



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

Mid-term Evaluation Report

The Family Strengthening Programme: SOS Children's Villages in Malawi Programme

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CCJPA	Community Child Justice Protection Act
CPC	Child Protection Committee
DRMC	Disaster Risk Management Committee
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSP	Family Support Strengthening
GKII	Group Key Informant Interview
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MSG	Mothers' Support Groups
MTE	Mid-term Evaluation
PTA	Parent-Teacher Associations
SBC	School Bursary Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOS	SOS Children's Village
ToR	Terms of Reference
UFA	Utilisation-Focused Approach
VIG	Vashi Impact Group
VCPC	Village Child Protection Committee
VSLA	Village Savings and Lending Associations
WFP	World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

SOS Children’s Villages Malawi is implementing the Family Strengthening Programme (FSP) in Ngabu, Chikwawa District (2022–2025), funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) Iceland. The programme supports 1,500 children and young people from 400 families, providing care, protection, and education while addressing risks of abandonment. The programme is implemented with financial support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), Iceland under a three-year framework agreement (2022) with SOS Iceland Chapter. The overall objective of the midterm evaluation (MTE) was to provide an independent review of the programme and provide key learning points that will be used by MFA and SOS Malawi and Iceland.

Methodology

The evaluation adopted a mixed-method approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, focusing on meeting the MTE objectives and programme indicators. A participatory approach was employed, engaging a broad range of stakeholders and beneficiaries to assess the programme’s impact and identify positive changes. Data was collected using key informant interviews, focus groups discussions, quantitative survey targeting beneficiaries and observations.

Findings

Relevance

The FSP aligns with various policies and strategies, including those of the Government of Malawi, SOS Malawi, and the Government of Iceland. The programme supports the government’s education and child protection priorities by promoting school enrolment and retention and addressing issues like child abuse and exploitation. It also aligns with Iceland’s international development strategy, focusing on poverty eradication, gender equality, and climate change. The programme contributes to the SDGs, including No Poverty (SDG 1), Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), and Climate Action (SDG 13). The FSP is designed to meet the needs of vulnerable households, particularly those with children at risk of losing parental care, offering support such as positive parenting training, education assistance, and livelihoods support. While the programme has been highly relevant to beneficiaries, with most services considered helpful, some unmet needs include a lack of furniture and resources in schools, insufficient educational infrastructure, and the need for support with examination fees and food. Additionally, emerging needs, such as those for Early Childhood Development and better school infrastructure, are beyond the scope of the current intervention.

Coherence

The evaluation highlights the strong synergies between the programme and other development initiatives in Ngabu, such as government efforts, other NGOs, and community-based structures, which enhance service delivery and support more beneficiaries. SOS works alongside organisations like the Lengwe National Park and CAMFED, ensuring complementary support without duplication. SOS Iceland plays a key role as an intermediary between SOS Malawi and the MFA, facilitating funding and communication, with both organisations sharing aligned values and principles that improve programme success. SOS Iceland also contributes 37% of the funding, and when Cyclone Freddy affected Ngabu, it quickly approved

additional support, allowing SOS Malawi to assist impacted families. The evaluation found that SOS Iceland's involvement positively contributed to the programme's implementation.

Effectiveness

Outcome 1: The programme has made notable progress in supporting vulnerable households toward self-reliance and reduced vulnerability through care, protection, and health services. As of the midterm, 16 out of 180 households were phased out for achieving self-reliance, and 72 out of 225 households became less vulnerable. However, external shocks like natural disasters continue to challenge these gains. The programme exceeded its target by training 320 caregivers in positive parenting, with 99.3% of respondents applying the knowledge to improve childcare and protection. The training was highly rated, though some participants expressed interest in additional training on adolescence and caregiver well-being. In terms of housing, the programme aimed to assist eight households, completing six homes by midterm. All surveyed households reported high satisfaction with their new homes, which significantly improved their welfare and allowed them to focus on other areas of development. A new cost-effective model has been proposed, where SOS Malawi provides materials, allowing beneficiaries to contribute to construction.

Outcome 2: The program has made substantial progress in increasing access to education for vulnerable children and young people, with enrolment rising from 296 at baseline to 969 at midterm, leaving just 31 more children needed to reach the 2025 target. The number of young people with employable skills also grew from 7 to 45, though the target of 100 may not be met due to a lack of qualified candidates. Additionally, two out of five planned girls and disability-friendly toilets were completed by midterm, though was halted due to a design change aimed at providing better privacy and facilities for girls. The construction of the facilities needs to be coupled with other interventions in order to facilitate access to education by children with disabilities. Currently, only a few children with disabilities are enrolled in school. To address this, the program should combine the construction of disability-friendly toilets with broader strategies to enhance educational access for these children.

Outcome 3: At mid-term, the programme had exceeded its targets for resilient livelihoods, training 322 families in strategies like VSLAs, crop husbandry, afforestation, and goat production. While training was highly valued, particularly in paravet management, gender differences in perceived usefulness were noted. Natural disasters, including Cyclone Freddy, hindered the effectiveness of crop and livestock support, but interventions like irrigation pumps improved food security and income for many families. The VSLA groups have seen strong participation, with 95.3% saving money, though many still need business capital and financial management training to sustain income-generating activities. The programme faces challenges in timely fund distribution, requiring further focus on business skills and clearer communication with stakeholders.

Outcome 4: As of June 2024, the programme has successfully trained two local community-based organizations (CBOs) in child protection, enhancing the capacity of Child Protection Committees (CPCs), CBOs, and Mothers' Support Groups (MSGs) to handle cases such as early marriages and child abuse. Despite successes, training durations were shorter than planned, leaving some gaps in knowledge, and there was a need for longer sessions and refresher courses. CBOs also require financial support to initiate income-generating activities to sustain their operations. The programme has strengthened child protection reporting mechanisms, with community members now better equipped to handle abuse cases, although they still seek more training in case management and police interactions. While most children

are aware of abuse and reporting mechanisms, few have directly reported cases, indicating room for improvement in awareness and accessibility.

Efficiency

The evaluation highlights the adequacy and availability of resources for the programme, including financial and human resources. The total budget of EUR 844,384.51 was 67% funded by a donor and 33% by SOS Iceland. By the mid-term, 69% of the funds had been received and 61% spent, with no significant impact from the depreciation of the Malawi Kwacha due to funds being held in foreign currency. Despite budget constraints, SOS Malawi has managed to implement activities without compromising quality, using cost-cutting measures. On human resources, while the team in Ngabu is adequate, some stakeholders noted that additional staff, especially at the community level, would improve efficiency. The programme's cost-effectiveness is enhanced by its community-based model, which is more affordable than institutional care, and by sharing costs with other programmes. Financial resources were disbursed timely, ensuring smooth implementation. In terms of reporting, SOS Malawi submits bi-annual reports, but they opt to submit quarterly reports for better tracking. A minor issue with the timing of quarterly financial reporting is being discussed to ensure accuracy while meeting deadlines.

Impact

The programme focuses on strengthening households, particularly those with children at risk of losing parental care or those who have already lost it. It aims to create a nurturing environment by improving family capacity, resulting in reduced child abuse, exploitation, and trafficking, with no new trafficking cases reported since the programme began. Additionally, households have reported better income generation, enabling them to meet essential needs like food. Parents and caregivers have received training on child safety and well-being, leading to improved child health, earlier clinic visits for pregnant women, and a decrease in child marriages and unplanned pregnancies. Significant changes have been observed in children's behaviour, with many who were previously out of school now re-enrolled. The programme also supports families with resources like goats and financial aid, which improve security and educational support. Vocational training has helped youth avoid harmful behaviours, while families affected by disasters like Cyclone Freddy have demonstrated resilience through VSLAs, contributing to long-term community stability and reducing reliance on external aid.

Sustainability

The evaluation highlights the sustainability of the programme's activities and outcomes after its completion. Institutional sustainability is ensured through the capacity-building of CBOs, which will continue supporting vulnerable households, particularly in child protection. Government stakeholders also expressed their commitment to sustaining support, with proper handovers and ongoing monitoring. Financial sustainability is promoted through economic interventions that equip households with skills and business opportunities to foster resilience and long-term growth, enabling them to meet their children's needs. Social sustainability is maintained by integrating the programme into existing community structures, respecting local norms, and addressing harmful gender practices, particularly affecting women and girls. Environmental sustainability is supported through training on disaster preparedness and promoting eco-friendly farming practices. However, certain interventions, such as support for VSLAs and business enterprises, will still require ongoing assistance from government departments, which may face resource constraints that could affect their ability to provide support after the programme ends.

Cross-cutting issues

The programme focuses on equity, gender equality, children's rights, and environmental sustainability. It ensures that vulnerable households benefit through a community-driven selection process, which has led to high satisfaction levels. Gender equality is promoted by providing equal access to education, vocational training, and financial support for both boys and girls, with particular attention to the needs of girls. The programme emphasizes children's rights, especially education and protection from early marriage, while improving parenting skills. It also supports environmental conservation through community training and tree planting, contributing to ecological balance and climate change mitigation.

Lessons Learnt and best practices

The Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) highlights several key lessons and best practices from the programme. Key lessons include the importance of empowering stakeholders to foster ownership and sustainability, using existing community structures to prevent duplication of efforts, and shifting community attitudes towards education to improve enrolment and retention. Additionally, providing adequate sanitation facilities has been essential in promoting school attendance, particularly for girls. Best practices identified include the successful policy of preventing the sale or slaughter of goats before reaching a set target, safeguarding houses built under the programme, involving stakeholders in project activities to enhance their capacity, and strengthening household resilience to reduce poverty-related school dropout and improve child well-being. These practices have contributed to the programme's overall success and sustainability.

Recommendations

The operational recommendations for the remaining implementation period are as follows:

- **Construction of houses:** The construction of houses is on hold until a new model is approved, where beneficiaries contribute to the building process. The MTE recommends speeding up the approval by demonstrating the model's benefits to SOS Iceland and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and facilitate the resumption construction.
- **Construction of disability-friendly toilets:** The design of girl-disability-friendly toilets must be completed, and the facilities should be constructed well before the end of the implementation period to avoid delays.
- **Enhance communication on benefits:** Clarify misconceptions regarding the support available to young people for vocational training, business start-up capital, and the differences in levels of support among beneficiaries from various funding sources. The staggered nature of start-up capital should also be communicated clearly to beneficiaries and stakeholders.
- **Provision of start-up capital to train young people:** Minimize the lag between training and the provision of start-up capital to ensure young people can start their businesses promptly. Encourage the use of locally available materials during this period.
- **Provide refresher courses on child protection:** Regular refresher courses should be held for CBOs, CPCs, and MSG members to ensure deeper knowledge retention in areas like case management, child protection policies, and coordination with police services.

The strategic recommendations for long-term planning, policy alignment, and systemic changes are as follows:

- **Develop interventions that enhance access to education for children with disabilities:** SOS Malawi should complement infrastructure improvements, such as disability-friendly toilets, with other support measures to ensure that children with disabilities can attend school.

- **Local advocacy for reducing child marriages and labour:** SOS Malawi should continue engaging traditional leaders and community gatekeepers to promote cultural shifts that protect children, including reducing child marriages and child labour.
- **Strengthening the resilience component:** Scale up livelihood resilience initiatives, such as VSLAs, crop and livestock support, and financial literacy training, while integrating climate-resilient agricultural practices and irrigation support to mitigate the impact of natural disasters.
- **Address gender disparities in education bursaries:** SOS Malawi should design interventions to address gender disparities in educational bursaries and vocational training, particularly by encouraging female enrolment in vocational programs and providing tailored support for girls and women.
- **Enhance Positive Parenting:** Expand positive parenting training to foster improved childcare practices, as early results indicate significant potential impact on the project's goals.
- **Mobilise more resources to strengthen the resilience of households:** SOS Malawi should mobilize additional resources and develop new interventions to support vulnerable families facing external shocks, building on lessons learned from the current phase.
- **Child Protection Coordination:** Strengthen the coordination of child protection initiatives by addressing overlaps in roles and responsibilities of community-based structures and enhancing partnerships with law enforcement to improve case management.
- **Strengthen financial sustainability for CBOs:** Provide financial support and training for CBOs to establish income-generating activities, such as a proposed maize mill business, to reduce dependence on external funding.
- **Facilitate comparisons between models/designs used under the programme:** SOS Malawi should conduct evaluations comparing new and existing models (e.g., housing models and disability-friendly toilet designs) to ensure adaptability and effectiveness in future programs.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview of the programme

SOS Children's Villages (SOS) in Malawi is implementing the Family Strengthening Programme (FSP) in Ngabu, Chikwaka district, in the Southern Region of Malawi with the ultimate goal of ensuring that children and young people who are deprived of parental care are given an opportunity to realise their goals in life. The programme is implemented with financial support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), Iceland under a three-year framework agreement (2022) with SOS Iceland Chapter. SOS Iceland implements programmes in different parts of the world, including Malawi, to provide homes and education to orphaned and abandoned children. Support is also extended to vulnerable families to curb the likelihood of children being abandoned and minimising their exposure to protection risk. The FSP in Malawi seeks to support 1,500 children and young people from 400 families. Implementation of the programme commenced in 2022 and is set to end in 2025. programme

The programme has four (4) outcomes as shown in Table 1.1. The programme seeks to ensure that children have access to care, protection and health services and also quality and inclusive education. This is aligned with Malawi's Child Care Protection and Justice Act 2010; African Children's Charter Article 20 and the Convention on the Rights of Children Article 27(2). The programme intends to build the capacity of the parents/caregivers and communities to provide for the children's needs and their protection. This is to be achieved through a package of interventions which included training of 300 caregivers in positive parenting, construction of low cost houses for eight (8) families in crisis, provision of education support to 1100 vulnerable children and young people, provision of improved girl and disability friendly structures in schools, capacity building of 300 families in resilient livelihood, capacity building of 6 village civil protection committees in environmental management and disaster preparedness, and provision of resilient crop varieties and provision of livestock to 75 families.

Table 1.1: Programme outcomes

Outcome	Outputs
Outcome 1: Vulnerable children and young people receive care, protection and health services.	Output 1.1: 300 families receive training in positive parenting
	Output 1.2: 8 Families have improved housing conditions
Outcome 2: Vulnerable children and young people have equal access to quality inclusive education	Output 2.1: 1100 vulnerable children and young people are enrolled in formal and informal education.
	Output 2.2: 5 Improved Girl and disability Friendly structures in supported schools
Outcome 3: Vulnerable families have improved resilience to economic and climatic shocks	Output 3.1: 300 Families receive training in resilient livelihood strategies
	Output 3.2: 75 Families receive Improved crops and livestock.
	Output 3.3: 180 families have income generating activities
Outcome 4: Communities actively protect the vulnerable children and young people.	Output 2.1: 2 Local community-based organisations trained in child protection
	Output 2.2: Reporting and responding mechanisms for child protection are established/strengthened in the communities.

The other planned interventions included mobilising extension support for 75 families, promotion of village savings and loan schemes, support for vocational skills training for 75 caregivers and training of two local structures in child rights, lobby and advocacy for support for children and young people living with disabilities and establishment of child protection and responding mechanisms, among others. The objective of these interventions is to strengthen families and community local structures so that they

effectively respond to the needs of vulnerable children. SOS Malawi has implemented a similar programme from 2016-2020 which was supported by NORAD. Thus, the current programme builds up on the successes and lesson learnt from the previous programme.

1.2. Programme context

More than half (51%) of Malawi's population is below the age of 18 years. This has social and economic consequences as it puts pressure on the country's education, healthcare and other infrastructure and services¹. The number of dependents relative to the labour force in the country and at the household level is thus high which creates a high economic burden². This means the ability or capacities of families to look after their children is low and this is worse in the rural communities where poverty levels are high. Chikwawa district, the target district, is one such area with one of the highest levels of poverty. The situation is made worse because 15% of children in the district are double orphans while 11% have lost one parent³.

Ngabu is reported to have limited infrastructure such as schools and health facilities which are unable to meet the needs of its population. Consequently, people travel 15 kilometres to access a health facility, children learn under trees due to few classrooms (classroom ratio is 107 students to 1 classroom) and the morbidity rate in the area is very high (50%)⁴. School dropouts and absenteeism are also high as children skip school to take up some responsibilities at home especially when their parents have fallen ill with no medical assistance in sight. This situation deprives children and young people of an opportunity to develop and grow surrounded by care, love and protection. The breakdown of the traditional safety nets of the extended family has increased the vulnerability of children and young people which further exposed them to exploitation and abuse. It is against the backdrop of this dire situation that SOS Malawi sought to implement this programme to ensure that children and young people deprived of parental care in the target communities have an equal chance to succeed in life.

1.3. Evaluation Purpose and Scope

The main purpose of the midterm evaluation was twofold: ensuring accountability and fostering organisational learning. Therefore, the overall objective of the midterm evaluation (MTE) was to provide an independent review of the programme and provide key learning points that will be used by MFA and SOS Malawi and Iceland. The outcomes of the evaluation will facilitate the review of the implementation strategies that have been employed since 2020. This will be done to improve the effectiveness and quality of programme outcomes. The specific objectives were to:

- Determine the extent to which the programme's interventions have effectively contributed to achieving the intended outcomes.
- Measure the adequacy and quality of inter-stakeholder and inter-agency coordination mechanisms put in place to maximise the effectiveness of interventions.

¹ Malawi FS Expansion Concept Note Final, August 2022.

² Bongaarts J. 2009. Human population growth and the demographic transition, Philosophical Transactions B.

³ UNICEF. 2018. Basic Education and Youth Development Sectoral and OR+V(Thematic) Report. <https://open.unicef.org/sites/transparency/files/2020-06/Malawi-TP4-2018.pdf>

⁴ SEP. 2017; UNICEF. 2018. 2018/19 Education Budget Brief. <https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org/esa/files/2019-04/UNICEF-Malawi-2018-Education-Budget-Brief.pdf>

- Assess the engagement of SOS Iceland and their additionality as a donor to the intervention beyond financing.
- Identify lessons learned, document good practices and generate knowledge to inform the refinement of the programme model and approach.
- Report on the level of achievement of targets for each indicator.
- Develop recommendations (strategic and operational) to improve the quality of implementation and the likelihood of achieving programme results.

2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1. Analytical framework

The evaluation was guided by an Evaluation Matrix (Annex 1) that was developed taking into consideration the questions set in the Terms of Reference for this evaluation. The questions were critically examined and subsequently used to develop the evaluation matrix to promote comprehension and facilitate the collection of adequate data to address the objectives of the MTE. These questions were further broken down into sub-questions to ultimately enable the development of leading questions in the interview guides. The broad and sub-questions were grouped following the OECD-DAC criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, which was adopted as the major analytical framework for this evaluation. Given that this was a mid-term evaluation (MTE), a light-touch analysis was applied to assess the impact domain, focusing on the programme's emerging impact. A seventh domain was added for cross-cutting issues, encompassing equity, gender, children's rights, and an additional focus on the environment. Through this framework, the evaluation provided actionable insights, highlighting lessons learnt, and offered recommendations to inform the remaining phase of the programme and future programming decisions for SOS and its donor partners.

The adopted analytical framework includes a gender and intersectional lens towards data collection and analysis. As such, we incorporated [Gender Analysis](#) and [Intersectionality](#) frameworks that mainly focus on gathering data related to gender mainstreaming, and gender transformative approaches and examining how intersecting identities, such as orphanhood, gender, age, disability, and ability shape people's experiences. Contribution Analysis was also incorporated to systematically and robustly examine the programme's role in impacting outcomes. This method enabled a systematic exploration of how the programme's interventions have thus far contributed to the observed results, considering the influence of external factors and stakeholder engagement. This approach also highlighted the contributions of various actors, such as community leaders and local authorities, in shaping the programme's effectiveness. The findings from this analysis offer valuable lessons for refining future programme designs and implementation strategies, ensuring more impactful and sustainable outcomes. To emphasise a participatory evaluation, the Utilisation-Focused Approach (UFA) was adopted, ensuring that the evaluation was crafted with end-users in mind, supporting its application in decision-making for implementing teams and target groups to strengthen their efforts.

2.2. Evaluation design

Data collection for the evaluation took place in Ngabu, within Chikwawa district, using a mixed-method approach. Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered to meet MTE objectives and address programme indicators comprehensively. The evaluation design prioritised capturing beneficiary perspectives, including children's voices, through ethical, competency-driven methods grounded in honesty, respect, non-discrimination, dignity, participation, inclusion, accessibility, transparency, and

accountability. These principles guided the evaluation team's adherence to safeguarding standards and a commitment to "do no harm" throughout the evaluation process.

Participatory and innovative approaches that promoted extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and beneficiaries including children was adopted. It was pertinent to reach out to a wide array of stakeholders and beneficiaries so that all the different components of the programme were sufficiently covered. By adopting a participatory approach, the MTE assessed the programme's level of achievement and the extent to which it brought positive changes and added value for the children, their parents and other relevant stakeholders. This participatory approach involved engaging stakeholders in identifying outcomes and analysing their significance, thereby providing insights into the programme's contributions to systemic change. Our analytical framework includes a gender and intersectional lens towards data collection and analysis. As such, the [Gender Analysis](#) and [Intersectionality](#) frameworks that mainly focused on gathering data related to gender mainstreaming, and gender transformative approaches and examining how intersecting identities, such as orphanhood, gender, age, disability, and ability shape people's experiences were incorporated.

Stakeholder consultations, including with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG)⁵, were integrated into the process to foster ownership and allow recommendations to be tailored to their needs. From the start, the evaluation ensured that key stakeholders were committed to utilising the evaluation findings to address potential gaps and better support vulnerable children and their communities. Key stakeholders were engaged using the UFAs in the following way:

- i. Conducting interviews with key personnel from MFA, SOS Malawi and implementing partners.
- ii. Collaborating with the ERG to co-design evaluation and propose an evaluation framework with pertinent questions.
- iii. Engaging in consultations with the stakeholders to foster ownership of the evaluation process and to jointly devise recommendations tailored to their specific needs and circumstances.
- iv. Engaging with stakeholders, giving them ownership over the evaluation process. This included engaging stakeholders in the design and dissemination of the tools and in the feedback sessions.

