



# Stories of Change in Nutrition

NOVEMBER 2022

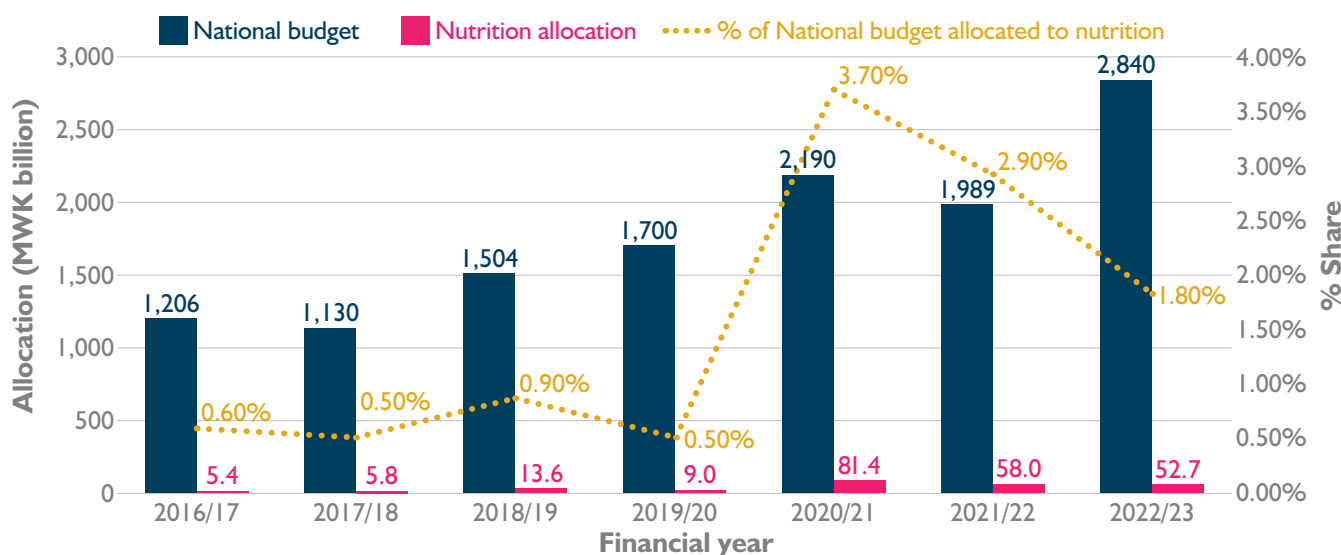
## Funding for Nutrition



JONATHAN HYAMS / SAVE THE CHILDREN

Malawi has strong policies and frameworks for nutrition but insufficient funding to implement them. Analyses of government budgets at national level and in 10 districts from financial years 2016/17 to 2022/23, found that domestic budget allocations for nutrition are still well below the 5% of national budget target set by the government. National budget allocations ranged between 0.5% to 3.7% depending on the year. At district level, they ranged from 0.2% to 1.6%, with only one district, in one financial year, exceeding the 1.5% target for district level nutrition budget allocations. Over 95% of nutrition activities in Malawi are currently funded by external donors. The absence of sufficient, consistent and dedicated domestic budget for nutrition at national and district level, means nutrition policies and plans will continue to be driven by, and dependent on, externally funded pilot-scale projects without national reach or ownership. Budget tracking is essential, as it provides data, which all actors can use to hold government to account on their commitments and funding targets.

