

CDSC FOR ECD CASE STUDY

NACHIKODOWA: The Chicken Nobody Gave Them

How parents left waiting on slow-breeding goats invented a faster pass-on scheme on their own initiative.

Case Snapshot

CBO Nachikodowa CBO	COUNTRY Malawi
DISTRICT Mulanje	COMMUNITY Multiple villages, illustrated through the Tiyanjane care group
ECD ISSUE Household poverty and lack of local jobs, leading parents to leave children unattended, exposing them to abuse and malnutrition	CDSC FOCUS Community-designed economic empowerment, goat pass-on, group soft loans, and later a parent-invented chicken pass-on, delivered through village care groups
KEY ROOT CAUSES No local jobs or income sources; children left unsupervised while parents searched for income; unsupervised children vulnerable to abuse; minimal household food resources	MAIN SOLUTION Goat pass-on tied initially to under five clinic attendance, group soft loans for small businesses, and care groups combining nutrition, protection and caregiving education
KEY STAKEHOLDERS Nachikodowa CBO, elected lead mothers, secretaries and treasurers, traditional leaders, agricultural extension officials, the Ward Councillor, male champions	MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME Parents spontaneously created their own chicken pass-on scheme after finding goats too slow to breed, entirely outside Nachikodowa's design
QUANTIFIED RESULT Caregivers citing at least two or three pieces of information from a health professional rose from 35.0% to 86.0%	SUSTAINABILITY SIGNAL Reported child abuse and neglect fell from 7.5% to 5.3%, and community members describe the CBO as a tool the community will keep using on its own

THE CASE IN ONE LESSON

The clearest evidence of ownership was not that parents did what Nachikodowa asked. It was that they invented a faster pass-on model of their own, using an animal nobody gave them, because the one they were given did not move fast enough for what they needed.

The Problem

Brief background

Nachikodowa CBO works across multiple villages in Mulanje district in southern Malawi. Before this case, a lack of local jobs meant many parents spent long hours searching for income, often leaving children at home alone. Community members reported that unsupervised children were vulnerable to physical abuse from neighbours, and that minimal household food resources were contributing to malnutrition.

Nachikodowa validated the problem through repeated community meetings, sharing data on recorded abuse and malnutrition cases directly with chiefs and parents, who confirmed the figures reflected their own villages before agreeing to prioritise the issue.

The problem

The presenting problem

Parents searching for income left children unsupervised, and community members reported cases of child abuse and malnutrition.

The underlying problem

A lack of local jobs meant parents had no way to provide for their households without spending long hours away, which left children unsupervised and household food resources thin.

The root causes

- Low household income and a lack of local employment forced parents to spend long hours away from home searching for work.
- Children left unsupervised were vulnerable to physical abuse from neighbours who took advantage of their vulnerability.
- Minimal food resources at the household level contributed directly to malnutrition.

The systems involved

Household livelihood system → **Child protection system** → **Nutrition system** → **Community governance system**

The root cause sat squarely in household income, but its effects reached directly into child protection and nutrition, which is why Nachikodowa's economic empowerment solution was deliberately designed to also carry protection and nutrition education alongside it.

"The CBO was just a tool used to help us achieve their goals. The community will continue to run and maintain the programs on its own."

— Focus group discussion, Nachikodowa male champions

CDSC in Action

Nachikodowa's case includes an unusually well corroborated account of solutions that were tested and dropped, and a striking example of parents inventing their own pass-on model outside the CBO's design.

CDSC stage	What happened	Evidence strength
1. Problem identification and prioritisation	<p>The problem was identified and validated through repeated community meetings in which Nachikodowa shared data on recorded abuse and malnutrition cases, and chiefs and parents confirmed the data reflected their own villages before agreeing to prioritise it.</p> <p>This validation step, checking CBO-held data against community experience before proceeding, gives the process a documented grounding beyond CBO assumption alone.</p>	Strong
2. Root cause analysis	<p>The wider Malawi evaluation specifically credits Nachikodowa with unusually strong alignment between problem identification and community participatory priorities, citing clear evidence of root cause analysis and community reflection.</p>	Strong
3. Solution identification	<p>Parents themselves proposed three solutions: tailoring, baking and livestock pass-on. Two were dropped during implementation rather than at the planning stage. Baking was dropped because it conflicted with the programme's use of only locally available resources in cooking demonstrations. Tailoring stalled due to facilitator fees and a shortage of sewing machines.</p> <p>Both dropped solutions are independently confirmed by the wider Malawi endline evaluation, giving this account unusually strong corroboration.</p>	Strong
4. Action planning and implementation	<p>Goat pass-on was initially restricted to parents who were not defaulting on under five clinic visits, deliberately using the pass-on as an incentive for a related health behaviour. Once clinic attendance rose enough that this restriction was no longer needed, allocation shifted to rotate through village care groups instead.</p> <p>Parents, frustrated that goats took roughly six months to breed, independently started their own chicken pass-on scheme without being asked to by Nachikodowa, which states directly that it has no control over how chickens are shared within groups.</p> <p>A goat shortfall, where parent demand exceeded the original planned supply of 70 goats, was resolved through an open, multi-stakeholder meeting involving parents, agricultural officials and chiefs to agree a fair per-village allocation, which Nachikodowa credits with preventing resentment.</p>	Strong