To effectively deliver the mid-term evaluation, the evaluation team adopted a blend of the following methodology comprising well-defined steps including desk research, data collection, data analysis and report writing including provision of recommendations for future programming were adopted. The evaluation was conducted in logical phases.

2.3. Data Collection Methods

2.3.1. Comprehensive Desk review

A comprehensive review of secondary data was conducted, drawing from a diverse set of existing sources including the annual and quarterly reports, monitoring reports, financial records, internal policy documents, and other programme documents to complement primary data findings. The initial review was conducted to inform the evaluation design and identify key issues related to the programme. This review provided a better understanding of the programme design, implementation strategies, target areas, beneficiary groups and anticipated outcomes. Further review provided historical context,

⁵ Comprised VIG, MFA and the SOS Children's Villages Programme team to guide and inform the evaluation process.

benchmarks, and quantitative metrics, leading to a retrospective analysis of the programme's progression and achievements. The desk review was broadened to include relevant policy and national reports that helped to develop a detailed understanding of the programme context and alignment with national priorities. See Annex 2 for the list of reviewed documents.

2.3.2. Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were held with diverse stakeholders, including MFA, SOS Malawi senior management staff, technical staff, and government officials. A total of 12 key informants were interviewed (Table 2.1). The key informant interviews collected information on the programme's achievements, challenges, and emerging impact. Discussions with key informants also provided insights into the utilisation and management of resources, focusing more specifically on resource adequacy for the remaining programme period. The other issue included the sustainability measures that are being instituted during programme implementation to ensure that outcomes continue beyond the duration of the programme. Key informant guides were developed to aid the discussions.

Table 2.1: Number of key informants interviewed during the data collection exercise

Group	Interview type	Target	Actual
SOS Executive Director	KII	1	1
MFA	KII	2	1
SOS Programme Staff	GKII	4	6
Government representatives	KII	2	2
Head teachers	KII	2	2
CBOs (changed to FGD)	KII	4	-
Total		16	12

2.3.3. Focus Group Discussions

A total of 19 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were convened as a means of providing a platform for direct engagement with children, parents, mothers' groups, teachers, community leaders and community-based organisations as groups in two project locations namely Mphenza and Mphungu (Table 2.2). Caregivers and children were drawn from those who did not participate in the quantitative survey. The information gathered from FGDs was used to determine the relevance of the programme to the needs of the target communities, effectiveness of the programme strategies, emerging impact, efficiency and sustainability of the programme outcomes. Approximately 8–10 participants comprised an FGD. Approximately 190 participants were reached through the FGDs. The FGDs were convened in spaces that were accessible and conducive for discussions. Discussion guides were developed to provide overall guidance on the issues to be discussed.

Table 2.2: Number of FGDs conducted during the data collection exercise

Stakeholder group	Target	Actual
Community-based organisations	2	2
Parents / caregivers	2	2
Community leaders	2	2
Journey mapping with children	2	2

Adolescent girls (10 – 17 years)	2	2
Adolescent boys (10 – 17 years)	2	2
Female teachers ⁶	2	1
Male teachers	2	2
Mothers' Groups	2	2
CPC	1	1
CBOs	-	1
Total	19	19

2.3.4. Observations

Field visits were made to some of the sites to determine the impact of the programme. Two beneficiaries were visited in their homes to see the houses that were built for them. One Village Savings and Lending Association (VSLA) member and one youth who was running a business were also visited in their places of operation. A disability-friendly toilet, the only one so far built under the programme was also toured. Where possible, photographs were taken and these form part of this report. Through this method, the evaluation team was able to validate information obtained through interviews and discussions, ensuring a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis.

2.3.5. Household and Child/Youth Questionnaire Survey

A quantitative survey was employed to collect data from both children beneficiaries and their caregivers. Two surveys were implemented both at the household level: the caregiver survey and the child/youth survey. In each sampled household, the caregiver (registered with the project) and one child or youth beneficiary (10-17 or 18-24 years) were interviewed. The main purpose of the caregiver survey was to collect household-level data to establish the extent to which the project improved the resilience of caregivers to economic and climatic shocks and their capacity to provide for the needs of children and to uphold child rights. Data collected from the child/youth survey helped ascertain the extent to which vulnerable children and young people are receiving care, protection, health support, and access to quality inclusive education. Both the caregiver and child/youth questionnaires also collected information on the child protection services and support available because of the programme interventions. Besides impact, the collected information collected helped to establish the relevance and effectiveness of programme interventions to complement qualitative data collected from key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Participation in the survey was contingent upon the caregiver providing informed and voluntary consent for themselves and the child. Two survey data collection tools were developed and administered by well-trained enumerators.

The sample for the surveys was obtained from 300 households and their caregivers directly benefiting from the programme and 1500 vulnerable children and young people from these households. Sampling is done at the household level. The statistically⁷ determined sample size of the evaluation was 169 households and 169 children/youth. Table 2.3 below shows that 183 caregivers (157F, 26M) and 174 children/youth (81F, 93M) were interviewed, more than the targeted sample.

⁶ There were no female teachers in one of the targeted schools.

⁷ Details on the computation of the sample size are contained in the inception report for the evaluation.

Table 2.3: Number of households and children interviewed per village

Villages	Household survey		Child survey	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Babton	20	11	18	10
Chabisala	23	13	23	13
Gonyo	20	11	19	11
Khundu	25	14	26	15
Mpheza	41	22	40	23
Mphungu	33	18	28	16
Piava 2	21	11	20	12
Total	183	100	174	100

2.4. Field Processes and Logistics

Primary qualitative data was collected by the Head of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) at VIG, with the assistance of three enumerators (2 female and 1 male). On the other hand, quantitative data was collected by four enumerators (2 female and 2 male) working under the supervision of the National Researcher and Senior Quantitative Researcher at VIG. Enumerators were recruited based on their ability to speak the local languages and prior experience in collecting data electronically. The enumerators and National Researcher were trained adequately before the data collection exercise. The training covered all aspects of fieldwork implementation including identification of selected households, questionnaire administration, ethical issues, interview techniques, quality control procedures, fieldwork tracking and communication, research ethics, and use of Kobotoolbox to collect data and ensuring adherence to research ethics. Role playing was done during training and issues with the survey forms were identified and addressed before the start of the fieldwork. A debriefing session was held with SOS Children’s Village Malawi after the conclusion of the data collection exercise to give feedback on the preliminary findings of the evaluation.

2.5. Quality Assurance

The evaluation team applied a comprehensive quality assurance approach throughout the evaluation to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the MTE. The five key principles guiding our quality assurance process were: 1) Output-based approach; 2) Programme Management; 3) Stakeholder Engagement; 4) Communication and Coordination; and 5) Engagement of Female Enumerators. Adopting an output-based approach ensured that each evaluation stage produced tangible outputs to maintain transparency and accountability. The evaluation was managed by a dedicated programme manager, supported by a detailed work plan. Stakeholder engagement was prioritized through an Evaluation Reference Group (ERG), ensuring effective communication, timely feedback, and minimized delays. Equal participation of female and male enumerators was emphasized to foster gender-sensitive, inclusive data collection, which improved engagement with diverse community members and enhanced credibility. Field team members underwent familiarization exercises to align understanding of the program, and regular supervision and quality checks ensured accuracy during data collection. A rigorous data validation process, including cross-checking from various sources, upheld data reliability. These measures strengthened the evaluation’s credibility and supported evidence-based decision-making.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

At all evaluation stages, the research team adhered to strict ethical procedures in gathering data from the stakeholders, ensuring the principles of do-no-harm and safeguarding using OECD/DAC Ethical Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance. In this regard, the SOS Code of Conduct was used, guidelines on child protection and gender equity and Iceland's Policy for Evaluations 2024-2028 as guiding pillars to inform the evaluations' ethical considerations. Consent was sought from all participants before their engagement to understand the purpose of the evaluation and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were explained how the data would be used and the issue of anonymity and confidentiality. They were told that the quotes from the data would only be used after their consent. Participants were allowed to ask questions and to withdraw from the process at any time without giving any reason. The evaluation team ensured confidentiality and data protection against any breach, reliability, and independence of the findings and ensured the broad participation of respondents. All electronic files were password-protected, with access restricted to authorised personnel only. Identifiable information was anonymised or pseudonymised whenever possible to safeguard the privacy of participants, ensuring that their identities cannot be linked to sensitive responses. This includes the use of pseudonyms for the beneficiaries whose stories and pictures have been included in this report.

2.7. Data Management and Analysis

A mixed-method approach was adopted to carry out the data analysis systematically. This process involved triangulating data from various sources to ensure the robustness and reliability of the findings. All recorded interviews were stored securely to avoid loss of data. Qualitative data was cleaned for translation, transcription and data analysis. The data was stored in a password-protected shared drive with clear file names, which only the research team has access to. The quantitative data was stored in Kobotoolbox and as an excel file to prevent data loss.

2.7.1. Quantitative analysis

The data analysis methodology blended quantitative approaches, optimising software tools tailored to each data type, such as Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Data was analysed using descriptive and correlational analysis. Descriptive statistics measures such as frequencies, percentages, and means were used to summarise and present the findings of key evaluation indicators. The results, whenever possible, were disaggregated by gender to bring out the dynamics introduced by existing gender disparities in the target society.

2.7.2. Qualitative analysis

Qualitative Analysis aimed at identifying emerging themes and patterns, which were then organised in a matrix format using the OECD DAC criteria, directly linked to the evaluation questions. The themes were then analysed using pre-selected themes using Nvivo and Dedoose software. Similar patterns were drawn from the data and were put together in emerging themes.

Prioritisation of data and quotes: The evaluation recognizes that creating a comprehensive report requires navigating the challenges of data inclusion, often limited by space constraints. To maintain the report's clarity and focus, prioritization of data was essential, highlighting relevant and impactful content while excluding less pertinent material. The data selected for the evaluation was chosen based on its direct relevance to the evaluation's objectives and themes, while adhering to quality and reliability standards and handling sensitive information ethically. Quotes were included to enhance the

understanding of the findings, particularly their impact on programme outcomes, and to capture diverse perspectives with clarity and resonance. Careful attribution and contextual framing ensured a balanced approach between inclusivity and relevance. They were also anonymised for both the name of the respondent and their organisation.

Value of singular quotes: In some instances, readers may notice that a single quote has been used to substantiate broader claims. This approach is intentional, as a well-chosen quote can capture the essence of a larger trend or perspective. By focusing on a singular, impactful statement, the evaluation was able to gain insights into the attitudes and motivations of a broader population. An isolated quote can also serve as an early indicator of emerging issues, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of on-the-ground realities and programme progress. Recognizing that truth is often subjective, a statement that may seem insignificant to some can hold profound meaning for others. When a quote resonates with a specific audience, it has the potential to become a rallying point, highlighting its importance for analysis and context. Such quotes can also guide future areas of inquiry and exploration.

Presentation of data: When presenting data, the evaluation prioritized preserving the authenticity of participants' voices. As a result, longer quotes were sometimes intentionally included instead of shorter excerpts. Using colloquial language within these quotes serves multiple valuable purposes in qualitative research, especially during interviews or when gathering qualitative data from participants. This approach ensures a genuine representation of participants' experiences, maintaining the richness of their expressions, providing cultural and contextual insights, and enhancing the relatability of the findings. It allows for a deeper understanding of perspectives while staying true to participants' unique ways of communicating their thoughts and experiences.

Depth of understanding: Lengthy quotes offered additional context and depth to participants' responses, enabling the evaluation to capture the nuances of their thoughts, emotions, and experiences more thoroughly. This approach led to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation. Moreover, longer quotes provided crucial context for participants' statements, helping to address questions like "What prompted the participant to say this?" or "What circumstances led to this response?" Such context proved invaluable for researchers when accurately interpreting the data. Additionally, some topics or experiences are inherently complex, requiring participants to elaborate at length. Long quotes allowed for this detailed expression, helping the researcher capture the multifaceted nature of their perspectives more effectively.

Preserving Authenticity: Colloquial language in quotes helped the evaluation to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices. It reflected how people naturally communicated in everyday conversations, which are often less formal and more reflective of their true thoughts and feelings. Presentation of colloquial language also helped researchers demonstrate rapport and build trust between researchers and participants.

2.8. Limitations

No major limitations were encountered during the evaluation. The primary challenge arose in some targeted households where certain children were unavailable due to school holidays, as they had travelled. To address this, the field teams were instructed to utilise the reserve sample and conduct interviews solely with children present in those households.

2.9. Risk Management

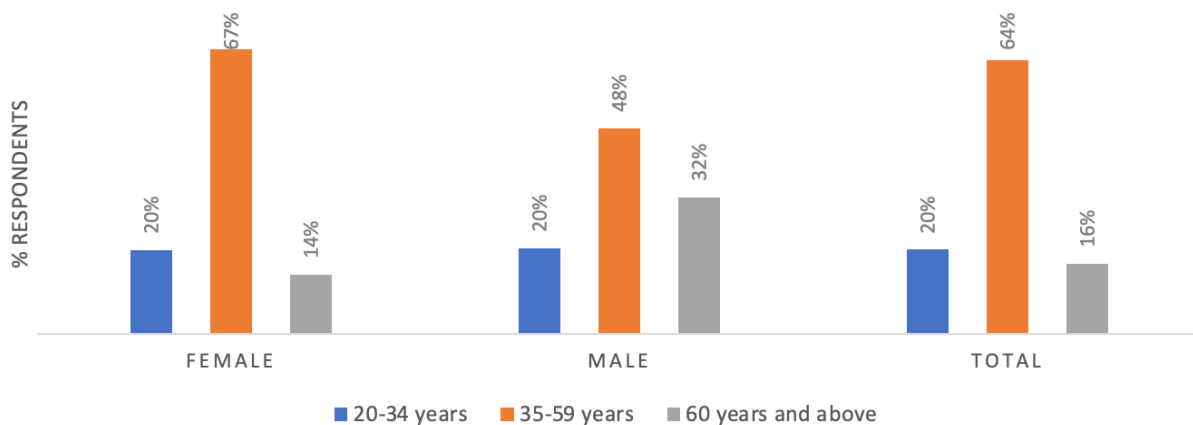
The evaluation considered possible risks that could be experienced during the evaluation together with the mitigation strategies, and these are detailed in a matrix in Annex 3.

3. SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

3.1. Household survey respondents

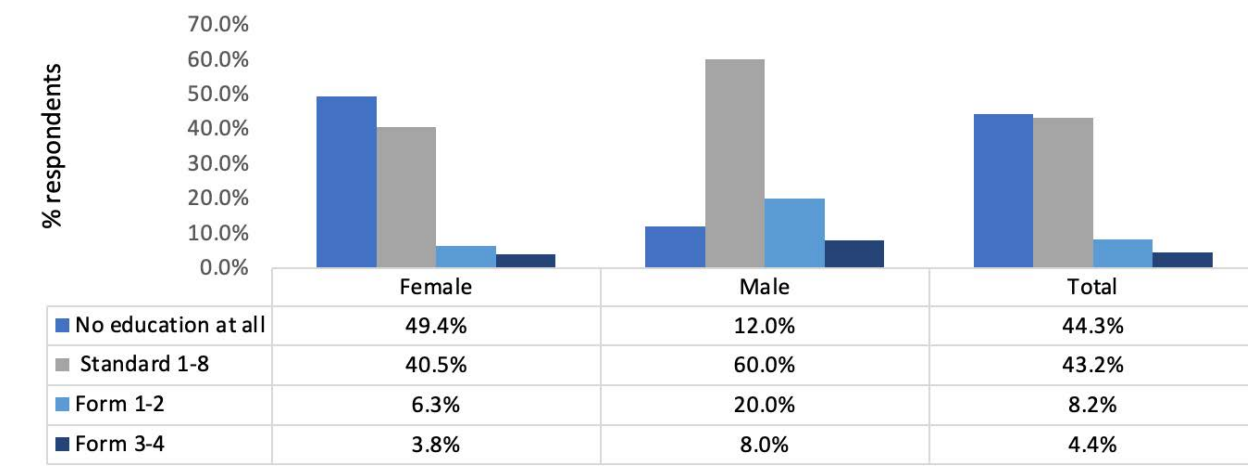
Most of the respondents for the household survey were female (86%) and 14% were male. About 70% of these were household heads while about 96% of those who were not, were spouses of the household heads. The average age of the respondents was 46% (45F, 53M). The age distribution of respondents shows that 64% were between the ages of 35-59 years while 19.7% were young parents in their youth (Figure 1). Elderly respondents comprised 16% of the household survey respondents. Comparison by gender shows that male respondents had a higher proportion of elderly respondents compared to their female counterparts.

Figure 1: Age distribution of respondents by gender



Most household survey respondents were married (51%), while 33% were widowed. Those divorced or separated were 15%, while only 1% were single. Education levels among the respondents is very low. A significant majority of respondents (44%) reported having no education at all, while 43% attained primary-level education (Standard 1-8). Only 8% and 4% reached secondary school, and completed Form 1-2 and Form 3-4, respectively. This suggests a concerning educational gap among the population surveyed. A higher proportion of female respondents (49.4%) compared to male respondents (12%) had not attained any education (Figure 2). Female respondents also had the lowest percentage of those who reached secondary school. The disparities in the education level between males and females demonstrate how women from the programme communities are disproportionately disadvantaged and hence more vulnerable.

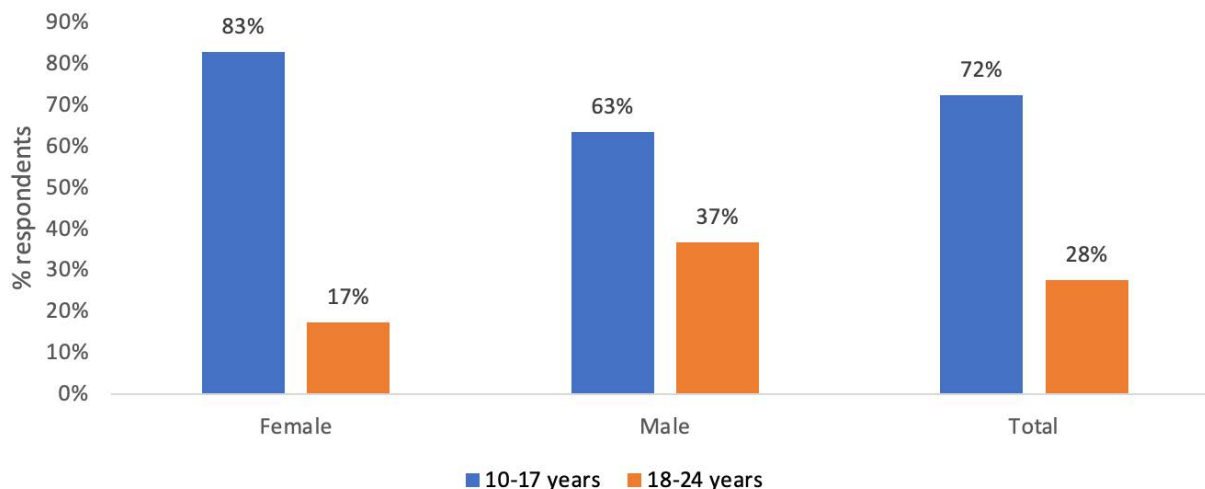
Figure 2: Respondents' level of education by gender



3.2. Child and Youth survey respondents

About 46.6% of the respondents to the child and youth survey were female and 53.4% were male. The mean age of children and youth respondents was 15 years (14F, 15M). Figure 3 shows that 72% of the respondents were between the ages of 10-17 years and 28% between the ages of 18-24 years. The 18-24 beneficiaries were youth who were supported with vocational skills training. Males had a higher proportion of youth between the ages of 18-24 compared to females. This resonates with the results in 5.1.1 of this report which show lower progression levels of females beyond primary school compared to male children.

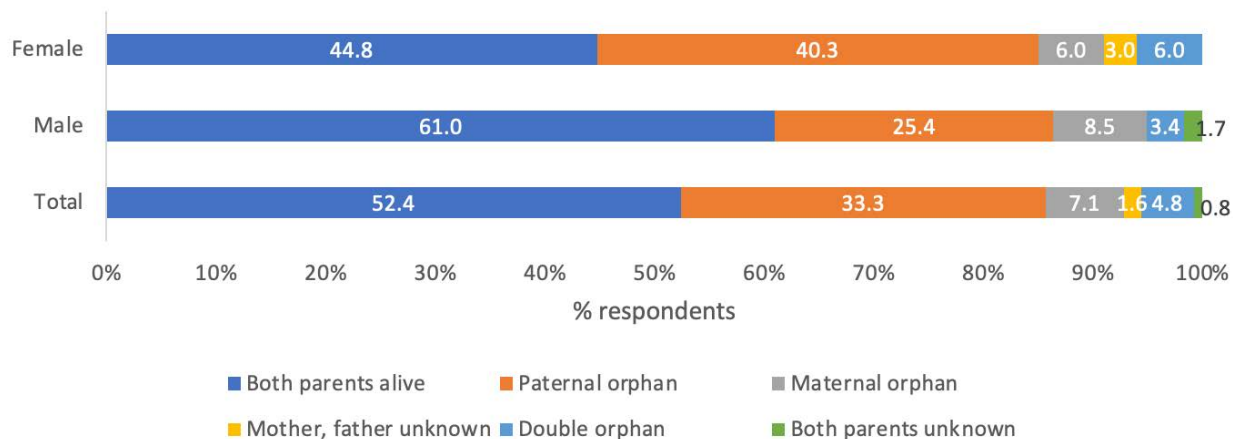
Figure 3: Age of child and youth survey respondents by gender



About 52.4% of the child beneficiaries 10-17 years who participated in the survey had both parents alive. However, a significant proportion were also orphaned. Some had lost their father (33%), mother (7.1%) or both parents (4.8%) (Figure 4). A small proportion of the children lived with their mother, but the father

was unknown while 0.8% did not know either of their parents. These results show the vulnerability of the children who were supported under the programme.

