



COMPACT
2025



MALAWI

ENDING HUNGER & UNDERNUTRITION CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

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SYNOPSIS OF ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Synopsis of Compact2025 Roundtable Discussion in Malawi

Compact2025, launched in November 2015, is a bold new initiative for ending hunger and undernutrition by 2025. It brings stakeholders together to set priorities, innovate and learn, fine-tune actions, build on successes, and synthesize sharable lessons in order to accelerate progress.

Compact2025 and partners organized a roundtable discussion in Lilongwe, Malawi, on May 26, 2016 to set the critical groundwork for assessing how to end hunger and undernutrition in Malawi by 2025. The roundtable identified key knowledge, policy, and implementation gaps as well as opportunities, potential synergies and priority areas for action. This synopsis summarizes the discussions, recommendations, and next steps.

Malawi's food security and nutrition situation

While hunger and undernutrition are still serious problems in Malawi, the country has made progress to reduce both. Nonetheless, Malawi has not attained stability in food security for all citizens, resulting in high levels of hunger and high mortality rates in the last two decades. Food shortages, most recently precipitated by El Niño-related weather shocks, have exacerbated hunger and undernutrition.

The country has made significant strides in reducing hunger. From 1990-92 to 2014-16, prevalence of undernourishment fell by over half, from 44.7 percent to 20.7 percent—a sign of strong, yet incomplete progress. Child undernutrition, manifested in stunting or low height for age, is still high. The proportion of children under 5 years of age affected by stunting in Malawi dropped from 53 to 42 percent between 2004 and 2014. Prevalence of child stunting varies by demographics: In 2010, it was more prevalent in urban areas (48 percent) than rural areas (40 percent), and among the poorest quintile (56 percent) compared to the wealthiest (36 percent).

Undernutrition results in severe human and economic costs: It costs Malawi 10.3 percent of their GDP annually, mainly due to lost productivity. In order for Malawi to meet its goals and end hunger and undernutrition by 2025, progress must be significantly accelerated.

Roundtable discussions

Over 100 stakeholders from a range of sectors participated in the roundtable discussion. The guest of honor was the Right Honorable Vice President of Malawi, Dr. Saulos Chilima, who reiterated his commitment to ending hunger and undernutrition. Also offering opening remarks were IFPRI director general Dr. Shenggen Fan and the Honorable Minister of Agriculture, Dr. George Chabonda. Dr. Alexander Kalimpira, Associate Professor of Human Nutrition and Head of the Department of Human Nutrition and Health at LUANAR presented Malawi's food security and nutrition situation and recent trends. These presentations set the stage for a series of panel and roundtable discussions.

Participants discussed questions of (1) which new or different policies/programs are needed to accelerate progress; (2) what data, information, and knowledge gaps must be filled; (3) what innovative approaches can be used to break down silos; and (4) what roles should different stakeholders play. They discussed these questions in two sessions, first on hunger, social protection, and vulnerability, and then on agriculture, nutrition, and gender. A third discussion took place around how to better coordinate policies and programs across sectors and stakeholders, and how to use innovative approaches to enhance synergies. A final panel on accelerating progress was chaired by Dr. Bob Baulch, IFPRI country program leader in Malawi, and included reflections from Mr. John Makina, Malawi Country Director of OXFAM. Along with Dr. Fan, Mrs. Chimwemwe Banda, Chief Director, Ministry of Health, Government of Malawi, offered closing remarks.

Five major recommendations

Recommendations resulting from the Malawi roundtable discussion to address challenges, fill gaps, and exploit opportunities to accelerate progress, include:

1. Strengthen capacity at all levels

Strengthening capacity of institutions, organizations, communities, and individuals is critical to accelerate progress. Greater capacity is needed to develop effective nutrition-driven policies as well as to efficiently implement those policies at national, district, and community levels. Further, capacity should be strengthened for champions of food security and nutrition at all levels. National and regional capacities in research, analysis, monitoring, and evaluation should be strengthened and should include education for mainstreaming nutrition across disciplines. More nutrition knowledge is also needed in agricultural research.

To increase capacity at community levels, nutrition education should be integrated with implementation. For example, implementing policies that promote crop diversification can be supported by behavior change interventions that increase demand for diverse and nutritious foods beyond maize. There is a need for increased awareness of food security and nutrition programs. Building capacity for nutrition knowledge by disseminating information of food preparation and nutritional content using media and technology should be explored.

2. “Break the cycle” with holistic, transparent, and market-driven approaches

A pattern of food shortages met with humanitarian responses has emerged in Malawi, and participants agreed that this cycle must be broken. Enacting and implementing the new National Social Support Programme will help enable a stronger multi-sectoral response to food and nutrition insecurity. National and sub-national early-warning systems should be developed and maintained. Timely collection and analysis of agricultural production data and Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) estimates should be promoted to inform early action. Further, strengthening MVAC in terms of inclusion of nutrition indicators, improved information sharing, and increased accuracy of targeting is critical.

