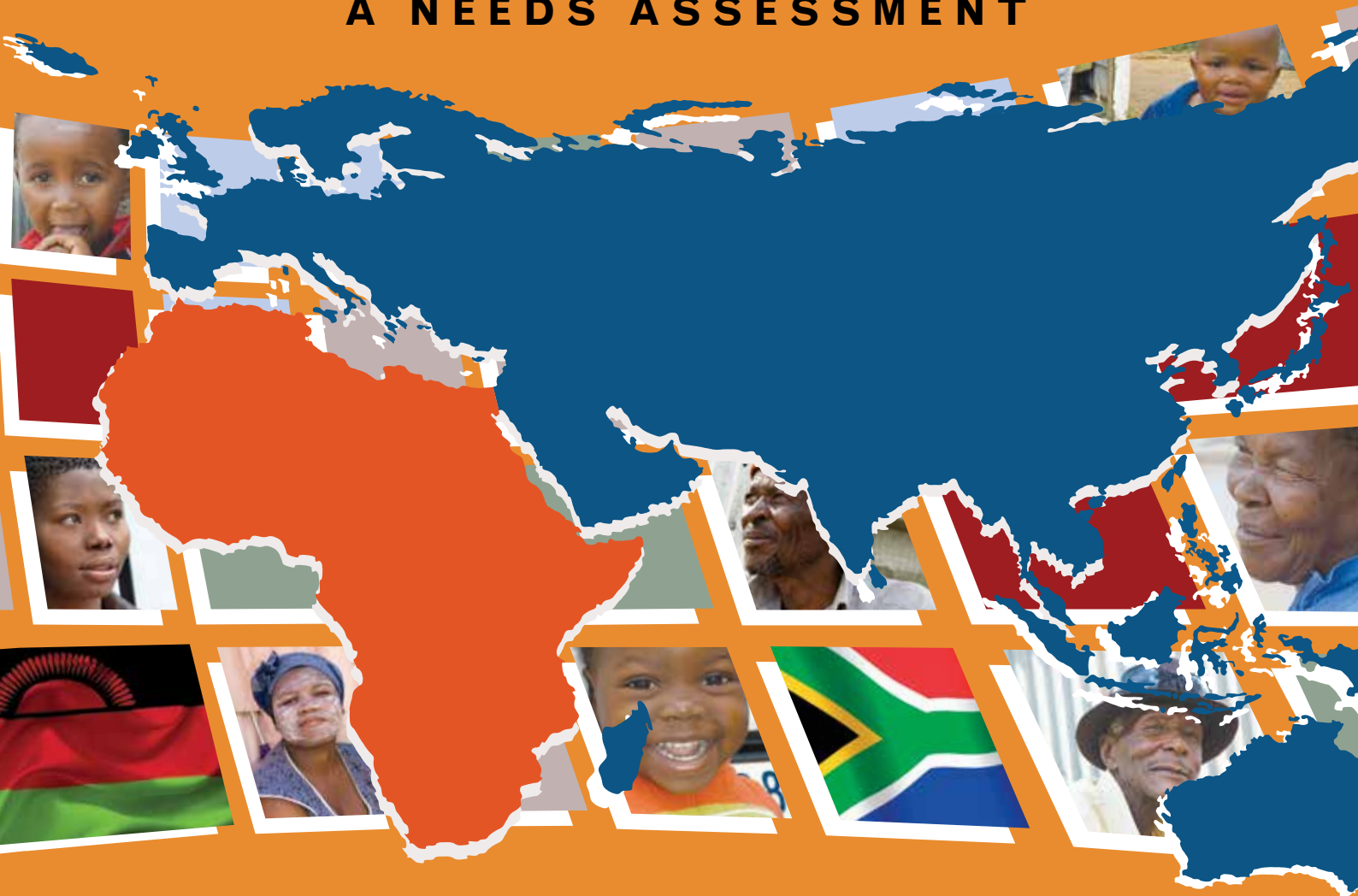


Identifying strategic gaps and establishing  
priorities for capacity building  
within selected government departments of

# MALAWI

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT



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## Abbreviations

<b>AEN</b>	Africa Evidence Network
<b>AFCOP</b>	Africa Community of Practice
<b>BCURE</b>	Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence programme
<b>CfAR</b>	Centre for Anthropological Research
<b>CLEAR-AA</b>	Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa
<b>CSR</b>	Centre for Social Research
<b>DEAP</b>	Development Effectiveness and Accountability Programme
<b>DFID</b>	Department of International Development
<b>DPME</b>	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, South Africa
<b>EIDM</b>	Evidence-informed decision-making
<b>LEAD</b>	Leadership for Environment and Development
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and evaluation
<b>MEJN</b>	Malawi Economic Justice Network
<b>MEPD</b>	Ministry of Economic Planning and Development
<b>MLGRD</b>	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
<b>MoFEPD</b>	Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
<b>Norad</b>	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
<b>NSO</b>	National Statistics Office
<b>OPC</b>	Office of the President and Cabinet
<b>PACHI</b>	Parent and Child Health Initiative
<b>UJ</b>	University of Johannesburg

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report sets out the methodology, and describes the implementation and outcomes of a phased needs assessment conducted to inform the design and intervention approaches for the University of Johannesburg's Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (UJ-BCURE) programme's application in Malawi.