Figure 4: Parental status of children aged 10-17 years by gender



Access to education among children is notably high. Of the children aged 18 years and under who participated in the survey, 92.4% were enrolled in school, with enrolment rates slightly higher for females (93.1%) than for males (91.7%). Only 11 of the 144 children (18 years and below) surveyed (5 girls and 6 boys) were not attending school. The reasons cited for not attending school included financial barriers such as lack of money for fees and school materials, lack of food at home, and needing to work to support their families (mentioned by two boys). Other reasons included caregiving responsibilities at home, and two children mentioned feeling too old to return to school.

However, 29.3% (31.3%F, 27.3%M) of children enrolled in school reported missing school in the past term. Slightly more girls than boys reported missing school in the past term. The two major reasons for missing school are the lack of money to buy school materials and ill health (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Reasons for missing school in the past term before the survey

Reasons for missing school	Female	Male	Total
Lack of money for school materials	66.7	55.6	61.5
Too sick to attend school	42.9	50	46.2
Lack of food	9.5	5.6	7.7
Lack of school fees	11.1	0	5.1
Had to work	11.1	0	5.1
School is too far	0	5.6	2.6
Had to care for a family member	0	5.6	2.6

3.3. Household characteristics

About 57.4% of the households that were supported by SOS Malawi are female-headed while 42.6% are male-headed. This shows a deliberate effort made in the programme to target vulnerable households led

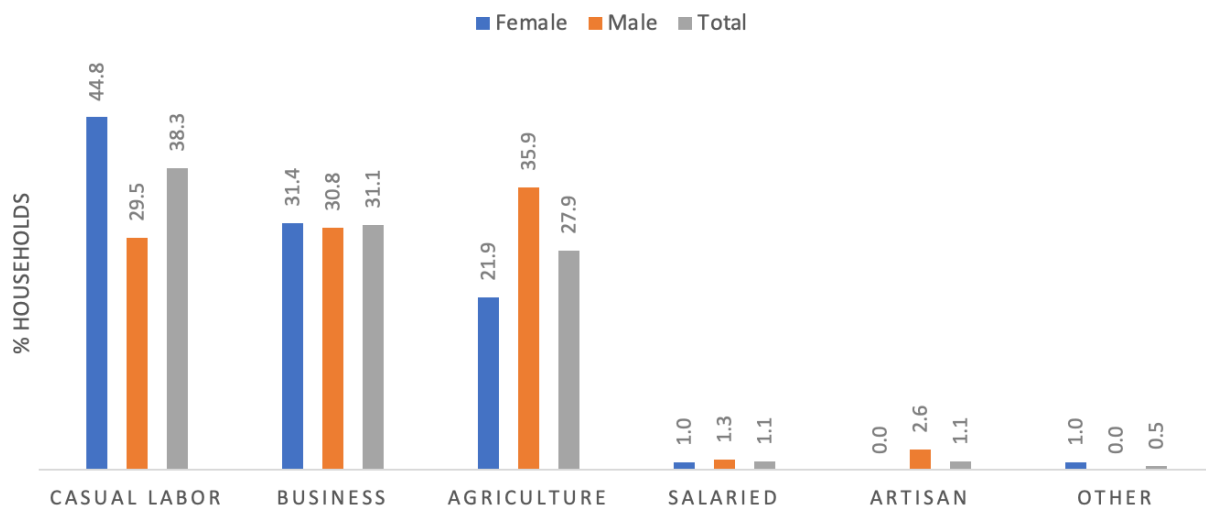
by women. The average size of the households that benefited from the programme was 5.4 with male-headed households having a higher average compared to females (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Average household size

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Female	105	5.1	1.9	0.2
Male	78	5.8	1.8	0.2
Overall	183	5.4	1.9	0.13

The main occupations for the chief wage earner in the surveyed households were casual labour, small business enterprises, mainly charcoal selling, and farming or agriculture (Figure 5). A negligible proportion of the beneficiary households had their chief wage earner working in a salaried job. More female-headed households, compared to males, are surviving mainly from casual labour to sustain their livelihood. Casual labour opportunities are not guaranteed and also tend to be seasonal. Households earning most of their income from casual labour were vulnerable and usually did not have savings to cushion in times of shock. There were no significant differences between female and male-headed households regarding their engagement in small business enterprises.

Figure 5: The main occupation of the chief wage earner in the household



Furthermore, about 18% (15.2%F, 21.8%M) of the beneficiary households had a member with some form of disability. The presence of disability was higher among male-headed households compared to female-headed households. Just over a quarter of the sampled households (25.7% (28.6%F, 21.8%M)) indicated having at least a member living with chronic illness. The average number of household members with chronic illness was 1.36 persons per household. The findings highlight vulnerabilities existing in households that were targeted under the programme. They also show that the programme was inclusive of these marginalised groups.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Relevance

Evaluation questions:

- To what extent are the objectives of the programme plan aligned with the SDGs, government of Malawi policies, priorities and plans, and government of Iceland policy for international development?
- To what extent are the objectives of the Joint Plan aligned with SOS Children’s Village policies and strategies?
- To what extent are the programme objectives consistent with the needs of beneficiaries?
- What are the gaps between the programme’s interventions and the priorities of national policies and plans?

4.1.1. Alignment with policies, priorities and plans of the Government of Malawi

The programme was found to be aligned with the policies, priorities and plans of the government. Education is one of the priorities of the government, and it strives to ensure that children are enrolled and retained in schools. The government encourages children who have dropped out of school to return and continue their education. The programme aligns with this goal by encouraging school enrolment and attendance. There is a strong connection between the programme’s efforts and the government’s initiatives. Before the program was implemented, many learners were out of school, but since the programme commenced focusing on the re-engagement of school dropouts, it has successfully helped many students return to school. According to some stakeholders, some of the children who had returned to school have dropped out again as they found it difficult to cope with the education demands. This does not negate the relevance of the programme as the importance of the initiative remains.

SOS Malawi has made concerted efforts to align its initiatives with government priorities to address the vulnerabilities that children face, including protection from various forms of abuse. The programme specifically targets issues like child exploitation, supporting government ministries in tackling child protection cases by providing resources, training, and coordination to improve response capabilities. This collaboration reinforces national efforts to protect children and ensure they grow up in safe, nurturing environments. Furthermore, SOS Malawi builds on the Government of Malawi's policy direction to provide community-rooted, family-based care for vulnerable children as outlined in the Community Child Justice Protection Act (CCJPA) 2010. By working in synergy with these national policies, SOS Malawi aims to create long-lasting, positive impacts for at-risk children, helping to break cycles of abuse and exploitation and setting a foundation for them to thrive.

Additionally, the programme supports the Malawi Government’s overarching development framework, the Malawi Growth Development Strategy (MGDS III) 2017-2022, which aims to drive national productivity, enhance resilience against economic and environmental shocks, and strengthen Malawi’s competitiveness on a global scale. Understanding the critical role of government alignment in achieving sustainable development, SOS Malawi has taken deliberate steps to ensure that its programmes are in

harmony with these objectives. To promote this strategic alignment, SOS Malawi appointed a representative from the Ministry responsible for childcare to its Board, ensuring that SOS Malawi's programmes meet government standards and reflect national priorities. SOS Malawi also maintains ongoing collaboration with government agencies, continually reviewing and adapting its programmes to align with emerging national goals. By actively engaging government officers and leveraging local and district-level structures, SOS Malawi fosters a cohesive approach to child protection and community development, creating a robust support network that benefits children, families, and the broader community.

4.1.2. Alignment of the FSP to the policies & strategies of SOS Malawi

SOS Malawi has a Strategic Plan covering 2023 – 2027 whose major thrust is to support children within their communities as opposed to institutional care. This is the core principle supported by the FSP in Ngabu. It is cost-effective to look after a child in the community as compared to looking after them in an institutional set-up. THE FSP model is not unique to Ngabu or Malawi. The context is prioritised when it comes to developing and implementing programmes within the local set-up. Therefore, SOS Malawi develops programmes that are in support of local ideologies and crafted around what is acceptable in each community. Therefore, the programme approach is the same as in other areas but what is different are the activities which are in line with the overall local context. It is also worth noting that

4.1.3. Alignment Government of Iceland (MFA) policy for international development

The programme is aligned to the 2024-2028 MFA Development strategy. In this strategy, poverty eradication, respect for human rights and improved living conditions are the overarching objectives of Iceland's international development cooperation. Human rights, gender equality and environmental and climate affairs are both specific and cross-cutting objectives that serve as pillars of all development cooperation efforts. The Government of Iceland prioritises the following four focus areas, which are accompanied by the 2024-2025 international development cooperation action plan.

- Human rights and gender equality – SDG 5 and 10
- Human capital and social infrastructure – SDG 3, 4 and 6
- Climate affairs and natural resources – SDG 7, 13, 14 and 15
- Humanitarian assistance and efforts towards stability and peace – SDG 2 and 16

“Iceland places human rights at the heart of its policy, puts gender equality and the rights of children at the forefront, and strives to support vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQI+ persons and people with disabilities.”

MFA Development Strategy 2024-2028

The four outcomes of the programme align well with the four areas of focus outlined above. The formal and informal education support, the support for business enterprises, the focus on children and climate change, and the promotion of gender equity by the programme directly align with MFA focus areas.

4.1.4. Alignment of the FSP to the broad developmental context

The programme was also found to be aligned to the broader development context. SOS is a signatory to the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care which they signed in 2019, and this promotes the caring of children within their communities. The programme also contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The programme aims to contribute to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on SDG 1: No Poverty by implementing targeted economic empowerment strategies for caregivers, thereby

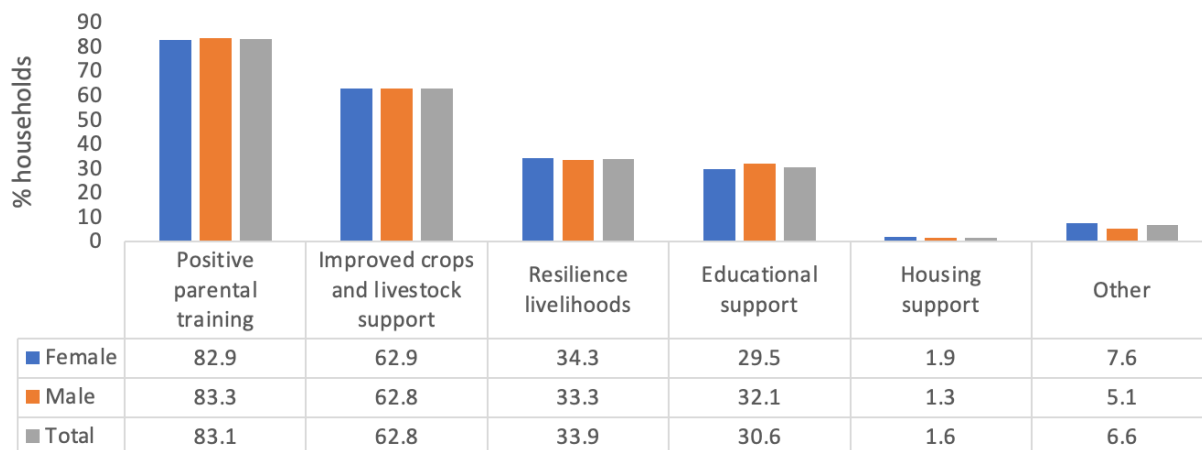
reducing their poverty levels. It also addresses SDG 4: Quality Education by increasing access to education facilities, providing learning materials, and supporting educational initiatives for children in need. To support SDG 5: Gender Equality, the programme will challenge and address unequal gender relations and their root causes throughout its interventions. Additionally, in alignment with SDG 13: Climate Action, the programme includes environmental restoration activities and resilience-building for families to help them adapt to climate change impacts.

4.1.5. Relevance to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries

4.1.5.1.1. Support received from the programme

The programme was conceptualised to directly address the needs of households and children within their households. To ensure the relevance of the programme at this programme, a needs assessment was conducted first. The programme is supposed to benefit children from vulnerable families who are either at risk of losing parental care or have already lost it, representing the poorest segment of the population. Indirectly, it will benefit a total of 15,000 school-going children and 500 households, creating a broader positive impact on the community. The outcomes of the assessment and the gains from the existing Family Strengthening Programme funded by Norad provided the premises upon which the programme was developed. Figure 6 shows the percentage of households that received different support services from SOS Children’s Village. The most common support received by most households was positive parental training (83.1%), followed by improved crops and livestock support (62.8%) and then resilience livelihoods (33.9%) and education support (30.6%). Only 1.6% received housing support. This was expected, given that the programme targeted only eight families with housing support. A few households (6.6%) also received humanitarian support in the form of food and other non-food items after Cyclone Freddy, while others indicated to have been trained or supported to start small businesses such as selling maize.

Figure 6: Access to SOS Children’s Village support by gender of household head

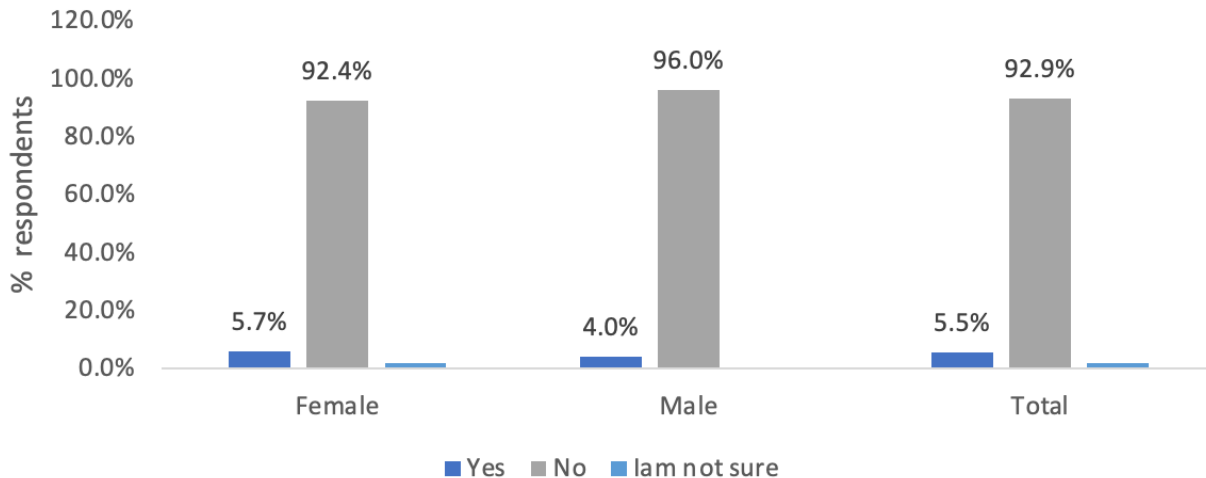


4.1.5.1.2. Relevance of the support received under the programme

Most respondents (92.9%) felt that the services provided under the FSP remained relevant (Figure 7). Only 5.5% (5.7%F, 4%M) reported otherwise. This shows that the programme was effectively designed to respond to the needs of the beneficiaries. The few that said some services were no longer relevant mentioned positive parenting training (3F), improved crops and livestock support (3F) and education

support: (1F). The fact that it is all female respondents, warrants an assessment to check if there are any structural challenges affecting the relevance of programme services in such households.

Figure 7: Are there services no longer relevant to you?



The relevance of the services provided under the programme was also confirmed by key informants and FGD participants as discussed below.

Promotion of positive parenting skills: It was established that the well-being of children was generally compromised by the lack of parenting skills. Caregivers confirmed that they had limited knowledge about the rights of children. As a result, they used to resort to corporal punishment as the major means of disciplining them. Child marriages were also acceptable to them. Therefore, children would drop out of school to get married, and they would have no problems with that. However, SOS Malawi has taught them positive parenting, and they now try to look after the children better. For instance, instead of administering corporal punishment, they now talk to the children and have realised that children are prepared to listen to their counsel. They also stopped child marriages and took children back to school at times with the assistance of mothers’ support groups (MSGs). Some children who had dropped out are now back in school. Some of those who had dropped out of school and are unable to enrol back are doing vocational training. Caregivers who participated in FGDs gave examples of such children whose prospects have become better due to programme efforts supporting informal education.

Changing attitudes towards education: In the Ngabu community, one of the biggest education-related challenges is that of changing people’s perceptions about education. When caregivers do not see education as important, it is difficult to get children to go to school regularly. It was obtained that prior to the implementation of the programme, some children would miss school, and caregivers would not bother them. Therefore, there was a need to encourage caregivers to support their children’s education in a more meaningful way. It is envisaged that if there is more awareness of the importance of education and the schools improve education provision, caregivers will probably be more willing to send their kids to school.

“The key issue is changing mindsets. Once the community fully embraces the value of education for all children, regardless of gender, support for learners will increase and help them succeed.”

Male, KII, Key stakeholder, Mphenza

“The main challenges many children faced included a lack of parental guidance on the importance of education, inadequate housing—especially for children who take care of each other—and a shortage of essential school supplies like exercise books and pencils. However, with the intervention of the SOS organisation, many of these issues have been addressed, and 47 children who had previously dropped out of school have returned to class”

FGD participant, Mwaiwathu CBO, Mphenza

Stakeholders in the education sector revealed that traditionally there has been a difference in how education for girls and boys is perceived, but this is changing. Due to the increased support that is also being rendered to girls, these have started performing well and progressing with their education.

“As someone who has been working in education for many years and is close to retirement, I see improvements. For instance, this year, we have sent both girls and boys to secondary schools, including national and district schools. This year alone, a girl from our school has been selected for a national secondary school, a boy is going to St. John Bosco, and another girl is going to a district school. Out of 52 learners, 38 have been selected for secondary education, showing significant progress.”

Male, KII, Key stakeholder, Mphenza

Lack of adequate and appropriate sanitation facilities in schools: Sanitation facilities are also a challenge especially for girls as most facilities do not offer adequate privacy. It was established that many girls opt to miss school during menstruation due to the lack of proper facilities. Linked to infrastructure is the lack of appropriate facilities for children with disabilities. The plight of children with disabilities is worse for girls who lack access to disability-friendly sanitation facilities that also offer adequate privacy. The programme is directly addressing this component by constructing disability-friendly toilets for girls at selected schools.

Strengthening resilience of households: The situation in Ngabu is marked by high poverty levels, significantly affecting the livelihoods of families and the future opportunities for their children. Many parents have limited income-generating options, and rely on IGAs such as charcoal-making, selling grass, or performing seasonal labour during the farming season. According to the Traditional Authority (TA) Ngabu and the Chikwawa Social Economic Profile (SEP) 2017, this area has some of the highest poverty rates in the region, with most families relying on subsistence farming. As a result, parents often struggle to cover school-related expenses, making education access challenging for many children. During the data collection phase, a visit to one local school revealed the story of a high-achieving girl who had excelled academically but came from a poor household. Despite being accepted into a girls’ secondary school, her parents could not afford the school fees, highlighting the barriers to education that high-performing children from impoverished families often face. Unfortunately, the girl’s village was outside the scope of the programme’s intervention, leaving her with few options to continue with her education.

The pervasive poverty in Ngabu also contributes to widespread violations of children’s rights, especially among girls who often view marriage as a potential escape from poverty. During FGDs, girls spoke openly about the emotional toll they feel when they miss school to care for their siblings while their parents take on menial jobs to earn a living. Although the girls understood the necessity of their parents working to

support the family, they expressed a desire for alternative solutions that would not require them to sacrifice their education. In this context, the programme's establishment of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and support for small enterprises offers a critical intervention. These initiatives provide families with new economic opportunities, helping to prevent and reduce the impacts of poverty on children's education and well-being, and creating a pathway for families to achieve greater financial stability.

"The main issues are violence, child labour, early marriages, and keeping children out of school to help with fieldwork or to take care of younger siblings. These problems stem from poverty and a lack of knowledge among parents about children's rights."

Female, FGD participant, Mwaiwathu CBO, Mphenza

The region has faced recurrent disasters, particularly heavy rainfall, almost annually for the past four years. These events underscore the importance of building resilience among local families, which is a key objective of the programme. By focusing on resilience-building, the programme aims to strengthen families, so they are better equipped to withstand future challenges by the end of its implementation. One central initiative involves tree planting at both community and individual levels, a strategy designed to help restore the environment, reduce soil erosion, and mitigate the impacts of floods.

