



**MALAWI  
COUNTRY  
STRATEGIC  
PLAN**

**2014-2018**

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**CONCERN**  
worldwide

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	2
2. INTRODUCTION .....	2
3. EXTERNAL ANALYSIS .....	2
3.1 Political and economic environment.....	2
3.2 Population and Environment.....	3
3.3 Poverty and development .....	4
4. INTERNAL ANALYSIS.....	5
4.1 Programmes .....	5
5. STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR COUNTRY PROGRAMME .....	6
Strategic Goal 1: Livelihood and Nutrition Security .....	9
Strategic Goal 2: Empowerment of Women and Girls .....	13
Strategic Goal 3: Organisational Effectiveness.....	16
6. COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN MANAGEMENT .....	18
7. APPENDICES.....	20

Image, front page: Beneficiary farmers Frank Suchali and his wife Sujadi, on their farm in Nkhotakota. Matthew Writtle, 2013.

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Concern Worldwide's Malawi Country Strategic Plan aims to consolidate and put into practice the important lessons learned over the past 12 years of our work in Malawi. The strategy is guided by Concern Worldwide's global mission and strategic plan, and has been designed to reflect our unique contribution toward the development of Malawi based on our vision of a world free of extreme poverty, and our understanding of both the enablers and barriers to long-term development in the Malawi context.

The overall mission is **to empower poor and vulnerable communities to attain their rights through high quality, participatory programmes, the benefits of which will continue and multiply without on-going support from Concern Worldwide**. We have organised our strategy around three strategic goals as outlined below. Under each goal, specific strategic objectives will guide our programming and implementation:

### Goal 1: Extremely poor households have improved food and nutrition security and increased resilience to shocks and hazards

- We will have the capacity to make timely and effective emergency responses in the districts where we are operational, as well as districts where we have no prior presence, when required;
- We will contribute to lasting reductions in extreme poverty through interventions focused on sustainable improvements in food and nutrition security;
- We will prevent undernutrition through direct programming, partnership, advocacy, and improved maternal and child health services.

### Goal 2: Women and girls are empowered and enabled to make decisions for their own wellbeing

- We will improve access to, and use of, high-quality maternal, sexual, and reproductive health services for women and youth;
- We will contribute to improvements in education among people living in extreme poverty through a safe, high-quality primary education.

### Goal 3: Concern programmes achieve the highest standards of quality, effectiveness, and accountability

- We will develop coordinated support systems that can deliver quality integrated programmes and effective emergency responses;
- We will have strengthened systems for monitoring, evaluating, learning, and sharing our results, with an emphasis on results-based management;
- We will have strengthened systems, support functions and programme processes to improve internal controls and transparency, along with accountability to beneficiaries, donors and other stakeholders.

This document will be used as the basis for all planning and management for the coming years, and will serve as the basis of new programme development, annual plans, partner engagement and staff development.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Concern Worldwide is an international, non-governmental, humanitarian organisation committed to the reduction of suffering and the elimination of extreme poverty in the world's poorest countries and has been working in Malawi since 2002.

Concern Worldwide's global organisational strategic plan covers the period 2011 to 2015, and has six strategic goals. These goals commit us to work in the poorest and most vulnerable places, respond effectively to emergencies, target global hunger, and address the root causes of poverty. In addition, the strategic plan guides the organisation to achieve higher standards accountability, results-based management, and organisational effectiveness.

Concern Malawi's previous country strategic plan (CSP) covered the years 2008 to 2012. Among other things, the previous plan led to a broadening of the country programme, by specifically identifying a need to include an education programme. The previous strategy also committed Concern Malawi to expanding its nutrition programme to focus more on maternal and child health.

Whereas the timing of the Concern Malawi Country Strategic Plan does not strictly follow the timing of the global strategic plan, it is very much aligned in terms of mission, values, goals and strategies.

Throughout all its work, Concern Malawi is guided by its overall mission to eliminate extreme poverty. Concern Worldwide's definition of extreme poverty takes into account three specific dimensions: assets, inequality, and risks & vulnerability. We believe that in order to eradicate extreme poverty, people must be assisted to improve their asset base (and their returns on these assets), reduce their vulnerability to shocks and hazards, and reduce inequality, in particular gender inequality. This strategic plan will focus on addressing these three dimensions of extreme poverty.

The CSP has been developed through a consultative process over the course of 2013 and 2014, with the involvement of staff in Concern Malawi and with support and input from Concern Worldwide's head office.

## 3. EXTERNAL ANALYSIS

An external analysis was undertaken in 2012 drawing on information published by credible sources, looking at the key indicators in Malawi.

### 3.1 POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

#### Guiding Principles

**Our Vision for Change:** A world where no-one lives in poverty, fear or oppression; where all have access to a decent standard of living and the opportunities and choices essential to a long, healthy and creative life; a world where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

**Our Mission:** Our mission is to help people living in extreme poverty achieve major improvements in their lives which last and spread without on-going support from Concern. To achieve this mission we engage in long term development work, respond to emergency situations, and seek to address the root causes of poverty.

