

# UBALE DFAP Final Performance Evaluation

## Summary Brief

## INTRODUCTION

The UBALE Development Food Assistance Project (DFAP) was launched in Fiscal Year 2014 and aimed to reduce food insecurity in Malawi through three purposes:

- P1: Vulnerable households increase income
- P2: Improved nutritional status among pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and children under two (CU2)
- P3: Communities are empowered to contribute to their own sustainable development

This brief summarizes the results of the final evaluation conducted by [TANGO International](#). The evaluation measured UBALE's development outcomes and presented evidence that:

- UBALE strengthened the capacity of structures to monitor and implement agriculture extension activities and organize communities for disaster risk reduction/community asset management
- The project's strategy of working through Agriculture Extension Development Officers to support lead farmers to transfer skills was successful
- Savings and Internal Lending Community groups expanded credit opportunities for both women and men, supported poverty reduction, and increased resilience
- Nutritional status, especially stunting, made impressive gains
- An integrated approach provided opportunities to reinforce messages between purposes and to complement/integrate activities at community level



Photo Credit: Luis Ramirez

## ABOUT UBALE

**Primary Focus Areas:** 1) Agriculture and other livelihoods; 2) Natural resource and environment management; 3) Undernutrition, especially for children under two and pregnant and lactating women; and 4) Disaster impact mitigation through early warning and community preparedness

**Implementing Organizations:** Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Save the Children, Catholic Development Commission in Malawi (CADECOM), CARE, NCBA/CLUSA, and the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi

**Funding Source:** United States Agency for International Development Office of Food for Peace

**Intervention Period:** FY 2014 – FY 2019

**Intervention Areas:** Three districts in southern Malawi: Chikwawa, Nsanje, and Rural Blantyre



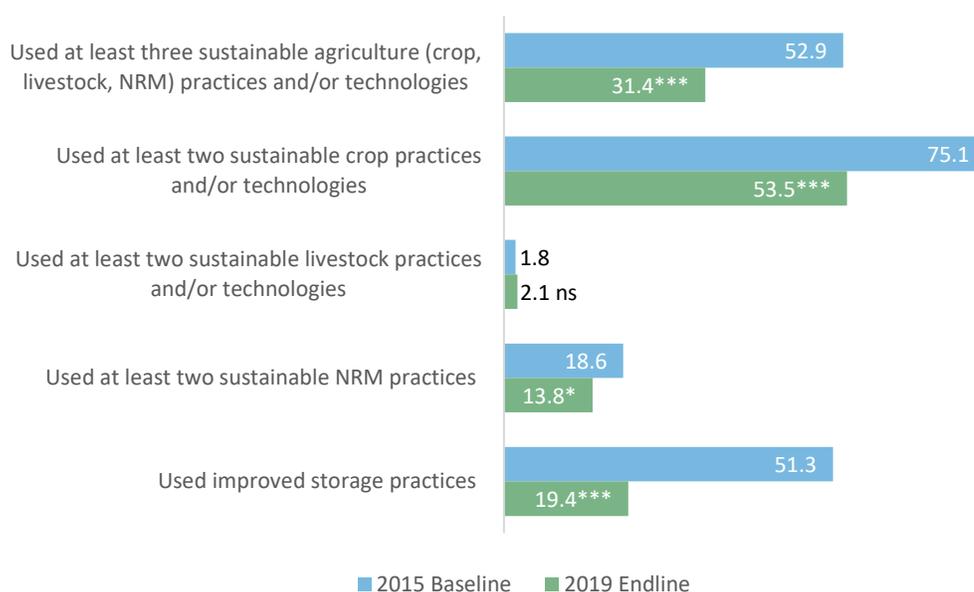
## KEY FINDINGS

### Vulnerable Households Increase Income (Purpose 1)

In line with the integrated nature of project activities, agricultural interventions under Purpose 1 increased the production of nutritious foods needed to achieve Purpose 2 objectives, supported women and men to make decisions together, increased income and savings, and provided options for farmers and communities to improve their resilience by incorporating agriculture technologies that increased yield and sustainability. The integration of activities created a supportive environment for farmers to increase food production and income. However, the project area and the districts suffered extreme weather events, pests, and market failures in four of the UBALE’s five years of operation that undermined production and sales.

