section 4.3.2 we investigated two such actors/programmes – LGAP (DAI) and Plan Malawi – for their potential to have contributed, via outscaling, to improvements in focal outcomes 1 and 2, but found no evidence of this. In Figure 3 we have shown these as part of the wider system, but without lines of contribution to the focal outcomes.
Figure 3: Diagram illustrating the systemic contribution made by a combination of actors to focal outcomes 1 and 2
3.4.3 Dynamic interactions between district and national level developments

Finally, we looked at possible contributions from the national level – blue system boundary C in Figure 3. While we found evidence of many developments nationally, as detailed under alternative hypothesis C (Section 4.3.3), we found almost no evidence that these were contributing to focal outcomes 1 and 2 (downward green dotted arrows).

However, as set out below, we did find evidence that the Oxfam-led consortium – and particularly Oxfam – contributed to these national changes (upward green arrows in Figure 3). Other CSOs working locally also contributed to these changes – for example the activities of Action Aid/ CISANET, and LGAP, led by DAI (upward green arrows on the left-hand side of the diagram). This is significant because of the potential upward and then downward systemic feedback loops that may emerge over time but have not yet manifested. Over time, this may turn out to have been a smart strategy [influencing both at national and local levels].

MEJN is one actor who highlights the importance of this big picture strategy:

‘Our [MEJN] main achievement at national level is that there has been growing interest in budget and budget tracking among civil society. Civil society and CSOs involved in PET for example, are fighting for people-centred budgets. We have also contributed to the development of capacities to analyse budgets. At another level, we have begun seeing efforts and connecting the dots in order to see the big picture.’ Malawi Economic Justice Network

Evidence that changes at the national level relevant to focal outcomes 1 and 2 were influenced both by the Oxfam-led consortium and by others

Focal outcome 1: Overall, our impression is that the impact of the partnership between Oxfam, DCT and CCJP was significant at national level, not because they worked in several districts, but because they were able to carefully document PET findings and present them nationally in a convincing manner, which contributed to making relevant authorities conduct further investigations on the use of LDF, DDF and CDF funds in 16 districts (57 percent).

‘Following the publication of our report on district level PET work and its dissemination at national level, there has been national commitment to follow up on the concerns that we raised in connection with the improper use of public resources. The Ministry of Local Government and the Anti-Corruption Bureau have instituted further investigations.’ Oxfam Programme Manager

‘Perhaps the most important contribution that Oxfam has made is towards improved use of public funds. Their PET findings, which were made public, necessitated the audit of 16 districts.’ National Local Government Finance Committee

There are also instances where Oxfam partners appear to have been singled out for having had a causal effect independent of the other members of the partnership, which may nonetheless be reflective of the consortium’s work:

‘Which CSOs do you see as playing a significant role in relation to public expenditure by local government?’ Evaluator
‘The ones that are extremely impressive are MEJN, CCJP and Action Aid. NDI was good but it is no longer operating. Oxfam just came at the right time. It compares well in terms of focusing on community empowerment.’ National Local Government Finance Committee

‘Who gets mentioned and who participates in these spaces?’ Evaluator

‘Apart from Oxfam, CSOs that make a significant contribution to local government public expenditure tracking and accountability are MLAGA, NICE, Centre for Multiparty Democracy, GIZ, Women’s Legal Resource Centre, MEJN Chapters, CCJP and DCT,’ Paniso Kalu, in his professional capacity

**Focal outcome 2:** The contributions of Oxfam and its partners to gender-based empowerment nationally appears to be even more significant, and this could be attributed to the fact that there are fewer organizations that work at the interface of gender and local government resources. Working with all female councillors and MPs appears to have helped Oxfam’s gender work stand out among its partners and CSOs in general:

‘In addition, they [Oxfam] helped to nationalize the women struggle as a development issue in the country, not just for individual MPs or women leaders in councils or Parliament.’ Representative of the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus

‘Oxfam is the only organisation that has come out in the open and said the 50:50 policy will never be realised in parliament and among councils if there is no support given to elected women who are already occupying these positions.’ Representative of the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus

‘Oxfam contributed to the operationalisation of the concept of decentralisation through supporting us as female MPs to visit each other’s constituencies, meet the people we represent, engage citizens in their own homes and languages, have them highlight governance and other issues they are facing, enabled us to engage with traditional leaders. Consequently, they have helped us to become better MPs, who spend time with the people. And people can see that women deserve to be leaders, to be MPs and councillors.’ Representative of the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus

‘Oxfam is also one of the leading gender organisations, and is actively involved in the Consortium for the Empowerment of Women, especially women leaders in parliament and council.’ Paniso Kalu, in his professional capacity

Our findings suggest that the efforts made towards inclusion of women in decision-making structures and processes were effective in terms of increasing elected women leaders’ capacities to perform and communicate their work: as individual women leaders and as a collective. This is partly because Oxfam and its partners have been working with women leaders that are already elected as councillors and MPs and these cover a relatively small proportion of wards and constituencies.