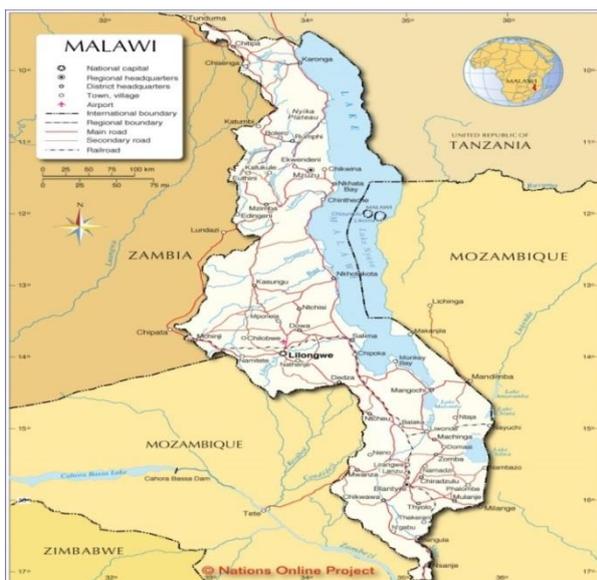
Malawi held its first democratic elections in 1994, creating a decentralised government structure. The onset of democratic governance also saw the rise of civil society and the opening up of the media as mechanisms for holding government to account. The free and credible presidential and parliamentary elections in 2009 marked a step forward in the successful transition to democracy.

The policies pursued by Malawi's democratically elected presidents include some notable achievements. Under former President Bingu wa Mutharika, poverty fell, child mortality was reduced, and the country's economy grew rapidly. However, in 2009, the situation declined, with worsening fuel and electricity shortages, rising unemployment and the suspension of budget support from international donors due to concerns over governance.

After the sudden death in May 2012 of Bingu wa Mutharika, the former vice-president, Joyce Banda, took over the presidency. Under Ms. Banda's leadership, political and economic reforms have been instigated, which resulted in greater confidence from donors, helping to restore aid and improve international relations. The Reserve Bank of Malawi devalued the Malawian kwacha by almost 50% and switched to a floating exchange rate, abolished fuel subsidies, and at the same time expanded agricultural subsidies.

Despite the reforms, concerns about public financial management remain, and the discovery in 2013 that millions of dollars in government funds had been misappropriated by civil servants and politicians dented donor confidence, with some donors suspending budgetary support at the time of writing. The impact of this is all the more evident given that international assistance accounts for 40% of the Malawi Government's budget.

There is a vibrant press in Malawi, reflected in the improved ranking to 75 (from 146) last year on Reporters without Borders' *Press Freedom Index 2013*. However, political participation and local civil society remain weak; in a recent World Bank study on governance and corruption, Malawi scored in the 41<sup>st</sup> percentile with regards to voice of civil society and accountability<sup>1</sup>.



### 3.2 POPULATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Landlocked Malawi ranks among the world's most densely populated and least developed countries. The economy is predominantly agricultural with about 80% of the population living in rural areas. Agriculture, which has benefited from fertilizer subsidies since 2006, accounts for one-third of the country's GDP, and 90% of export revenues<sup>2</sup>.

Malawi's climate is generally tropical, with a single rainy season which runs from November to April. There is little to no rainfall throughout much of the country from May to October. The total area of the country is

<sup>1</sup> The World Bank. *World Governance Indicators*. 2012. <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home>

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank. *World Development Indicators*.

118,480 km<sup>2</sup>, of which roughly one third is made up of Lake Malawi.

The nature and pattern of weather-related disasters is shifting and becoming unpredictable, increasing in frequency, intensity and magnitude as a result of climate change. With a historic vulnerability to natural disasters such as drought and flooding, climate change poses a significant risk. The poor spend a greater proportion of their income on food, and it is estimated 78% in Malawi, are exposed to increases in food prices linked to climate change. Recurrent and prolonged dry spells have been persistent in many parts of the country

The population of Malawi is estimated at 15,380,888 in 2013. Malawi has a very young population, with 48% of the population below the age of 15. The population is growing at a rate of 2.8% per year; between 1966 and 2010 the population rose from 4 million to 15.3 million<sup>3</sup>; the Malawi Government has prioritised family planning and slowing population growth as critical to the long-term development of the country<sup>4</sup>.

The rapidly growing population puts stress on already limited natural resources. Malawi maintains the highest rate of deforestation in southern Africa, losing forest at an estimated rate of 1-2.8% per year<sup>5</sup>, which results in soil erosion and can affect water sources. The Malawi Government estimates that poor natural resource management costs the country \$191 million per year through losses in agricultural productivity<sup>6</sup>.

### 3.3 POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT

Malawi is considered among the poorest countries in the world, ranking 170 out of 187 on the Human Development Index<sup>7</sup>. However, in a multi-agency report released in 2013<sup>8</sup>, Malawi was cited as one of the 20 best performing countries in making progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Significant gains have been made in reducing child mortality, the nation has rolled out anti-retroviral therapy for treatment of HIV and AIDS, and enrolment in the early grades of primary education is high. Still, Malawi is not expected to reach targets in reducing maternal mortality and ensuring equitable access to primary education.

#### Key Indicators, HDI 2013

- Population below poverty line: 50.7%
- HIV and AIDS prevalence: 10.6%
- Maternal mortality ratio: 675 per 100,000 LB
- Population growth: 2.8% per year
- Female literacy rate: 68%
- Human Development Rank: 170 out of 187
- Gender Inequality Index: 0.573
- Global Hunger Index Score: 15.1 (Serious)
- Children under 5 with stunted growth: 48%

The Malawi Integrated Household Survey (IHS) conducted in 2011 found disappointing rural

<sup>3</sup> Malawi National Statistical Office. *National Census 2008*.

<sup>4</sup> Malawi Ministry of Development Planning and Cooperation. 2010. *RAPID: Population and Development in Malawi*.

<sup>5</sup> Malawi Environmental Affairs Department. *Malawi State of the Environment and Outlook Report*. 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Malawi Environmental Affairs Department 2010.

<sup>7</sup> HDI 2013, <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/MWI.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> African Union Commission, UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), UN Development Program (UNDP), and the African Development Bank. 2013. *Assessing progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals*.

outcomes despite five years of economic growth. While overall poverty had decreased, improvements are limited to urban areas, and poverty in rural areas had risen.