A major achievement of UBALE was strengthening the capacity of government and traditional structures to monitor and implement extension work. UBALE’s strategy included working through Agriculture Extension Development Officers (AEDOs) to support lead farmers and was successful in transferring skills, simple, low-cost technologies, and new agriculture management techniques to farmers. Diversity and Nutrition for Enhanced Resilience (DiNER) fairs encouraged farmers to diversify their crops using high-quality hybrid seed. Seed multiplication groups helped to improve accessibility to sorghum, soya, orange-fleshed sweet potato, and bio fortified bean seeds. UBALE also assisted farmers to sell collectively, build sustainable market connections for select value chains, and form higher-level marketing associations. This enabled the sale of larger quantities at higher prices, though farmers need continued technical support and aggregated crop storage facilities to ensure sustainability. Despite the large number of livestock in the UBALE communities, the project did not address livestock management, which the evaluation team felt was a missed opportunity.

**Figure 1: Agriculture indicators – adoption of improved practices**



*ns = not significant, + p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001*

*Source: Quantitative Survey*

The number of UBALE farmers who applied improved technologies or management practices exceeded project targets in FY17 and FY18 (per IPTT data). In contrast, the population-based survey (PBS) shows a baseline-endline decrease of 22 percentage points for the percentage of farmers who used at least three sustainable

agriculture practices and/or technologies in the past 12 months, and in the percentage who used at least two sustainable crop practices and/or technologies. The effect of adverse weather on food and income insecurity in the districts should be considered when interpreting these data. Given the unpredictable rainfall in southern Malawi, an irrigated farming component, where feasible, would be valuable to drought-stressed farmers and home gardens, and could provide entrepreneurial opportunities for youth.

Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC) groups provided a successful mechanism for poor households to save money and access credit. As of September 2018, UBALE SILC groups had over USD 1.4 million in savings and nearly USD 1.2 million in outstanding loans. However, UBALE's efforts to establish a Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization did not allow adequate time for financial and managerial processes to mature and, at the end of the project, the SACCO was not sustainable without substantial external support.

The gender dialogues and emphasis on gender equality have led to greater sharing of household responsibilities by men, improved household relations, and reduced domestic violence. Women have more time to participate in community activities and the confidence to assume leadership positions. UBALE worked with youth clubs but, beyond disseminating messages and some public service activities, there was no clear agenda to support the needs of youth, representing a missed opportunity. The gender dialogues and emphasis on gender equality have led to greater sharing of household responsibilities by men, improved household relations, and reduced domestic violence. Women have more time to participate in community activities and the confidence to assume leadership positions.

## Improved Nutritional Status among PLW and CU2 (Purpose 2)

UBALE followed the “First 1,000 Days” approach to child nutrition. Community mobilization efforts and integration of Purpose 1 and 2 activities, especially in project communities with intense agricultural support, successfully enabled 1,000-day households to access nutrient-dense, diverse foods. According to the PBS,



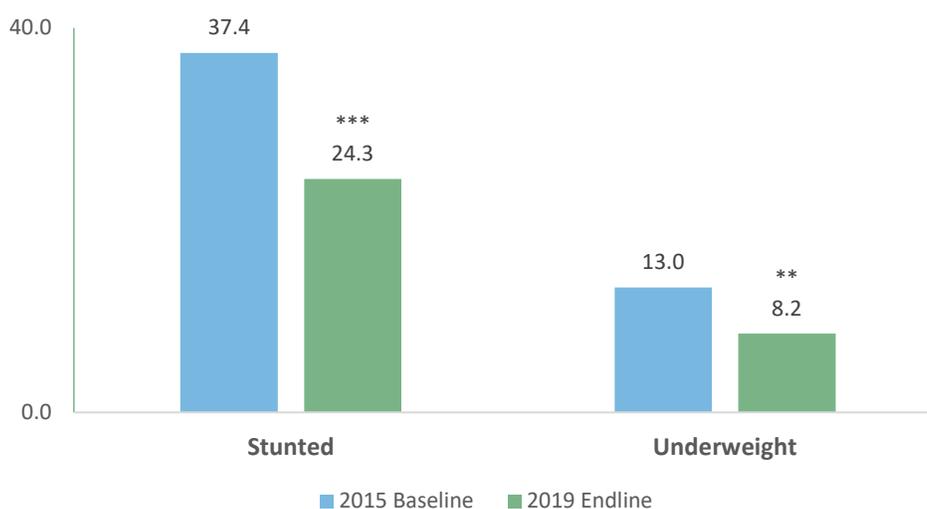
Photo Credit: Jeanne Downen

the percentage of children ages 6-23 months receiving a minimal acceptable diet in the broader population decreased more than 10 percentage points to just over 5 percent, which is likely a result of decreased food production due to repeated shocks. Among UBALE participants, despite overall deterioration of household food access and decreased dietary diversity due to multiple shocks, consumption of nutrient-rich value chain commodities, especially orange-fleshed sweet potato, increased among women of reproductive age and CU2. A major achievement was the full-scale implementation of Care Groups, the key component of the Government of Malawi community nutrition strategy, reaching over 92 percent of the target population. District health authorities attributed the P2 impact to district-wide coverage, use of the government curriculum, increased adoption of key behaviors by parents, improved linkages to community health services, and strong capacity strengthening of community volunteers. The volunteer health promoters, who received a modest stipend only during the first two years of the project, played a vital role in the success of the Care Groups.

