



Zomba and Mangochi NRS M&E Plan development teams discussing progress during a workshop. Photo: ©Titukulane RFSA 2023/Samuel Chibaya

*Titukulane*, is a five-year USAID Resilience Food Security Activity being implemented by CARE together with partners (Emmanuel International, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM), Save the Children, and WaterAid). Titukulane aims to 294,837 direct participants over five years, including 176,902 women and 103,193 youth between the ages of 15 and 29 who face uncertain futures as farming becomes less viable. So far Titukulane has reached 145,757 direct participants, including 97,720 women and 51,015 youth with different interventions. The Activity aims to support implementation and ensure effectiveness of the Malawi National Resilience Strategy (NRS), which is established to guide investments in agriculture, reduce impacts and improve recovery from shocks, promote household resilience, strengthen management of Malawi's natural resources, and facilitate coordination between government institutions, civil society organizations, and development partners.

## Lessons from Developing District-Level M&E Plans to Implement the National Resilience Strategy

### Background

The National Resilience Strategy (NRS) aims to build resilience against economic and environmental shocks, promoting inclusive growth, food security, and well-being for all Malawians. The NRS consists of four pillars: (1) Resilient Agricultural Growth; (2) Risk Reduction, Flood Control and Early Warning and Response Systems; (3) Human Capacity, Livelihoods, and Social Protection; and (4) Catchment Protection and Management. Titukulane RFSA is piloting the NRS in Zomba and Mangochi districts, working with District Councils to coordinate implementation with various stakeholders.

This learning brief highlights the lessons learned from developing the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plans in Zomba and Mangochi districts and offers recommendations

for other districts planning to implement the National Resilience Strategy (NRS). The brief also discusses the Opportunities for Collaboration between National and District Pillar Leads and Aligning the NRS with Key Government Strategies, particularly the Malawi 2063 (MW 2063), to foster synergy and impact.

### M&E Plan Components

The M&E plan developed in Zomba and Mangochi districts consists of three main documents:

1. Implementation Plan: This document outlines the activities, timelines, and responsible parties for implementing the NRS at the district level, ensuring

coordination and alignment with district development priorities.

2. **M&E Framework:** The framework identifies key indicators and targets for each NRS pillar, providing a basis for monitoring progress, evaluating outcomes, and learning from the implementation experience.
3. **Operational Guidelines:** These guidelines provide practical instructions and protocols for data collection, reporting, and analysis, ensuring consistency and quality in M&E processes across different sectors and stakeholders.

## Lessons Learned

1. **Stakeholder Engagement:** The wide-ranging consultations with stakeholders at the district and national levels were instrumental in formulating a multisectoral district NRS implementation plan. Engaging stakeholders early on fostered buy-in and commitment to the strategy, setting the stage for more effective collaboration throughout the implementation process.
2. **Utilizing Existing Structures:** By mapping NRS pillars to district technical structures and using existing structures for management and coordination, the process was streamlined and duplication of efforts was minimized. This approach leverages existing resources, knowledge, and relationships, enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of the NRS implementation.

## Challenges

1. **Potential Challenges Related to M&E Staff Involvement:** Insufficient attention to coordination and communication during meetings may be attributed to the inadequate commitment from M&E staff to lead the process of developing the M&E plan. This issue underscores the importance of dedicated and committed M&E personnel to enable the successful implementation of the NRS.
2. **Insufficient Follow-Up on Assigned Tasks:** The lack of follow-up on tasks assigned during meetings led to delays and inefficiencies in the M&E plan development process. This challenge underscores the importance of establishing clear roles, responsibilities, and follow-up mechanisms to ensure timely and effective implementation.
3. **Orientation and Guidance from the National Level:** The lack of orientation and guidance from the national level on the NRS implementation process created confusion and hindered the development of the M&E plan. This challenge highlights the need for effective communication and support from the national level to ensure a coherent and

coordinated approach to NRS implementation across districts.

4. **Multiple Management Information Systems (MIS) Across Sectors:** The existence of different MIS across sectors made it difficult to consolidate data and align it with the NRS M&E framework. This challenge emphasizes the need for a harmonized and integrated data management approach to facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation of the NRS.
5. **The complexity of large pillar working group:** The numerous sectors and technical working groups within Pillar 3 posed challenges in coordinating efforts and consolidating data. This challenge highlights the need for clear coordination mechanisms and effective communication channels among the various stakeholders fall under complex and multisectoral pillars.