Although poverty is widespread throughout Malawi, higher poverty rates are found in the southern and central regions. However, there are significant variations within districts, and other measures of human development vary widely, making it difficult to identify extremely poor-vulnerable areas.

#### **4. INTERNAL ANALYSIS**

An internal analysis was undertaken in late 2012 to assess the perceived strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for Concern Malawi's country programme. The assessment was carried out by an external consultant, and involved stakeholders from a wide range of backgrounds, including Concern Malawi staff, government and partner staff, other civil society organisations, and donors. Some of the key strengths of the programme that emerged include:

- Amongst staff, a strong sense of pride in our work;
- Externally, a reputation for high quality programming;
- Strong relationships with local communities and district-level stakeholders;
- Innovation and flexibility in programming;

A number of challenges also emerged from the internal analysis, including:

- A lack of integration, with programmes operating independently from each other;
- Staff motivation and retention challenges;
- An environment of mistrust due to fraud issues in the past;
- Complex internal systems;

##### **4.1 PROGRAMMES**

At the time of this strategic plan, Concern Malawi works in three sectors: Education; Livelihoods; and Health & Nutrition. During the previous strategic plan, Concern Malawi successfully added an education programme in one district, and widened the focus of its health programme beyond the management of malnutrition, to encompass maternal and child health and the prevention of under-nutrition.

In **education**, we have created a niche for ourselves in the area of preventing and responding to School-related Gender-Based Violence. However, an internal review carried out in 2012 found that the quality of education in the schools where we work is weak, posing a significant risk to the gains made in girls' education. Concern Worldwide's global strategy has adopted a tri-partite strategy which aims to improve access to education, quality of teaching, and the safety and wellbeing of learners. Concern Malawi will seek funding opportunities to develop further the education programme in line with the global strategy.

In the **health** sector, Concern's experience in supporting the government to scale up Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) has enabled us to take a strong leadership role in nutrition at the national level; Concern currently holds strategic positions within key civil society and other stakeholder groups on nutrition, and chairs the national Civil Society Organisations Nutrition Alliance. In 2009 Concern shifted its focus to

preventing under-nutrition and tackling child mortality; in 2012 the health programme further expanded to include maternal and reproductive health. Malawi was one of the three pilot countries involved in the Innovations for Maternal and Child Health project, funded by the Gates Foundation. Malawi's experience in health programming has contributed to organisational learning in health and nutrition, rolling out innovative approaches that have been adopted in other countries.

The Livelihoods programme was initiated using a rights-based approach, and has evolved over the years, now incorporating a greater emphasis on climate-smart agriculture, and market-based approaches, to strengthen trade and sustainably lift people out of poverty. In 2010, Concern began promoting the use of Conservation Agriculture, which has particularly benefitted women, and which can mitigate against the impacts of more frequent and longer dry spells. Projects are spread across three districts, and aim to increase agricultural production and diversity, build the capacity of civil society to meet the needs of the extreme poor, and empower women to have greater control over household resources. From 2007 to 2012, Concern worked primarily through partners, but due to mixed results and concerns over accountability, a shift has been made towards a value-added approach, identifying local organisations with specific strengths to carry out smaller, distinct pieces of work.

Concern Malawi was one of the first countries in Concern Worldwide to pilot and test cash transfers for emergency response, through the Food and Cash Transfer (FACT) and Dowa Emergency Cash Transfer (DECT) projects in 2006-2007. Concern has maintained a presence in emergency responses, carrying out cash transfers and emergency nutrition work in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

## **5. STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR COUNTRY PROGRAMME**

The country strategic plan for Concern Malawi has been developed within the context of the Concern Worldwide organisational strategic plan, which covers the period 2011 – 2015.

The overall goal of the strategic plan is **to empower poor and vulnerable communities to attain their rights through high quality, participatory programmes, the benefits of which will continue and multiply without on-going support from Concern Worldwide** and we have organised our strategy around three strategic goals.

Strategic Goal 1: Extremely poor households have improved livelihoods and nutrition security and increased resilience to shocks and hazards;

Strategic Goal 2: Women and girls are empowered and enabled to make decisions for their own wellbeing;

Strategic Goal 3: Concern programmes achieve the highest standards of quality, effectiveness, and accountability.

Within each strategic goal are several Strategic Objectives, which will form the core areas through which we will deliver and support our programmes. Each strategic objective has a number of specific expected results, which will enable the achievement of these programmes and approaches.

The strategy requires Concern Malawi to break down silos in programme and support departments Programming will be in integrated within geographical areas focussed on the

needs of our target group, the extreme poor. We intend to deliver a multi sectoral package in response to the realities of the poorest communities in the poorest districts. The success of the strategy goes beyond the success of one programme.

The operational districts chosen for programming will be determined by our application of the “How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty (HCUEP)” paper to the Malawi context, We are currently operating in four districts (Mchinji, Lilongwe Rural, Nkhotakota and Nsanje) and during this strategic plan will carry a HCUEP poverty review to ensure that we are in the poorest districts which will determine whether we need to shift away from current districts to districts facing more extreme poverty and lacking coverage from other actors.

