

Malawi: Sustainable Transformation of Food Systems – Empowering Pathways Bottom Up

Transforming Malawi's food and agricultural systems offers a crucial opportunity to combat food insecurity. Empowering decentralized institutions helps ensure national strategies are grounded in real-life contexts, making them more effective and sustainable.

The challenge- Why food systems governance?

Malawi's food systems face significant challenges in ensuring access to adequate and healthy diets. These challenges are reflected in limited dietary diversity and persistent food and nutrition insecurity that remain widespread throughout the year, despite the country's heavy reliance on an agriculturally based economy. Beyond environmental and socio-economic pressures, food systems' governance remains an evolving area. Strengthening coordination, evidence-based planning, and accountability across sectors is increasingly recognized as essential for building sustainable, equitable, and nutrition-responsive food systems.

Food systems governance, as defined by the UN Food Systems Summit (2021), involves the collective setting, implementation, and assessment of priorities—while managing synergies and trade-offs across sectors and stakeholders. **Food systems governance is a critical lever for achieving transformation.** Following the 2021 Summit, **Malawi committed to transforming its food systems** through the development of **five national pathways**—strategic frameworks aimed at ensuring sustainable, resilient, equitable, and nutritious food systems. The national pathways directly support the goals of **Malawi 2063** and contribute to key global and continental commitments, including the **UN Food Systems Summit outcomes**, the **African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)**, and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, by advancing food security, health, equity, and environmental sustainability.



Our approach

The STEP UP! project supports national level partners and district institutions in Chikwawa, Dedza, and Mzimba to drive equitable, participatory, and locally led food systems transformation for healthier diets. It strengthens governance capacities to enable context-specific solutions across the following four priority areas:

- ⇒ **Strengthening Decentralized Food Systems Governance:** Supporting district institutions to independently coordinate, lead, and manage the transformation of their local food systems.
- ⇒ **Enhancing District–National Exchange:** Enabling district-level actors to actively contribute to national dialogues and decision-making on food systems transformation.
- ⇒ **Healthy Diets as an Outcome of Effective Food Systems Governance:** Promoting a shared understanding among national decision-makers that healthy diets are a key outcome of well-governed and sustainable food systems.
- ⇒ **Promoting Equitable and Representative Participation in Food Systems Governance:** Supporting inclusive governance processes that ensure fair and balanced participation from all relevant stakeholders—including women, youth, and underrepresented groups.

Project name	Sustainable Transformation of Food Systems Empowering Pathways Bottom Up (STEP UP!)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Implementing organisation	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
Project region	Malawi's Districts of Dedza, Chikwawa and Mzimba
Lead executing agency	Department of Nutrition, of the Ministry of Health (MoH)
Duration	01.04.2025 – 31.03.2027



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How the project works for a Sustainable Transformation of Food Systems in Malawi

Effective governance for bottom-up food systems transformation requires collaboration across all levels of government—from district councils to national institutions. The STEP UP! project strategically engages the following key state actors:

- ⇒ **Mzimba, Dedza, and Chikwawa District Councils:** Local government authorities responsible for implementing and coordinating food and nutrition initiatives within their respective districts, using established coordination structures.
- ⇒ **Ministry of Health, Department of Nutrition:** The national lead agency for multi-sectoral nutrition, responsible for promoting healthy diets and providing technical and policy guidance.
- ⇒ **Ministry of Agriculture:** The government's technical authority on agriculture, responsible for guiding agricultural policy, overseeing production and distribution systems, and promoting food consumption and utilization to improve nutrition outcomes.
- ⇒ **National Planning Commission:** An independent body mandated to drive long-term national development strategies, including the coordination and monitoring of the Malawi 2063 vision.
- ⇒ **Global Programme, Transformation of Food Systems – Malawi:** STEP UP! partners with TI Malawi which strengthens civil society efforts that promote sustainable food systems and healthier diets.



F. Parson & Wells (2019) _ Understanding the food system: Why it matters for food policy.

Where We Work



The Benefits

The project supports state actors by creating an enabling environment and strengthening their capacity to lead food systems transformation.

- ⇒ At the decentralized level, local stakeholders are equipped to apply a systems-thinking approach that fosters cross-sector collaboration and facilitates the implementation of high-impact, context-specific initiatives.
- ⇒ At the national level, the project enhances stakeholders' ability to advocate for and coordinate food systems transformation by leveraging lessons and successes from the project districts to inform evidence-based, inclusive policy development and scale effective practices.

Results and Voices echoing change

During STEP UP!'s inception meetings, district councils expressed strong support for the project and emphasized the importance of investing in 'software' solutions that build institutional capacity, promote mindset shifts, and strengthen accountability. In Dedza, the Chief Agriculture Officer commended the project's focus on governance, noting that it presents a valuable opportunity to enhance collaboration between key coordination structures such as the District Agriculture Extension Coordinating Committee (DAEC) and the District Nutrition Coordinating Committee (DNCC). She affirmed the district's commitment by stating that strong local governance is a critical foundation for driving sustainable improvements in food systems, nutrition, and food security—and expressed readiness to actively engage in the project's implementation.



STEP UP! Project Website

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