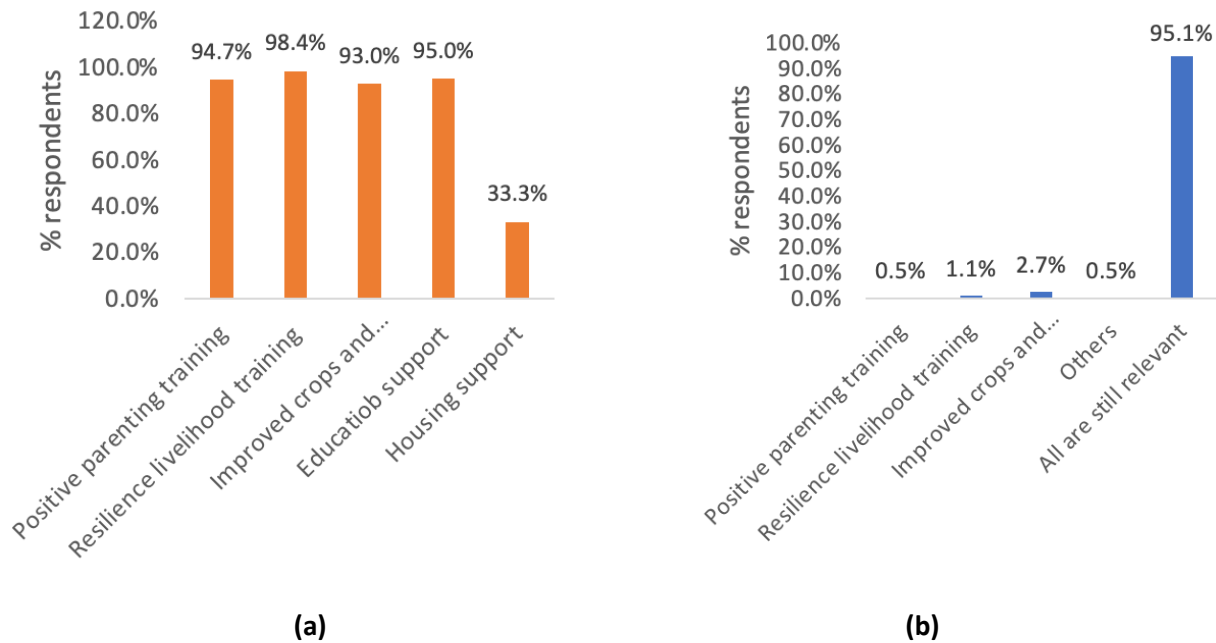
Strengthening community-based structures: In addition to these efforts, SOS Malawi has also aligned with and supported a government-led initiative, the Disaster Risk Management Committees (DRMC), which operates at both village and community levels. Although the DRMC structure was not introduced by SOS Malawi, it plays a crucial role in enforcing environmental management practices such as preventing deforestation and promoting resilient construction practices to minimise disaster risks. This system was updated in 2024, with the former Civil Protection Committees being restructured into Disaster Risk Management Committees at district and area levels, reflecting the latest policies and priorities. By working alongside these government initiatives, SOS Malawi helps ensure that local families not only receive support for immediate needs but also gain access to sustainable practices and resources that build long-term resilience against environmental threats.

Provision of quality housing - The provision of houses to vulnerable households was found to be relevant as the households were living in very poor quality and unsafe houses.

4.1.5.1.3. Most and least helpful (relevant) services

Results in Figure 8 show the services rated as most useful and least useful by beneficiaries. Services rated most useful are resilience livelihood training (98.4%), education support (95%), positive parenting (94.7%), improved crops and livestock support (93%) and housing support (33.3%). Of the three households that benefited from housing support - only one indicated that the support was most helpful. Survey participants were asked about the least helpful (least relevant) services. Results show that most survey participants (95.1%) found all the services relevant. Only 2.7% found the improved crop and livestock support the least helpful.

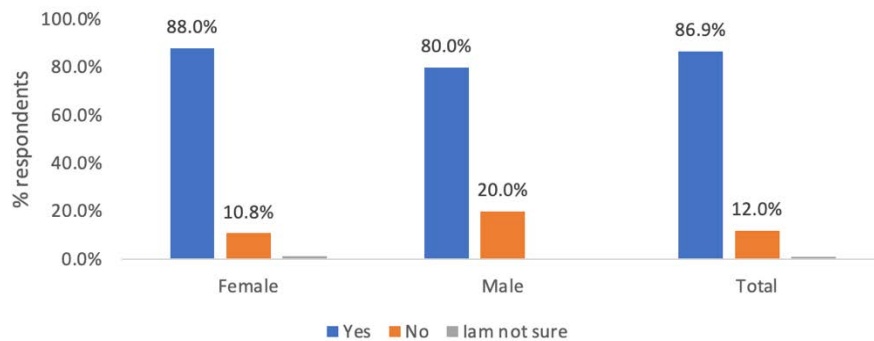
Figure 8: Which services did you find most helpful (a) and least helpful (b)



4.1.5.1.4. Changes in beneficiary needs

The evaluation sought to determine whether the beneficiary needs were still relevant as was determined during the Needs Assessment. A significant 87% of respondents (88%F, 80%M) reported that their needs and circumstances had changed over the past six months, suggesting evolving challenges within beneficiary households (Figure 9). The trend is the same for both females and males. This response underscores the vulnerability of these households and the diverse range of challenges they encounter. This was confirmed by key informants from SOS Malawi who felt that the needs have not necessarily changed but more needs have become more apparent. For instance, the need for examination fees has become more apparent during the implementation of the programme but this does not necessarily mean that school fees support ceases to be relevant. It is possible that survey participants responded to this question considering their met and unmet needs.

Figure 9: Have your needs changed in the past 6 months before the survey



4.1.5.1.5. Unmet needs

Although the programme was found to be directly meeting the needs of households, other needs were cited as being unmet. The evaluation acknowledges that there are households whose capacity to take care of children is improving, however, some still need more time and support to adequately cater for children's needs. Gaps were noted in the following areas:

Lack of furniture and teaching and learning resources: Many schools do not have necessities like proper desks and chairs, which force students to sit on the floor. This uncomfortable and inadequate seating arrangement can hinder their ability to focus and learn effectively. Another major challenge is the shortage of educational materials. Schools often struggle with insufficient textbooks and learning resources. Although there is some government support through the School Improvement Program, the allocated funds are frequently inadequate to meet all the needs of the students and the school. Improving furniture, increasing learning materials, and maintaining school infrastructure could greatly enhance student engagement and retention. There are several areas where additional support could be useful. For instance, providing textbooks, school uniforms, and other necessary materials would be beneficial. Although government policy dictates that students should not be sent home for lacking a uniform, it is still important for families to be encouraged to obtain them.

Lack of infrastructure in schools: One significant problem is the lack of infrastructure. Enrolment in schools is very high but classrooms are very few to accommodate all learners. Statistics in Ngabu show that 12,620 learners learn in 117 classrooms (SEP, 2017) with the resultant ratio of 107 learners to 1 classroom. The overall condition of school buildings is often poor, which negatively affects the learning environment. Proper maintenance and improvement of school infrastructure are crucial to providing a conducive learning atmosphere. Some learners therefore learn under trees. Sanitation facilities are also a challenge especially for girls as most facilities do not offer adequate privacy. Linked to infrastructure is the lack of appropriate facilities for children with disabilities. The plight of children with disabilities is worse for girls who lack access to disability-friendly sanitation facilities that also offer adequate privacy. The programme is directly addressing this component by constructing disability-friendly toilets for girls at selected schools.

Examination fees: In terms of education assistance, there is a need to assist vulnerable children with examination fees. Some get to repeat grades due to a lack of examination fees. Currently, examination fees are approximately MKW 1,000 but most families hardly have one child sitting for examinations at any given point in time.

“As I mentioned, many children can't sit for exams due to a lack of fees. Currently, one exam costs about 1,000 Malawian Kwacha. If you have four children, that's 4,000 Kwacha just for exams, plus 4,500 for food, making it very difficult. Any help in this area would be beneficial.”

Female, FGD participant, Caregivers, Mphungu

Food: Food was said to be a major concern in Ngadu because of the recurrent droughts and other natural disasters. Nearly three-quarters of the students arrive at school on an empty stomach, and there are times when the food from the World Food Programme (WFP) is delayed. It was established from FGDs with children that some students run away from school when food is not served on time. This was in line with

sentiments expressed by some of the key informants that provision of food by WFP was complementing the efforts of the programme in promoting school attendance. Caregivers also concurred that food was indeed a challenge. They are forced to do menial jobs so that they can earn income and buy food. This disadvantages girls who have to miss school baby-sitting their younger siblings. Due to hunger, some girls are getting into early marriages.

“We need to eat before going to school because we can’t attend school if we don’t have food.”

Male, FGD participant, Adolescent boys, Mphungu

“The main issue is food. If we have food, our education and security will improve, and things will be easier than they are now.”

Male, FGD participant, Adolescent boys, Mphungu

The needs are varied, and the magnitude is big, and all cannot be covered by the FSP Iceland funding. Students who excel in schools are in the programme, but they come from villages that are not within the programme areas, cannot receive further educational assistance to further their education.

As mentioned earlier, according to SOS Malawi, the needs have not changed but other needy areas have been unveiled during the implementation phase. These emerging needs cannot be addressed as they are mainly outside the scope of this intervention. The available resources are also meant to cover the current programme activities. In terms of education, SOS Malawi has noted that the need is bigger e.g. the need for Early Childhood Development (ECD), adult literacy, and infrastructure to cater for long distances.

4.2. Coherence/ Complementarity

Evaluation questions:

- To what extent are the synergies from different development efforts in the respective sectors and in the region ensured? Is there consultation between technical and financial partners?
- To what extent has the partnership with SOS Malawi, Iceland been successful, and what are the challenges?
- To what extent has the programme contributed to strengthening the interventions and actions on the ground of stakeholders at the prefectural level in terms of prevention and care for children and young people who are victims of sexual exploitation?
- To what extent has the joint program reached groups and/ or individuals not previously covered or sufficiently covered?

4.2.1. Synergies/complementarity with other development initiatives

The evaluation determined that the programme was complementing the efforts of other development interventions in the Ngabu community. The complementary efforts of various organisations and structures facilitate the reach of more beneficiaries and, at the same time, enhance the effectiveness of the services rendered to the target groups. Foremost, the programme complements government efforts in strengthening community-based structures. According to one government stakeholder, they were involved in various activities implemented by the programme. This includes identifying beneficiaries and conducting some of the training. The government officials work together with local leaders, community

members, and community-based structures to monitor the contractors of houses to ensure the programme stays on track. Business training was conducted jointly with government officials.

“Although we were already working on Village Savings and Loans (VSLs) independently, SOS’s involvement was crucial to addressing remaining needs. With only two officers, including myself, we couldn’t cover every community group, highlighting the need for additional support like CPS to extend our reach. The Department trained 6 VSL Agents who in turn train the VSLA members.”

Male, KII, Key stakeholder

“For business management, I’ve conducted three trainings. This time, I trained community members directly rather than through village agents. Given the large area, I conducted these trainings in phases, including a refresher course.”

Male, KII, Key stakeholder

The programme also complements the efforts of other non-governmental organisations in providing support to vulnerable houses and children within them. It was established that there is another organisation involved in supporting animal production activities, but their approach is different. While SOS provides support directly to individual households, this other organisation, known as the Lengwe National Park, supports community members by providing livestock to groups, e.g., a group of households. This method contrasts with SOS Malawi’s household-focused approach. Therefore, there is no significant duplication of efforts in the household economic empowerment components, as each organisation has its approach. On the contrary, additional support received from one organisation such as training is bound to be beneficial to both organisations.

The other organisation working in the education sector in Ngabu is the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED). CAMFED provides education support to girls. Hence, there is no overlap or duplication. School authorities mentioned that they keep records of children who benefit from different organisations so that there is no duplication. SOS and other organisations such as CAMFED complement the efforts of the government to ensure enrolment, retention and progression of children at different educational levels. Synergies were also noted between the FSP programme and the school feeding programme being implemented by the WFP. Whereas the school feeding programme addressed the critical aspect of day-time hunger, it is also a strong incentive for children to attend school. This complements the efforts of SOS in promoting school enrolment and attendance.

Interviews with various key informants revealed that government efforts in the different aspects of childcare and support are limited. This is not limited to the education sector but even to the implementation of social protection programmes targeting vulnerable households. Current government social protection programmes, especially those targeting households /families with vulnerable children are not comprehensive enough to take into account various needs caregivers have to fully support their children. Government officials in Ngabu expressed their gratitude to SOS for implementing the FSP as it enabled them to accomplish their mandate.

“There is a good working relationship between SOS and government officers, and we are informed and involved in the activities within the community.”

Male, KII, Key Stakeholder

SOS also works with community-based structures in delivering the programme. Due to their presence at the community level, the structures are better placed to interact with households and children. Some of these structures already have the mandate of promoting the rights of children, e.g., Child Protection Committees, Mother Support Groups and traditional leaders.

“We work hand in hand with SOS, mainly in monitoring children. We ensure that children who are not attending school start going, and those who refuse face consequences until they comply. Children who dropped out of school long ago are enrolled in vocational training schools. When SOS builds houses for vulnerable families, we make sure that no construction materials are stolen. They also help in restoring the environment by planting trees. We have also banned initiation ceremonies during school time and restricted other harmful traditions.”

Male, FGD participant, Traditional Leaders

The evaluation highlighted the presence of numerous community-based structures tasked with supporting children and their families but noted that a lack of role clarity among these groups often leads to overlap and tension. SOS strategically chose to partner with Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), as they encompass representatives from other local structures. This approach maximises the impact of training provided to CBOs, as knowledge and skills can be effectively shared with other structures through the representatives within the CBO. Furthermore, this setup allows issues faced by other groups to be communicated to the CBO, fostering a more cohesive support network.

However, the Village Development Committee (VDC) holds a key position as the apex structure within the community, underscoring the importance of engaging with it for broader community alignment. Concurrently, the Child Protection Committees hold a specific mandate to advance children’s welfare. Other structures have a role to play regarding children’s welfare. SOS’s engagement with CBOs is essential, but there is also a need to approach these relationships carefully, as power struggles exist among these different groups. SOS must remain mindful not to exacerbate existing power imbalances or get entangled in these conflicts, ensuring its work supports child welfare without contributing to local tensions.

4.2.2. Partnership between SOS Malawi and Iceland

The FSP is implemented through a partnership between SOS Malawi and SOS Iceland with funding from the MFA. The roles and responsibilities between the two organisations are distinct and elaborated in the Partnership Agreement. SOS Iceland acts as an intermediary between SOS Malawi and the MFA and conducts the overall administration of the programme. Foremost, SOS Iceland is the legal contract holder with the MFA, making the organisation accountable for the proper utilisation of resources and reporting to the MFA. Therefore, the organisation provides overall guidance to SOS Malawi on both technical and administrative issues and this role was appreciated by the latter. In addition to the scheduled meetings, ad hoc meetings can be requested by either of the organisations whenever need arises. Both narrative and financial reports are edited by SOS Iceland before they are submitted to MFA for quality control purposes. This also enables SOS Iceland to ensure that there is compliance with all reporting requirements.

The MTE examined the efficacy of this intermediary role played by SOS Iceland and determined that it was facilitative in nature. Foremost, it was noted that the two organisations share the same vision, mission and guiding principles and are bound by the SOS KDI International statutes, objectives and policy framework. This not only contributes to the standardisation of service delivery under programmes such

as the FSP in Ngabu but also enhances the success rate of such interventions i.e., it is relatively easy for SOS Iceland to appreciate and support SOS Malawi because of the shared values and principles. Due to this alignment in the aspirations of the two organisations, SOS Malawi has not faced difficulties in relating to SOS Iceland. According to most of the project team members in Malawi, SOS Iceland is “very supportive and always responds on time” as they readily offer technical assistance and guidance whenever required.

Further to acting as an intermediary between SOS Malawi and the MFA, SOS Iceland is also a donor under the programme. The MFA provided 67% of the requested financial support and 37% was covered by SOS Iceland (refer to the Efficiency chapter, section 4.4.1). This has enabled SOS Malawi to cater for beneficiaries and needs that could have been achieved with funding from the MFA only. When Ngabu TA was affected by Cyclone Freddy, SOS Malawi successfully requested for assistance from SOS Iceland. It was understood that the funds were swiftly approved and disbursed, enabling SOS Malawi to assist vulnerable families whose lives had been seriously affected by the cyclone. What was applauded the most was the promptness of the response from SOS Iceland as it enabled households to stabilise and commence the recovery efforts. In summary, the evaluation noted that the roles played by SOS Iceland have contributed positively to the implementation of the FSP. Based on this, SOS Malawi appreciates SOS Iceland as a reliable and supportive partner due to their flexible and consistent support. This flexibility allows for more effective implementation of the FSP programme, ensuring that the needs of the beneficiaries are met in a comprehensive and responsive manner.

4.3. Effectiveness

Evaluation questions:

- Were the planned outputs and outcomes achieved?
- What were the major that influenced the achievement of these outcomes?
- What were the major factors or challenges that prevented or made it difficult to achieve these results?
- What are the unmet needs, particularly among the most vulnerable adolescents?

4.3.1. Progress towards the attainment of outputs and outcomes

Outcome 1: Vulnerable children and young people receive care, protection and health services

Findings show that there is progress towards the set targets of households that have been made self-reliant and less vulnerable due to the care, protection and health support services, although more efforts need to be made in the remaining period of the programme implementation. Monitoring data shows that 16 out of the 180 households had been phased out due to becoming self-reliant. Furthermore, 72 out of the 225 households had become less vulnerable as compared to the time they were enrolled under the programme. At baseline, both values were at 0. Self-reliance was said to be hampered by external shocks such as natural disasters that reverse the gains that will have been made.

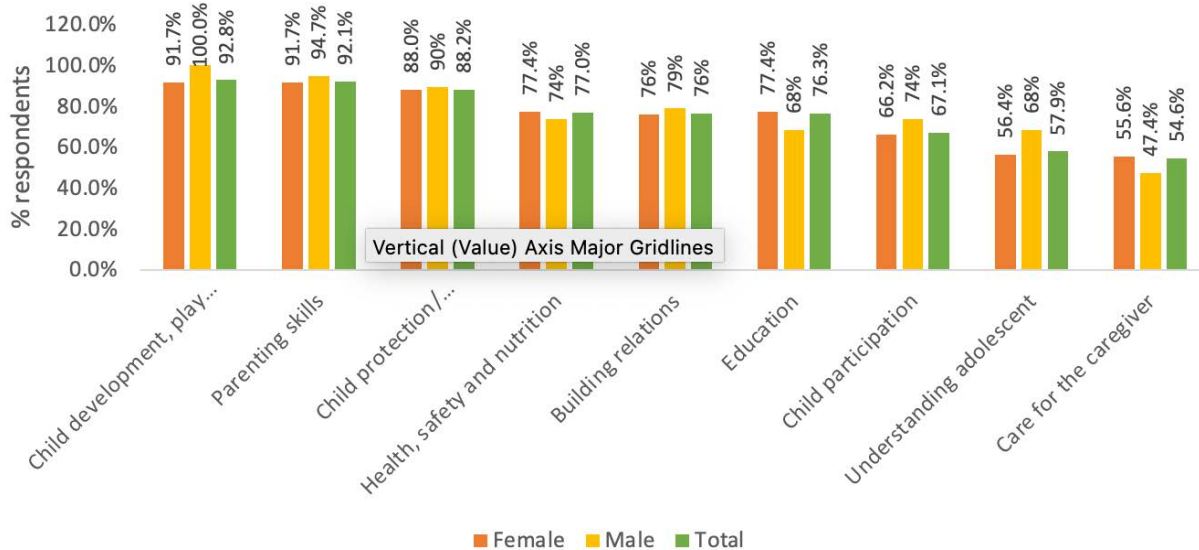
Output 1.1: 300 families receive training in positive parenting

Type of positive parenting received

Training was provided to caregivers on parental skills. The study determined that the target for this output was surpassed, as 320 beneficiaries had been trained instead of 300 as of the end of June 2024. Among the topics that were covered during training, child development, play and stimulation was the most

commonly cited training (91.7%) (Figure 10). This was followed by parenting skills (92.1%) and child protection and safeguarding (88.2%). The other training that was mentioned was that of teaching children to be prayerful.

Figure 10: Type of positive parental training received by parents/caregivers



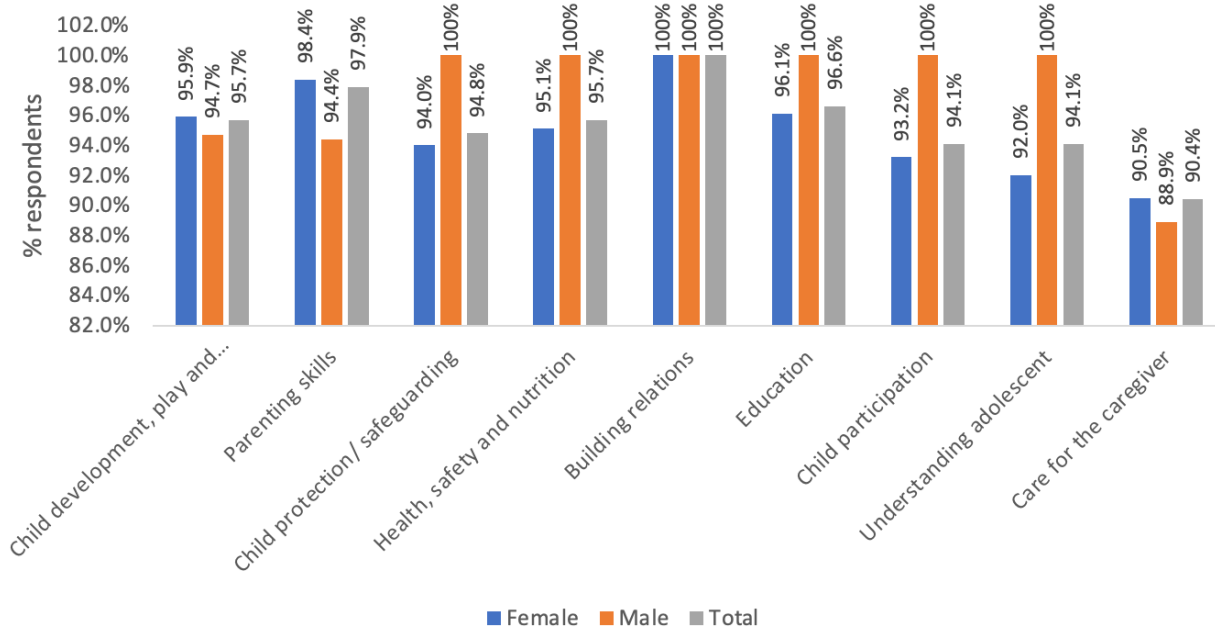
Usefulness of positive parental training

The respondents were asked about the usefulness of the training and results are presented in Figure 11. All the males found the training on child protection/safeguarding, health, safety and nutrition, building relations, education, child participation and understanding adolescence to be useful. On the other hand, all the females found the training on building relations to be useful. It was obtained that training in parenting skills was useful and important because it has improved knowledge of proper child parenting and child rights. The training built their understanding of the importance of child education and child protection especially from abuse. Parents now know how to properly care and give guidance to their children, and some said the training improved their lives especially their living at home.