As discussed in the section titled 'Purpose of this needs assessment', the rationale was to generate data that could be used to maximize the relevance and impact of the support the UJ-BCURE programme could provide in the Malawian context. Specific emphasis is placed on the use of evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) by civil servants in Malawi.

The assessment is aligned to the overall purpose of the UJ-BCURE programme, which is to identify a sustainable method for capacity-building, grounded in EIDM, within the civil service in Malawi.

The UK Department of International Development (DFID) funds the UJ-BCURE programme as an expression of the department's commitment to respond to a perceived need in some African countries for evidence-informed policies and strategies to more effectively address poverty.

The UJ-BCURE team utilised qualitative data collection methods (consultations with civil society actors, in-depth interviews, and desk-top reviews) to elicit more complex data and analysis. The results from the research contributed to increased knowledge of the capacity building needs that exist particularly within two government departments in Malawi: the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MoFEPD), and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD). The research data were used to frame and direct the capacity-building support the UJ-BCURE programme intends to provide.

The report describes the development of the relationship between the UJ-BCURE programme and the MoFEPD. The MoFEPD was initially identified as the key institution to support because its function within the Malawian administrative and governance structure facilitates maximum reach. The MoEPD is, inter alia, the central point for the convergence of evidence gathered by all line ministries in Malawi. The MoFEPD is no longer the principal programme partner but continues to contribute to the programme by serving on the UJ-BCURE steering committee.

The report also describes the programme shift towards providing capacity-building support to local government structures, and the consequent growth and development of the relationship between the UJ-BCURE team and the MLGRD. The shift is partially a result of the programme's attempt to align with political, legislative and administrative developments (i.e. decentralisation) within Malawi. The MLGRD's relevance as a UJ-BCURE partner derives from its role as a policy implementer and as a facilitator of bottom-up development planning. The proximity of district councils and newly elected district councillors to the general population, arguably, increases the potential for UJ-BCURE programme impact.

The main body of the report describes numerous other relationships developed between the UJ-BCURE team and various government and civil society agencies in Malawi. Key among these is the partnership with the Parent and Child Health Initiative (PACHI), which has resulted in the production of various pieces of research and a project proposal for our implementation phase (2015 – 2016). Although proposal development was done by staff at PACHI who UJ-BCURE had built up working relationships with, those staff had moved to a new non-governmental organisation (NGO) called Citizens' Health and implementation of the programme of work described below is therefore being done by Citizens' Health.

Section five of the report is a detailed list of activities undertaken by the UJ-BCURE team for the completion of this needs assessment, and in preparation for the programme implementation phases that is to follow. This includes approximately twenty-two meetings with a range of government and civil society representatives, a workshop, a seminar, and six pieces of commissioned research.

Section six of the report focuses on planned activities. The UJ-BCURE programme aims to contribute to the development of people-centred management systems in local government in Malawi, to ultimately contribute, through improved service delivery, to enhanced livelihoods in four of the 28 Malawian districts. The programme aims to do this by providing appropriate training and mentorships. The programme will be implemented in two districts in 2015 (Mchinji and Ntchisi). In 2016, the focus will shift to two different districts (Phalombe and Mangochi).

## 1. PURPOSE OF THIS NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The UJ-BCURE team conducted a phased needs assessment to inform the design and approach of our interventions in Malawi, and accordingly, to maximize relevance and impact.

During the first phase, which we titled the ‘landscape review’, we conducted broad research on the civil society role players active in the field of EIDM in Malawi. The second phase focussed on identifying the needs (i.e. skills gaps and relevant capacity constraints) within specific government departments in Malawi. The initial focus was on national departments, but shifted, following data collection and consultations, to local government. The identified government departments were the MoFEPD<sup>1</sup>, and the MLGRD. The rationale for the needs assessment was that the data generated could be used to maximize the relevance and impact of the support UJ-BCURE could provide, with specific regard to the use of EIDM by civil servants in Malawi. The assessment was therefore aligned to the purpose of the UJ-BCURE programme, which is to identify a sustainable model of capacity-building, grounded in EIDM, within the civil service in Malawi.

The specific purposes of the needs assessment included:

- To identify organisations or individuals in the Malawian civil society sector active in EIDM that could be approached to work as UJ-BCURE partners in the execution of BCURE’s mandate; notably to support capacity building among civil servants (e.g. specific government departments) in Malawi.
- To identify the capacity building needs (as these related to the use of EIDM) of specific government departments in Malawi.
- To align the UJ-BCURE programme with the identified needs (e.g. design support interventions in response to capacity gaps and opportunities identified), whilst maintaining programme flexibility.
- For the UJ-BCURE programme to remain fluid enough to be able to accommodate additional needs (of partners or government departments) emerging over time, whilst operating within DFID’s funding and programme framework.

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly (before the May 2014 national government elections) the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD).

The specific aims of this needs assessment were to:

- Understand high-level systems and their relationships in EIDM
- Identify the key focus themes within the EIDM environment of the identified departments
- Establish UJ-BCURE programme goals in EIDM capacity-building following discussions with these departments.