**Concern Malawi Theory of Change, 2014-2018**

Mission

To empower poor and vulnerable communities to attain their rights through high quality, participatory programmes, the benefits of which will continue and multiply without ongoing support from Concern

Strategic goals

Extremely poor households have improved food and nutrition security and increased resilience to shocks and hazards

Women and girls are empowered and enabled to make decisions for their own wellbeing

Concern programmes achieve the highest standards of quality, effectiveness, and accountability

Strategic objectives

Capacity to make timely and effective emergency responses in the districts where we are operational, and when need be where we have no prior presence

Contribute to lasting reductions in extreme poverty through interventions focused on sustainable improvements in food and nutrition security

Prevention of undernutrition through direct programming, partnership, advocacy, and improved maternal and child health services

Improved access to, and use of, high-quality maternal, sexual, and reproductive health services for women and youth

Improvements in education among people living in extreme poverty through a safe, high-quality primary education

Coordinated support systems that can deliver quality integrated programmes and effective emergency responses

Strengthened systems for monitoring, evaluating, learning, and sharing our results, with an emphasis on results-based management

Strengthened systems, support functions and programme processes to improve internal controls, transparency, and accountability to beneficiaries, donors and other stakeholders

Inter-programme linkages

Inter-programme linkages

Programme results are made sustainable through improved governance and ownership at all levels, from communities to national policies

## 5.1 THEORY OF CHANGE

Concern Worldwide mission is to help people living in absolute poverty achieve major improvements in their lives which last and spread without ongoing support from Concern. We work with the poorest and most vulnerable people, in the poorest districts of the poorest countries, to tackle poverty, hunger, and respond effectively to disasters.

Concern Malawi's programmes are guided by the policy document "How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty" which defines extreme poverty in terms of three key dimensions: the lack of assets, or a poor return on assets; inequality; and risk & vulnerability.

Malawi is a land that depends on its natural resources for economic growth and the well-being of its people. Over the past twelve years, the rapid deterioration of Malawi's natural resource base has emerged as a major cause and risk factor for poverty, exacerbated by environmental degradation and rapid population growth. The result has been more frequent and more intense emergencies, which stress the already limited coping strategies and food reserves of poor families, and contribute to the extremely high rates of chronic malnutrition in the country

Under the first strategic goal, Concern Malawi will improve the food and nutrition security of rural poor households through interventions that will improve household resilience to shocks by mitigating and responding effectively to emergencies, improving household food availability, and reducing under-nutrition. These interventions will be closely linked, using lessons from other programmes that have successfully integrated food security, nutrition, and household resilience activities.

Gender inequality, and the role of women, is now recognised as a key driver of poverty globally and within Malawi. Women's empowerment has an important role to play in all areas of Concern's work in Malawi, but especially within our work in health and education. Girls are particularly important in breaking the cycle of poverty; girls' education is strongly linked to improvements in health and income inequality. Delaying childbearing, improving children's nutrition and reducing HIV infection rates all begin with a focus on young women.

Under the second strategic goal, Concern Malawi will develop programmes that seek to holistically improve the well-being of women and girls through improved education and health services. Prevention of undernutrition will also be a core focus of this work, providing cross-sectoral links to Concern's work in food and nutrition security.

The third strategic goal will guide how and where we deliver our programmes, and help us to deliver high-quality, relevant, and efficient programmes with the optimum impact in all the districts where we work.

Strengthening the capacity of government, civil society, and communities is essential for ensuring that the benefits of our programmes last and spread without our on-going support. Over the years Concern Malawi has established strong relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, and will continue to involve the participation of communities and our beneficiaries across all programmes. We will use the results of our programmes to advocate for improved services and policies, and will work with local partners to improve the relevance and accountability of our work.

## **STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Extremely poor households in Malawi have improved livelihood and nutrition security and increased resilience to shocks and hazards**

More than 80% of households in Malawi rely on agriculture for food and for income; agricultural growth is therefore a prerequisite to economic growth and human development in the country. Over 70% of the agricultural economy is reliant on small-holder farming, with 84% of smallholder farmers cultivating less than half a hectare of land. Although urbanisation has increased dramatically, the majority of the Malawian population still resides in rural areas.

Environmental degradation and increasing vulnerability to natural hazards pose serious risks to long-term development in Malawi. Climate-related disasters are becoming more and more common, with droughts and floods the main disasters that affect the highest number of people. Rapid environmental hazards, disasters, degradation all increase the risk to rural communities, and reduce their ability to cope with hazards.

Thanks in part to the government and donor investment in agriculture, Malawi has not had a major food shortage emergency since 2005, and has achieved surplus harvests most years. This has not, however, translated into significant improvements in the nutrition and food security of the poorest households. On average, extreme poor households face a “hunger gap” of five months each year, when they have insufficient food to meet their needs. Malawi has one of the highest rates of stunting in the world, at 48%. Even among middle-income households, chronic malnutrition is common, largely due to poor diet and the very high prevalence of illness. Stunting is closely related to a country’s socioeconomic conditions and contributes to reduced economic growth through the loss of physical and cognitive potential.

During the next five years, Concern Malawi will move beyond a focus on agricultural production and diversification, ensuring that agricultural improvements contribute to household nutrition, and actively working to reduce stunting. In terms of resilience and sustainability, Concern will address the increasing risk of environmental hazards, which frequently undermine and delete asset bases, through a greater emphasis on building resilience, and adapting programmes to meet the challenges of climate change, as well as through direct emergency response work when it is required.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.1: TIMELY AND EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY RESPONSE MECHANISM**

**We will have the capacity to prepare for, mitigate against and respond effectively to emergencies in the districts where we are operational, as well as in districts where we have no prior presence, when required;**

Humanitarian action is a key part of Concern’s work globally; Concern initially began working in Malawi in response to a food emergency, and has been involved in several small-scale emergency response actions over the past decade. Since 1990, Malawi has had to contend with a total of 16 state-declared disasters, with drought and floods affecting the highest numbers of people.