“As a single mother, I am now able to raise my children without difficulties.”
Female Respondent, Parent Survey

They now believe that their children will grow to be independent and responsible adults because of the support. Parents have also now developed better ways of disciplining their children.

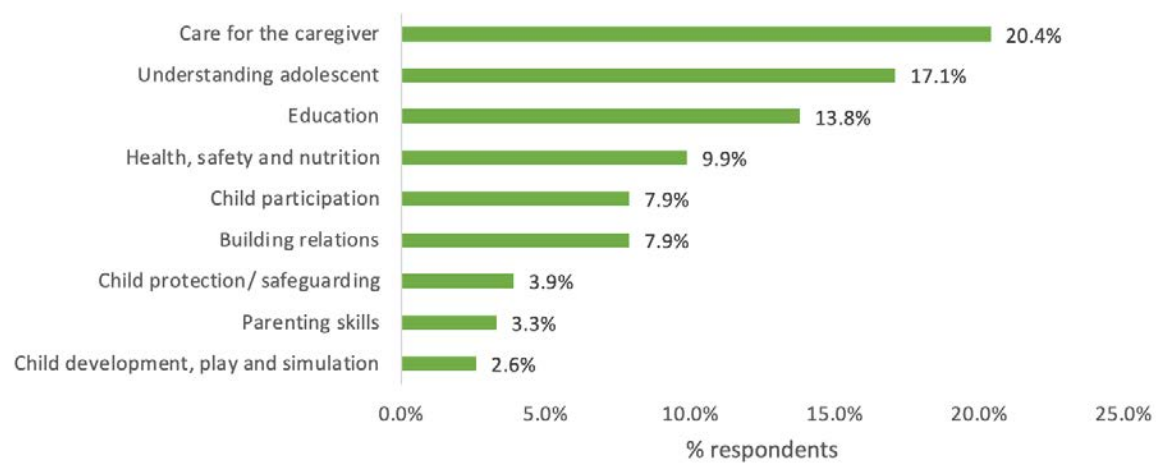
Figure 11: Most useful positive parental training by gender of the respondent



Only 5.4% (8 parents) of those who received training in positive parenting felt that some of the training **was least useful**. They mentioned the following topics as least useful; understanding adolescence, care for the caregiver, parental skills, child protection and safeguarding, education, health, safety and nutrition (9.9%), and child development, play and simulation. Two respondents felt they still needed more knowledge on understanding adolescence, while another felt that their child falling pregnant before marriage meant they failed.

Respondents were asked if there was any other training in positive parenting that they did not receive but would have wanted to receive. The most cited training was care for the caregiver (20.4%), understanding adolescents (17.1%), education (13.8%) and health safety and nutrition (9.9%) (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Other training that caregivers would want to receive



Quality of training

Respondents rated the quality of training on positive parenting that they received and 77% was very good. (Table 4.1). It should be noted that 21.7% felt that the quality of training was good. Similar sentiments were obtained from FGDs with caregivers where data shows that most of the households were happy with the quality of training.

Table 4.1: Rating of the quality of training on positive parenting that you received

	Rating of the quality of training on positive parenting that you received		
	Satisfactory (%)	Good (%)	Very good (%)
Male	0	26.3	73.7
Female	1.5	21.1	77.4
Total	1.3	21.7	77

Ability to use acquired positive parenting knowledge and skills

Every respondent said they managed to utilise the acquired knowledge. About 99.3% indicated that the positive parenting training they received enabled them to provide better care, protection and health services to their children. 0.7% said they were not sure, and this was a female respondent. Caregivers said that they had learnt how to handle errant behaviour.

“Previously, when our children misbehaved, we would beat them with sticks. But with SOS, we have learned that disciplining a child doesn't require physical punishment but rather using words. Now, when a child does something wrong, we instruct them with words rather than hitting them, and they listen better.”

FGD participant, caregiver, Mphungu

“Before, we experienced abuse from our parents, but after SOS came, they educated them, and the abuse decreased. In the past, we had dropped out of school, but we returned and even went to Lilongwe to learn vocational skills like carpentry and tailoring. Now we feel more valued as individuals. We used to be in a pitiable state, but after receiving goats, our lives have improved.”

Female, adolescent, FGD participant, Mpheza

“Another family with children with disabilities was given tailored support. They previously treated these children as if they were not human, but after receiving training, they learned better ways to care for them.”

FGD participant, Caregivers, Mpheza

Caregivers were also asked whether children in their households were better off from the positive parenting training provided to parents. Ninety-eight (98%) of respondents said children in their

community were better off from the positive parenting training provided to parents. 2% (2F and 1M) said they were not sure.

Output 1.2: Eight families have improved housing conditions

The programme sought to improve the housing conditions for eight vulnerable households by constructing houses for them. The programme managed to deliver six of the eight houses to vulnerable families by the midterm. The outstanding houses had not been constructed yet as SOS Malawi was considering changing the model of support. Under the current model, SOS Malawi was constructing the house entirely and handing it over to the beneficiary once completed. It was realised that funds were being used to benefit a few households. To improve cost-effectiveness, the proposal was to provide some of the materials and allow the beneficiary to provide what they can too. This implies that more households will be supported with the same amount of funding if the model is changed. Although the proposed change is noble, due care has to be taken so that the material provided by SOS Malawi does not lie idle as the households struggle to provide the rest and construct the houses due to their economic vulnerability status. The beneficiaries were selected based on their vulnerability.

Three beneficiaries participated in the household survey and all of them indicated that they had occupied the houses. In some cases, the old houses had fallen due to Cyclone Freddy. According to stakeholders, one of the families had been housed at a school after their house went down during the cyclone. They took immediate occupation once the house was completed. To ensure that the houses cannot be sold, or the beneficiaries be dispossessed of the houses, background checks were done before the construction of the houses. In addition, the land where the house is built is specifically designated for the owner being allocated the property. No one can simply buy the land, as purchasing land in Malawi requires a lengthy process. Chiefs must provide documentation to land authorities, so any attempt to sell the land would be flagged during this process.

Satisfaction with the quality of houses

All three households that were interviewed in the survey who received housing support were very satisfied with the house that they received through the programme. The houses were said to be safe, well-ventilated and offering the necessary protection that the households required.

Effectiveness of the housing support

All three households reported that the housing support had positively impacted their family's welfare. One family highlighted that it provided a safe place for them, while another mentioned that previously, they lived in a poor, leaking house that exposed them to weather elements. Thanks to the support, they now have a secure home that they can truly call their own. Another indicated that the support meant that they could focus on other development areas for their family. None of the households interviewed that received housing support reported needing any additional improvements to their home, indicating that the support fully met their housing needs.

Box 1: Stella Mwanza – House Beneficiary



Stella Mwanza is a woman with disabilities (deaf and mute). She has three children and is without a husband. Her old house had no separate rooms, so she and her children would all sleep in the same space. Additionally, the house was severely damaged by Cyclone Fred and was left in bad shape. She said the new house is much better as it has more space and three rooms. The new house is strong, and it feels safer to sleep in compared to the old one. She responded that the new house is well-ventilated, and she prefers it over the old one. She said she is very happy with the new house; it gives her much joy, and she would like to thank SOS for her new home. She responded that the toilet was built by her 15-year-old relative. Neighbours and relatives were all pleased for her because they felt sorry about her situation in the old house. When she moved into her new house, some of her relatives even helped by providing bricks and labour to build the new toilet.

Pictures: *Left: Beneficiary⁸ standing in front of her old house; Centre: New house; Right: Toilet built by her 15-year-old son*

⁸ The name of the beneficiary has been changed in line with the safeguarding principles. This applies to the names of all beneficiaries cited in the case studies.

Box 2: Mr and Mrs Phiri – House beneficiaries



Mr. and Mrs. Phiri's family has received a house from SOS Malawi through the FSP programme. The family consists of six members: the parents and their four children, two girls and two boys. The family was selected to benefit because Mr. Phiri has a chronic illness. Their previous home was destroyed by Cyclone Freddy. Their new home has three bedrooms, which are shared among the family members. They mentioned that the new house is much better, with more space and three rooms that can now accommodate the entire family. The new house is sturdy, and they feel much safer sleeping in it compared to the old one. They responded that the new one was far better than the old one. They now feel much safer when sleeping in it, even during the rainy season. They said they love their living conditions in the new house. They also received goats to help improve their living conditions so that they can support themselves. They also indicated that all was done above board as they were informed about the process. "Our traditional leader gathered us and explained that SOS was planning to assist some of the most vulnerable people in the villages. The identification of beneficiaries was done with the help of CBO members, who are more familiar with us at the community level".

Pictures: *Left: Standing where the house was destroyed by Cyclone Freddy; Right: New house built under the programme*

Outcome 2: Vulnerable children and young people have equal access to quality inclusive education

The number of children and young people who are accessing formal and informal education increased from 296 at baseline to 969 at midterm. This implies that only 31 children and young people needed to be enrolled in school for the target set for 2025 to be attained. In addition, the number of young people with employable skills increased from 7 at baseline to 45 at midterm. This was out of the targeted 100. The target for the young people with employable skills might not be reached as there are no/few young people who have the necessary credentials.

Output 2.1: 1100 vulnerable children and young people are enrolled in formal and informal education

Formal Education Support

Number of children benefiting from the education support

At midterm, the number of children and young people enrolled in formal and informal education was 969 out of the targeted 1000. Therefore, significant progress has been made towards the attainment of the output. As indicated earlier in Section 4.1.5, 30.6% of the sampled households received educational

support for their children in the form of bursaries and other related items. Most of the households had one child (76.8%) who received an education bursary under the programme followed by 16.1% with 2 children and 7.2% with 3 or more children. Table 4.2 below shows the percentage of households with children who received education bursaries by gender of the child. More households had 2 male children compared to female children supported with bursaries by SOS Children’s Villages Malawi. The survey with children showed that 19.9% (15.5%F, 23.8%M) reported to have received education bursaries while 25.3% (28.4%F, 22.6%M) reported to have received other education-related support.

Table 4.2: Percent households with children with education bursaries by gender of the child

	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	4 Children
Female children	85.7	4.8	9.5	0
Male children	84.1	13.6	0	2.3

A higher proportion of male children received educational bursaries compared to female children. Approximately 78% of household respondents reported that the children in their households who benefited from the education bursaries were male, whereas 37.5% indicated that female children had received the same. Among the households that reported having children supported under the programme, 26 of those children were female and 53 were male. This disparity suggests a gender gap in the distribution of educational support among children in these households. A comparison by household type reveals that, on average, more children in female-headed households received educational bursaries (1.55 children, with a standard deviation of 1.29) compared to those in male-headed households (1.24 children, with a standard deviation of 0.60). This suggests the programme’s focus on prioritising support for the most vulnerable households.

Beneficiary selection process

All households with children receiving educational bursaries from the programme expressed satisfaction with the selection process for child beneficiaries. Key informants noted that although the children are selected differently compared to the standard selection process at schools, the children selected for SOS Malawi were also on the proposed beneficiary list drawn by the School Bursary Committee (SBC). Beneficiary selection under the FSP was done at the household level, whereas selection by the SBC is individual-based and conducted at school. Considering that the SOS Malawi beneficiaries were also on the SBC lists shows that the children were indeed deserving of the support.

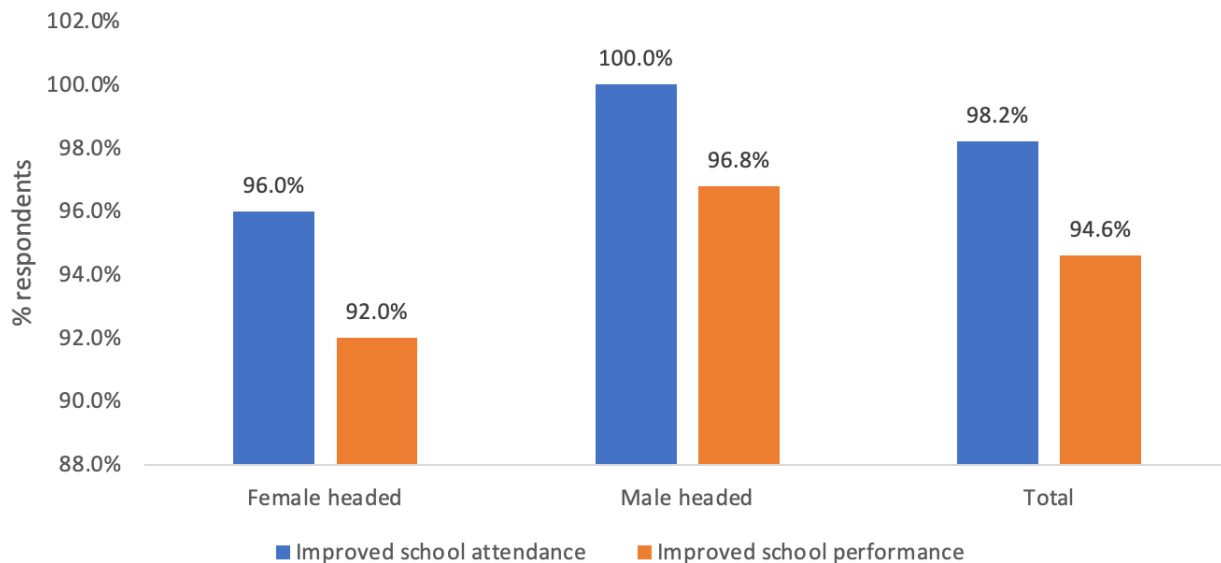
Impact of education bursary on school attendance and performance

Education support was one of the most applauded strategies by evaluation participants. Findings show that 98.2% of the respondents felt that education support had improved school attendance, while 94.6% felt that academic performance had also improved (Figure 13). All the males (100%) felt that the education support had improved attendance as compared to 96% of females. School Headteachers and teachers also confirmed the positive trends in the two indicators. Caregivers also indicated that most children fall out of school mainly because of school fees, implying that once this component is addressed, children have no reason to stay at home. However, it was acknowledged that other non-monetary reasons lead to the dropping -out of children. School attendance due to the education support was coupled with the

efforts of MSGs and the complementary school feeding programme. MSGs are intended to be very supportive in this regard, but they are understaffed.

“MSGs were intended to be very supportive, but because they are understaffed, they don’t operate at full capacity. However, they do play a crucial role in helping girls return to school after childbirth or when they are rescued from early marriages.”
FGD participant, Teachers

Figure 13: Percent households reporting improvement in school attendance and performance of children



Satisfaction with education bursary

Regarding the children in school whose parents could not afford fees, the programme has been paying for them without any issues, so things are going well. All respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the education support provided to their children. Caregivers and children alike had questions about the ability of SOS Malawi to continue assisting the current beneficiaries after the programme ends. This shows the desire to have the education support post-education support that will enable their children to stay in school and progress through the levels. Others were not aware that those repeating students still access education support.

Vocational skills for youth (Informal Education)

At midterm, 45 out of the targeted 100 youth had been trained in vocational skills. A total of 37.5% (41.9%F, 32.0%M) households reported that they had children who were benefiting from vocational skills training support. All of them reported that they were satisfied with the vocational skills training support received.

A child with special needs supported by SOS was provided with a wheelchair and completed secondary education. Thanks to the vocational training offered through the program, the child is now a successful tailor, demonstrating the lasting impact of the support they received. Young people have received skills training, but some have not been able to utilise the acquired skills.

“In addition, we’ll need capital to start businesses so we can buy materials. For example, carpenters need to buy timber to start a business. Without capital, we can’t do anything. We need loans to help us buy timber, make products like beds, and sell them.”

FGD participant, Male Adolescent

“As of now, our lives haven’t changed much because we’ve only learned skills, but we don’t have the tools. Without tools, our lives can’t change. Right now, we’re just idle. If we receive the tools, we’ll have something to do, and next time you visit, you’ll see that our community has truly developed.”

FGD participant, adolescent boys, Phungu, Ngabu

The programme needs to address expectations among programme beneficiaries. Those who have received training requested for attachment to perfect their skills. They felt that they needed attachment before establishing their businesses, but this has not happened. Some are still waiting for this to happen and SOS Malawi is encouraged to inform them if it is still possible. In addition, beneficiaries do not know the difference between similar initiatives funded by different partners. They might not appreciate the differences between the packages supported by other sources donors. This can result in false allegations and expectations. It is imperative that SOS Malawi clarifies these differences to the beneficiaries including those who have completed their training so that the issue is laid to rest.

Box 3: Youth business enterprise



Peter Mwale is a man with a walking disability, and he runs a tailoring shop. I already had the skills but with little knowledge. It is SOS that helped me improve my tailoring skills. It was small back then, but it is growing now as I have built the shop we are in. Initially, I was operating from a shelter. I make clothes for females and males, except for jackets. Both the vocational training in tailoring and the tailoring machine have made a difference. In addition to the shop, I have installed electricity in my shop, I am paying fees for my brother who is in form four, and I am also teaching him how to sew. My parents used to pay school fees for my brother, and now it is my responsibility. On a good day, I can now make 20,000 kwacha, whereas previously I could make 10,000 kwacha. The only challenge is the speed of the electric sewing machine, which is slow compared to the old one. I live on my own, as I am separated from my family, but I have one child. I support my two brothers and my child.

Utilisation of acquired skills

Children who had dropped out of school have been enrolled in various colleges and now have jobs based on the skills they acquired, making them self-reliant. Some are using the skills they have acquired e.g., those doing hairdressing. These can plait hair, and this does not require any special equipment.

“Before the programme came, we were in extreme poverty. For example, many of us have gained skills thanks to SOS. The programme has done many things, and our lives have changed.”

FGD participant, adolescent boys, Phungu, Ngabu

Life was difficult. Some of us stayed in the village without going to school, but now we are attending school. My life has changed. We were in the village without much to do until SOS came and taught us skills, like baking cakes and bread. I’m very thankful because I wouldn’t have known these things otherwise.” ***Female, FGD participant, Mphungu, Ngabu***

Output 2.2: 5 Improved Girl and disability-friendly structures in supported schools

The programme intends to construct five girls and disability-friendly toilets. At baseline, there were no such toilets and by midterm, two had been constructed. The pace of constructing the toilets was reduced as SOS Malawi decided to change the design. The desire now is to have toilets that can offer more privacy and facilities for girls. SOS Malawi needs to conclude the discussions and proceed with the construction of the remaining toilets.

It was noted that there are few children with disabilities at the targeted schools. However, such children still face several challenges in accessing education. To meet the needs of children with disabilities, disability-friendly toilets need to be coupled with other strategies that promote access to education for children with disabilities.

Box 4: Disability Friendly Toilets



Outcome 3: Vulnerable families have improved resilience to economic and climatic shocks

Output 3.1: 300 Families receive training in resilient livelihood strategies

At the midterm, i.e., June 2024, monitoring data shows that the programme had exceeded its target for training families in resilient livelihoods by 7%, with 322 families trained compared to the initial target of 300. This achievement demonstrates the programme's effectiveness in reaching and surpassing its goals,

equipping more families than anticipated with vital skills to enhance their economic resilience and sustainability.

Type of resilience livelihoods training received

Among the parents or caregivers who received resilient livelihoods training, 58.1% came from female-headed households, while 41.9% were male-headed households. The training that was mentioned by most of the respondents was VSLA training (82.3%), land resource and crop husbandry (75.8%), afforestation (62.9% and goat production and management (61.3%) (Table 4.3). Due cognisance is made to the fact that not all beneficiaries were receiving the same package and thus the training attended would also differ.