## **2. PROGRAMME BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION**

The UJ-BCURE programme is funded by DFID based on the latter's identification of a need in some African countries for evidence-informed policies and strategies to more effectively address poverty. This requires appropriate EIDM capacity within the relevant public sector institutions.

The UJ-BCURE programme is housed within the Centre for Anthropological Research (CfAR) at the University of Johannesburg. The focus of the programme is to build EIDM capacity within selected government departments in South Africa and Malawi, by providing relevant technical assistance until December 2016.

Over the course of the three-year UJ-BCURE programme, the activities of the programme, and the technical assistance to the identified Malawian government departments, will include:

- A landscape review to better understand who the main suppliers or producers of research in Malawi are. The review also sought to determine how they interact with government. This was to done to inform UJ-BCURE of the stakeholders in the civil society EIDM environment and to avoid duplication of future UJ-BCURE EIDM plans with existing activities. (This activity was completed in 2014).
- Designing and employing innovative (beneficiary-relevant) methods to build capacity. Methods include tools, systems, and processes for capacity-building using:
  - training and seminar programmes, ranging from introductory awareness-raising sessions for senior civil servants, to advanced skills in accessing, appraising and synthesizing evidence for technical staff within government,
  - a mentorship programme on adaptation and implementation of learning within their work environment(s) and,



- Building on, and expanding, the Africa Evidence Network (AEN), which will include the establishment of country-specific branches and the hosting of two continent-wide colloquiums to provide capacity-building and capacity-sharing opportunities.

### **3. NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

A starting point to any needs assessment is to review existing research, or assessments, of the country context, government departments, and systems. Whilst conducting the needs assessment, the UJ-BCURE team found that internet-based desktop research was of limited value, yielding very little data. It appeared that available research is seldom published, and especially not online. The team also did not find a central repository of information of studies conducted. Relevant studies were often identified through (and made available by) discussions and interviews with individuals. However, our understanding of the political and governance context and challenges faced in Malawi was, nevertheless, informed by a number of documents which we identified over the course of the inception period. Although not all can be listed here, some are include here as illustration:

- The 2013 DFID-funded report on *The study of the demand for and supply of evaluation in Malawi* by the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA)
- A 2004 report submitted to the World Bank by E.W. Chirwa from the University of Malawi on *Poverty monitoring systems in Malawi: An analysis of institutional arrangements*.
- A 2014 report by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) on *Statistics for the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy: A mid-term review*.
- A 2006 report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on the *Drivers of change and development in Malawi*. Working Paper 261.
- The 2009 UK National Audit office report on *Department for International Development: Aid to Malawi*.

In addition, we utilised the following qualitative data collection methods: in-depth consultations with possible partner and other relevant organisations, and commissioned qualitative research. The qualitative approach was chosen in order to elicit more complex and in-depth responses than, we believed, could have been obtained via quantitative research.

The consultations with possible partner and other relevant civil society organisations (NGOs, research institutes) in Malawi were informed firstly, by the UJ-BCURE project proposal, and from there developed as other relevant stakeholders and departments were identified. Although many

consultations took the form of face-to-face discussions during three programme visits to Malawi in 2014, others were conducted over the telephone or via email.

The consultations contributed to increased knowledge of the capacity building needs that may exist within the specific Malawian government departments, and other relevant institutions. This knowledge was used to frame and direct the support UJ-BCURE intends to provide.

The commissioned qualitative research was conducted by key consultants in Malawi. These consultants submitted research papers to UJ-BCURE as is described in the section below on 'commissioned research'.

Although this qualitative approach yielded a lot of insight into the working and capacity building needs of particular ministries, it did not provide us with an overview of the EIDM capacity needs across the entire Malawian government. Following our qualitative approach was also arguably more time consuming than a more quantitative approach, but we were of the view that it would give us more opportunity to explore information in-depth.

#### **4. PROGRAMME PARTNERS AND ACTIVITIES TO DATE**

Relationships were established with three key programme partners, notably the MoFEPD, the MLGRD, and PACHI.

##### **4.1 Support to the MoFEPD**

The first identified public institution partner of the UJ-BCURE programme in Malawi was MoFEPD, formerly<sup>2</sup> known as MEPD. The MoFEPD was identified as an ideal partner because its mandate is closely aligned to the objectives of the BCURE programme and because it is a central ministry with overarching planning, and monitoring and evaluation responsibility across government ministries. Working with the MoFEPD, therefore, presented an opportunity to provide support that would impact on EIDM across all departments and sectors served by the MoFEPD. The MoFEPD was consulted during the proposal development stage of the UJ-BCURE programme and had expressed interest in, and support for the programme. UJ-BCURE subsequently asked a local consultant who had experience in working at senior level in the Ministry to identify and suggest a possible way forward for EIDM capacity building. The terms of reference for this work included documenting the type of training initiatives that the MoFEPD monitoring and evaluation (M&E) Division has benefitted

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<sup>2</sup> Changed after the May 2014 elections.

from, provide examples of the implementation of learning that has taken place as a result of such training, and identify further gaps in training and the adequacy of local capacity to supply such training.