CDSC stage	What happened	Evidence strength
5. Monitoring, evaluation and learning	<p>Care groups elect their own lead mother, secretary and treasurer, and escalate unresolved issues first to a Nachikodowa community supervisor, then to local leaders only if still unresolved.</p> <p>A specific accountability example is documented: a loan recipient who defaulted on repayment was confronted first by fellow group members according to their own rules, then by local leaders, and ultimately returned to repaying once the reasoning was explained to him.</p> <p>The wider capacity assessment notes Nachikodowa's documentation of timelines and resource flows is comparatively weak, even though the underlying participatory process itself is assessed as strong.</p>	Moderate to strong

Action and System Change

What actually happened

Community validates problem data → 3 solutions proposed, 2 dropped → Goats distributed, tied to clinic attendance → Parents invent chicken pass-on themselves → Groups fund businesses, protection & nutrition improve

Key actions and who was responsible

- Community: elected care group leadership, proposed and tested three livelihood solutions, and independently created a chicken pass-on scheme outside the CBO's original design.
- Nachikodowa: distributed goats and soft loans, facilitated cooking demonstrations, and provided ongoing community supervisor support for unresolved group issues.
- Traditional leaders: hold signed copies of each care group's self-written rules, enforce them when broken, and help groups secure land at fair rates for group farming.
- Agricultural extension officials: provide immunisation and disease treatment for pass-on goats and chickens, including direct intervention after a chicken disease outbreak.
- The Ward Councillor: redirected funding originally intended to boost chicken pass-on toward general group business investment once some groups had already established their own flocks independently.
- Male champions: model shared caregiving to other men and help sensitise the wider community to the programme's goals.

Systems influenced

- Household livelihood system: group livestock grew from 70 goats and 2 chickens at the start to roughly 173 goats and 139 chickens, alongside group and individual businesses in maize, groceries, small fish trading and locally made snacks.
- Child protection system: reported child abuse, neglect and inappropriate punishment fell in Nachikodowa's catchment area, consistent with community accounts of reduced unsupervised time now that household income has diversified.

- Community governance: care groups write and enforce their own rules, with signed copies held by traditional leaders, extending formal accountability structures down to the village level.

Implementation adaptation

The clearest adaptation was entirely community-driven: parents invented their own chicken pass-on scheme because goats bred too slowly for their needs. Nachikodowa's response was to let this happen without asserting control over how chickens were shared, a deliberate choice to follow the community's own initiative rather than redirect it.

Outcomes

The clearest outcome is the shift from a single, CBO-designed pass-on model to a community-invented second one. Parents grew group livestock from 70 goats and 2 chickens at the outset to roughly 173 goats and 139 chickens, with the chicken pass-on scheme created entirely on the community's own initiative once goats proved too slow to breed for their needs. Soft loans distributed to groups, rather than individuals, funded a group maize business and a range of individual ventures, including groceries, small fish trading, locally made snacks and sugar cane sales.

This economic shift appears closely connected to child protection outcomes. Reported child abuse, neglect and inappropriate punishment in Nachikodowa's area fell from 7.5% to 5.3%, consistent with community accounts describing less time children now spend unsupervised as household income has diversified beyond a single, uncertain source. Male involvement in caregiving also rose sharply, with caregivers reporting that men are responsible and involved in child care rising from 27.5% to 75.4%, and two fathers now participating directly in what was previously an all-female care group.

Community testimony adds important texture to this gender shift. Male champions describe men now being comfortable carrying children to the hospital and walking with them in public, behaviour once regarded with suspicion. But the same respondents describe real, ongoing social costs: men who take on visible caregiving roles report being mocked, with one account describing being called a coward for behaviour that is 'not supposed' to be done by a man. This is reported here as a genuine, unresolved tension rather than a fully settled norm shift.