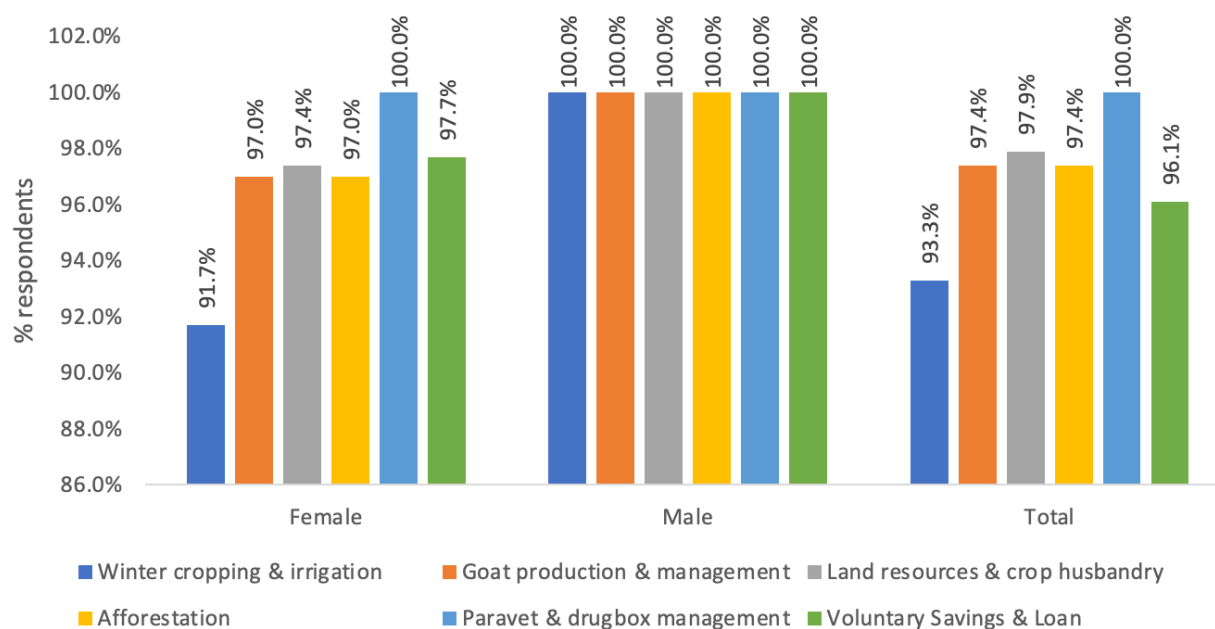
Table 4.3: Resilient livelihoods training received by gender of the respondent

Training	Female	Male	Total
Winter cropping & irrigation	46.2	60	48.4
Goat production & management	63.5	50	61.3
Land resources and crop husbandry	75	80	75.8
Afforestation	63.5	60	62.9
Paravet and drugbox management	21.2	10	19.4
Village Savings & Loan Schemes	82.7	80	82.3
Other	1.9	0	1.6

Usefulness of the training

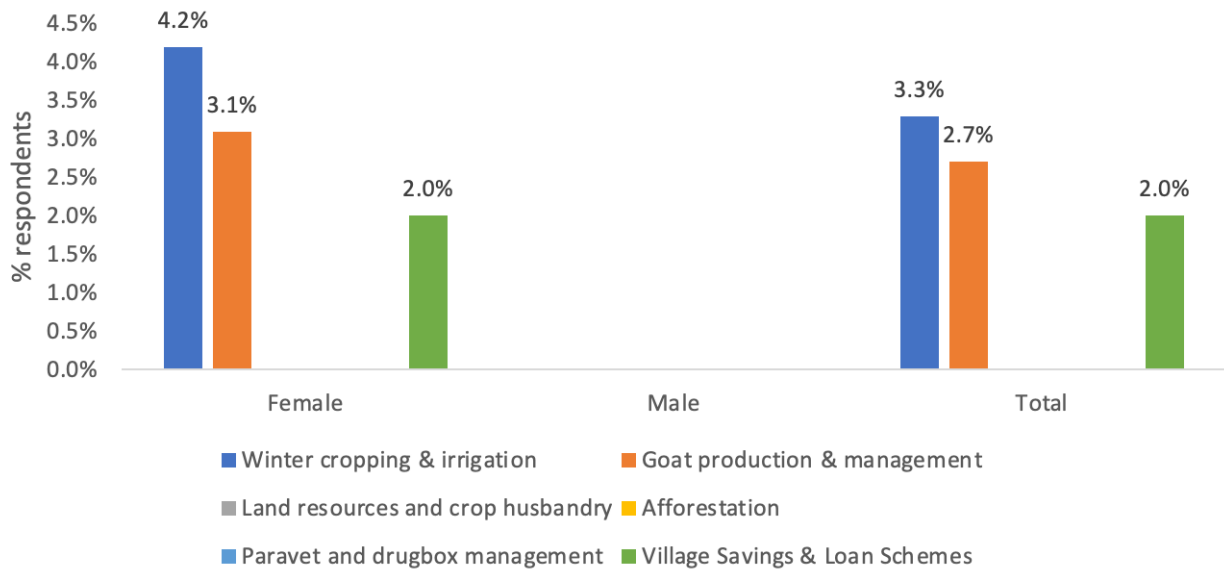
Respondents rated paravet and drugbox management training as the most useful (100%), followed closely by land resource and crop husbandry (97.9%), goat production and management (97.4%), afforestation (97.4%), VSLAs (96.1%), and winter cropping and irrigation (93.3%) (Figure 14). Interestingly, while all male respondents found most training useful, fewer rated VSLAs as such, though a high percentage (87.5%) still found it beneficial. This suggests a broad appreciation for the training provided, with some gender-based differences in perceived utility.

Figure 14: Most useful resilient livelihoods training by gender of the respondent



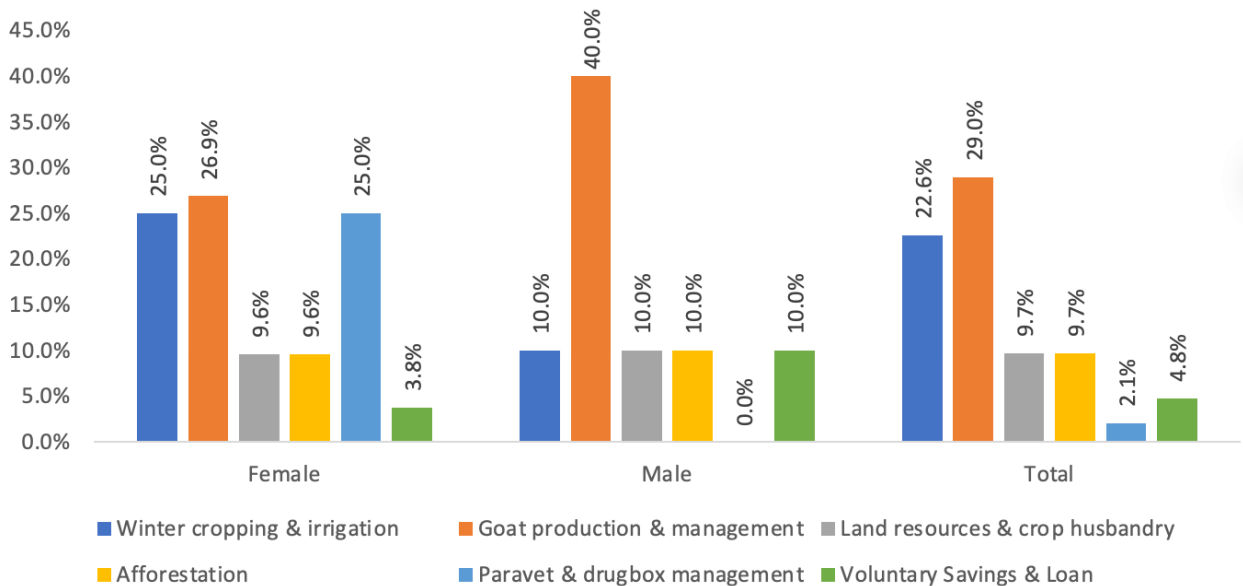
The evaluation also determined that a few females mentioned winter dropping (4.2%), goat production and management (3.1), and VSLA (2.3%) training as being the least useful training. Similarly, a few males selected the three areas, i.e., winter cropping and irrigation (3.3%), goat production and management (2.7%), and VSLA training (2%). However, the percentages are very low showing that the trainings were mostly useful (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Least useful resilient livelihoods training by gender of the respondent



In terms of other training in resilient livelihood that respondents did not receive but would have wanted to receive, goat production and management were mentioned the most (29%), followed by winter cropping (22.6%) (Figure 16). This is a possible indication of the number of respondents who are interested in this training but have not received it.

Figure 16: Needed resilient livelihoods training by gender of the respondent



Quality and effectiveness of training

The respondents were asked to rate the quality of training on resilient livelihood that they received and 98.4% (100%F, 90%M) rated the quality of the resilient livelihoods training very highly. The remainder rated it as satisfactory. Challenges include the short duration of programme training, which were covered over two days instead of the intended five. This made it difficult for the beneficiaries to fully grasp everything that was being taught. Among the respondents who received training, 96.8% (96.2%F, 100%M) reported that they were able to use or apply the resilient livelihood training to improve the welfare of their families. The few who could not use it indicated the lack of resources as the main challenge. Findings show that 91.9% (94.2%F, 80%M) felt that the resilient livelihood training enabled them to improve the welfare of their families. This means 8.1% of the beneficiaries did not realise any impact from the training received. Furthermore, 96.8% (98.1%F, 90%M) reported that children in the community were better off because of the resilient livelihood training. The slow distribution of business funds has hindered some families' economic recovery. This was coupled with the effect of the natural disasters.

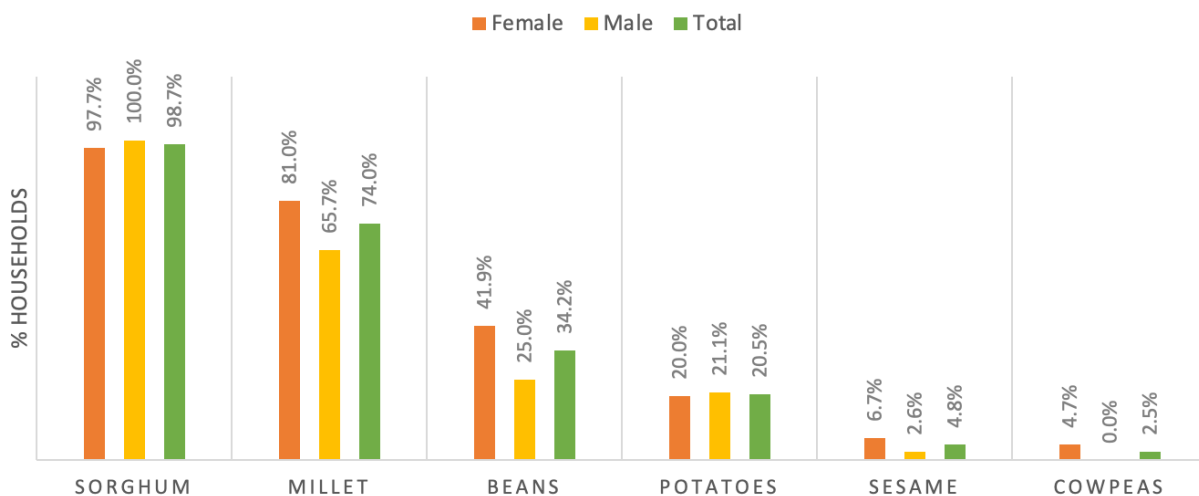
Output 3.2: 75 Families receive Improved crops and livestock

The programme is progressing well toward achieving the targets for this output. Monitoring data shows that as of June 2024, the programme had already reached 150 families with resilient crop varieties—double the original target of 75 families—reflecting a 200% achievement. Additionally, 45 families received improved livestock in the form of goats, representing 60% of the intended goal. These results indicate strong progress in enhancing agricultural resilience and improving livelihoods for participating families, with the crop-related interventions particularly outperforming expectations.

Support received by respondents

Among households that reported to have been supported with improved crops and livestock support, 72.2% (68.2%F, 77.6%M) received resilient crop varieties support. Figure 17 shows that most of the respondents received sorghum (98.7%) and millet (74%). Satisfaction with the resilient crop support was very high at 95.1% (93.5%F, 97.4%M). Many farmers lacked access to modern seeds and farming tools. In areas like Chikwawa, where droughts are common, SOS Malawi introduced modern farming methods using diesel or petrol-powered pumps. These have helped many farmers progress, reducing hunger through improved household farming.

Figure 17: Resilient crops support received by gender of the household head



Among households that reported receiving support for improved crops and livestock, 76.5% (78.8%F, 73.5%M) received livestock assistance. All of these households were provided with goats to rear, aimed at helping them start a goat production and selling business. Satisfaction with livestock support among beneficiary households who received goats was very high, with 97.7% expressing satisfaction (98.1%F, 97.2%M). Households appreciate the goats given to them and they cannot sell them at the moment. Therefore, they would have preferred to also receive immediate assistance to cater for their daily needs. In one FGD, the caregivers acknowledged that they are aware that the goats cannot be sold before they are 10 in total, but the risk remains high due to economic vulnerability.

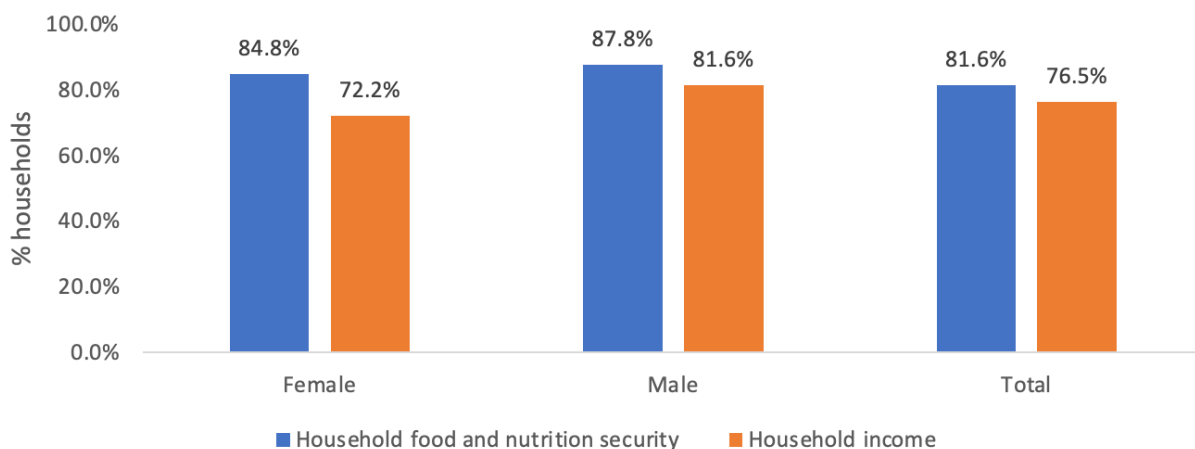
“They gave us goats to use when our children grow up, but we cannot sell them now. We wish they could also provide additional immediate assistance that we can use now.”
Female, FGD participant, Caregiver

Close monitoring is required to ensure that the recipients of the goats continue to keep them even during difficult times. Findings show that although there is an appreciation that goats are a long-term asset, the recipient’s challenges increase the risk of selling the goats. The risk is bound to be heightened even more when the programme ends.

Effectiveness of the support

The support is supposed to contribute to the resilience of beneficiaries. However, it was noted that in the programme areas, 657 households were affected by Cyclone Freddy, 203 hectares of land were swept away, and 163 livestock were washed away (First quarter progress report Jan-March 2023). The major challenge that limited the effectiveness of the strategy was the natural disasters. The first distribution (2022) was destroyed resulting in the same households receiving the seeds during the second distribution. The second distribution (2023) was also destroyed by Cyclone Freddy, implying that the households still have not benefited significantly from the initiative. It is against this background that SOS Malawi took the initiative to provide pumps so that irrigation can be conducted, resulting in cultivation all year round. Despite the challenges encountered, Figure 18 shows that 86.1% and 76.5% of households reported improved food and nutrition security and household income, respectively, due to improved crop and livestock support. Going forward, SOS Malawi is urged to strengthen the irrigation component to improve the food security of more beneficiary households. The production of high-value cash crops alongside drought-resistant crops is expected to continue assisting households in addressing their most immediate needs.

Figure 18: Households with enhanced food and nutrition security and household income by gender of the household head



Output 3.3: 180 families have income-generating activities

Monitoring data shows that, as of June 2024, 32 out of the targeted 180 households had income to meet the basic needs of their children and young people. This shows there is still some work to be done in the remaining period so that the targets are met.

Formation and training of VLSAs

New Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA) cycle commenced in all 23 groups where 421 caregivers (83M, 388F) have joined, of this number 271 (39M, 232F) are program participants (Quarterly report, January-March 2024). A total of 92.3% (93.3%F, 91.0%M) of the respondents joined a VSLA after the support received under the programme. Training was successfully delivered to the intended beneficiaries in conjunction with government stakeholders. According to the stakeholders, the approach was to train village agents who in turn train other members. After each training session with village agents, they created an action plan for the next steps. They would then make follow-ups and visit the agents according to their schedules to ensure they were cascading the training intended groups. Although the training was conducted successfully, gaps have been noted, including business management skills and financial literacy.

“While the VSLs are functioning normally, there is a noticeable gap in business management. Initially, people were provided with financial support in the form of goods to sell, but the training did not fully address the management of these resources. Some beneficiaries lack the necessary mindset and skills for proper financial management, leading to potential mismanagement of funds”.

KII, Key Stakeholder

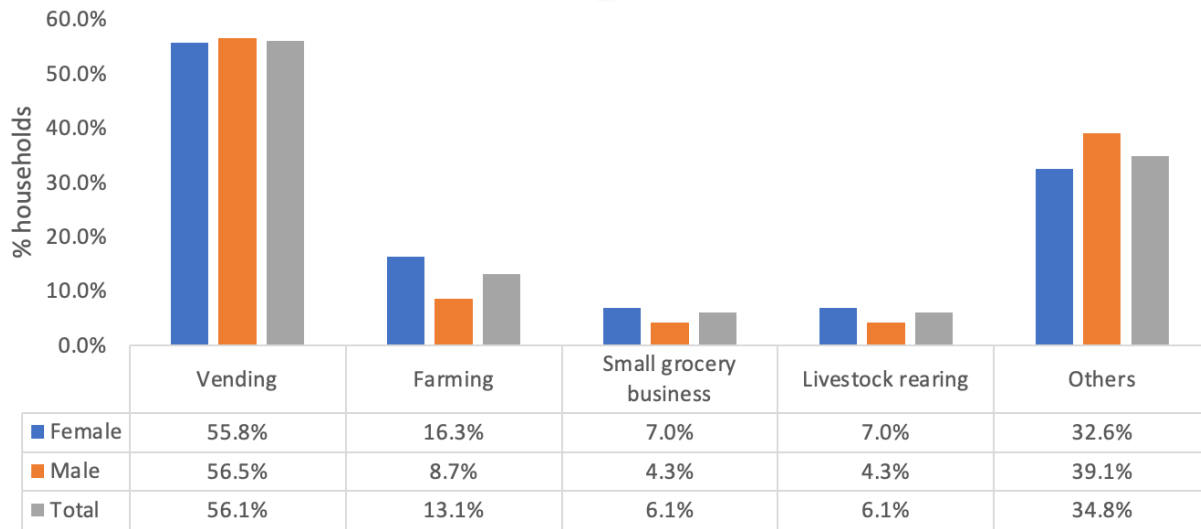
According to the key stakeholders, if someone is given a small amount of money to start a business but lacks financial training, the risk of diverting funds instead of reinvesting is there. Therefore, there is a need for additional financial literacy to address these issues. There was an acknowledgement that there was training in financial management, but it has been limited. Key stakeholders recommended the engagement of financial literacy experts to enhance their approaches.

Ability to save and establishment of IGAs

Respondents were asked whether they had managed to save through their VSLAs and 95.3% (93.9%F, 97.2%M) confirmed this. It was established that groups were making savings and members were able to borrow and pay back with interest. The VSLAs have accumulated MK1,478,900 (1,312 Euros) from member shares, with outstanding loan balances reaching MK2,973,800 (2,638 Euros). Additionally, they have saved MK192,000 (170 Euros) in a social fund.

Findings show that 39.1% (43.9%F, 32.4%M) managed to start income-generating activities from the money saved from VSLA. Those who failed to start any income-generating activities said this was because either the money saved was too little or they used it to address other households' needs, such as food, clothing and school fees for children. Figure 19 shows that 56.1% (55.8%F, 56.5%M) said they had started vending businesses.

Figure 19: IGAs started by gender of the household head



Box 5: VSLA Member Business Venture



My bread business idea was already there even when there was no support. I chose the business because it was the only business I could manage. I sold millet that I had cultivated to raise the initial capital. We begin saving in January and distribute the contributions in December. We can borrow up to 100,000 kwacha, but there is no strict limit. I borrowed 50,000 Kwacha for the business and used all of it to improve my business. With interest, I paid back 65,000 Kwacha. I sell the bread for 100 and it normally gets finished daily. I am now able to look after my family.

Extra Support Needed

Respondents were asked about the type of extra support needed to support their VSLA or income-generating activities, and the majority (76.9%) wanted business capital or loans (Table 4.4). Although business training in financial management was recommended by key stakeholders, only 3.8% of the respondents mentioned it as extra support they needed.

Table 4.4: Support needed to initiate VSLA and income-generating activities

Support needed to initiate VSLA or IGAs	Percent
Business capital or loans	76.9
Business training in financial management	4.9
Livestock support	3.8
Business equipment	1.1
Financial advisors	0.5
Housing support	0.5
Training in fabric business	0.5
Training in soap production	0.5
Training in VSLA operations	0.5
Training in goat farming	0.5
No idea	1.6
Nothing	8.2
Total	100

Establishment of business enterprises by households

The programme also sought to provide 75 families with vocational skills and provide them with capital to start their businesses. Of the 12 families supported with business capital in December 2023, four have registered profits, five others have not improved, and three have stopped doing business (Quarterly report, January-March 2024). According to caregivers, members of the two CBOs and the traditional leaders, the disbursement of funds to families was slow. It was established by SOS Malawi that households had drawn up their business plans, and some were not yet due to receive capital for their business enterprises. Some beneficiaries might have felt anxious because they noticed that some of the households had received their capital. SOS Malawi must provide adequate information to stakeholders so that they fully appreciate the processes while households are reminded of their business plans and related timelines.

Outcome 4: Communities actively protect vulnerable children and young people

Output 4.1: Two Local community-based organisations trained in child protection

Programme monitoring data shows that the target of having two local CBOs trained in child protection has been achieved. To strengthen the community's child protection response mechanisms, the programme provided specialised training for community-based structures, namely the Child Protection Committees (CPCs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and Mothers' Support Groups (MSGs). One CBO member highlighted that SOS Malawi delivered training on resolving child protection cases, along with regular review meetings every three months with SOS Malawi and bi-monthly meetings on their own as a CBO. The programme also provided training on child protection policies, which has empowered local

groups to address child protection cases more effectively. Similar sentiments were obtained from CPCs indicating that they now possess significant expertise in handling various child abuse cases and can identify and respond to such incidents appropriately. The CPC members from Mphenza indicated that they had effectively resolved approximately 18 cases of early marriages and assisted around 40 children to return to school. In Mphungu, the CPC had stopped 8 child marriages and helped 15 children who were out of school, as well as 6 additional children who had been neglected by their parents, to return to school.

“Child protection existed but was minimal and disorganised. When SOS Malawi came, they introduced a structured approach to protect children, such as involving the police when necessary.”

Male, FGD participant, Traditional leaders

Despite these gains, CPC and CBO members expressed that the training duration was often too short. While five days were initially planned, many sessions were condensed to just two days, limiting participants’ ability to fully grasp the material. Additionally, some previous training was incomplete, leaving knowledge gaps. Members have requested longer training sessions and more frequent refresher courses, which would reinforce their learning and allow them to stay updated on evolving child protection practices. Another challenge arises from the periodic turnover of members within these committees; with changes in membership, some trained individuals leave, creating a need for continued training to maintain a knowledgeable base within these essential community structures. CPC members indicated that they are keen on acquiring certain skills since the training was brief. The meetings they have with SOS Malawi every three months are review meetings.

“The training was originally intended to last a week, but we only received two days of instruction. During that time, we learned about recent issues like human trafficking, which we were previously unaware of, and the importance of addressing early marriages, which has helped us work towards preventing them in our communities.”