The findings from this short report<sup>3</sup> suggested that:

- MoFEPD staff have previously received training, specifically on monitoring and evaluation, although there are still many staff who lack formal training.
- The impact of previous capacity building initiatives was negatively affected by high staff turnover rates in the department.

Considering that the UJ-BCURE team's focus is on EIDM more broadly, rather than only M&E, the UJ-BCURE team argued that its resources might be better directed elsewhere. There clearly appears to be a need for the training of staff in M&E, but this is too far removed from the core remit of the UJ-BCURE programme.

Although the MoFEPD will no longer be the principal UJ-BCURE partner in Malawi, the institution will through key representatives still contribute to UJ-BCURE's work. Two MoFEPD staff members continue to serve on the UJ-BCURE steering committee.<sup>4</sup> The MoFEPD was also instrumental in facilitating an introduction to the MLGRD as described in 4.3 below by arranging a number of meetings between UJ-BCURE staff and different government departments to introduce the project and gauge interest in our work.

## **4.2 Support to the MLGRD**

### **4.2.1 Roles of the MLGRD**

In 1998 the Malawian government adopted a national policy on decentralisation and also passed the Local Government Act which came into effect in 1999.<sup>5</sup> One of the objectives of the policy and the legislation was to reduce poverty through improved service delivery. The documents argued that decentralisation of power would contribute to improved (more efficient) service delivery. The documents further argued that decentralisation would contribute to the strengthening of

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<sup>3</sup> Kumwenda, H from M&E Resources. 2014. 'Capacity building study: M&E Division, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development'. Report commissioned by UJ-BCURE. Unpublished.

<sup>4</sup> They are Mr Peterson Ponderani who is the Deputy Director of M&E and Ms Elsie Salima, a Chief Economist in the Planning Division.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Malawi, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, in association with the Malawi German Programme for Democracy and Decentralisation (MGPDD) and the Royal Norwegian Embassy (RNE). 2005. 'A strategy for capacity development for decentralisation in Malawi. Report on Phase 1: Capacity assessment'. Funding support by GTZ.

democratic institutions and enhance citizen participation in democratic processes at a local government level.

The decentralisation reforms that followed the adoption of the Act resulted in institutional changes in local government structures and decision-making processes. This included the establishment of district councils in all 28 districts. District councils are responsible for policy implementation (i.e. service delivery at local government level). Sub-district structures were established to facilitate 'bottom-up' development planning and to enhance a coordinated approach to local level development. The MLGRD is responsible for overseeing and supporting these decentralised structures.<sup>6</sup>

The MLGRD's relevance as a UJ-BCURE partner derives from its role as a policy implementer and as a facilitator of bottom-up development planning. The proximity of district councils and newly elected district councillors to the general population, arguably, increases the potential for UJ-BCURE programme impact. For decentralisation to improve service delivery, decision-makers need to have the capacity to synthesise and use evidence for decision-making in order to allocate scarce resources.

### **4.3 Building a relationship between UJ-BCURE and the MLGRD (and associated activities)**

Initial interactions between UJ-BCURE programme staff and representatives of the MLGRD were facilitated by representatives from the MoFEPD, specifically the Programme Coordinator for the Development Effectiveness and Accountability Programme (DEAP). During the UJ-BCURE team's first visits to Malawi, the DEAP coordinator had set up meetings between UJ-BCURE staff and representatives of various ministries. This was a key function performed by the department, and the progression to work with MLGRD flowed from this facilitation.

The meeting between UJ-BCURE staff and representatives of the MLGRD was particularly successful and the relationship thus established has continued to develop, for example, a senior representative of the MLGRD (Mr. Walusungu Kayira, the Head of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation) delivered a keynote address at the AEN colloquium hosted by UJ-BCURE in Johannesburg in November 2014.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

In addition, the relationship that UJ-BCURE had built up over the course of our inception year with a Malawi-based NGO with links to local government (see below) lent further impetus to the decision to shift focus to the MLGRD.

#### **4.4 Partnership with PACHI and subsequently with Citizens' Health**

PACHI is a Malawi-based NGO that has strong local links with district level structures as a result of previous donor-funded research and other projects the organisation has conducted.

UJ-BCURE has, over the course of the 2014 inception year, developed a relationship with staff at PACHI through the commissioning of shorter pieces of work, which staff at the organisation successfully delivered. This work included: 1) a short vignette as background to PACHI's work and its efforts in the research-into-policy field;<sup>7</sup> 2) a short piece on the policy-making process in Malawi and different factors that influence this process;<sup>8</sup> 3) a landscape review of role players in the Malawi research landscape outside of the health sector;<sup>9</sup> 4) an overview of the structure of Local Government in Malawi and the history of the decentralisation policy in that country;<sup>10</sup> and 5) a proposal for how UJ-BCURE might build capacity in Local Government in EIDM.<sup>11</sup> The intention was to expand this relationship to facilitate both the implementation and impact of the UJ-BCURE programme, whilst also contributing to capacity building for PACHI.