**Evidence that CSO-led work may be contributing to a backlash at national and local levels (unintended negative results)**

Publicizing local government abuse of public resources is a double-edged sword, which Oxfam and its partners have used as an important awareness raising and advocacy tool in relation to citizen participation, public resource use, accountability and effectiveness. While councillors and community leaders in project districts, national representatives of female councillors and MPs and media people engaged in the evaluation were highly appreciative of the role played by use of media to enhance good governance and use of local government resources, other CSOs
and council officers interviewed in the study were sceptical about the efficacy of the method, especially when it is not preceded by more subtle and ‘quieter’ methods of persuasion. Using media to report PET findings has had the unintended effect of making the relations between some PET-promoting CSOs and government officers sour. This has been worsened by CSOs that have exaggerated the implications of their findings, resulting in a backlash against CSOs in general.

‘Our approach leans more heavily on capacity development, especially in the beginning of the process. We also believe strongly in engagement of power directly, quietly in the background. It is only when this does not work that media is brought in, but still grounded in the evidence. So, in a sense our activism might not be exactly the same as that of Oxfam and CCJP in that regard. We do primarily seek to make ourselves as visible.’ Malawi Economic Justice Network

‘CSOs and civil society generally find it difficult to access financial information from council, which in turn undermines their chances of PET and making public sector accountable... CSOs are partly responsible for their lack of access to financial information. When they come across indications of abuse of local government resources, they do not engage the district council for clarification and verification. They often blow it out of proportion and make it available to the public. This has created animosity and distrust between the public sector and CSOs.’ Paniso Kalu, in his professional capacity

‘What has been the backlash on CSOs?’ Evaluator

‘Increasingly council officers see civil society as an enemy. They react by hiding information, not cooperating, closing up, and becoming defensive... Some council officers and councillors have just found smarter ways of stealing public resources.’ The Nation newspaper journalist

The hike in annual NGO registration fees was announced by the government of Malawi in January 2017, to take effect from January 2018. In 2018 the annual fees rose 20-fold, from 50,000 MK to as high as 1,000,000 MKW.65

In Malawi, when western organizations such as Oxfam support certain reforms, such as land and certain gender reforms, their efforts can work against the interests of the people they support.66 This is partly because the power and leverage of western organizations is seen as excessive, partly due to the country’s dependence on foreign aid, and therefore resented.67 A recent study suggests that Malawians are, at best, only partly convinced that international organizations genuinely want to help them, with 15 percent seeing them as having excessive influence. It is worth noting that the 50:50 campaign for women representation in which Oxfam took an active part was dropped from the Gender Equality Bill before it was tabled in parliament.68

In conclusion, it appears too early tell whether the national level changes have yet begun to impact locally. Nonetheless, we might anticipate that if and when they do so, we could expect to see a reinforcing effect to the widespread groundwork that has been laid by CSOs – hopefully an emergent dynamic of the next phase of responsiveness, inclusivity, accountability and effectiveness in managing local development funds. Furthermore, if this turns out to be the case, then the upward influencing of organizations like the Oxfam-led consortium and others will have played a dual role in contributing to this transformation in democratic practices.
4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 PROGRAMME LEARNING CONSIDERATIONS

After careful analysis of the available evidence and subsequent reflection on the findings, the following project learning considerations emerge. These are intended to provide a basis for further discussion and reflection, and to inform current and future programming.

4.1.1 A carefully crafted approach to citizen empowerment and local government accountability through developing technical and agentive capacities in PET

The design and implementation of the Oxfam-led Kutukula Umwini pa Chitukuko Cha m’mboma Ang’ono project was distinctive in its approach to relating with power in and around local government (public) resource budgeting and utilization. It deliberately set out to work on the side of the historically powerless, uninformed and excluded (community members, women and youth, and female councillors and MPs) whose participation and benefit was essential, while at the same time working with those who provided the public resources and for whom accountability for proper and effective use of such resources was required (men and women councillors in the selected traditional areas and districts, all MPs and councillors across the nation, media and the National Local Government Finance Committee).