The distribution of supplementary rations (corn-soy blend) reinforced complementary feeding messages, and oil and split peas were easily integrated into women and children’s diets. Agricultural activities also increased the availability of beans and pigeon peas, assisting families to provide nutritious foods to their children on their own after project end.

UBALE ultimately surpassed project targets for decreasing malnutrition in children under five (CU5). The proportion of CU5 classified as underweight decreased from 13.0 percent to 8.2 percent, and the percentage with moderate or severe stunting (chronic malnutrition) decreased from 37.4 percent to 24.3 percent. The significant reduction in stunting in CU2 (the most vulnerable group and main focus of project activities) from 30.8 percent to 17.4 percent merits further study to assess the extent to which lean season rations contributed to project gains. However, there was no statistically significant change in women’s nutritional status. In addition, while the endline sample was too small to show a change in children under six months who are exclusively breastfed, key informants and focus groups reported increases in exclusive breastfeeding as a result of the Care Group methodology.

**Figure 2: Prevalence of CU5 stunted and underweight**



*ns = not significant, + p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001*  
 Source: Quantitative Survey

The qualitative study found the Community Complementary Feeding and Learning Sessions an effective way to identify and treat children at risk of malnutrition early, reinforcing child feeding practices, and improving dietary diversity. DiNER fairs, food preservation teaching events, and UBALE’s emphasis on locally available foods helped households maintain dietary diversity and food security during the lean season.

The percentage of CU5 who had diarrhea in the two weeks prior to the PBS increased slightly by endline from 19.0 to 24.1 percent, and UBALE did not achieve the target (13.0 percent). However, district health and nutrition authorities and focus groups in almost all UBALE communities reported a large decrease in diarrheal cases and the near eradication of cholera as a result of UBALE efforts in water, sanitation, and hygiene. For three out of the four water treatment technologies, adoption improved significantly, with 28.7 percent of UBALE households practicing correct use of recommended household water treatment technologies, an increase of 20.7 percentage points from baseline. PBS data show no change in household use of improved sanitation facilities, but UBALE participants indicated large positive changes in peoples’ knowledge and

appreciation of basic hygiene and sanitation and widespread promotion and adoption of latrines, though construction quality was often low.

The endline survey data indicates a positive change in shared decision-making between women and men at the household level, indicating both greater willingness by men to include women in household decisions, and greater participation by women in those decisions. From baseline to endline, the prevalence of men making maternal health decisions jointly with their partners increased from 20.1 to 31.9 percent. Similarly, regarding child health and nutrition, joint decision-making among men increased over 8 percentage points to 40.3 percent.

## Communities are Empowered to Contribute to their own Sustainable Development (Purpose 3)

UBALE worked with governance structures, including Village Development Committees, Care Groups, Water User Committees, private service provider networks, marketing clubs, and youth clubs. The project worked through government structures and traditional authorities, providing trainings to village, area, and district committees to improve their abilities to organize, plan, and monitor progress, and obtain funding for community development activities. Village and area committees were coordinated with district government and traditional authorities to build credibility, inclusion, and accountability.

The Village Civil Protection Committees (VCPCs) and Village Natural Resource Management Committees were working to reduce disaster risk, monitor the coming rainy season, set flood contingency plans, and support nurseries to continue reforestation and protection of riverbanks, though VCPC members indicated that committee member turnover and lack of training for new members limited committee performance.

UBALE supported improved water management focused on training water committees. For greater impact, this could have been complemented with provision or repair of water points, for which there was widespread demand. There was also an opportunity to productively channel runoff water from boreholes to provide water for livestock. Village committees and participants appreciated the creation or rehabilitation of community assets that will improve the sustainability of natural resources and protect the productivity of farmland, while the work supported vulnerable individuals through Food for Assets. The impact of these community assets could be amplified by rooting them in local efforts to develop a sustainable strategy for integrated watershed management. Six months after the end of the project, the qualitative study team observed that village committees continued to support nurseries and plant tree seedlings to mitigate soil erosion and deforestation, improve water retention, and provide shade and groundcover to support agricultural production. The continuation of community organization and local government interest indicates that the communities value these activities. District officials stated that the presence of organized committees in UBALE communities made it easier for government to continue supporting health and extension services.