Figure 1: National level nutrition budget allocation

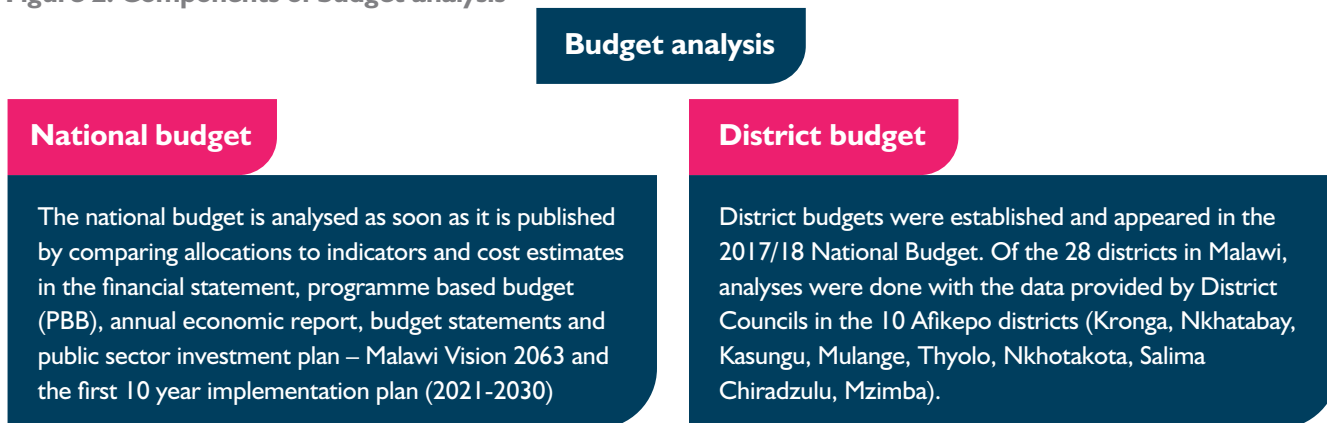


## Background

Malawi has made substantial progress in reducing the prevalence of stunting in recent decades, but it is still one of the highest in the region. Malawi has strong national policies and strategies supporting nutrition, however turning this policy into programming requires financing. Currently, over 95% of nutrition activities are funded by external donors, channelled either through government or through direct

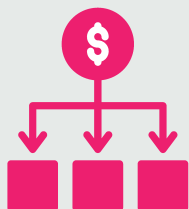
implementation. To increase government funding for nutrition and reduce dependency on external funders, it is vital for advocates to have an accurate understanding of government budget allocations for nutrition. Through the [Afikepo](#) advocacy project, government and civil society organisations at national level and in the 10 project districts were trained to conduct annual budget analyses to monitor budget allocations to nutrition and use that data to advocate for more funding for nutrition.

Figure 2: Components of budget analysis



## What does the national budget show?

### Low budget allocation to nutrition



- Figure 1 shows that Overall allocation to nutrition since 2016/17 has been below the 5% share of national budget recommended in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (MGDS III) (Government of Malawi, 2017), and the 3% target recommended by the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) committee in the East Southern Africa region (Graça 2020).
- After very low budget share allocations (0.5%-0.9%) between 2016/17 and 2019/2020, it reached a peak of 3.7% (its highest level) in 2020/21, but has since fallen again to 1.8% in 2022/23, despite a large increase in the overall national budget.
- The total budget for nutrition increased substantially since 2016/17 (when it was only MWK 5.4 billion) but fell again from MK 58 billion (in 2021/22) to MK 52 billion in 2022/23 allocation.

It is important to note that these budgets include donor funding channelled through government. The increase observed in 2020/21 is in fact linked to new external funding for nutrition channelled through government (the Adolescent Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture Pilot project and the Access to Primary Education [NAPE] project). The drop observed in the 2021/22