The decision to establish a cooperative programme implementation relationship with a Malawian organisation was influenced by, inter alia, the following considerations:

- The UJ-BCURE programme is not based in Malawi, but would benefit from having a cost-effective continuous local presence.
- The UJ-BCURE programme would benefit by building on existing relationships and embedment in existing Malawian institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix I Summary of PACHI Activities and Profile in Erasmus Y. *et al.* 2014. 'An overview of role players outside government that are central to evidence-informed decision-making in Malawi: A landscape review', UJ-BCURE. Available from [www.africaevidencenetwork.org](http://www.africaevidencenetwork.org).

<sup>8</sup> PACHI. 2014. 'Task 2: Overview of the policy-making process in government in Malawi.' Commissioned by UJ-BCURE. Unpublished.

<sup>9</sup> PACHI. 2014. 'Task 3: Landscape review outside the field of health in Malawi.' Commissioned by UJ-BCURE. Unpublished.

<sup>10</sup> PACHI. 2014. 'Strengthening generation and use of evidence for decision making in local government in Malawi.' Commissioned by UJ-BCURE. Unpublished.

<sup>11</sup> PACHI. 2014. 'Strengthening research and evidence-based decision-making in local government in Mchinji, Ntchisi, Mangochi and Phalombe districts.' Commissioned by UJ-BCURE. Unpublished.

The decision to establish a cooperative relationship with PACHI in particular was based on the organisation's established relationships in four Malawian districts and the organisation's effective delivery of commissioned work to UJ-BCURE. The organisation has, thus far, led (with input and guidance from UJ-BCURE) the development of a proposed programme of work with local government (see below).

Although proposal development was done by staff at PACHI who UJ-BCURE had built up working relationships with over the course of our inception year, those staff have since moved to a new NGO called Citizens' Health and implementation of the programme of work described below is therefore being done by Citizens' Health.

## 5. SUMMARY OF UJ-BCURE PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES TO DATE

Programme activities to date include: meetings, commissioned work, workshops and seminars. The table below outlines the type, number, purpose and outcomes of **face-to-face meetings** held thus far.

**Table 1: Face-to-face meetings conducted for the period inception to December 2014**

Title & Date	Attendees	Focus	Outcome
Meetings with MoFEPD, 8 July 2014	MoFEPD & UJ-BCURE representatives	Presentation of landscape review. Discuss EIDM capacity needs of the Ministry. Provide overview of the AEN.	Agreement that a need for EIDM capacity building support is required by the Ministry. Identification of possible points of entry and provision of capacity building support, notably the yet to be established ministerial research and policy unit, and the departments of Education and Agriculture.
Meeting with PACHI, 8 July 2014	PACHI & UJ-BCURE representatives	Discussion on political context and the implication thereof on programme design and delivery.	MoFEPD to remain UJ-BCURE's main partner, but UJ-BCURE is also open to requests for capacity building support from other government

			departments. Agreement for possible future work between the two institutions (UJ-BCURE and PACHI) reached.
Meeting with the National Statistics Office (NSO), 11 July 2014	NSO & UJ-BCURE representatives	Discussion on the roles and activities of the two attending institutions.	Identification of the importance of data use and implementation coordination among national government departments. Confirmation of the role that MoFEPD plays in this regard.
Meeting with the Centre for Social Research (CSR), 11 July 2014	CSR & UJ-BCURE representatives	Discussion on the nature and challenges of research in government.	Discussions on how the two institutions might work together.
Meeting with Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD), 11 July 2014	LEAD & UJ-BCURE representatives	Context and nature of environmental research in Malawi and how LEAD interacts with the Malawi government.	LEAD would provide a short summary of some examples of their research-into-policy initiatives with government.
Meeting with Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), 14 July 2014	Representatives from MEJN & UJ-BCURE	Discussion on the nature of research in Malawi and the role of MEJN.	Recommended UJ-BCURE acquire a political champion to increase probability of programme success. Recommended UJ-BCURE target ministerial advisors rather than ministerial officials.
Meeting with Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC), Projects Implementation and Monitoring Unit, 14 July 2014	Representatives from the Unit & UJ-BCURE	Discussion on the limited use of evidence to inform policy in Malawi. Shortcomings of the Results Based Management system in the OPC. OPC was in the process of producing an internal implementation plan on monitoring and evaluation.	No concrete way forward identified between UJ-BCURE and OPC.
Meeting with private	UJ-BCURE	Context of research in	Recommended that