## Recommendations

1. Strengthen coordination of development partners at the national level to promote the NRS and ensure district offices are funded to implement NRS activities. This approach will facilitate more efficient and effective implementation of the NRS across districts.
2. Align projects at the national level according to NRS pillars and ensure funding for activities at the district level. This alignment will help create synergies, avoid duplication of efforts, and ensure resources are effectively channelled towards NRS priorities.
3. Improve communication and commitment among stakeholders to coordinate the NRS. Ensuring open lines of communication and fostering a collaborative environment will enable stakeholders to effectively work together to implement the NRS.
4. District M&E Coordination Committee (DMECC) should lead in the establishment of a single, harmonized MIS at the district level for easy access to data, rather than relying on individual sectors to provide data to pillar leads. This approach will enhance data consistency, comparability, and ease of analysis, leading to more informed decision-making and improved NRS implementation.
5. Develop clear coordination mechanisms and communication channels for complex and multisectoral pillars, such as Pillar 3. By streamlining coordination and communication, stakeholders can work more effectively together to achieve the desired outcomes of the NRS.

## Opportunities for Collaboration between National and District Pillar Leads

The development of the district National Resilience Strategy (NRS) M&E plans offers a valuable opportunity for national pillar leads to engage in discussions with district level pillar leads to ensure that targets are feasible, considering the period of implementation, frequency of activities, budgets, and target impact areas. This collaborative approach is essential for successful NRS implementation at the district level.

**Period of Implementation:** Discussion and agreement on the implementation period can ensure realistic and achievable timelines, considering seasonal variations, local contexts, and available resources. Aligning national and district level expectations for the implementation period can help prevent delays and ensure planned activities are completed on time.

**Frequency of Activities:** National and district level pillar leads should discuss the frequency of activities to ensure they are appropriate for the district's needs and capacities. This discussion will help set achievable targets, avoid overloading district-level stakeholders with too many activities, and ensure that activities are conducted at the right intervals for maximum impact.

**Budgets:** Engaging in discussions around budgets ensures that financial resources are effectively allocated and managed. By working together, national and district level pillar leads can identify potential funding gaps, explore opportunities for resource mobilization, and prioritize activities based on available resources. This collaboration can lead to more efficient use of funds and better alignment with NRS priorities.

**Target Impact Areas:** Discussing target impact areas will ensure that the NRS activities focus on areas with the greatest need and potential for positive impact. By identifying and prioritizing these areas, the NRS implementation can be more targeted and effective, leading to better outcomes in resilience-building.

## Aligning the National Resilience Strategy with Key Government Strategies: Fostering Synergy and Impact

While the NRS is being implemented, other national-level policies have emerged that also contribute to resilience building. One such policy is the Malawi 2063 (MW 2063)

agenda, which aims to create a prosperous, inclusive, and self-reliant Malawi by 2063.

To align the NRS with the MW 2063 agenda, district-level M&E plans should be robust enough to integrate the implementation of not only activities directly under the NRS implementation plan but also other government-led policy implementations or initiatives that contribute to resilience building. This integration will help to demonstrate how different outcomes result or contribute to resilience building or strengthening, making it easier to identify areas where policy interventions are effective or need to be adjusted.

For instance, if the NRS emphasizes the importance of building resilient infrastructure to withstand climate shocks, then district-level M&E plans can integrate the implementation of other policies or initiatives that aim to improve infrastructure resilience, such as the MW 2063 agenda's focus on improving transport infrastructure. By integrating these policies into the district-level M&E plans, it becomes possible to track progress and outcomes related to infrastructure resilience across different initiatives, making it easier to identify gaps, overlaps, and opportunities for synergy.

Similarly, the integration of policies related to livelihood diversification and food security can help to align the NRS with the MW 2063 agenda's focus on creating a prosperous and inclusive Malawi. District-level M&E plans can integrate the implementation of other policies or initiatives that aim to improve food security and livelihood diversification, such as the MW 2063 agenda's focus on increasing agricultural productivity and promoting agribusiness. By integrating these policies into the district-level M&E plans, it becomes possible to track progress and outcomes related to livelihood diversification and food security across different initiatives, making it easier to identify areas where policy interventions are effective or need to be adjusted.

## Conclusion

Piloting the National Resilience Strategy (NRS) in Zomba and Mangochi districts has provided valuable insights and lessons for future district-level NRS implementation. The development of M&E plans, with clear components and aligned with existing structures, has highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement, collaboration, and communication in ensuring the success of the NRS. Challenges faced during the pilot, including the commitment from M&E personnel, follow-up on assigned tasks, and orientation from

the national level, point to areas that require improvement to enhance overall NRS implementation.

Key recommendations for districts planning to implement the NRS include strengthening coordination of development partners, aligning projects and funding with NRS priorities, improving communication and commitment among stakeholders, establishing a harmonized MIS, and developing clear coordination mechanisms for complex pillars. By addressing these recommendations and applying the lessons learned from the pilot, future district-level NRS implementations can be more efficient, effective, and sustainable. Ultimately, this will contribute to building resilience against shocks and promoting inclusive growth, food security, and well-being for all Malawians.

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