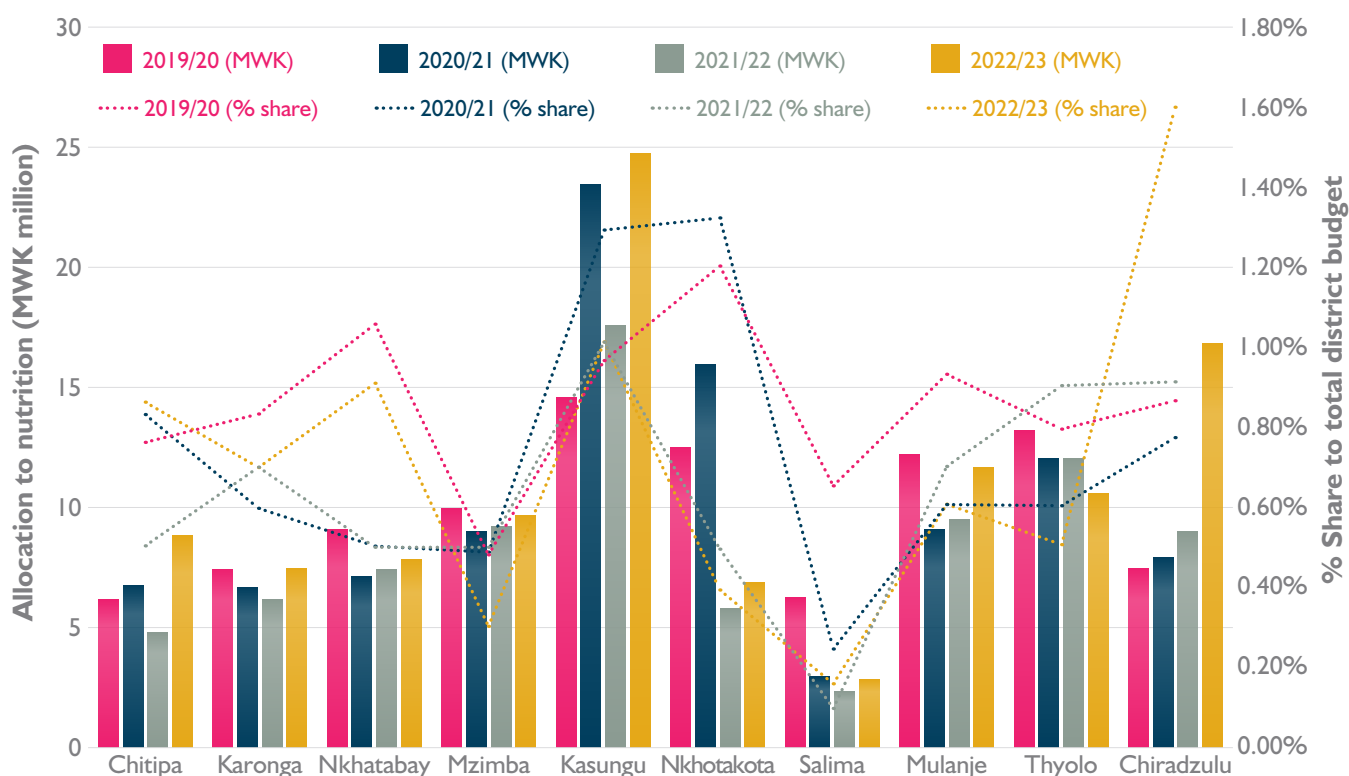
financial year was because of a drop in previously funded programmes/interventions – Agriculture diversification and livestock production interventions (with zero allocation in 2020/21), and the phase out of NAPE. This highlights the need to strengthen commitment by government to increase domestic funding for nutrition.

### Variations in allocation across ministries



- The government of Malawi has prioritised nutrition in the National Development Agenda (MGDS III, New Vision 2063), including within the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Agriculture National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP, 2017–2022) for financial year 2022/23, with the highest number of nutrition interventions funded through the health sector.
- The Ministry of Health allocation for nutrition (MWK 18.6 billion) in 2022/23 represents an increase of over MWK 10 billion from 2021/22, but the trend is reversed in the Ministry of Agriculture, where allocations fell by MWK 12 billion to MWK 17 billion.
- Intra-sectoral allocations on programmes in some Ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, are crowding out nutrition programmes consequently causing a reduction in the allocation.
- Shortfalls in allocations, combined with inefficiencies in the management of programmes are inhibiting the effective implementation of nutrition policies and plans.

**Figure 3: District nutrition budget allocation**



## What does the district budget show?

- Minimal resources for nutrition:** The budget allocation for nutrition across the 10 Afikepo districts ranges from 0.2% to 1.6% of the total district budget between 2016/17 and 2022/23. Only one district (Chiradzulu) reached the 1.5% target for district level budget allocations, and only in 2022/23. The lack of dedicated budget lines for nutrition at district level means that nutrition interventions (growth monitoring and promotion, community management of acute malnutrition, awareness campaigns, training health staff to do nutrition counselling, establishing Care Groups, school feeding, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, etc.) must be funded within government sectors' budgets (health, agriculture, education). However, nutrition interventions are rarely prioritised in the development of these sector budgets.
- Improvement of nutrition outcomes and tracking:** Since 2018/19, District Councils have implemented programme-based budgeting (PBB) and have gradually been disaggregating nutrition indicators by programmes and sub programmes, which has made it easier to track nutrition allocations within each sector. What it has highlighted is that gaps in nutrition resource allocations at the district level exist within all sectors.
- Creation of budget lines:** There are efforts to create a nutrition budget line at the district level with an allocation of around MK 190 million being set aside by the Ministry of Health for nutrition coordination and governance in the 2022/23 financial year<sup>1</sup>. This is a change from previous years when there was no dedicated nutrition budget line for

district councils which made it difficult for the coordination structures to function sufficiently and to trace resource distribution, forcing reliance on donor support. Advocacy efforts have frequently recommended the establishment of a dedicated nutrition budget line.