consultant with experience working in government, 15 July 2014	representatives & Dr Hannock Kumwenda	Malawi and difficulty changing institutional culture toward EIDM.	UJ-BCURE understand political decision-making processes.
Meeting with OPC, Recurrent Budget Assessment Division, 16 July 2014	Representatives from the Recurrent Budget Assessment Unit & UJ-BCURE	Exploration of relationship with, and role of South Africa's Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in showcasing their work to other African countries.	No concrete recommendations or way forward.
Meeting with the Ministry of Finance, 16 July 2014	Ministry of Finance & UJ-BCURE representatives	Discussion of the landscape review. Discuss EIDM capacity needs of the ministry. Provide overview of the AEN. The Malawian research context as it pertains to the Ministry.	Recommended that UJ-BCURE meet with the Ministry of Economic Affairs as they have a Research and Policy Analysis unit. Suggested that MoFEPD set up this meeting.
Meeting with Africa Community of Practice (AFCOP), 16 July 2014	Representatives from AFCOP & UJ-BCURE	The development and future launch of AFCOP in Malawi. Role clarification to avoid organisational duplication of activities. Need for utilisation of existing research in government decision-making.	No issues identified that requires future action.
Meeting with MLGRD, 17 July 2014	MLGRD & UJ-BCURE representatives.	Presentation of UJ-BCURE overview. Discuss EIDM capacity needs of the ministry. Provide overview of the AEN. Discussion on the role of local government. Discussion on the lack of research use at local government level, particularly with regard to policy development.	Ministry expressed great interest in receiving capacity building support and assistance in promoting the use of evidence/research at local government level.



Meeting with SECURE Health <sup>12</sup> , 17 July 2014	SECURE Health staff & UJ-BCURE	Briefing on each programme's work.	The two programmes would keep in contact to share lessons learnt and challenges.
Meeting with MoFEPD, 17 July 2014	MoFEPD representatives & UJ-BCURE staff	A first draft of a work plan for EIDM support that MoFEPD had developed.	Clear steps and concomitant dates were agreed to further refine the work plan.
Meeting with DFID Malawi, 18 July 2014	DFID Malawi & UJ-BCURE representatives	Presentation of UJ-BCURE overview and AEN introduction. Discuss EIDM capacity needs of MoFEPD and MLGRD.	No further outcomes.
Meeting with DFID Malawi, 1 September 2014	DFID Malawi & UJ-BCURE representatives	Updating DFID Malawi on UJ-BCURE's work	Recommendation from DIFD Malawi to seriously consider the findings of the 'State of M&E in Malawi report' in deciding on a programme of work for Malawi.
Meeting with the team leading the M&E study, 2 September 2014	Dr Dennis Pain & UJ-BCURE representatives	Briefing of UJ-BCURE's work, expression of interest in the report, and request to be invited to workshops about the report. Briefing on the study teams' progress and intended delivery dates of the report.	No further outcomes.
Meeting with Dr Collins Mitambo, Ministry of Health and Knowledge Translation Platform, 3 September 2014	UJ-BCURE representatives & Dr Mitambo	Introductions as Dr Mitambo works closely with SECURE Health and had been offered a bursary to attend the AEN colloquium. Learning more about the history of the Knowledge Translation Platform in Malawi and their plans for the future.	No further outcomes. Dr Mitambo will attend the AEN colloquium.
Meeting with PACHI, 4 September 2014	UJ-BCURE representatives & PACHI	Discussion of a possible programme of work in Malawi.	PACHI made the suggestion that they could develop a

<sup>12</sup> SECURE Health is another DFID-funded BCURE programme implementing in Malawi developed by the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) in collaboration with the College of Medicine (CoM) at the University of Malawi, ECSA-Health Community, and FHI 360.

			proposal for work with MLGRD to provide EIDM capacity building. UJ-BCURE would discuss this internally and revert back to them.
Meeting with PACHI, 13 October 2014	UJ-BCURE representatives & PACHI	Detailed discussion of the proposal of work with local government that PACHI had developed prior to the visit. Detailed discussion of the workshop with representatives from the districts that would take place on Friday the 17 <sup>th</sup> of October.	Agreement on the way forward on the proposal – changes that needed to be made and submission dates to UJ-BCURE. Agreement on the format of the workshop that would be discussed with Mr Walusungu Kayira.
Meeting with Mr Walusugu Kayira from the MLDRG, 13 October 2014	UJ-BCURE representatives, representatives from PACHI & Mr Kayira	To discuss any comments he might have on the proposal. To discuss the workshop format for the 17 <sup>th</sup> of October.	Agreement on the workshop format. Mr Kayira would give further input into the proposal then.
Meeting with Dr Maxton Tsoka from the CSR, 13 October 2014	UJ-BCURE representatives & Dr Tsoka	For Dr Tsoka to brief UJ-BCURE on the validation meeting on the 'State of M&E in Malawi' report that had taken place that day.	Dr Tsoka to attend the release of the final report on UJ-BCURE's behalf. The date has yet to be set.

The table below outlines the type, number, purpose and outcomes of **workshops and seminars** held thus far.

**Table 2: Workshops and seminars conducted for the period of inception to December 2014**

Title & Date	Attendees	Purpose	Focus	Outcome
Seminar at the College of Medicine, Blantyre, 10 July 2014	University staff and students & UJ-BCURE representatives	UJ-BCURE was invited to present a seminar on our work.	Overview of UJ-BCURE's work. Sharing of lessons learned pertaining to EIDM. Discussion of how UJ-BCURE's work is different from AFIDEP's SECURE Health	Interest in future cooperation expressed by the university, especially related to systematic reviews. The College of Medicine would make contact for support once they

			programme that the College of Medicine is an implementing partner of.	had agreed internally on the systematic review support required.
Partnership workshop with local government officials for programme proposal development, 17 October 2014	UJ BCURE & PACHI representatives, and a large number of district council representatives. There were 24 delegates in total.	To solidify the relationships between the participating institutions. To introduce the UJ-BCURE programme to local government representatives. To solicit buy-in for the programme at local government level. To present a programme of work in the four districts developed in partnership with PACHI and with input from the MLGRD and to elicit comments on this.	The importance of EIDM. An overview of the UJ-BCURE programme in Malawi. An overview of PACHI and its work. Strengthening research and evidence use in local government project proposals.	Enhanced understanding on the importance of EIDM among local government officials. Identification of a need to include more district councils in the programme.