Female, FGD participant, CPC members

CBOs need financial support so that they can start IGAs. This is necessary so that they can sustain their activities without resorting to external funding. One CBO is considering starting a maize mill business to generate income, but they currently lack the funds to launch the venture. It was learnt that there are CBOs that raise goats, sharing responsibilities among members for daily care and management. Once the goats are sold, the funds are used to support their activities. Other CBOs run ECD centres while others operate a bakery business, employing a salesman to sell their products locally. Additionally, they supplement their finances by writing proposals and submitting them to NGOs and international organisations in Malawi for funding. This approach helps them sustain their daily operations and activities. The two CBOs working with SOS Malawi also expressed their interest in seeking funding from NGOs so that they can strengthen their financial base. One government stakeholder said that their department has been assisting CBOs to be able to write proposals.

“We are still in the process of teaching and guiding CBOs on how to seek funding, write proposals, and start income-generating activities as a group. I’ve had the opportunity to instruct them on these matters. While some may struggle with writing, especially in English, I assist them. They invite me when needed, and I help with proposal writing by translating their ideas into English before they sign and submit.”

Male, KII, Key stakeholder

Output 4.2: Reporting and responding mechanisms for child protection are established/strengthened in the communities.

Monitoring data shows that the target of establishing or strengthening child protection reporting and responding mechanisms has been achieved. The FSP sought to strengthen the reporting and responding mechanism for child protection cases. Child Protection Committee members indicated that they would like training on using the case management forms and handling reports related to child abuse cases. It was established that groups like the MSGs and CBOs sometimes bypass them despite their mandate of overseeing child welfare. They would, therefore, like to have role clarity and how they are supposed to handle cases effectively and thus discharge their duties well. Additionally, they need training on how to interact with the police when handling criminal cases, such as rape cases. They once handled a case that was rejected by the police. They also need to be assisted in getting designated police contact to help resolve such issues more quickly.

Traditional leaders confirmed that SOS Malawi had not changed existing laws but added measures to improve the system and trained them on how to respond. For example, if a child is assaulted, they should be taken to the hospital immediately, not delayed. They also learnt that such cases must be reported to the police. Child protection programmes existed before the FSP was implemented, but sometimes members of the structures didn't know how to handle certain cases until they received training from SOS Malawi.

The evaluation also explored the demand for child protection support and the results are summarised below. About 82.8% (80.2%F, 84.9%M) of children said they know what child abuse is. Of these, 74.3% (73.8%F, 74.7%M) know where to report child abuse cases. Only 51.7% (50.6%F, 52.7%M) know Child Protection Committees in their communities. Of these children, only 8.9% (9.8%F, 8.2%M) have once reported a case of abuse to them, of which half said their issues were resolved. Only 6.6% of household respondents (12 out of 183) reported needing child protection services in the 12 months preceding the survey, with a slightly higher proportion among males (8.0%) than females (6.3%). The required support included safe shelter for children (5 out of 12 respondents: 4 females, 1 male), counselling (2 respondents, both female), and health services (7 respondents: 6 females, 1 male). Of those who required child protection services, only three received support from local health facilities.

4.3.2. Most and least effective strategies

Opinions were gathered from various groups that participated in the evaluation of the strategies they found most effective. Although all programme components were recognised as contributing to the programme's overall goals, their effectiveness varied considerably. There was consensus among most groups that the most effective strategies are education support, parenting skills training, housing and the training of community-based structures.

Education assistance - The education support program was highly valued because it enabled students who had previously dropped out to return to school. While students may leave school for various reasons, many of these are tied to their families' financial capacity to support their education. Therefore, assistance in this area often helps children resume their studies. Although some students may face challenges readjusting to school life and occasionally feel inclined to stay home, such cases are rare, and most returning students tend to stay in school. Additionally, the WFP programme provides food support, which benefits students and promotes consistent attendance.

Parenting skills - This component was found to be highly effective as caregivers acquired knowledge and skills that they are using to take care of children. While cases of child labour were mentioned by children, most parents attested to the observation that their skills for caring and supporting children in their households had improved. The most common perception was that this has been very effective and the contribution of the component to the goal is bound to be very significant.

Housing - Although a few families have benefitted from the housing support, this has brought relief to the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries were among the most vulnerable in the communities. For some households, the support was rendered at a time when they were either homeless or about to be homeless.

Training of community-based structures – the training offered to community-based structures such as the CBOs, VCPC and CPCs was said to be very effective as it has built their capacity. The programme has managed to offer them the support that they wished to receive from the government.

The least effective strategies were identified as the provision of improved crop support in setting up of household income-generating activities and enterprises for young people. Although the provision of crops and livestock was said to be relevant, the evaluation established that it has not demonstrated its effectiveness. The provision of improved crops has not been very beneficial since the crops were affected by the natural disasters. Therefore, the contribution to food security and the overall resilience of households has been very limited. Based on the lessons drawn so far, SOS plans to provide high-value cash crops like sesame. Sesame is also drought resistant. Furthermore, the organisation intends to encourage households to adopt better farming practices that take into consideration the weather patterns, e.g., planting early. To enhance the effectiveness of this strategy, SOS also intends to facilitate the cultivation throughout the year. The provision of goats was perceived to be better as most households still had the goats and expected to benefit from them in future, thus contributing to the resilience of families in the long term. The training of young people in vocational skills was another strategy that was said to be very relevant but has not demonstrated its effectiveness since most of the trained young people have yet to utilise the skills. The provision of start-up capital to young people and households to set up their income-generating activities has been slow. It was established that some businesses collapsed a few months after being established due to the diversion of funds to cater for more pressing needs like food. The start-up support must be rendered when there is still ample time for the business enterprises to be set up and monitored before the final evaluation.

4.4. Efficiency

This section of the report presents the findings about the adequacy and availability of resources, management of resources and reporting. Since this is a midterm evaluation, the evaluation considers some of the value of money principles. The expectation is that the compliance of the programme to all the principles will be done during the final evaluation.

4.4.1. Adequacy and availability of resources (Quality and Quantity)

Financial

The programme had a total budget of EUR 844,384.51 for the entire duration of the programme. The amount from the donor is EUR 565,739, amounting to 67% of the total budget. The balance is from SOS Iceland. At the mid-term, a total of EUR 586,275.10 (69%) has been received and a total of EUR 516,077.15 (61%) has been spent. Although the Malawi Kwacha has been depreciating against the major currencies, this has not affected the programme funds since these are held in foreign currency. Therefore, the

available funds have not been affected by exchange rate losses. According to SOS Children’s Villages Malawi, the remaining funds will be enough to cater for activities planned for the remaining period. SOS Malawi will continue applying cost-cutting measures so that planned activities are completed. This is necessitated by the budgetary constraints that existed even at the start of the programme. The evaluation established that, so far, SOS Malawi has managed to implement activities despite the limited budget without compromising on the quality of services provided under the programme.

On resource availability, the evaluation noted that funds were availed in tranches annually, as shown in Table 4.5 below. The funds for each year were already determined, making planning easier. SOS Malawi did not allude to any delays in disbursements hence there have been no delays due to lack of resources. This led to the conclusion that the financial resources were availed timely facilitating the smooth implementation of programme activities.

Table 4.5: Approved budget for the programme

Year	Euro
2022	232,267.19
2023	210,391.98
2024	212,546.18
2025	189,179.16
Programme Budget	844,384.51

Human

The programme is being delivered by a team of experts who are resident in Ngabu. These are supported by senior management staff that are in Lilongwe and Blantyre. Interviews with the personnel in Ngabu revealed role clarity. Although SOS Malawi felt that they were adequately staffed to successfully deliver the programme, some key stakeholders felt that more staff was needed, especially at the community level. The targeted area is big and cannot be adequately covered by one or two members of staff. However, the key stakeholders applauded the staff members for their dedication and ability to drive activities at the community level, while networking with key stakeholders at the district level at the same time.

“Another challenge is the limited staff managing the programme. For example, in the large Mphenza area, with six chiefs, things are delayed because just one person is handling everything.....people complain that things take too long because one person is managing everything. If possible, SOS should increase their staff so responsibilities can be shared and tasks completed more efficiently.”

Male, FGD participant, CBO, Mphenza

4.4.2. Cost-effectiveness and efficiency

Considering that this is a mid-term evaluation, a light touch analysis of cost-effectiveness and efficiency principles was conducted. The model of supporting children within their communities is more cost-effective than caring for them within an institutional set-up. This contributes to the cost-effectiveness of the programme. The programme also adopted cost-cutting measures, e.g., sharing fixed costs among the programmes such as internet costs. The costs are shared between the programme, NORAD and the standard programme. Although the Malawi Kwacha has been losing value, this has not affected

programme implementation as the budget is held in USD. The costs that have gone up are those incurred in local currency, such as the procurement of building materials for the construction of houses.

4.4.3. Reporting

SOS Malawi is required to submit both technical and financial reports twice a year, including bi-annual and annual reports. This has been smoothly managed, as SOS Malawi has chosen to maintain high reporting standards, opting to submit reports to SOS Iceland quarterly rather than solely on the bi-annual schedule. This regular reporting practice includes comprehensive technical reports that document progress across all activities, potential risks, and key lessons learned, and financial reports that detail expenditure and budget alignment. SOS Malawi has reported no challenges in preparing and submitting these reports, which is partly due to the pre-designed reporting templates created during the programme's inception phase. These templates, adapted from previous versions, were collaboratively designed with SOS Iceland and therefore are familiar and user-friendly.

While SOS Malawi has had no issues with the financial reporting, there has been a minor concern regarding the timing of quarterly financial reporting. Currently, financial accounts for each quarter are typically finalised by the end of the first month of the subsequent quarter, yet reports are expected earlier. This timing misalignment has sparked discussions on how to adjust submission timelines to better fit the financial closeout process, ensuring accurate data while meeting reporting deadlines. These ongoing discussions aim to find a mutually agreeable solution that maintains the quality and timeliness of financial reporting.

4.5. Emerging Impact

Evaluation questions:

- What have been the significant changes and impacts of the programme?
- To what extent has the programme contributed?
- To what extent has the programme influenced changes
- Are there any notable changes?

The primary focus of the programme is to support children within their communities by strengthening households, with special attention to two main groups: children at risk of losing parental care and those who have already lost it. By enhancing the capacity of families, the initiative aims to create a nurturing environment that allows children to grow up with care and protection. According to one stakeholder, there has been a notable reduction in child abuse cases since the programme's implementation. Moreover, community-based structures like the Village Child Protection Committees (VCPC) have improved the handling of child exploitation cases, such as children being forced to sell goods at markets instead of attending school. In the past, child trafficking was also a serious issue due to the area's proximity to international borders, but since 2022, no new cases have been reported to the Social Welfare office, coinciding with the programme's start in Ngabu TA.

Households have also reported improved income generation, allowing them to better cover essential needs like food. Children in these communities are now more aware of their rights and contribute positively to their homes. Training sessions have equipped parents and caregivers to prioritize child safety

and well-being. For example, families now ensure children receive timely medical care, and pregnant women seek clinic visits earlier than before. There has also been a noticeable decline in unplanned pregnancies and child marriages.

“Child marriages are still happening, but before SOS, it was even worse.”

Female, FGD participant, Caregivers

“Some children caused trouble in the village, while others worked as cattle herders for other people. When SOS arrived, they were taken to school, and now they are benefiting a lot by working. If we find a child herding cattle during school hours, we prosecute both the owner of the cattle and the child’s parent. Some children were getting married at a young age, but we annulled those marriages and took them back to school.”

Male, FGD participant, Traditional leaders

Significant changes have been observed among families who received resources such as goats, houses, and financial aid, resulting in improved security and better support for their children's education. Parental care training has helped caregivers adopt positive parenting practices, aligning child-rearing with children's rights principles. As a result, many children who previously dropped out of school have re-enrolled, and early marriages have decreased.

Traditional leaders and caregivers have observed positive transformations in children's behaviour and community norms. Children who once caused trouble or worked as cattle herders have been reintegrated into school, with community mechanisms now in place to hold parents and employers accountable for school attendance. Early marriages have been annulled, and vocational training has provided alternative paths for youth, reducing engagement in harmful behaviours such as theft.

Families affected by disasters, such as Cyclone Freddy, have demonstrated resilience through economic initiatives like Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). Some households have even rebuilt homes using resources from these savings groups or small enterprises. This economic independence allows certain families to support their children without relying solely on external aid, contributing to long-term community stability and self-reliance.

4.6. Sustainability

The evaluation considered the likelihood of the programme activities and outcomes continuing after the programme ends. The analysis determined the activities and outcomes that are bound to require further support after the programme ends.

4.6.1. Continuation of programme activities and outcomes after implementation

Institutional Sustainability - The training provided to CBOs has enhanced their capacity such that their support to vulnerable households is sustainable, ensuring that childcare monitoring will continue after the programme ends. The trained personnel will remain active in the communities, and the CBOs will continue their work. Child protection services have been integrated into the livelihood support systems, ensuring their continuation after the programme ends. The importance of ongoing monitoring and support for children is now recognized and will be maintained. Government stakeholders also indicated that they will continue rendering support to households as this is in line with their mandate as government ministries/ departments.

"It is my responsibility to continue supporting them, even if the partner leaves or if I get transferred. If I am transferred, someone else will come and take over the same role. Proper handovers, including notes and records, will be made to my successor, ensuring they can continue providing support. Every time we meet, we discuss these matters to ensure that support remains consistent, even if SOS leaves." **Male, Key Stakeholder, Ngabu**

"The education we have received will continue to be useful because the knowledge we gained cannot be forgotten even if they leave." **Male, FGD participant, Traditional Leaders**

The evaluation recommends that the active and deliberate involvement of different stakeholders should continue during the remaining period of implementation so that when the programme ends, they will be prepared to continue monitoring and supporting programme activities.

Financial Sustainability - The programme aims to foster financial sustainability through economic interventions guided by an asset-based community development model. By leveraging this model, selected households are provided with targeted skills and business opportunities to promote economic resilience and growth. The approach focuses on identifying and building upon existing assets and resources within the community, empowering families to drive their own economic progress. This approach is designed to ensure that the improvements achieved during the programme's implementation will be maintained even after its completion. Strengthened households will be better equipped to meet their children's needs, from education and healthcare to nutrition and overall well-being, creating a lasting impact on children's lives and enhancing long-term family stability.

Social sustainability - The FSP delivers the programme by working within existing community structures, consciously avoiding the creation of parallel systems. This approach not only promotes sustainability but also respects and preserves local frameworks and relationships. The evaluation confirmed that the programme activities do not disrupt social cohesion within communities; instead, they integrate smoothly into the local context. The programme's social focus is limited to addressing harmful gender norms that negatively impact the community, particularly women and girls. By challenging these detrimental norms, the programme seeks to foster a more equitable environment while strengthening community bonds and enhancing support networks.

Environmental sustainability - The FSP has trained VCPCs on disaster preparedness and response. The training is expected to equip the VCPCs so that they can respond when natural disasters are experienced. Further to this, the activities conducted under the programme do not negatively affect the environment but on the contrary seek to preserve it. Farming activities will promote the utilisation of organic

4.6.2. Interventions that will still require support after the duration of the programme

The evaluation has established that most activities will be sustained by the existing structures and government departments. Government departments have been involved in programme activities and have committed to continue providing technical support to VSLAs and business enterprises. They also confirmed that providing support to various groups, children and vulnerable households falls within their mandate, but they have been constrained by the lack of resources. There is a possibility that these constraints might persist and hamper the ability of these departments to support the activities/ outcome post the duration of the programme.

4.7. Cross-cutting Issues

4.7.1. Equity

Findings show that the programme beneficiaries are among the most vulnerable households in the community. For instance, the households that received houses were selected based on a set vulnerability criteria. The evaluation also established that the selection of beneficiaries for the different programme components was not done by the SOS team but was driven by the community-based structures. The selection process was done with the input of community members during a gathering called for the specific purpose. The same applies to children who receive education support. According to one stakeholder, selection of children who receive education support is conducted in a way that is different from the one that is usually used by the school-selection committees. These select potential beneficiaries for education support and come up with a prioritised list. Development partners who intend to support children are simply given names from that list. Of interest is that the children who are benefitting from the education support under the programme are selected from a household level. However, stakeholders attested that the children chosen through this system are also in the school lists, implying that the children do really deserve the support.

“This programme does not favour anyone. When they choose who will benefit, they call a meeting and select in the presence of everyone.”

FGD participant, Adolescent Girls, Mphungu

“Those receiving help are the ones who need it. Those receiving houses are people who cannot build houses on their own, and those sent to school are the ones who can’t afford it... The benefits are going to the right vulnerable people”

FGD participant, Adolescent Boys, Mphenza

The evaluation established that there is generally no discontentment regarding the selection of beneficiaries in the communities. In most FGDs, participants expressed their satisfaction with the reach of the programme.

“Families are assembled by their traditional leaders, who invite all community members. During these gatherings, community members nominate families in urgent need of support. Once agreed upon, these names are forwarded to the CBOs, who then submit them to SOS Malawi.”

Female, FGD participant, CPC

4.7.2. Gender

The programme promotes gender equality by ensuring equal access to resources, such as education, vocational training, and financial support for both boys and girls. Girls are particularly vulnerable to early marriage and limited educational opportunities, so the programme addresses this by providing school fees and ensuring equal vocational training opportunities for both genders. Parents and caregivers receive gender-sensitive training focused on children’s rights. The programme also encourages women’s participation in decision-making roles at both household and community levels. Leadership positions of several committees like the CBOs, Village Development Committees, and the VCPC are elected to office at regular intervals. Currently, some women are in these committees even though gender parity has not been achieved.

“Yes, they include everyone in training sessions, and this has helped reduce domestic violence as everyone learns together.”

Female, FGD participant, Caregivers, Mphungu.

4.7.3. Children’s rights

Although the programme activities target various community groups including caregivers and community-based structures, the group at the centre is that of vulnerable children. The programme promotes the upholding of children’s rights such as the rights to education, food and shelter. By enhancing parenting skills, the programme seeks to improve the care and support of children. The programme discourages child marriages while promoting the right to education.

4.7.4. Environment

The programme has made consideration for the conservation of the environment. Foremost, training was held at community level to create awareness of environmental issues. According to caregivers, they were taught about sustainable tree planting and environmental conservation. The programme also provided trees for planting. SOS has contributed to environmental conservation by facilitating the planting of additional trees in our communities, helping to mitigate climate change effects and promote ecological balance in an area prone to droughts and floods. On the other hand, it was noted that the programme activities do not cause any negative environmental effects.

4.8. Lessons learnt

Based on the results of the MTE, several lessons have been identified:

- **Empowering stakeholders enhances ownership:** SOS Malawi has maintained its supportive role to stakeholders to encourage local leadership and ownership of programme activities and processes. This is expected to contribute to the sustainability of outcomes.
- **Utilisation of existing structures prevents duplication:** utilisation of existing community-based structures and platforms avoids duplication of efforts and leverages each organization's strengths. This is the case with organizations like Lengwe National Park and CAMFED, which employ distinct approaches (group-based livestock support and targeted education for girls, respectively). Initiatives, such as training programmes, benefit multiple organizations, amplifying overall impact.
- **Changing community attitudes towards education is crucial for enrolment and retention:** Increasing awareness about the importance of education shifts caregivers' perceptions, leading to higher enrolment and retention rates.
- **Adequate sanitation facilities are essential for promoting school attendance, especially for girls:** Providing proper sanitation facilities reduces absenteeism during menstruation and supports children with disabilities, promoting an inclusive educational environment.

4.9. Best practices

The MTE has identified some best practices, and these are listed below:

- **Increasing resilience by ensuring that goats cannot be sold or slaughtered before reaching a set target:** The FSP, through the CBOs, has done well by setting targets for those who received goats. This has prevented households from selling or slaughtering goats even during difficult times. The difficult times have posed as a risk, but the policy has managed to deter the households successfully. Some of the households attested to the fact that the goats were already breeding.

- **The safeguarding of houses constructed under the programme:** The households that were supposed with accommodation are vulnerable to the extent that some could easily be dispossessed of the houses. The programme instituted measures that have prevented such occurrences. It was apparent from the discussions with different groups that the chances of the households losing their houses was very slim or non-existent.
- **Involvement of stakeholders in project activities:** The program has successfully empowered stakeholders, including government ministries and community-based structures, to perform their duties effectively, addressing resource constraints and capacity challenges. While stakeholders often have high expectations for SOS Malawi to take the lead, the organization has balanced its role by building their capacity and providing opportunities for them to carry out their responsibilities. This approach has ensured that the programme supports rather than disempowers stakeholders, promoting their independence and strengthening their ability to sustain activities beyond the project's lifespan.
- **Strengthening household resilience to mitigate the impact of poverty on education and child well-being:** Encouraging households to move from subsistence farming to more sustainable income-generating activities enhances economic stability and reduces the need for children to drop out of school to support their families. Strengthening irrigation and planting of cash crops is expected to contribute in this regard.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Relevance

The programme is highly relevant and responsive to the needs of vulnerable children and households, as evidenced by a needs assessment and alignment with government policies. Key initiatives, such as positive parenting training, support for informal education, and livelihood resilience, have made notable progress in improving child well-being, education, and family stability. However, persistent issues, including poverty, inadequate school facilities, and gender disparities, require sustained efforts and tailored interventions. SOS Malawi's collaboration with community structures, economic support programs, and government initiatives strengthens resilience and promotes long-term positive change, despite ongoing challenges. The programme is well-aligned with government policies and priorities, particularly in promoting education, child protection, and community-rooted care for vulnerable children. By encouraging school enrolment and providing resources and coordination to tackle child exploitation, the programme supports key national goals and reinforces government efforts. Collaboration with government agencies and alignment with strategic frameworks such as the Malawi Growth Development Strategy ensures the programme's relevance and sustainability. This synergy creates a cohesive support network, enhancing positive outcomes for at-risk children and their communities.

