

Upgrading Tools and Analytical Skills for Stronger Food Security Analysis in Malawi

Food security early warning analysis and forecasting rely on a variety of data and information on agroclimatology, markets and trade, nutrition, and livelihoods. In Malawi, where shocks such as dry spells, flooding, and crop and livestock diseases increase the risk of food insecurity, a strong early warning information and analysis network is essential to prepare for such shocks. During 2015 and 2016, FEWS NET provided targeted support to the quality and breadth of livelihoods information in Malawi for greater decision support.

Established in 2002, the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) – a multiagency committee made up of government, nongovernmental, UN, and academia representatives – has conducted assessments to inform policy and response planning to mitigate livelihood and food insecurity. Up until 2015, however, the analysis relied heavily on livelihoods baseline information generated between 2003 and 2005. This ten-year old baseline became outdated and no longer compatible with new analysis tools.

To ensure the reliability of food security and livelihood analysis in Malawi, FEWS NET worked with MVAC between April 2015 and April 2016 to update the livelihoods baseline, revise the livelihood zone profiles, and support the adoption of newer, standardized methods of food security and livelihoods analysis.

FEWS NET additionally built MVAC’s capacity through training in Household Economy Analysis (HEA), and provided HEA-integrated analysis tools, including the Livelihoods Integrated Analysis Spreadsheet (LIAS) tool, while offering continued data collection, assessment, and analysis support.

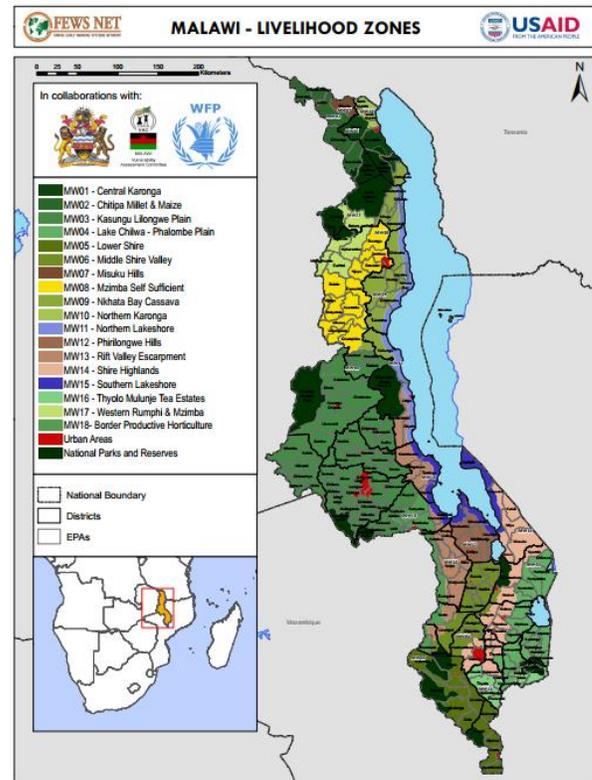
The updated baseline has captured recent shifts in livelihoods patterns, resulting in more accurate assessments of food security and livelihoods outcomes. The new baselines are also used for long-term livelihoods recovery programming, and developmental and research purposes.

“MVAC had outdated HEA baselines that were being used for over 10 years. These posed challenges in the field,” explained Dr. Richard Jack Kajombo, Chief Economist at MVAC. “Some of the crops that used to be major cash or food crops were no longer produced in some districts, including cotton. The level of contribution of a number of livelihood strategies to the overall livelihood zones had dramatically changed,” he added.

Vulnerable populations in Malawi can now receive timely and appropriate humanitarian assistance when a shock occurs since the early warning analysis is now based on updated livelihoods baselines. Government and other implementing partners are also benefitting by formulating better informed and timely food security and livelihoods emergency response plans.

“The update of the baselines which was supported by FEWS NET enables MVAC to address challenges,” Dr Kajombo explained. “The introduction of the LIAS analysis tool has made MVAC food security analysis easy and objective. It is easy to alert both policy makers and technical officers using LIAS and results are easily communicated.”

Figure 1. [Malawi Livelihood Zones](#)



Source: FEWS NET

Figure 2. MVAC HEA baseline data collection



Source: FEWS NET