Focusing on developing the agency of these two overlapping stakeholder groups appears to be an effective way of increasing local government accountability. The agentic capacities of community members, councils and female MPs were developed through addressing lack of knowledge, authentic participation and power with others and power to perform (and not power over). Knowledge of rights holders and their representatives was partly developed through input from the national oversight structure – the National Local Government Finance Committee, which must have provided reassurance and trust into the intervention process. The new knowledge on PET enabled rights holders to understand who owned public resources and towards what ends it should be used, which served as an important stimulus while the prospects of change identified through participating in PET processes served as a potential reward for demanding accountable, responsive, inclusive, gender-sensitive and effective management of LDF, DDF and CDF.

From a systems and complexity perspective, it was the capacity development not just of individual men and women that generated the agentic capacities needed, but also and especially in developing the collective agency of ‘permanent’ institutional structures, which included the VDCs, ADCs and PICs at local level, and the Women Parliamentary Caucus and Group of Women Councillors at national level. It was this that created capacities for transforming power relations and desired changes. Furthermore, working with media helped to escalate the voices of rights holders in the selected traditional areas and among the women councils and MPs, thus increasing its agent potential. In both Phalombe and Dowa districts, we also have evidence that these systemic changes are being sustained, for example in the continuation of PET processes in Phalombe and in VDCs and ADCs continuing to hold duty bearers accountable.

The evaluation findings also support the logic of the consortium in not working directly through VDCs, ADCs and TAs as frontline agencies of change, recognizing that these were interested parties, who may have been benefiting from the status quo, which they would then be inclined to perpetuate. A significant argument for focusing on STAR circles and RLCs was that these were neutral
structures (i.e., not politically aligned), which potentially enabled them to be more effective in keeping the various local duty bearers – VDCs, ADCs, traditional leadership – accountable.

4.1.2 Using a unique combination of project partnership mechanisms to generate desired change progressively over time

Using a process tracing approach helped the evaluation to reveal the catalytic and transformative role of partnership mechanisms IRLCs, data compilation teams, STAR circles and interface meetings] as tertiary tools that enabled double and triple-loop learning while at the same time stimulating the materialization of outcomes. We identified the process-wise (project value chain) nature of these mutually reinforcing mechanisms, which we believe to be unique in Malawi, as an enabler of cumulative, inclusive, gender-sensitive, accountable, just and effective use of local government resources. The sequencing of contributions from recording, editing and disseminating data generated through situational analysis, project planning and budgeting, implementation and monitoring by RLCs helped connect efforts along the project’s value chain, with use of radio further strengthening this process. This was augmented through the collection, analysis and interpretation of financial and performance data concerning CDF, DDF and LDF by District Data Compilation Teams. Throughout the data generation, analysis and sense-making processes, power relations and gender justice considerations were made visible through the participation of STAR circles comprising women-only groups.

4.1.3 Similarities and differences between districts – the strengths and limitations of the Oxfam-led consortium’s approach

One of the most significant changes observed across all three districts is the growth in communities’ knowledge of the funds and the way in which they view these. There has been a significant shift in the discourse around the funds, from projects being seen as a gift from duty bearers to an understanding that the funds belong to communities and should, therefore, be managed by communities. This is one of the most significant impacts of the project in the areas where it has been active. The mechanisms that have led to this shift in discourse can be traced back to the approach to capacity building, which involved providing and working through the guidelines, and collaboratively monitoring the funds at multiple levels and through different neutral community structures.

The observed differences in outcomes between the three districts, Phalombe, Dowa and Karonga, helped to highlight both the strengths and limitations of the Oxfam-led consortium’s approach. In contrast to the overall effectiveness of the consortium’s approach in Phalombe and Dowa districts, we identified more partial outcomes in Karonga. These differences seem particularly to have reflected differences in the effectiveness of interface meetings, with the district secretariat and councillors in Phalombe and Dowa using these as platforms to demonstrate their responsiveness and accountability, whereas in Karonga they were often used by councillors and others as loopholes that enabled them to continue to mismanage development funds. These in turn may reflect differences in the standing and approach of the consortium in the three districts, with DCT playing a particularly strong role in Phalombe, where it invested successfully in relationship building with the secretariat, and as a result was respected, whereas in Karonga its role may have been weaker. Other possible explanations for these different outcomes in Karonga are that the project ended prematurely with stakeholders not yet equipped to play the role that the data compilation teams did and that the project was not implemented across the entire district, which meant that isolated communities were trying to hold district level duty bearers accountable. However, this did not prevent project successes in Phalombe and Dowa. These patterns may also be reflective of a more significant gap in project
design and implementation, which was the failure to treat the district councillors as one collective and to support them accordingly (See Section 1.4.4).