Given that Malawi’s economy is dependent on rain-fed agriculture, the effects of climate change are potentially devastating to the already limited livelihoods options of extremely poor households. Another major contributing factor that has increased the frequency of emergencies has been population growth, which exacerbates environmental degradation. Further with 48% of the population under 15 years of age, dependency ratios are high, and the capacity to cope with disasters for most households is stressed due to years of natural resource base depletion. These

factors make it almost certain that Concern Malawi will have to respond to more frequent, severe and complex emergencies within the next five years. This means that we need to strengthen our work on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and be able to identify and respond effectively to emergencies when they occur.

Concern is committed to effectively respond to localised and countrywide emergencies through helping people and communities to avoid impending disaster threats; ensuring that those who are affected receive adequate assistance; and contributing to recovery efforts following an emergency. To facilitate this objective, increased and improved surge capacity mechanisms will be identified and put in place in order to ensure skilled staff are readily available in a timely manner to respond to emergencies and prolonged crises. At the same time we will continuously monitor for key hazards at a national and local level – adverse weather conditions on agro-pastoral production (failed or poor harvests), increased prices in rural and urban markets and political developments, particularly in the run up to 2014 elections.

Concern will explore options for maintaining a contingency fund, accessing new rapid funding mechanisms for emergency response. In addition, we will develop an emergency preparedness plan, as part of the “Preparing Effective Emergency Responses (PEER)” process and build the capacity of staff and partners to respond to and prepare for emergencies. As part of this plan, district offices will compile and keep updated key district data such as a list of villages and populations, the frequency and intensity of hazards and emergencies, and key early warning indicators. Our humanitarian work will complement efforts to build resilience to shocks and hazards through our development programmes.

#### Expected results:

By the end of this strategic plan, Concern will:

1. Have an approved Preparing for Effective Emergency Response (PEER) plan that will be the basis of emergency response decision making and implementation;
2. Establish an Emergency Response team, made up of existing staff members and partners that will be ready and able to ensure that the country programme has sufficient surge capacity to respond effectively to emergencies;
3. Build the surge capacity of Concern Malawi staff to enhance their understanding and improve their skills in managing and implementing an emergency response initiative;
4. Contribute to coordination and response in the event an emergency occurs, focusing on, but not limited to, our existing areas of operation.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.2: FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY**

### **We will contribute to lasting reductions in extreme poverty through interventions focused on sustainable improvements in food and nutrition security**

Agriculture is central to development in Malawi, where the majority of people live in rural areas, dependent on small-holder farming for their livelihoods. Concern has worked to strengthen food security in several districts in Malawi since 2003 and has recently been recognised as a leader in **Conservation Agriculture (CA)**. Initial results from Concern’s CA projects have shown clear benefits of this approach in terms of improved yields, better drought resistance, and protection of farmers’ natural resource base. Concern in Malawi will leverage its experience in implementing CA to advocate for scale-up and greater commitment to climate smart agriculture within the country.

The overarching themes of under-nutrition, food security, access to markets and social protection are highlighted by almost all development partners in Malawi. These themes are also central to most government policy discussions. It is expected that over the next five years, agriculture, markets, and nutrition security will continue to be high priority areas for development programmes.

Although programme evaluations have shown that Concern's approach in Malawi has a number of very effective and innovative approaches, there is scope for improvement. Over the next five years, greater emphasis will be placed on the role of markets, and on empowering women through all interventions.

Concern started working with the private sector and engaged with BERL, to produce oil from *Jatropha* grown as hedges around farmers' fields that will be used to produce diesel and kerosene biofuel blends for the local market. Within this strategic plan more opportunities with the private sector will be explored in developing value chains.

Recent evidence shows that interventions to strengthen agriculture have the potential to lead to improvements in nutrition, when delivered using a nutrition-sensitive approach, with an emphasis on nutritional education and the role of women. To ensure that Concern Malawi's programmes target not just food security, but nutrition security, Concern Malawi will apply learning and best-practice from recent agriculture projects that have successfully had an impact on nutrition.

#### Expected results:

By the end of this strategic plan, Concern Malawi will:

1. Establish a national presence as a leader in generating evidence, information, and learning around Conservation Agriculture and advocating on Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA).
2. Concern Malawi's existing three districts will strive to be seen as "centres of excellence" for generating learning around the adoption of Conservation Agriculture;
3. Design and implement an integrated nutrition and agriculture programme in at least one district;
4. Increase engagement with private sector and increase activities designed to strengthen interaction with local markets;
5. Improve the targeting and effectiveness of programming for extreme poor households with a greater focus on households lacking productive assets.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.3: IMPROVED NUTRITION**

#### **We will contribute to the prevention of under-nutrition through direct programming, partnership, advocacy, and improved maternal and child health services**

Under-nutrition is a persistent and endemic problem in Malawi. Between 1992 and 2010, the rate of stunting among children under the age of five has reduced, but nearly half of all children (47.8%) are still chronically under-nourished. In addition, severe acute malnutrition (SAM) affects 1.6% of children, increasing the risk of illness and death.

High levels of under-nutrition are linked to poor economic growth; evidence indicates that developing countries could increase GDP by 2-3% if they invested in good nutrition interventions. The evidence suggests that children with stunting are more likely to become sick or die at a young age, and have reduced educational attainment and cognitive development.

There are numerous factors contributing to poor child nutrition in the country, including a monotonous, maize-based diet, frequent illnesses, poor maternal nutrition, and inappropriate child

feeding practices. Interventions to address under-nutrition therefore need to be holistic and comprehensive in order to be effective.

Concern has a strong history of working within the nutrition sector in Malawi. We piloted the CMAM approach in Malawi in 2002, and later successfully assisted the government to scale up CMAM throughout the country. Malawi was one of the first “early risers” after the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) movement was launched in 2010.