UBALE integrated gender equality messages across all activities that enabled greater participation by women in decision-making structures. Participants reported that more women now serve on committees, hold higher-level decision-making positions, and are able to voice their opinions at the community and family level. Among UBALE participants, the percentage of women in community committees reached 46 percent. Additionally, 56 percent of marketing club members and 75 percent of SILC group members were women.

“UBALE made the various government structures and systems become functional and transparent.”

- District Government Staff

Implementing UBALE activities required a high level of coordination with multiple government, UN, non-governmental and private-sector actors. Overall, this was done successfully while strengthening the capacity of government to deliver services in the target areas, though staff changes in UBALE sometimes hampered consistent communications and actions. However, district government partners and IPs stated that although they collected monitoring data for the program, UBALE management did not share the data analysis and reporting with them (which would have aided their understanding of results). Broader understanding could have been facilitated with a robust M&E system that captured key outcome indicators and used them to support mutual learning of all stakeholders, and thus joint ownership of results.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



### Support to Livelihoods

- **Expand opportunities for market-based food security solutions.** New, more market-based food security solutions need to be identified at local, district, and national levels. It is critical for future programs to facilitate connections between large private buyers and small producers. The private sector should be part of market solutions to provide sustainability to smallholder agriculture.
- **Invest in livestock development where it is a major component of livelihood strategies.** Future programs should understand how livestock fits into agricultural systems and consider not only animal health components but also farmers' organizations, markets, value-added activities, and coping strategies to adapt to external shocks and stresses through integrated crop and livestock development.
- **Allow sufficient time to build new financial institutions.** The formation of local financial institutions should start early to give the necessary time for financial services to mature, attract a viable customer base, and achieve sustainability during project life.
- **Support innovative income-generation opportunities for youth.** New agricultural and non-agricultural income generation opportunities need to be explored for youth who are keen to get involved in innovative and new ways of achieving food security and developing viable, sustainable livelihoods.



### Watershed Management and Agriculture

- **Root community assets in an integrated watershed management strategy.** Just as sustainable farming and income generation should be central to project design, integrated watershed management should be a key element in strategic planning. This strategy should involve government officials, communities, and local experts to define risks, action plans, and support to watershed management.
- **Use small irrigation schemes to build food security.** Small and medium irrigation schemes should be considered in new proposals to strengthen the ability of communities and farmers to mitigate and adapt to food security shocks and stresses. Small irrigation schemes have the potential to provide youth with entrepreneurship opportunities where linkages can be made with private companies that can support and purchase locally produced food. Irrigation would also support more successful home gardening for improved nutrition.
- **Complement water management capacity strengthening on infrastructure provision.** Training alone is not sufficient without support for improved water infrastructure through Food for Assets (FFA) or other activities. Technologies are needed to harness borehole runoff water for the benefit of animals in an environmentally friendly manner, especially where livestock is an important livelihood element.



## Nutrition and Health

- **Ensure support and proper selection of volunteer health promoters.** Future programs should provide an adequate budget to cover health promoter stipends for the initial years of a program. In addition, selecting promoters using national standards, joint trainings for health promoters and HSAs, and joint supervision will help foster partnership and integration of community and health outreach activities.
- **Latrine promotion should follow standards and be implemented in phases.** Projects should provide minimum standards for different models suited to different levels of household resources. Households may need economic support to build latrines and maintain them after project end. Latrine construction activities should be embedded in a social and behavior change strategy around sanitation and hygiene.
- **Build upon established and successful community health models and support related government policies.** Future health and nutrition components of food security programs in Malawi should continue to build on the successful community health model adopted in UBALE.



## Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Implement a results-based M&E system.** Programs that aim to change social and behavioral practices need a results-based M&E system that goes beyond measuring outputs and activity targets. Capturing key outcome indicators in annual surveys and close monitoring of coverage indicators is an opportunity for NGO and government partners to periodically review achievements and progress and develop joint ownership of program efforts.

### MIXED-METHODS METHODOLOGY

- Population-based survey (Jul – Aug 2019)
  - 1,260 households in the three project districts
- Quantitative analysis compared baseline and endline indicators
- Qualitative study (Oct – Nov 2019)
  - 50 focus group discussions (276 F, 272 M)
  - 72 key informant interviews (national and site-level) (17 F, 55 M)
  - 15 site visits to observe infrastructure assets built or rehabilitated with project support (demonstration plots, home gardens, FFA infrastructure, WASH facilities)
- Review of project documents, project monitoring data, and secondary sources