To develop long-term solutions, market-driven policies and approaches with a focus on nutrition are needed. Maize policies and regulations should be more transparent and consistent, with clear guidelines for MVAC humanitarian response and Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) subsidized sales. The Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) should be revised to be less distortive of the market and also to allow for the promotion of diverse, nutritious crops. Additionally, value-chain approaches that target nutrition outcomes are needed. For example, the private sector should be engaged to help monitor aflatoxin at market level and address food safety issues. Addressing long-term challenges will also require boosting agricultural productivity, mitigating and adapting to climate change, and addressing high population growth.

3. Improve accountability and coordination

The Government of Malawi as well as many key stakeholders in Malawi are committed to ending hunger and undernutrition. However, without clear accountability with defined roles and actions, progress cannot be accelerated. Participants emphasized that food security and nutrition commitments and planning must be championed by Malawians with the government taking an active role. Along with accountability, greater coordination is needed to reduce inefficiencies and accelerate progress. A strong, centralized unit comprised of different stakeholders, including government, private sector, civil society, research institutions, and key groups, can help improve coordination. Joint sector-wide meeting should be held regularly to evaluate progress.

Greater accountability and coordination is needed at the district and community levels between actors involved in achieving food security and nutrition. District Executive Committees (DECs) should be strengthened to coordinate implementation, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation. Innovative feedback mechanisms should be established between national and district levels. At the community level, chiefs should play a stronger role in

implementation, farmers should be organized into groups, and men should also be made accountable for improving household nutrition. Improving coordinating and monitoring of food security and nutrition activities through continued leadership and strengthened coordination capacity with clear terms of reference will be key.

4. Fine-tune and implement nutrition-driven policies

Malawi has developed many strong policies that are well-integrated with nutrition, health, and gender objectives. However, policies and programs can be fine-tuned to become more food security- and nutrition-driven. For example, productive, nutrition-driven social protection can help provide nutritious foods in the near-term while contributing toward long-term agricultural productivity. Further, investments in inefficient agricultural policies that promote solely maize production should be redirected to support more efficient, nutrition-driven policies.

Improving implementation of policies that have an impact on food security and nutrition will be key in accelerating progress. For example, implementation of social protection policies can be made more efficient by installing a united beneficiary registry, and technology should be integrated in service delivery to help reduce leakages. Frontline extension and nutrition workers should be reinstated to help deliver nutrition interventions and training. Implementation structures are weak for gender policy, and more work is needed for all implementers to embrace it. Overall, there needs to be more dialogue, information sharing, and learning around best practices for implementation.

5. Fill data, indicator, and knowledge gaps

There are several key data and knowledge gaps that must be filled in order to generate evidence to inform policies and programs. These include more sex-disaggregated and district specific data and data on individual or household food consumption. More information is needed to carry out a vulnerability mapping to help understand the nature and severity of vulnerabilities to food and nutrition insecurity in Malawi. More research is needed to understand what it takes to improve implementation and facilitate scaling up of successes in Malawi. For example, rigorous impact evaluations should be conducted to determine the most effective and efficient social safety net transfer modalities in Malawi. Additionally, research on developing food value chains for nutrition and further understanding the role of women's empowerment in agriculture-nutrition linkages in Malawi was emphasized. Further research is needed to develop the agricultural sector, including how to inform investments in a sustainable and inclusive irrigation system, and to improve post-harvest handling along the value chain.

Filling data and knowledge gaps requires clear indicators and a strong research system. First, nutrition indicators must be developed and used at design stage of policies and programs. Knowledge management systems should be developed to consolidate fragmented data across sectors and to share information and experiences with stakeholders to learn from each other and be made aware of who is doing what in Malawi.

Next steps

There are many opportunities to fill gaps in research, policy, and implementation in order to accelerate progress. Responding to the needs identified at the roundtable discussion, Compact2025 aims to set up a Knowledge and Innovation Hub in Malawi, ideally within the Vice President's Office in partnership with relevant ministries and stakeholders. The hub will work to support country goals, processes, and programs with demand-driven research and innovation for the purpose of accelerating progress. It will help to collect data, strengthen capacities, and enhance tracking and monitoring and evaluation systems. With a focus on South-South learning, the hub will synthesize lessons and compile, share, and communicate information and best practices within Malawi and beyond. It will also leverage existing networks, including the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS). Outputs of the hub will include a freely accessible website, which will be set up so that it can be used also by farmers and individuals in local communities through their mobile phones. A follow-up roundtable will be held next year to reconvene stakeholders, evaluate progress, exchange experiences, identify action gaps, and fine-tune next steps toward ending hunger and undernutrition by 2025 in Malawi.