As a result of our credible and strategic presence in the nutrition sector, Concern was invited to represent civil society organisations in the national donor nutrition group, and is one of the founding co-chairs (and host) of the national Civil Society Organisations Nutrition Alliance (CSONA). The Alliance builds consensus on nutrition policy and actions and encourages sharing of best practices and lessons learnt. The alliance also advocates for mobilisation of funding for nutrition. We are also active members of the National Nutrition Committee and the national SUN Task Force. Concern Malawi will use membership of these strategic bodies to continue to galvanise actors, enhance existing nutrition coordination platforms and seek to ensure all relevant stakeholders prioritise effective nutrition interventions. We will also ensure that in nutrition interventions the extreme poor are prioritised, and we will be held accountable for nutrition targets.

Concern will continue to maintain a high profile presence in nutrition in Malawi, both contributing to the development of new and innovative solutions to prevent under-nutrition, as well as by ensuring that children with acute malnutrition are able to access care. This will be achieved through the primary health care system, as well as through an integrated approach to health and nutrition. Emphasis will be placed on a life-cycle approach to improving nutrition, addressing not only childhood nutrition but the important role of adolescent girls’ and maternal nutrition in preventing stunting.

#### Expected results:

By the end of the strategic plan, Concern Malawi will:

1. Contribute to the growing body of evidence on best practice in the prevention of under-nutrition through at least one district-wide, holistic programme aiming to reduce chronic malnutrition;
2. Be recognised as a leader in nutrition programming within the country and internationally, continuing to participate in key networks and influencing nutrition programming and policy in the interests of the extreme poor;
3. Use its influence in nutrition to increase the role of civil society in advocating for improved nutrition services, both independently and through the launch and support of a national CSO Nutrition Alliance;
4. Strengthen the integration of nutrition within the health sector in our operational districts.

## **STRATEGIC GOAL 2: WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE EMPOWERED AND ENABLED TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR THEIR OWN WELLBEING**

Gender inequality remains a key driving force of poverty in Malawi. Despite holding essential roles in Malawian society as productive members of the labour force, caregivers, and custodians of culture, women remain disadvantaged in terms of income, ownership, decision-making power, and other assets. Gender inequality can be found at the heart of nearly all major issues hindering long-

term development in Malawi, such as HIV and AIDS, agricultural productivity, and poor educational attainment.

Women are a key focus of all Concern's sectors, and a gender mainstreaming approach has been adopted for all programmes. Practical and pragmatic links will be built between programmes to better address the needs of women and girls. The Education and Health programmes in Malawi will specifically address the role of women in development by improving their access to quality education, by improving choice and opportunities for reproductive health, and through strengthening maternal, new-born, and child health services. Within the Livelihoods programme, women will be prioritised for key interventions, with an aim of improving their control over household resource and decision-making processes.

Over the next five years, Concern aims to work with the most vulnerable individuals and communities to help them develop their own understanding and 'voice', with particular focus on women's empowerment. Although the focus will remain primarily on engaging and empowering women, men will be engaged in Concern's programmes as well, in recognition of the key role they can play in challenging gender norms and ending the cycles of gender-based violence.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.1: IMPROVED WOMEN'S HEALTH**

#### **We will improve access to, and use of, high-quality maternal, sexual, and reproductive health services for women and youth**

Despite a moderate decline, Malawi still has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios (675 per 100,000 live births) in sub-Saharan Africa, and it is not expected to meet the maternal mortality Millennium Development Goal<sup>9</sup>. Every day in Malawi, ten women die due to complications of pregnancy or childbirth, leaving children orphaned and families without a significant provider of labour and care. Most maternal and reproductive health services are targeted to married women through health facilities, and young people, despite high rates of teenage pregnancy, are often overlooked by government health services.

HIV and AIDS remains a major obstacle to development. An estimated 930,000 people in Malawi, or 10.6% of the adult population, are living with HIV and AIDS and 68,000 people die of AIDS every year<sup>10</sup>, despite the national roll-out of antiretroviral therapy (ART).

Concern Worldwide has worked in the area of maternal and child health in Malawi since 2010, and has implemented a number of innovative and effective approaches such as strengthening the capacity of communities and service providers to implement and manage health interventions, while also integrating nutrition interventions within behaviour-change approaches. Concern Worldwide's *Innovations for Maternal, New-born, and Child Health* project helped establish important connections within the health sector in Malawi.

In the next five-year period, Concern Malawi aims to strengthen and broaden existing programming in maternal and new born health, developing specific expertise and a niche for itself in the area of youth. We will emphasise an integrated approach to health systems strengthening, at both facility and community level, and seek to incorporate new elements of the programme if required.

#### Expected results:

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<sup>9</sup> Government of Malawi, National Statistics Office Malawi: 2010 Demographic and Health Survey Report (2011).

<sup>10</sup> Available from: [www.unaids.org/en/Country](http://www.unaids.org/en/Country)

By the end of the strategic plan, Concern Malawi will:

1. Maintain its technical specialisation in the area of maternal and reproductive health services through a district programme in at least one district, with an additional emphasis on integrating interventions that address new-born health;
2. Develop expertise and a niche in delivering health services to youth, working with and through youth to improve the quality, appropriateness, and accessibility of both health and nutrition services, including prevention of HIV and AIDS, at the community, school, and facility level;
3. Develop a strong reputation for building community capacity with particular emphasis on our innovative village level Health Institution Capacity Assessment Process (HICAP).

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.2: IMPROVEMENTS IN EDUCATION**

### **We will contribute to improvements in education among people living in extreme poverty through a safe, high-quality primary education**

Education is recognised as a foundation for long term development, contributing to improvements in nutrition, human productivity, child survival, and family planning. Improvements in education are also strongly linked to reductions in income inequality.

