

Project title: Strengthening Districts’ Covid-19 Preparedness and Response Plans (DCPRPs)

Project period July – November 2020 (5 months)

Implementing partners: United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI)

Reporting period: July – November 2020

1. Background:

On 20th March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a national disaster in Malawi, and on 02nd April 2020, Malawi registered its first cases of COVID-19. On 6th May 2020, a Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 was appointed to tackle the crisis. On 08th April 2020 the National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan (NCPRP) was launched by the Ministry of Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events (MoDMA, now DoDMA). The NCPRP had a duration from April until June 2020.

2. Problem analysis:

Since the onset of the COVID-19 (C-19) emergency, gaps in coordination between the national level and the districts has been identified as one of the biggest bottlenecks for the harmonization and effectiveness of the implementation of the Government of Malawi National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan (NCPRP) launched in April 2020. Despite national commitment across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) for timely delivery of the NCPRP, and marshalling of action among diverse actors across multiple sectors, the multi-sectoral nature of the impacts of the pandemic are stretching organizational capacity, particularly at district and sub-district levels.

After launching of the NCPRP Malawi’s 28 districts were directed to submit their District Covid Preparedness and Response Plans (DCPRPs). However, little guidance was given to the Districts for the development of these plans, hence the plans were all very different in structure and priorities, which makes it difficult to follow up and monitor implementation. Not all districts have developed their plans. Through the District focal points COOPI received reports that districts would have liked to get more guidance on the DCPRP developments.

COOPI was provided with 21 DCPRPs for a detailed analysis by LGAP¹:

Northern Province	Central Province	Southern Province
Nkhata Bay, Karonga	Dowa, Kasungu, Lilongwe, Nkhotakota, Ntcheu, Ntchisi, Salima	Blantyre, Chikwawa, Chiradzulu, Mangochi, Machinga, Mulanje, Mwanza, Neno, Nsanje, Phalombe, Thyolo, Zomba

¹ LGAP = Local Government Accountability and Performance project (funded by USAID)

As aforementioned the plans differed in structure and detail; only some plans contained budgets or work-plans, and few of them contained indicators for structured for monitoring of implementation. Plans that contained budgets had large budget variations.

3. Results of the analysis:

The COOPI team analyzed the plans for their priorities by screening budgets and work-plans (when attached) as well as narrative descriptions in the plans

The following priority activities were found:

- 1) Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE): Here in particular public awareness campaigns with mobile vans and loudspeakers spreading information about C-19 were found to be the highest priority, followed by printing of IEC materials and leaflets. Also sanitation of customs officers at border points was prioritized.
- 2) Health: Procurement of PPE's and medical equipment to be provided to health centers, as well as training on adequate C-19 protection and treatment was prioritized.
- 3) Coordination: Coordination meetings across clusters ranked highest, followed by monitoring of C-19 compliance measures and contact tracing was prioritized.
- 4) WASH: Provision of hand washing stations, soap for hand-washing, as well as rehabilitation and new construction of water points was prioritized.
- 5) Training of Rapid Response Teams (RRTs): Training of RRTs on C-19 measures and training of burial teams was prioritized.

The budget analysis revealed huge differences amongst the districts with Mulanje (513,439,170 MK), Zomba (504,194,300 MK) and Lilongwe (388,182,500 MK) requesting the highest budgets, whereas Neno (4,768,000 MK), Blantyre (4,200,000 MK) and Chikwawa (3,677,850 MK) requesting far less.

The analysis was shared with MoDMA (now DoDMA) together with an offer to support districts in their DCPRP developments and follow up during implementation.

4. Development of a standard tool for DCPRP development and indicator monitoring:

Based on the analysis of the district plans, COOPI developed a proposed standard template that was discussed with UNDP M-CLIMS technical team with the aim to translate the tool into an electronic format. It is envisaged that the activity plans are automatically translated into a work-plan and monitoring tool that includes output indicators, and that shall be filled by the District Civil Protection Committees in collaboration with the health and wash cluster authorities. UNDP's technical teams confirmed that the tool can be translated into the electronic format within a week.

The electronic format shall not only allow District authorities to monitor implementation of the plans, but also enable the national authorities, DoDMA, to follow up on C-19 response.

5. Challenges:

Communication with DoDMA proved challenging. After the initial discussion on the DCPRP analysis and developing a standard tool with Mr Dyce Nkhoma (deputy Director), COOPI was later on referred to Director Moses Chimpepo. Unfortunately, constructive responses were not received and communication with DoDMA ceased despite persistent follow up by COOPI. UNDP was informed about these constraints.

Meanwhile DoDMA approved the second NCPRP for the period August – December 2020. Districts were provided with a manual standard template to provide their inputs to the National plans

In a virtual meeting with DoDMA's Commissioner Mr. James Chiusiwa on 08th September 2020 he mentioned that DoDMA prefers using their existing formats instead of developing new ones. This was seen by COOPI as the reason not to continue with the development of a digital format for the DCPRP development and called upon UNDP to discuss changes in the approach and alternative support that can be provided to DoDMA.

6. Development of alternative activities to support DoDMA in the Covid response and beyond:

In a meeting with DoDMA's Deputy Director Mr. Dyce Nkhoma on 16th October it was decided that COOPI / UNDP will provide support to districts in the development of their multi hazard disaster contingency plans. Mr. Nkhoma agreed to provide a list of priority districts to COOPI. The official deadline for the districts to submit their plans was officially set for the 31st October 2020. COOPI agreed to send their DRR officers to the priority districts as soon as DoDMA submitted their list.

This process was further delayed because a) DoDMA provided the list later than agreed, and b) several of the districts were already served by other partners.

Through the district focal points COOPI contacted the districts to confirm where there were still needs for support to district Contingency Plan developments.

The consultation process was finalized in early November and COOPI's officers were dispatched to the districts of Nchisi, Dowa and Mchinji on 16th November. Although the government deadline for the submission of the district plans was in the end of October, many of the plans were sent back to the districts for revisions. This is where the COOPI teams provided support to the district councils. COOPI ensured that C-19 considerations are reflected in the district plans. District plan revisions were finalized and will be submitted to the national level for inclusion into the national plan.

7. Lessons learned:

Engagement with DoDMA proved to be challenging throughout the project period. During the repeated election period in June 2020, with lots of political rallies and mass gatherings, C-19 cases spiked and DoDMAs engagement in the Covid-19 response was high with few capacities to spare for coordination of DCPRPs developments. COOPI, through the District Focal Points (DFPs), was able to follow engagement of districts in district / national level coordination, and the district's inputs into the development of the NCPRP for the period July – December 2020. A frequent complaint was that though tools were provided by the national authority but no guidance or training on how to fill them.

Possibly after the decline of Covid case numbers in Malawi DoDMA's focus shifted to lean season response planning and updating of the multi hazard contingency plans to prepare for the upcoming rainy season with potential flooding.

During this project it became obvious that there was little interest from DoDMA in using an e-based planning and monitoring tool. Their required engagement in developing, approving, training and rolling out of such a tool would have also been too slow for the 5 months' project period, considering the emergency context.

However, a framework for an e-based monitoring tool for other emergency situations was laid under this project, and it is proposed to build on these achievements at an early stage during non-emergency times.

Lilongwe, 24th November 2020

H. Guelker

ANNEX I: Summary analysis of DCPRPs

ANNEX II: Proposed DCPRP standard format and monitoring tool

ANNEX III: District Contingency Plans