It is also important to point out here some of the unintended outcomes of the project. On the positive side, in Phalomba we found evidence of improved functionality VDCs and ADCs, and of citizens looking beyond CDF, LDF and DDF to the accountability of other funds, such as school improvement grants. The latter was also observed in Karonga, where one of the STAR circles is now following up on a health committee to see how they are spending their funds. By contrast, the main unintended negative effective were identified in Dowa, where the project appears to have raised citizen expectations but not created enough time for follow through. As a result, concerns have been raised regarding demand for the wrong kind of information using inappropriate channels associated with not knowing enough about how district councils operate. From a group development perspective, in Dowa the Oxfam-led PET project appears to have ended when relations in the district council had reached the ‘storming’ stage that is riven by unresolved conflicts. In the process, the project is reported to have created the impression of witch-hunting and has resulted in a certain level of backlash on CSOs, and even on some community members.

4.1.4 Thinking and designing systemically 1: What should we do differently in future and what should we leave others to do?

Perhaps the most striking insight arising from contribution analysis in this project lay in seeking to clarify the reasons for lack of inclusive, transparent, gender-sensitive, accountable and effective performance among some duty bearers, especially council officers in Karonga (see above). The contribution analysis revealed that while the Oxfam-led partnership excluded the technical capacity development of council officers in the three districts in which they operated, partnerships involving MHRCC, and particularly MEJN, in the same districts [and ActionAid in other districts], trained both the duty bearers and rights holders. This approach, which Oxfam and its partners may wish to consider in future, had the effect of trust building between district officers and partnership members as well as between local rights holders and the district officers. This kind of relational agency between rights holders and duty bearers has the potential to sustain impact.

The contribution analysis also revealed, however, that it is the combination of approaches in a district that matters, not what each consortium does on its own. A key design question for Oxfam and its partners in future interventions might therefore be: How should we play to our strengths in this district, and what can we leave to others? However, this approach is only likely to work if there is some coordination in both the design and the implementation of initiatives. Coordination requires activities like joint mapping by partners ahead of project design – or there needs to be some mediating organization – such as Tilitonse – that takes this role (see Section 1.4.6).

4.1.5 Using project partnership mechanisms to generate desired change progressively across scales

The process tracing also helped to reveal a picture of system-wide change from local interventions through multi-scale (vertical) project mechanisms towards effective and socially just use of local government resources. Using processed information generated through RLCs, data compilation teams and STAR circles, district interface meetings served as a process and places for engagement, negotiation, accountability and commitment building, connecting the local to the district levels in each of the three project districts. The scaling up and out of issues,
progress and lessons from the districts to the national level then occurred through the following pathways:

- Partnership with media, which reported PET issues on national radio stations and in newspapers.
- Project partnerships’ joint reflections and reports, which fed into media and national government.
- Tilitonse-funded joint project partnerships’ reflections and reports, which fed into media and national government.
- Documentation and reporting of gender issues and women’s achievements in all districts, which was coordinated by women councillors and MPs through the Women Parliamentary Caucus and Group of Women Councillors.

The contribution analysis also revealed a potentially significant dynamic between the district level changes and changes at a national level, with substantial national-level developments as a result of the influencing activities of a wide range of initiatives, including the Oxfam-led consortium, but with little evidence as yet that these national-level changes have begun to impact locally. We can, however, reasonably expect this top-down dynamic to emerge soon, which could lead to a reinforcing effect to the widespread groundwork that has been laid by CSOs – hopefully an emergent dynamic of the next phase of responsiveness, inclusivity, accountability and effectiveness in managing local development funds. If this turns out to be the case, then the upward influencing of organizations like the Oxfam-led consortium and others will have played a dual role in contributing to this transformation in democratic practices.