However, the external analysis has found that Malawi lags behind its neighbours in delivering quality primary education. One quarter of all learners will not reach Standard 6 (UNDP, 2010), and every year 20% of students need to repeat at least one grade. Large class sizes, poor infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, poor quality instruction, poverty, low parental involvement, and inadequate school management all contribute to the problem<sup>11</sup>. Gender based violence is also recognised as a major impediment to realising the right of all girls to access quality education<sup>12</sup>.

Concern Worldwide has worked in the area of education in Nsanje District since 2010,. We are one of the few organisations targeting school-related gender-based violence, despite the fact that such violence is widespread in Malawi. Concern Malawi seeks to expand its programming in education, with emphasis on preventing school-related gender-based violence, strengthening community involvement in education, and improving early-grade literacy. Concern Malawi will also link with health and nutrition programmes to incorporate issues of maternal and new born health among youth, and adolescent girls' nutrition.

#### Expected results:

By the end of the strategic plan, Concern Malawi will:

1. Develop and begin implementing a new programme that holistically addresses access, student well-being, and quality of instruction.
2. Become a leader in Malawi on the issue of equality in education, particularly focusing on generating evidence and sharing learning on the barriers that prevent girls from accessing education, such as gender-based violence and maternal and new born health;
3. Use its long-standing presence in education in Nsanje district as a platform for piloting and testing new innovations in education programme delivery; the results of these will be used to advocate for scale-up in additional districts.

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<sup>11</sup> Concern Worldwide, 2012

<sup>12</sup> Dunne et al., 2006

### **STRATEGIC GOAL 3: CONCERN PROGRAMMES ACHIEVE THE HIGHEST STANDARDS QUALITY, EFFECTIVENESS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Concern Malawi's programmes in Education, Livelihoods, and Health & Nutrition form the core strategies for reducing extreme poverty in Malawi. However, in order to effectively address poverty, these programmes need to be run efficiently, effectively, and transparently. The contribution of Concern Malawi's support systems are essential for the management of high-quality, responsive programmes. In addition, adherence to standards of accountability will ensure that the programmes we deliver are appropriate for the populations we aim to serve. Monitoring and evaluation of programme implementation and results will inform programme development and ensure programmes are of the highest quality, and documentation of our learning will improve institutional knowledge so that the impact of our programmes go beyond district borders.

#### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.1: COORDINATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

**We will develop coordinated support systems that can deliver quality integrated programmes**

Since 2008, considerable efforts have been made to address the risk of fraud within the operating environment, and systems and support functions have been re-shaped in order to effectively manage the risk of fraud while still remaining responsive to the country office's needs. Over the next five years, we will continue to improve our procurement, human resources, Information and Communication Technology, and financial management functions.

Going forward the support services unit will contribute to the programme quality goal by seeking to provide responsive, timely support services that ensure the financial integrity of the organisation. Communication across departments will be strengthened, and programme and support services staff will meet regularly to inform, plan and work together as well as share specific donor and other compliance requirements.

Concern Malawi intends to be a centre of excellence known for the quality of its programming, and our greatest resource is the team of staff who carry out and support our programmes. Therefore, the role of **human resources** management in ensuring that high-achieving staff are recruited, developed and retained is essential if we are to effectively implement this strategic plan. Strong leadership will also be integral to this plan. Over the next five years, Concern Malawi will strengthen the existing management structure, building the capacity of management staff to adapt to the constantly changing external environment, effectively managing programmes, making decisive and transparent decisions, and communicating effectively.

#### Expected results:

By the end of the strategic plan, Concern Malawi will:

1. Strengthen our ability to recruit, retain, and develop dedicated staff of high quality to fulfil our vision and mission;
2. Ensure Concern Malawi's general donations and donor funds are safeguarded, utilised correctly, and that budget holders are provided with timely, accurate, and user-friendly financial information;

3. Ensure that logistics and procurement systems are able to deliver the correct goods, to the correct location, in the correct condition, at the correct time, while ensuring the best value for money;
4. Further develop information systems in a way that enables users to work with maximum efficiency, increasing the use of technology in programme delivery, and rolling out the creative use of technologies for management, monitoring and evaluation, programme delivery, and communication.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.2: MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING**

**We will have strengthened systems for monitoring, evaluating, learning, and sharing our results, with an emphasis on results-based management**

Under Concern Worldwide's organisational strategic plan, we have committed to being an organisation which delivers results, continuously learns from its programmes, and uses learning to influence policies, programmes, and people at all levels – from beneficiaries, duty bearers and the wider community to global communities of practice. Concern Worldwide is committed to results-based management, using the organisational programme cycle management system.

Malawi's internal analysis found that monitoring and evaluation is inconsistent across programmes; all programme staff share responsibility for monitoring and evaluation, but there is a lack of coordination across programmes, and there is no country-level M&E framework in place. Improvements have been made in ensuring that baseline and endline data collection is carried out for all new projects, and the use of digital data gathering across all programmes is being rolled out.

Over the next five years, Concern Malawi aims to continue to build on the improvements of the past five years, while addressing the gaps that remain, developing a more systematic and streamlined approach to monitoring and evaluation; digital data gathering will be utilised as much as possible.

#### Expected results:

By the end of the strategic plan, Concern Malawi will:

1. Develop a country-level monitoring and evaluation plan as well as results frameworks to guide the implementation of the country strategic plan, which will be reviewed annually;
2. Ensure that all programmes have a clear monitoring and evaluation plan, using standardised tools and approaches, and that all programmes conduct annual reviews, midterm reviews (where appropriate), as well as baseline and endline data collection;
3. Improve cross-programme learning, and will develop regularly and systematically share learning information, best practices, and results within the organisation;
4. Develop improved systems and tools for documenting and sharing learning and results externally, incorporating funding for learning events and commemorative days in all major proposals.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.3: TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

**We will have strengthened systems, support functions and programme processes to improve internal controls and transparency, along with accountability to beneficiaries, donors and other stakeholders.**

Accountability and transparency are central to Concern Worldwide's commitment to constantly improve the quality of its work. Concern Worldwide was certified by the Humanitarian

Accountability Partnership (HAP) in 2010, one of only eight organisations certified at the time, which provides the guiding principles to which Concern Worldwide is applying to both humanitarian and development work. Concern Worldwide believes this internationally recognised certification is an indication of our strong and accountable processes and is a stamp of quality of our work.