- Disbursement issues:** Although most districts are prioritising nutrition on paper, the resources are not always being disbursed as per plans. In general, the analysis was able to draw out that budgets for district activities were insufficient to cover the full range of recommended activities.
- Lack of data and disaggregation:** Comprehensive analysis was challenging due to a lack of costed work plans and expense tracking (to see how the funds are utilised, not just allocated). Disaggregated data is also absent making it challenging to distinguish who is being targeted with nutrition resources.
- Reliance on external partners:** The implementation of nutrition-related interventions in all analysed sectors in the districts relies heavily on development partners' funding. This is a particular concern should partners scale-back nutrition support. For example, in Mzimba, the health sector budgeted MK 45 million for nutrition in their 2019/20 District Implementation Plan, of which 67% (MK 27 million) was to be financed by unsecured partners.

**Note:** The [Malawi Stories of Change in Nutrition – Lessons on Advocacy](#) provides more details on challenges scaling up nutrition at district level.

<sup>1</sup>Note: In November 2023 (when finalising this brief), this budget allocation had still not made its way to the districts

## How do we use this information?

Thanks to the Afikepo investment, the national and district nutrition budget analysis has been an annual process that generated comparable data. This has allowed for a data-led focus on advocacy, and more effective lobbying of the Government to increase budget allocation to nutrition. The budget analysis meetings are regularly attended by about fifty Members of Parliament (MPs) from across the political spectrum and have been held regularly since 2013. The analyses were also discussed on the floor of the Malawi National Assembly and presented to the National Assembly's female caucus. MPs have used the data to help them write their nutrition cluster report, which was then used as an advocacy tool to encourage greater prioritisation of nutrition within national budgets. The budget analyses have also received good press coverage (TV, radio and newspapers), raising awareness among the public. As capacity has been built to continue the budget analysis, we hope leading actors at national and district level (government and civil society) will continue monitoring budget allocations and using the data to lobby and advocate for more funding for nutrition.

## Conclusions

Implementation of nutrition plans are heavily reliant on funding from external donors, either directly (as projects) or via the government. These analyses only focused on government funding or donor funding channelled through the government and is therefore missing a large proportion of nutrition funding.

The nutrition budget analysis tool and support provided through the Afikepo project, has enabled up-to-date information to be used by civil society and shared with MPs to encourage a greater focus on nutrition despite this changing scenario. The budget analysis process is a strong tool for accountability. It demonstrates the tangible changes made and enables advocates to hold commitment makers and policymakers to account.

Positive changes are noted in financing and budgeting of nutrition through the budget analysis work. Notably, efforts to create a nutrition budget line at district level and the prioritisation of nutrition interventions as per the Malawi 10-year implementation plan for Vision 2023 (MIP). However, overall nutrition budget allocation remains low, below targets and insufficient to scale up nutrition plans and policies.

This work is based on national and district-level budget analyses conducted under the advocacy component of the European Union funded [Afikepo](https://www.ifpri.org/project/stories-change-nutrition) project, implemented by Save the Children, in partnership with the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). It is part of a Stories of Change in Nutrition series for Malawi to unpack the factors contributing to changes in nutrition in the country. It builds on a wider Stories of Change project, which has captured narratives of change in nutrition outcomes and policy processes in over 20 countries so far, to improve our understanding of what drives undernutrition reductions, and how enabling environments and pro-nutrition policy and implementation processes can be cultivated and sustained.

See more at <https://www.ifpri.org/project/stories-change-nutrition>

## References

Government of Malawi (2017). The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) III (2017–2022). Building a Productive, Competitive and Resilient Nation

Graça Machel Trust (2020): Second Regional Nutrition Budget Analysis Report focusing on 8 East and Southern Countries

### SUGGESTED CITATION

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