**4.1.6 Thinking and designing systemically 2: Seeing the bigger system**

In conclusion, we identified a significant set of lessons for improving future project design:

- Mapping and seeing the bigger, multi-scalar system-of-interest, working perhaps with intermediary organizations, such as Tilitonse.
- Addressing issues of scale through design approaches which prioritize collaborative learning, planning and action with other partnerships involved in promoting accountable, just and effective use of local government resources from district to national levels.

At district level, this space is afforded by the District Executive Committees – technical advisory bodies of the council that coordinate district development. At national level, existing sectoral or new issue-specific civil society structures and spaces could be established for mutual learning and action.

These learning considerations point to the richness of insights that can be gleaned from careful analysis and reflection on an innovative project of this nature.
# APPENDIX: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

## Phalombe district

| Phalombe District Councillors: | 1. Damson - PET Committee; Chair, Finance & Development Committee  
2. Kalepa - Chair; councillor for Genala TA  
3. Rex - Ex-chair (2015-16); councillor for Nazombe; member of the district data compilation team |
| Phalombe District Council – secretariat: | 1. GS Maguta - Executive Director  
2. JL Mtiza - Director of Finance  
3. S. Majoru - PO LDF  
4. E. Mochola - Administration and Human Resources Management Directorate [AHRMD]  
5. LK Kaudiado - Director of Administration  
6. FK Chudzalo - Director Public Works |
| Jenala Tribal Authority – members of the Radio Listening Club and Community-based Data Compilation Team | 1. Maxwell Yobe - Chair, RLC  
2. Agnes Fabiano - Secretary, RLC  
3. Aline Mataloka - Treasurer, RLC  
4. Enerest Chiwalo - Monitor, Data compilation team  
5. Frank Moffat - Vice Monitor, Data compilation team  
6. Aesi Mofolo  
7. GVH Kasongo [Chief] |
| Jenala Tribal Authority – VDC and ADC members | 1. Edward Bunongo - ADC member  
2. Raymond - Deputy Chair, VDC |
| Regional actors with a focus on Phalombe district | 1. Rose Makanjela - Catholic Commission for Justice & Peace (CCJP), Blantyre  
2. Zione Mayaya - Development Communication Trust (DCT), Blantyre |

## Dowa district

| Dowa District Councillors: | Jalivesi Miti  
Brecious Mangeni  
Jeremot Mthope Jumbe  
Martin Luka |
| Dowa District Council – secretariat: | 1. Francis Sidira - Dowa District Officer  
2. Timothy Banda - Dowa District Officer |
| ADC: | 1. Blackson Moyani - ADC Chair  
2. Fatness Muteyi - ADC member  
3. Joyce Makwate - ADC member  
4. Billy Kagwa - Village Headman and ADC member |
| Msakambewa – Radio Listening Club | This focus group discussion involved nine members of the RLC and one member of the STAR circle |
| CCJP: | Enock Kamudi |
| Focus group discussion at Mbande | 1. ADC Chair – Mr Kalambo  
2. ADC member (male)  
3. VDC member (female)  
4. STAR circle member male  
5. STAR circle member female  
6. Radio listening club member male  
7. Radio listening club member female  
8. Village – male |
| Focus group discussion at Kayuni | 1. ADC Chair – Mr Vincent Kayuni  
2. VDC member – male  
3. STAR circle – Mercy Ndovi – chairlady of a group of 20 women  
4. STAR circle – female chairlady of another group of 20  
5. Radio listening club – male  
6. Radio listening club – female member  
7. Villager – male  
8. Youths – 2 males |
| Meeting with MP | Hon. Frank Mwenefumbo |
| Focus group discussion at GVH Katolola | 1. GVH Katolola  
2. Adviser to GVHKatolola – male  
3. VDC Chair Katolola  
| Focus group discussion at GVH Mwashimba | 1. GVH Mwashimba  
2. VDC Chair – Wisdom Mwashimba  
3. ADC member – female  
4. STAR circle member – female  
5. VDC member – male  
6. Community member – male |
| Focus group discussion at GVH Mwenelupembe | 1. GVH Mwenelupembe  
2. Secretary to the GVH  
3. VDC members – male  
4. VDC member – female  
5. STAR circle – female  
8. Youths – male |
| Focus group discussion with CCJP | 1. Mwawi Shaba – team leader  
2. Nazombe – Director Tuntufye radio – (project officer for the project)  
3. Mr L. Nkhata Desk Officer – governance |
| Visit and discussions at Lupembe CDSS head teacher’s house | 1. Mercy Ndovi  
2. GVH Kayuni  
3. Deputy Head Teacher – male  
4. Teacher – male |
| Visit to Mwenilondo Health Centre | 1. VDC member – male  
2. Villager – male |
## National stakeholders interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Name and Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxfam in Malawi</td>
<td>Lusungu Dzinkambani - Governance Programme Manager, Oxfam Malawi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Elyvin Nkhonjera - Extractive Industries Coordinator, Oxfam Malawi</td>
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<td>Tilitonse Foundation</td>
<td>Robert White - CEO, Tilitonse Foundation</td>
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<td>Amakhosi Jere - Grants &amp; Partnerships, Tilitonse Foundation</td>
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<td>MEJN</td>
<td>Dalitso Kubalasa</td>
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<td>Crispin Chavula</td>
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<td>DCA</td>
<td>William Khololongo</td>
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<td>DAI (responsible for implementing the LCAP programme)</td>
<td>Edwin Msewa</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Paniso Kalu</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIZ</td>
<td>Vittima Mkandawire</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jan Dannheisig</td>
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<td>National Local Government Finance Committee</td>
<td>Stanley Chuthi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women’s Parliamentary Caucus</td>
<td>Honourable Jessie Kabwira - Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group of Women Councillors</td>
<td>Ms Kaduya - Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nation newspaper</td>
<td>Golden Matonga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus group discussion with councillors
1. Councillor Kisyombe
2. Councillor Kanyika
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Rumphi Civil Society Network (2017) *Turning the CDF implementation challenges into positive implementation changes: Change is not made without inconvenience.* Lilongwe, Malawi: ActionAid & CISANET.