**Commissioned work** includes:

- Capacity Building Needs Assessment of MoFEPD: UJ-BCURE commissioned an independent consultant in Malawi to conduct a needs assessment within the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of the MoFEPD. Qualitative research methods including a documentation review and in-depth interviews were utilised for data collection. In addition to providing an overview of the functions of the unit, the report identified capacity building and other support needs with regard to resources, quality, evaluation and staff turnover. More specifically: (1) there are limited state resources available for monitoring and evaluation given more urgent budgetary priorities; (2) monitoring and evaluation training that has been provided has in some instances been of low quality and resulted in limited skills acquisition; (3) the unit does not have the capacity to conduct evaluations; and (4) staff turnover rates contribute to institutional memory loss and negatively affects performance. The report went on to recommend short- and longer-term capacity building support focussing on the development

of monitoring and evaluation skills, and technical assistance for conducting evaluations. This report does suggest that there are clear areas for capacity building in MoFEPD. However, after careful consideration of the report the UJ-BCURE team has concluded that these immediate capacity building concerns are outside of the remit of UJ-BCURE whose aim is to encourage the uptake of broader research evidence in decision-making. Although M&E data are part of the spectrum of evidence that can be considered in decision-making, the programme's ultimate aim is to encourage the consideration of robust research evidence. Providing training in M&E and evaluations is not within the programme's remit.

- Landscape review produced by the UJ-BCURE team in collaboration with PACHI: The review focussed on civil society institutions' relations to the supply, demand and utilisation of research in Malawi.
- Qualitative research by PACHI (utilising primarily in-depth interviews as a method) among selected government officials that focussed on understanding work processes, work content, extent and manner in which research is utilised, and extent of linkages to research institutions. The public institutions included the Ministries of Gender, Children and Social Welfare; Education, Science and Technology; Agriculture and Food Security; and the Office of the President of Malawi.
- A short write-up by a representative of the CSR, University of Malawi on the role of the Reserve Bank of Malawi in research: Following the review of the Landscape Review by a member of the CSR, the individual produced a short section for inclusion into the Landscape Review on the research role of the Reserve Bank of Malawi. It shows that the Reserve Bank is both an important consumer and producer of research. On the supply side, the Bank is primarily responsible for research on price and fiscal stability and the production of financial data. The data and reports are published on-line. With regard to demand, the Bank utilised information to facilitate policy and inter-departmental integration. This was excluded from the Landscape Review as the Reserve Bank is not a civil society organisation, but is mentioned here as a reflection of information collected as part of the needs assessment.
- Paper on policy formulation processes in Malawi: UJ-BCURE commissioned PACHI to produce a paper analysing the policy formulation process in Malawi. In particular, to identify the various political, socio-economic and administrative influences that contribute to the final format and content of national policies. This was a desk-top research exercise. The research revealed that the Malawian policy making process is multifarious, phased, and departmental dependent. Inputs include research and civil society and external stakeholder consultation.

- Profiling local government in Malawi: UJ-BCURE commissioned PACHI to conduct a review and analysis of the configuration of, and relationships between, local government structures in Malawi. The rationale for the assignment included obtaining data relevant to designing possible UJ-BCURE capacity-building initiatives, and examining the relevance and appropriateness of the UJ-BCURE programme's modification from a national to a local government focus in Malawi. The research revealed a shift in Malawi, with regard to political administration, away from centralisation of power and towards decentralisation. The stated aim of the decentralised approach is to enhance democracy and encourage citizen participation in the belief that this will reduce poverty.

**Other programme activities include:**

- Engagement with the leaders of a study on the State of M&E in Malawi: during the course of the inception year DFID Malawi made UJ-BCURE aware that MoFEPD had commissioned a study regarding the 'State of Monitoring and Evaluation in Malawi' and asked UJ-BCURE to consider the findings of this report in identifying possible collaborative opportunities and to prevent duplication of activities. The UJ-BCURE team also had a meeting with the leader of the study during a country visit in September 2014 to learn more about the objectives of the study and its preliminary findings, and to make the research team aware of UJ-BCURE's work and interest in the study and its findings. Once the final report was released in November 2014, the UJ-BCURE team determined that, although the report did not identify an additional small area of focus for the UJ-BCURE programme, the content of the report provides support for the programme decision to provide capacity building support to local government in Malawi.
- Serving on a reference group: A representative from the CSR<sup>13</sup> served on the reference group for the production of the above-mentioned 'State of Monitoring and Evaluation in Malawi' report. He also attended the validation workshop of the first draft of the report as a UJ-BCURE representative.

