



RAPID FEEDBACK MONITORING SYSTEM (RFMS)

**2020 - 2025 | IMPLEMENTER:
CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES**



Globally, poverty is being recognized as dynamic rather than static, with poor households facing high levels of unplanned risks in response to shocks, stresses, and seasonal extremes. In Malawi, where the majority of the population lives in rural areas, poverty is high, and livelihoods and food security rely heavily on rain-fed agriculture, short- and long-term shocks such as floods, droughts, and disease outbreaks can be devastating to households and communities. Effective resilience programming necessitates an evidence-based, multidimensional understanding of how communities are affected by and cope with shocks in the short and long term, and how this changes over time. Unfortunately, most approaches to measuring resilience rely on annual surveys, which fail to capture seasonal shifts or how resilience fluctuates before, during, and after a shock.

loops for improving design and monitoring of both locally- and donor-led interventions, with the eventual goal of permanently transferring the capacity to the country's local systems to accelerate development outcomes.

Launched in 2020, the RFMS is working in 10 districts in Malawi's Southern Region, targeting 4500 households. The districts align with USAID/Malawi's Resilience Focus Zone (RFZ). In March 2022, the RFMS expanded to 3 urban centers namely: Blantyre, Zomba and Mangochi with an aim of understanding the dynamics of resilience/vulnerability and poverty in the peri-urban areas. Ultimately, the RFMS could be expanded nationwide and become a Malawi-owned process to support transformative country-wide resilience.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The RFMS is a frequent, rapid monitoring system that combines CRS' Monthly Interval Resilience Analysis (MIRA) and the World Bank's Survey of Well-Being through Instant and Frequent Tracking (SWIFT), resulting in a multi-faceted methodology that allows stakeholders and communities to better measure and understand resilience,

WHAT IS THE RFMS?

Recognizing the need for better, more collaborative insight on resilience, poverty and wellbeing in Malawi, USAID, the World Bank, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and Cornell University co-designed the RFMS as an innovative approach to build a sustainable infrastructure for frequent measurement, in collaboration with Malawian institutions including the National Statistics Office (NSO) and the Centre for Social Research at the University of Malawi's Chancellor College (CSR). This unique partnership is funded and guided by a multi-stakeholder Governing Board. The RFMS directly supports Malawi's National Resilience Strategy and Malawi Vision 2063. It creates feedback

RFMS GOALS

- 1) Provide real-time feedback for better collaboration, learning, and adaptive management
- 2) Enhance sustainable local capacity to improve resilience and wellbeing
- 3) Improve the evidence base around Malawi's resilience and wellbeing





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vulnerability and poverty and thus improve and refine resilience programming.

MIRA collects monthly data at the household level to provide a real-time record of shocks experienced over time, which is linked to characteristics that may make them more or less resilient. The goal is to model the experience and effect of being exposed to various shocks, as well as to explain variations in recovery from these shocks. MIRA is made up of four major components:



Qualitative research to adapt survey instruments and embed data collection within existing programming and communities.



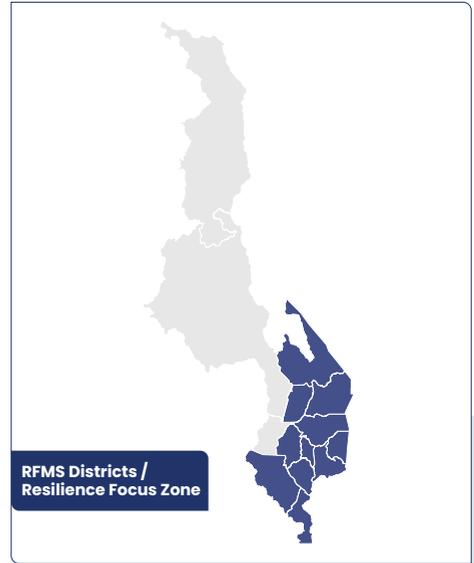
High frequency data collection by community-based enumerators on shocks and key indicators.



Research and analytics to support impact evaluation, targeting and forecasting.



Community engagement to identify uses of the data and disseminate findings to inform locally-led action.



SWIFT gathers poverty correlates, such as household size, asset ownership, or educational attainment levels, twice a year and uses estimation models to translate those correlates into poverty statistics. With the estimates, SWIFT makes it possible to estimate poverty rates, statistics on inequality, and income data. This aids project teams in understanding who the poor are, where they live, and what obstacles they face in escaping poverty.

RFMS's modular system allows questions to be added or removed as needed for maximum adaptability; for example, CRS recently deployed a Flood module to track the impact of Cyclone Ana. The survey application has a case management functionality to prompt respondents about previous shocks, allowing CRS to seamlessly track subjects and analyze changes over time. As enumerators capture data via smartphone, the data is automatically uploaded to the cloud, transformed and managed in a Microsoft Azure database enabling near-real time data visualization and analysis.

HOW IS THE DATA USED?

RFMS data is a valuable tool for donors, program implementers, policymakers, and communities themselves.

- **Driving local action:** A central element of the RFMS is engagement with existing community and district structures, so that they understand the data and how they can use it. CRS has developed simple, visual community and district dashboards that show key results from the monthly data.
- **Improving program design and targeting** to reach households that are currently vulnerable and identifying those most likely to be adversely affected by future seasonal and extra-seasonal shocks.
- **Enabling real-time adaptive management** by providing insight into which interventions are having the most impact on resilience and enabling fine-tuning of interventions much more quickly than traditional monitoring.
- **Supporting program evaluation** by comparing incidence and persistence of shocks between households benefitting or not benefitting from a given project, demonstrating if the project is making them more resilient.
- **Improving poverty monitoring capabilities and design of pro-poor policies** by estimating poverty rates, inequality statistics, and income data
- **Predicting incidences of food insecurity** using machine learning models to support and anticipatory action.



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