Concern Malawi has a number of existing instruments for accountability such as the Programme Participant Protection Policy (P4), staff Code of Conduct (CoC), and Complaints and Response Mechanism (CRM), which make up core elements of our accountability framework. During the course of the next strategic plan, the Concern Malawi team will bring a renewed emphasis on reaching these accountability commitments. A key element of being accountable to our stakeholders is ensuring that the appropriate people are reached with aid and support. In addition to the policies and guidelines outlined above, Concern Worldwide is also accountable for ensuring that programmes are targeted to benefit the extreme poor, in line with the guiding principles set forth in the document 'How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty'. In the next five years, Concern Malawi will seek to balance practical concerns, such as funding opportunities and the need to avoid overlap with other development actors, with strategic programming that targets the most poor and vulnerable communities. Efforts to improve targeting will be accompanied by a renewed emphasis on exit strategies both at community and district level.

#### Expected results:

By the end of this strategic plan, Concern Malawi will:

1. Work in locations determined by a coherent targeting policy and related exit criteria, which will be developed by the end of 2014;
2. Review and revise the existing accountability implementation plan making accountability commitments simpler and more understandable to both Concern Malawi and partner staff, with a specific focus on information sharing;
3. Pilot, roll out, and monitor an appropriate Complaints and Response Mechanism (CRM) for the workplace and for development and emergency programmes;
4. Review and revise our partnership strategy with an aim towards establishing the purpose and improving the quality of our partnerships.

## **6. OPERATIONALISING THE PLAN**

### **6.1 HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGY**

Concern Malawi recognises that our staff are our greatest asset, and that attracting, developing, and retaining high quality staff will be essential to the achievement of this strategic plan.

To support the realisation of Concern Malawi's goals, we will increase our investment in the development of programme and support staff. A training and development policy will be finalised, which will explore ways to provide opportunities for on-going study and training. Concern Worldwide has begun rolling out management and leadership training throughout the organisation, and Concern Malawi will maximise this opportunity to the benefit of staff. In particular, we seek to support national staff to grow within the organisation, and aim to increasingly nationalise senior management roles.

Special effort will be placed in fostering a team-based approach across the country programme, improving internal communication and engaging in activities to build a team spirit within and across departments.

Globally, Concern Worldwide has set a target of falling at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile for staff salary and benefits, and Concern Malawi will routinely benchmark our salaries with other similar organisations to ensure that staff packages remain competitive within the rapidly changing Malawian market.

## **6.2 FUNDING STRATEGY**

The current external trends have had major consequences for NGOs with regards to funding. With the economic crisis set to continue, we can expect structural changes in the NGO sector as funding becomes scarcer and more competitive. Today more than ever, NGOs find that traditional funding sources are often insufficient to meet the growing needs and rising costs in programmes. Furthermore, increased restrictions imposed on many grants and donations, along with the uncertainty of these funds over time, make it difficult for NGOs to do long-term planning, improve their services or reach their full potential.

To increase access to more funding opportunities, we need to raise knowledge about our organization's accomplishments and key competences in order to strengthen our competitive position for grant funding. To allow us to deliver effective, high quality programmes, we will continue to seek to diversify our funding base, with an emphasis on long-term grants. We recognise the value of working in consortia, and will leverage our existing relationships in small consortia, and with our Alliance2015 partners, to position ourselves for larger, multi-organisational and multi-country grants. While we aspire to expand and increase our programmes, we aim to grow at a pace that does not overextend our capacity to effectively and efficiently absorb funds in delivering quality programmes to our beneficiaries.

## **7. COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN MANAGEMENT**

Responsibility for implementing and managing the plan rests with Concern's Senior Management Team in Malawi, who will be expected to report on an annual basis on progress towards achieving the goals identified in the CSP and provide an update on performance against the indicators included in the Country Results Framework (CRF).

To ensure proper implementation of this Country Strategic Plan, it must be well understood by staff and stakeholders. To some extent, staff understanding of the strategic plan has already begun by virtue of their involvement in the process of developing this plan. Coherence between the CSP and resultant programmes will help ensure practical understanding of this strategy. However, once the CSP is formally approved, the plan will be printed and rolled out to in all our offices and partners.

Upon approval of the CSP country-level monitoring and evaluation and results frameworks will be developed to guide the implementation of the country strategic plan. The framework will be reviewed annually, or more frequently as necessary, to monitor progress. The plan itself will be reviewed in mid-2015 to ensure it is still relevant to the Malawian context.

Monitoring indicators for result areas and specific objectives of livelihoods, health and education programmes will directly link to results outlined above in this plan. This integration will mean that programme annual reviews, mid-term reviews, and end-of-programme evaluations will contribute to measuring progress towards the objectives of this strategic plan.

As this document is the basis for all planning and management for the next five years, our annual operational and strategic pace and direction is communicated by cascading the overall strategic results through to individual objectives and personal development plans. In this way, the management and monitoring of the CSP will be a routine task of line managers.

## **8. APPENDICES**

Annex 1 – Country Results Framework

Annex 2 – Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for Country Strategic Plan

Annex 2 – External Analysis Report (2012)

Annex 3 – Internal Analysis Report (2012)