## **6. PLANNED UJ-BCURE PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES IN MALAWI**

As reported above, the UJ-BCURE programme in Malawi's focus has shifted from EIDM capacity-building support at a national level, to EIDM capacity-building support at a local level. The shift was primarily a result of a clear need for such support at local government level (as revealed by the

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<sup>13</sup> Dr Maxton Tsoka, from the Centre for Social Research at the University of Malawi.

various pieces of commissioned research discussed above). Broadly, UJ-BCURE's reasons for shifting to local government include:

- Being responsive to the administrative shift in the Malawian administration towards decentralisation, which included some decentralisation of policy development and implementation responsibility
- Being responsive to research indicating that monitoring and evaluation systems and skills are weak or limited among key local government structures, coupled with a lack of monitoring and evaluation planning and coordination
- Being responsive to research indicating low and insufficient data supply to local government structures in Malawi
- Being responsive to research indicating poor data management processes at local government level, and
- Being responsive to the demand for support in EIDM expressed by our key contact in the MLGRD.

Accordingly, the UJ-BCURE programme has proposed to contribute to the development of people centred management systems in local government in Malawi to ultimately contribute, through improved service delivery, to improved livelihoods in four of the 28 districts. The programme aims to achieve this by providing training and mentorships:

- Training will be provided to monitoring and evaluation officers, as well as to senior civil servants engaged in policy planning and implementation. The training will focus on the processes and utilisation of data.
- Mentorship of District Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinating Committees (DMECCs) which consist of the monitoring and evaluation officers across different sectors such as education, health, agriculture etc. Although DMECCs are primarily constituted by district civil servants, civil society organisations working in the district are also represented. This mentoring will comprise of aspects such as: mentoring on the different components of EIDM (e.g. accessing information and assessing quality), the strengthening of data management systems, research synthesis through case studies at district level on particular policy or implementation issues, mentoring around greater evidence use during the annual review of district development plans, and supporting the DMECC in dissemination of research through presentations to different decision-making committees.

This programme will be implemented in two districts in 2015 (Mchinji and Ntchisi) where after focus will shift to Phalombe and Mangochi in 2016.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

A key focus of this report is the programme shift from providing capacity-building support to national government structures, to providing EIDM capacity-building support to local government structures (and the concomitant shifts in relationships). The various reasons for this policy shift are discussed in the main body of this report, but it is also these contributing factors that generated the majority of the programme lessons. Some of these are discussed below.

### **Difficulty in distinguishing between needs and demand:**

Initial implementation (i.e. the formulation of workplans and in-country inception activities) revealed a challenge in the original research approach. In seeking to determine whether and which capacity-building needs existed, it is often difficult to also measure the likelihood of support-uptake. In various departments the need for capacity-building support exists, but for various reasons (relating, inter alia, to internal capacity, hierarchies and logistics) support that is offered is not taken up. It is therefore important to carefully consider whether demand exists (for EIDM support generally and/or for the specific programme on offer). However, it can take some time to establish the existence or not of true interest in EIDM support, especially as conflicting messages might be forthcoming.

### **Participatory approaches and expectation management:**

The UJ-BCURE programme is participatory in its design and approach. The advantages of this approach include programme relevance, higher programme uptake, and increased impact. The disadvantages of approaching potential partners or intended beneficiaries with a broad framework is the likelihood that requests are made for support that the programme does not have capacity to provide, or that expectations are raised to an extent that requires extensive programme resources to manage. Arriving with a clear mandate (i.e. less participation) might be more efficient and cost effective.

### **Strong relationships facilitate programme success:**

The discussion above has demonstrated how positive relationships (e.g. between UJ-BCURE and PACHI, and between UJ-BCURE and the MoFEPD) can facilitate programme implementation. In particular, programme experiences thus far have pointed to the importance of implementing

through a local partner, familiar with the political, economic and cultural context, and which has existing relationships (in this case with local government and at district level) in programme success. Relationship establishment and management are important conditions for success.

**Flexibility in programme design:**

A key factor in the success (if not the continuation) of the programme is the flexibility and fluidity in programme design (which, in part, derives from the programme's commitment to a participatory approach). It was the opportunity to be responsive to changing needs and administrative approaches (from one department to another, and from a centralised to a decentralised focus) that ensured the programme's continued relevance.

**The importance of planning and research:**

The UJ-BCURE programme plan initially allocated approximately one year of the programme cycle to planning, research, preparation and relationship building. The programme's experience in Malawi has demonstrated the importance of setting aside this time. It took approximately one year to ensure the design of a relevant programme, and to increase the chances of programme uptake and impact through the creation of appropriate relationships. Without the extensive research and consultation engaged in, the programme would not have been demand-driven, and would not have had the bearing that it does.

A number of risks to implementation and impact were identified in the process. The most predominant risk is that in some cases in Malawi, the combination of a resource poor environment, high poverty levels, and a history of donor institutions providing financial incentives (e.g. sitting allowances) for participation, combine to create an expectation for financial compensation among civil servants. This programme does not have a budget for such additional expenses (and which run contrary to the official policies of DFID, the funder of UJ-BCURE) and also does not in principle support the paying of such allowances. It is likely that this could result in reduced interest to participate in the programme over time.



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