

# Findings



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## **Designing an Operational Knowledge and Information Sharing System: The Malawi Social Action Fund**

The Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) has been in operation since July 1995 and was established specifically to directly finance communities to implement demand-driven sub-projects. Recently, (2004) under MASAF 3 it has begun the process of establishing a Knowledge and Information Sharing System (KISS) that will facilitate knowledge documentation and dissemination in order to improve the quality of project and program delivery. This system seeks to build on and integrate the experiences and lessons accumulated in the last nine years and move towards making MASAF a knowledge sharing and learning organization.

### **Rationale for the Knowledge and Information Sharing System**

The system attempts to enhance the internal and external efficiencies of the organization. There are a number of factors that led to the need for creating a knowledge sharing system.

On the internal side, while MASAF has produced a number of well-trained and experienced professionals, there is an inevitable turnover as they leave to work for other development institutions and projects. As new staff join, and given that at any point in time there are numerous sub-projects being designed and/or implemented, there is only a limited amount of time for them to get up to speed. To facilitate a quicker and effective transition period the system will document Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), project documents, guidelines and manuals—creating a knowledge base that should cover the majority of an individuals needs.

On the external side, MASAF needs to be able to organize and share information with stakeholders such as communities, district assemblies and non-governmental organizations to improve the speed, timeliness and quality of the delivery of program services. Identifying Users' Requirements by need will help to create homogenous groups defined by need, e.g., district-level officials, NGOs, etc., so that the majority of the documents on design, practices, experiences and lessons would not have to be redone each time they are required by a specific user. This would also assist in deepening the quality of the current partnerships to reduce poverty in Malawi. There is also the possibility that as more segments of Malawian society get to know more about the details of MASAF operations, opportunities for their participation could be enhanced.

## **Designing the Knowledge and Information Sharing System**

- *Operating principles.* The KISS system was developed around four main principles: (a) relevance (of the information generated to the stated objectives), (b) sharing (through the use of intranets, internets, briefings etc.), (c) ease of access (to information by stakeholders), and (d) capacity building (within MASAF to ensure that KISS is sustainable).
- *Target audience* includes communities participating in the MASAF program, local authorities, NGOs, private sector organization, donor agencies, sector ministries as well as other countries and social funds.
- *Knowledge base* consists of the experiences of staff, community members, NGOs, etc who were involved in project implementation, as well as research and evaluation results.
- *Synergies between the three main units of MASAF.* Management Information System (MIS) collects the hard data from the district levels and upwards. The Monitoring, Research and Evaluation (MRE) unit analyses it to identify emerging patterns and trends. Finally, the Development Communication unit (DCU) takes over and starts documenting this information in a meaningful way and sends them out over the radio, TV, printed materials, posters, etc, depending on the level of need and user

## **System process and procedures**

The system is designed around four broad processes.

- *Information gathering/knowledge pooling*, where the knowledge needs among the different actors in the program will be identified and linked to relevant sources. Sources of tacit and explicit knowledge will be identified and tapped into to meet the knowledge needs in the KISS.
- *Analysis and organization* of data/ information on MASAF processes and experiences through program monitoring and evaluation processes, to be gathered and stored via the MIS system. The information gathered would be synthesized into various themes and is authenticated to ensure accuracy and relevance for MASAF program operations.
- *Sharing/ dissemination* through the use of various channels such as the intranet, internet, information packs, workshops and briefings.
- *Review and evaluation*, where the main areas of focus will be—namely, extent of use of information, relevance, and impact on MASAF program operations.

This *Infobrief* was prepared by Aisha Rahman Khan and is excerpted from the following resources:

Debriefing of Sam Kakhobwe, Executive Director, Malawi Social Action Fund: "The Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) as a Learning Organization."

Case study note by Murphy Kajumi: "Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) Knowledge and Information Sharing System (KISS)."

Persons accessing the Bank's external website can get more information on Knowledge Sharing by clicking on **Topics in Development** and then on **Knowledge Sharing**. Bank staff can access this information from the Bank's Intranet by clicking on **Topics**.