5.2. Coherence

The evaluation underscores how the programme complements other development efforts in the Ngabu community, enhancing reach and service effectiveness. Collaboration with government, non-governmental organizations, and community-based structures ensures broad support for vulnerable children and households. The programme's joint activities with government officials, such as beneficiary identification, training, and monitoring, strengthen community structures and expand service coverage, filling gaps in existing efforts. Additionally, the programme aligns with other organizations in economic empowerment and education sectors, minimizing overlap and boosting impact through distinct, complementary approaches. Key informants highlighted effective synergies between SOS Malawi and

partners like CAMFED and WFP’s school feeding program, which collectively improve school enrolment and retention. Despite strong collaboration, challenges remain due to limited government resources and overlapping roles among community structures. SOS Malawi’s strategic partnerships with CBOs help streamline efforts and foster cohesive support networks while navigating potential power dynamics carefully to prioritize child welfare and community cohesion. Continued collaboration with stakeholders is crucial to sustaining and building upon these collective efforts. The facilitative roles played by SOS Iceland, both as intermediaries and a donor, has enhanced the reach of the programme and also enabled SOS Malawi to offer humanitarian assistance after Cyclone Freddy.

5.3. Effectiveness

The programme has implemented effective strategies to ensure that children have access to care, protection and health services and also quality and inclusive education. Under Outcome 1, the programme has made notable progress in improving household self-reliance and reducing vulnerability among targeted families through effective parental training and housing support. As of the midterm, 16 out of 180 households had achieved self-reliance, while 72 out of 225 households showed reduced vulnerability from their baseline conditions. Training on positive parenting has been widely beneficial, with nearly all respondents reporting better childcare, protection, and guidance practices. Housing support for vulnerable families has also yielded positive outcomes, with six houses constructed and beneficiaries expressing satisfaction with the improvements to their living conditions. However, challenges remain, including external shocks that undermine progress and the need to enhance cost-effectiveness in housing interventions. Continued focus on addressing these areas will further strengthen programme outcomes.

For Outcome 2, the programme has made significant strides in increasing access to both formal and informal education, with the number of children and young people enrolled rising from 296 at baseline to 969 at midterm, nearing the target of 1000 by 2025. Despite the impressive progress, challenges remain in achieving the goal of equipping 100 young people with employable skills due to limited credentials among candidates. Educational bursaries have notably benefited male children more than females, reflecting a gender gap that needs to be addressed. The programme’s education support has been praised for improving school attendance and academic performance, with positive feedback from caregivers and teachers alike. Vocational skills training has also had a meaningful impact, though there are concerns about the sustainability of the support once the programme ends. Infrastructure improvements, such as disability-friendly toilets, are underway, but further efforts are needed to support children with disabilities comprehensively. Overall, the programme demonstrates strong progress but requires continued focus on inclusivity, gender parity, and long-term sustainability.

The evaluation demonstrates that the programme has made strong progress towards achieving Outcome 3, i.e., enhancing resilient livelihoods among targeted families, with training initiatives surpassing set targets by reaching 322 families—7% above the initial goal. The training has been well-received, with high levels of satisfaction and utilisation reported. However, challenges such as the impact of natural disasters have hindered some benefits, notably affecting crop and livestock initiatives. The distribution of resilient crop varieties and improved livestock has seen partial success, with crop interventions notably doubling their original targets, though setbacks from Cyclone Freddy underscore the need for a strengthened focus on irrigation. While the VSLAs have provided an avenue for saving and income generation, gaps in financial literacy training have been noted, suggesting a need for enhanced support to ensure the effective use of

funds and sustainable income-generating activities. Despite these challenges, the overall programme trajectory indicates significant strides in fostering economic resilience and improved livelihoods.

The evaluation of the child protection component shows notable progress in achieving Outcome 4, i.e., building local capacity, with programme targets for training local CBOs fully achieved. Specialised training has strengthened the abilities of CBOs, Child Protection Committees (CPCs), and Mothers' Support Groups (MSGs) to effectively handle and resolve child protection cases. Significant successes include preventing early marriages and facilitating school re-entry for children, particularly in Mphenza and Mphungu. However, shortened training durations and member turnover present challenges to maintaining a consistent knowledge base, underscoring the need for longer sessions and regular refreshers. Financial sustainability remains a priority for CBOs, with some exploring income-generating ventures to reduce reliance on external funding. Efforts to establish robust reporting and response mechanisms for child protection have largely succeeded, though CPC members expressed a need for enhanced role clarity, case management skills, and improved coordination with police services. Overall, the programme has enhanced community capacity to address child welfare, though some gaps in training and resource access need continued attention.

5.4. Efficiency

The programme demonstrates effective financial and operational management, with timely disbursements and strategic cost-cutting measures ensuring smooth implementation. Despite budgetary constraints, SOS Malawi has maintained high service quality by optimizing resource use and collaborating with stakeholders at various levels. The programme's financial resilience is enhanced by holding funds in foreign currency, mitigating exchange rate risks. While there is a need for increased community-level staffing to enhance coverage, the dedication of existing staff has been commendable. The comprehensive reporting structure has further facilitated transparency and accountability, supporting informed programme execution. The programme's cost-effective, community-based model has proven to be impactful and efficient, laying a strong foundation for continued success in the remaining programme period.

5.5. Emerging impact

The programme has successfully strengthened community and household capacities to care for children, particularly those at risk of losing parental care or who have already lost it. By enhancing family stability and ensuring children's rights are protected, there has been a marked improvement in child welfare outcomes. This approach has reduced cases of child exploitation and trafficking, highlighting the effectiveness of the Village Child Protection Committees (VCPC) and community engagement strategies. Another significant outcome is the improved economic resilience of households, facilitated by resources such as goats, houses, and Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). These efforts have enabled families to better support their children's education and overall well-being, reducing dependence on external aid and fostering long-term stability. Additionally, targeted training on positive parenting and child rights has changed community norms, leading to a decline in child marriages, unplanned pregnancies, and harsh disciplinary practices. The programme's impact is further seen in the reintegration of out-of-school children into the education system and the creation of alternative vocational paths for youth. Community leaders and caregivers report positive behavioral changes among children and greater respect for educational and protective norms. This comprehensive approach has not only addressed immediate needs but also set the stage for sustainable, community-led progress in child protection, education, and family resilience.

5.6. Sustainability

The programme shows strong potential for long-term impact, with several key factors influencing its sustainability. The training of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) ensures ongoing childcare monitoring and community engagement. Integration of child protection services within livelihood support systems, supported by government involvement, strengthens sustainability. Government ministries' continued engagement aligns with their mandates, though consistent resource availability is needed for support. The asset-based community development model promotes financial resilience by empowering households through skills and business opportunities, helping to sustain gains in education, healthcare, and family well-being. The programme also fosters social cohesion and gender equality, enhancing community bonds. Disaster preparedness and environmentally conscious farming practices improve resilience and ecological preservation. While most activities will be sustained through local structures and government, resource constraints may challenge consistent support. Ongoing resource mobilisation is critical for sustaining long-term impact. Overall, the programme is well-positioned for sustainability through community initiatives, government partnerships, and capacity-building, but continued success requires addressing resource limitations and strengthening support for vulnerable households.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Operational Recommendations

These operational recommendations focus on immediate actions and program implementation details especially for the remaining implementation period:

- **Construction of houses:** The construction of houses has been halted pending the approval of the new model where beneficiaries receive some of the materials and they contribute to the building of the houses. The MTE recommends that the process be expediated so that this component is concluded. SOS should demonstrate to SOS Iceland and the MFA the benefits of changing the model so that construction can resume. Expediating the process will make it possible to determine the feasibility and efficacy of the new model, leading to comparisons between the two models during the final evaluation.
- **Construction of disability-friendly toilets:** The process of constructing girl-disability friendly toilets had been halted to facilitate the change in the design of these facilities. The MTE recommends that the designs must be completed and pave way for the construction of the toilets. These facilities must be constructed well in advance of the end of the implementation period to avoid pressure towards the end of the implementation period. This will also facilitate the comparison of the two models during the final evaluation.
- **Enhance communication on benefits:** Results show that there are misconceptions regarding the support available to young people who are being supported with vocational and technical skills outside Ngabu, and disbursements of start-up capital to establish businesses by the young people and households. It is important for SOS Malawi to clarify the differences in the levels of support among beneficiaries of similar initiatives but that are funded from different sources. The staggered nature of start-up capital also has to be well communicated to beneficiaries so that they know exact what to expect and at what point. The clarification should also be extended to CBOs and MSGs so that they are clear that there are no other benefits that are to accrue to them under the current phase other than the training and mentorship that they are already receiving.
- **Provision of start-up capital to train young people:** Currently, there is a lag period between training for young people and receipt of start-up capital. Funds permitting, there is need to minimise the lag between training and provision of start-up capital for young people. The presence of young people who have been trained but are currently not utilising the acquired skills is not healthy. SOS Malawi needs to support the young people with capital as is intended under the programme so that they can start their business ventures and receive monitoring and mentorship before the programme ends. The programme should also assist the trained young people by encouraging them to utilise locally available materials where possible instead of waiting.
- **Provide refresher courses on child protection:** Results have shown that although the quality of training was good, the duration of the training was short. To realise further improvements in child protection, it is recommended that SOS Malawi holds regular refresher courses for CBO, CPC, and MSG members. This will ensure deeper knowledge retention, especially in areas such as case management, child protection policies, and coordination with police services.

6.2. Strategic Recommendations

These recommendations focus on long-term planning, policy alignment, and broader systemic changes:

- While the evaluation appreciates the desire to change the model for assisting families with housing, due care has to be taken so that the most vulnerable still continue to benefit. The proposed model of offering households building materials towards the construction of houses is very noble only if the benefiting households are in a position to acquire the rest of the materials. Due care has to be taken in adopting the new model so that the most vulnerable households can continue to benefit from the initiative. It is recommended that a thorough evaluation of this initiative be conducted, contrasting between the two models and considering the social benefits.
- **Develop interventions that enhance access to education for children with disabilities:** There is a need to promote comprehensive support for children with disabilities. SOS Malawi should ensure that infrastructure improvements, such as disability-friendly toilets, are complemented by other support measures, including tailored educational and social services. The facilities are designed especially for children with physical disabilities, and these might be hampered by other factors preventing such children from attending school, thus reducing the effectiveness of the strategy.
- **Local advocacy for reducing child marriages and labour:** In addition to the other support, SOS Malawi should continue to engage traditional leaders and community gatekeepers to foster cultural shifts that protect children and promote positive norms, including reducing child marriages. Local advocacy should also include reducing child labour which impacts negatively on children's ability to attend school.
- **Strengthening the resilience component:** Scale up and strengthen existing livelihood resilience initiatives, such as VSLAs, crop and livestock support, and financial literacy training in the remaining period. Integrate climate-resilient agricultural practices and irrigation support to mitigate the impact of natural disasters. More households should move from reliance on rain-fed agriculture to irrigation so that they can produce food all year round.
- **Address gender disparities in education bursaries:** Findings have shown that more males are benefitting under the current bursary support as the programme targets children who are in secondary schools and fewer females are progressing to this level. Findings have also shown education levels are lower in female household heads as compared to males and contributing to the overall vulnerability of such households. SOS Malawi is encouraged to design interventions that address gender disparities in educational bursaries and vocational training through targeted awareness campaigns and equitable resource allocation. SOS Malawi is urged to conduct targeted awareness campaigns to encourage female enrolment in vocational training programs and provide tailored support to girls and women to enhance their employability and long-term outcomes.
- **Enhance Positive Parenting:** Due to the impressive results from the positive parenting trainings and subsequent emerging impact, it is recommended that SOS Malawi expand positive parenting training to foster improved childcare practices. Although this is an MTE, it is already anticipated that the training is going to significantly contribute to the goal of the project.
- **Mobilise more resources to strengthen the resilience of households:** This component has been affected negatively by natural disasters. The organisation is urged to mobilise for more resources and develop new interventions that will support the vulnerable families, particularly those facing external

shocks, to further reduce vulnerability and promote self-reliance. The intervention can build on the successes and lessons learnt from the current phase.

- **Child Protection Coordination:** Results have revealed a gap in the coordination of child protection initiatives among different stakeholders. The MTE recommends that SOS Malawi highlights the overlaps in roles and responsibilities of community-based structures. The organisation can build up on the successes of the current phase and offer more training on child protection and strengthen coordination of these community-based structures. The organisation should also Strengthen partnerships between community-based structures and law enforcement to improve child protection case management and policy implementation.
- **Strengthen financial sustainability for CBOs:** Facilitate financial support and training for CBOs to establish and manage income-generating activities, such as the proposed maize mill business. This would reduce dependence on external funding and promote self-sustaining community structures.
- **Facilitate comparisons between models/designs used under the programme:** SOS Malawi is urged to strengthen or develop mechanisms for continuous evaluation of models/designs, particularly in comparing new and existing models/designs to ensure adaptability and effectiveness. For instance, SOS Malawi should conduct a comparative evaluation of the two housing models (direct construction vs. material provision) to assess long-term social and economic benefits. Furthermore, the organisation should compare the effectiveness of the two designs of the girl-disability friendly toilets to determine the one that should be adopted in future programmes.

7. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Criteria	Broad Evaluation Question	Sub Questions	Type of responses required	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent is the SOS Children's Villages aligned with the national, and international frameworks? How does the programme contribute to these frameworks? To what extent do the objectives of the SOS Children's Villages correspond to the real needs of children and their families? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are the objectives of the programme plan aligned with SDGs, government of Malawi policies, priorities and plans, and government of Iceland policy for international development? To what extent are the objectives of the joint plan aligned with SOS Children's Villages policies and strategies? To what extent are the programme objectives consistent with the needs of beneficiaries? What are the gaps between the programme's interventions and the priorities of national policies and plans? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceptions and views of all stakeholders on alignment of the intervention to policies. Perceptions and views of all stakeholders on relevance of intervention to needs of beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme proposal M&E reports Stakeholder interviews Policy documents Discussions with communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review KIIs FGDs
Coherence/complementarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How compatible are the interventions in the programme with development efforts of the government, donors and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are synergies from the different development efforts in the respective sectors and in the region ensured? Is there consultation between technical and financial partners? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of coherence and complementarity of strategies Partnership success and challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme documents Stakeholder interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review KIIs

	<p>other partners? implementing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has the partnership with SOS Children’s Villages, Iceland been successful and what are the challenges? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies of government and other partners • Interviews with Programme Staff 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do programme activities overlap, duplicate other similar intervention by other donors or the government of Malawi? 			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has the programme contributed to strengthening the interventions and actions on the ground of stakeholders at the prefectural level in terms of prevention and care for children and young people who are victims of sexual exploitation? 			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has the joint programme reached groups and or individuals not previously covered or insufficiently covered? 			
<p>Effectiveness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the programme outcomes been achieved and what could have contributed to these results? • What are the unmet needs, particularly among the most vulnerable adolescents? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the planned outputs and outcomes achieved? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative analysis of planned against actual activities. • Perception and views of Program staff on attainment of planned activities • Perceptions and views of stakeholders and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme proposal • M&E reports • Interviews with children, young people and caregivers • Stakeholder interviews 	<p>Desk review KIs Questionnaire Survey FGDs</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What measurable evidence exists to demonstrate that vulnerable children and young people have better access to care, health protection, and quality inclusive education in the target community? 			

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What measurable evidence exists to demonstrate that vulnerable families in the target community have improved resilience to economic and climatic shock? 	beneficiaries on the efficacy of program strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with Programme Staff • Discussions with communities 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively did the programme ensure that communities actively protect vulnerable children and young people? 			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the major factors that influenced the achievement of these outcomes? 			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the major factors or challenges that prevented or made it difficult to achieve these results? 			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the gaps in needs of vulnerable children that are still existing in the community? 			
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent were the outputs/outcomes of the programme achieved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Within the planned time frame? ○ At a lower cost than other similar interventions? ○ With sufficient (in terms of quantity) and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did the programme adhere to the established timelines and budgetary allocations while achieving its intended milestones and results? • What were the key cost drivers or constraints impacting the efficient implementation of programme activities in Ngabu, Chikwawa, Malawi? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions and views of selected stakeholders and programme staff on adequacy & utilisation of resources. • Comparative analysis of budgets and expenditure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme proposal • M&E reports • Stakeholder interviews • Interviews with Programme Staff 	Desk review KIIs

	<p>adequate (in terms of quality) human/financial resources and inputs mobilized?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Would it be possible to achieve results with lesser resources? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively were the programme resources allocated and utilised in relation to the achieved outcomes and objectives to ensure that children and young people deprived of parental care have an equal chance to succeed in life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions and views of selected stakeholders on programme & resource management 		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the allocated human and financial resources sufficient and adequate to achieve the programme objectives and outcomes? 			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering the cost and results, could the results have been achieved using less resources? 			
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have been the significant changes and impacts of the programme? • To what extent has the programme contributed? • To what extent has the programme influenced changes • Are there any notable changes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What discernible changes or shifts in the lives of vulnerable children and young people were observed as a result of the programme interventions in the targeted communities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative analysis of before and after situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme proposal • Interviews with children, young people, and caregivers • Stakeholder interviews • Interviews with Programme Staff • Discussions with communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review KIIs Survey FGDs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did the programme contribute to improved care, health protection, and education outcomes for vulnerable youth and young people? 			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tangible action are the target communities to uphold the child right of vulnerable children and young people, protect them from abuse and ensure that have better access to child 			

		<p>protection services? How effective are the community child protection structures in ensuring that the programme delivers on this mandate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any notable changes or success stories observed in the lives of vulnerable children and young people and their families because of the programme? 			
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the probability that the positive actions resulting from the support of SOS Children's Villages Malawi and its partners will continue without this contribution? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How likely are the programme's achievements and outcomes on care, health, protection and education for vulnerable children to persist beyond the programme's duration? • Which interventions have been integrated in the existing livelihood support and child protection systems and thus will seamlessly continue after the programme ends? • Which interventions would still require external support beyond the life of the programme? • To what extent has the programme taken every opportunity to transfer skills and financial support for its activities to partners and final beneficiaries? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception and views of selected stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&E reports • Stakeholder interviews • Interviews with Programme Staff • Discussions with communities 	<p>Desk review KIIs FGDs</p>
Equity, gender & children's rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has access to prevention and care services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and with what success did the programme integrate or mainstream 	<p>Perception and views of selected stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&E reports 	<p>Desk review KIIs</p>

	<p>for the most vulnerable groups been taken into account?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have gender and the capacities of adolescents and institutions been strengthened in accordance with the principles of the child rights approach throughout the process of planning, implementing and monitoring the programme interventions? 	<p>vulnerable groups such as young girls in its interventions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What quantitative and qualitative data show that gender has been taken into account and that the capacities of adolescents and institutions have been strengthened in accordance with the principles of the child rights approach throughout the process of planning, implementing and monitoring the programme interventions? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder interviews • Interviews with Programme Staff • Discussions with communities 	<p>Survey FGDs</p>
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Annex 2: List of reviewed documents

1. Programme Quarterly Monitoring Reports
2. Programme Activity and Training Reports
3. FS Iceland Mid-term Results
4. Malawi FS Expansion Concept Note Final, August 2022
5. Bongaarts J. 2009. Human population growth and the demographic transition, Philosophical Transactions B
6. UNICEF. 2018. Basic Education and Youth Development Sectoral and OR+V(Thematic) Report.
<https://open.unicef.org/sites/transparency/files/2020-06/Malawi-TP4-2018.pdf>
7. SEP. 2017; UNICEF. 2018. 2018/19 Education Budget Brief. <https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org/esa/files/2019-04/UNICEF-Malawi-2018-Education-Budget-Brief.pdf>

Annex 3: Risk Management Matrix

Risk No.	Risk Description	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigatory strategy	Responsible Person
1	Delays in Stakeholder Mobilisation: Stakeholders may not be available or responsive in time.	High	Medium	Engage stakeholders early and maintain regular communication.	SOS
2	Incomplete Data Collection: Challenges in data collection due to technical & logistical issues	High	Low	Provide adequate support to all data collectors	VIG
				Regular updates between VIG & SOS	
3	Data Quality Issues: Inconsistencies or errors in data due to insufficient training or poor understanding of tools.	High	Medium	Conduct a training session for all data collectors.	VIG
				Implement a data quality assurance process (peer reviews, pilot tests).	
4	Delays in Report Writing: Unexpected delays in drafting or feedback incorporation.	High	Medium	Set internal deadlines earlier than the final deadline to allow a buffer.	VIG
				Prioritise critical sections and allocate resources accordingly.	
5	Stakeholder Feedback Delays: MFA, SOS or other stakeholders may take longer to provide feedback on the draft report.	Medium	Medium	Schedule feedback sessions in advance with clear deadlines.	VIG
				Communicate the importance of timely feedback to all stakeholders.	
6	Technical Issues During Remote Workshops: Connectivity issues or technical problems during validation workshop.	Medium	Medium	Test all technology and connectivity prior to the workshop.	VIG
				Have backup communication channels (phone, alternative platforms).	
7	Conflicts or Misalignment: Differences in expectations or objectives between VIG and MFA/SOS.	Medium	Low	Ensure alignment during the inception phase through clear communication.	MFA/SOS & VIG

				Regularly check in with stakeholders to address any emerging concerns.	
8	Capacity Constraints: Limited resources (time, personnel) affecting the ability to complete tasks on time.	High	Medium	Identify resource needs early and request additional support if necessary. Prioritise tasks and delegate where possible.	VIG
9	COVID-19 or Other Health Risks: Possible disruptions due to health concerns affecting the team or stakeholders.	High	Low	Develop a remote or hybrid plan for activities that can be done virtually. Follow health guidelines and have contingency plans in place.	VIG
10	Confidentiality or Data Security Breaches: Risk of sensitive data being exposed or mishandled.	High	Low	Implement strict data handling and security protocols. Train all team members on data protection and confidentiality standards.	VIG

Annex 4: Data Collection Tools

Attached separately