NOTES

1 STAR Circles are village forums that use a combination of participatory, rights-based approaches for agency development, collective action and policy influence. They involve the coming together of community members to address actions of community concern in a manner that encourages community ownership of development processes. The intervention mechanism grew out of the field of health and originally stood for Societies Tackling AIDS through Rights. (Kuphanga, D. (2014).)

2 Oxfam Malawi (14 April 2017)
3 We failed to record the TAs which MEJN were operating in.

6 Tiltonse (2013)
7 Source: http://www.ldf.gov.mw/about-ldf/
8 Rupphi Civil Society Network (2017)
10 Telalogic, S. (2014)
11 United Purpose (2017)
13 Oxfam in Malawi (2018)
16 This diagram was constructed to aid initial discussion and selection of the focal outcomes for the evaluation. It is not intended to offer a ‘full’ theory of change for the project.
17 See, for example, Stedman-Bryce, G. (2013); Delgado, M. (2014)
19 Generative perspectives on causality can be distinguished from ‘counterfactual’, ‘regularity’ and ‘configurational’ perspectives. See, for example: Befani, B. and Mayne, J. (2014)
20 Through a fine-grained explanation of what happens between a cause and an effect, generative mechanisms help to explain ‘why’ a certain effect occurred.
21 Oxfam GB (2013)
22 Oxfam GB (2013) op.cit.
24 Oxfam GB (2013)
26 The focus outcomes shown by the solid blue circle (only one in this diagram) and the unintended outcomes by the open blue circle. The original project of interest is within the dotted green box; the system of interest for the impact evaluation within the solid blue box.
27 Patton, M. Q. (2012)
28 NB Oxfam has a close relationship with the DCT, in part because Lusungu Dzinkambani (Governance Programme Manager for Oxfam Malawi) previously worked for the DCT, where she was Executive Director for five years (2008–13). DCT recently signed a five-year MoU with Oxfam Malawi.
29 Both RLCs were formed at VDC level. In Mbande area, the RLC started in 2010 as part of a previous DCT project which sought to find out from people what is going on in terms of realization of rights and informing the people about the key issues which were affecting them and taking them up to the duty bearers. In Lupembe area, the RLC was formed in 2016 as part of this project.
30 This approach has evolved since 2010 because of its perceived benefits for communities and is now largely used as a general vehicle for community discussions, and in particular to implement participatory development projects promoted by organizations such as the Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM).
31 We were unable to determine the exact number of interface meetings held in Karonga district.
32 https://www.danchurchaid.org/where-we-work/malawi
33 http://www.humanrightsmw/index_files/Howweoperate.htm
34 Mambucha, T. [21 July 2016]
Government of Malawi (2016)
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