Nutrition knowledge gains were substantial. Caregivers citing at least two or three pieces of information from a health professional rose from 35.0% to 86.0%, the largest gain of the three Malawian CBOs on this indicator, from the lowest starting baseline. Community members report no confirmed malnutrition cases in the catchment area at the time of this case study, which they attribute to parents independently running their own refresher cooking demonstrations rather than waiting for Nachikodowa to organise them.



NACHIKODOWA CARE GROUP

A Nachikodowa care group meeting, discussing loans and saving contributions.

Indicators linked to Nachikodowa's economic empowerment and protection pathway

The indicators below are drawn from the Malawi CDSC4ECD endline evaluation's CBO specific results tables. They are limited to indicators directly connected to Nachikodowa's poverty, protection and nutrition issue.

Relevant indicator (Nachikodowa)	Baseline	Endline	Change	What the result suggests
Children experiencing abuse, neglect or inappropriate punishment	7.5%	5.3%	-2.2 pp	A decrease is the desired direction, and speaks directly to the case's core protection rationale.
Caregivers citing at least two or three pieces of information from a health professional	35.0%	86.0%	+51.0 pp	The largest gain of the three Malawian CBOs on this indicator, from the lowest starting baseline.
Children receiving nutritious foods and a well balanced diet daily	76.9%	78.9%	+2.0 pp	A modest but genuine gain, in contrast to a nearby CBO's flat result on the same indicator.
Caregivers reporting that men are responsible and involved in caring for children	27.5%	75.4%	+47.9 pp	A large gain, consistent with two fathers joining a previously all-female care group and community accounts of shared caregiving.
Caregivers reporting at least two trusted people for child related support	67.5%	61.5%	-6.0 pp	A decline that sits awkwardly next to the case's strong community cohesion narrative, reported honestly rather than explained away.

Changes across four areas

A. Children and families

- Community members report no confirmed malnutrition cases in the catchment area, attributed to parents independently running their own refresher cooking demonstrations.
- Care groups make play materials from local resources, such as plastic and paper, specifically for use at CBCC centres, planned through the groups' own weekly meeting schedule.

B. Community practices

- Parents independently created a chicken pass-on scheme outside Nachikodowa's original design, growing it from 2 starter chickens to roughly 139.
- Group-run soft loan businesses include a group maize trade and individual ventures in groceries, small fish trading, locally made snacks and sugar cane sales.

C. Systems

- Agricultural extension officers provide ongoing veterinary support for pass-on livestock, intervening directly after a chicken disease outbreak.
- The Ward Councillor redirected funding toward general group business investment once some groups had already established their own livestock independently.

D. CBO capacity

- Nachikodowa's stakeholder network narrowed slightly, from 15 to 13 partners, though the wider capacity assessment frames this as a deliberate consolidation toward locally embedded community volunteers rather than a decline.
- Nachikodowa is credited with unusually strong alignment between its action plans and community participatory priorities, though its documentation of timelines and resource flows is noted as comparatively weak.

What Changed, and Why?

Quantitative, qualitative and implementation evidence converge clearly on protection and nutrition knowledge gains, while the gender norm shift and trust indicator show a more complex picture.

Quantitative evidence

A fall in reported child abuse and neglect, alongside large gains in nutrition knowledge and male caregiving involvement, are concentrated exactly where the case's economic empowerment and care group model was intended to have an effect.

Qualitative evidence

Community members describe less unsupervised time for children as household income diversified, fathers now comfortable carrying children to hospital, and parents independently running their own nutrition refreshers, alongside honest accounts of social mockery faced by caregiving fathers.

Implementation evidence

Livestock pass-on records, Nachikodowa's own account, and independent corroboration from the Malawi endline evaluation of two dropped solutions confirm the model is genuinely adaptive rather than a fixed plan reported as if everything worked as designed.

Taken together

Quantitative results, community testimony and independently corroborated implementation records converge on genuine gains in child protection, nutrition knowledge and caregiving norms. The evidence supports a plausible contribution pathway from diversified household income to reduced child neglect, though the decline in trusted-support networks and the ongoing social cost faced by caregiving fathers show the pathway has not resolved every dimension of the original problem equally.

What did not change, or changed less

- Caregivers reporting at least two trusted people for child related support declined, from 67.5% to 61.5%, despite the case's otherwise strong community cohesion narrative.
- A chicken disease outbreak killed roughly half the flock in at least one pass-on group, a genuine setback before agricultural officials intervened.
- Male caregiving involvement rose sharply in the data, but qualitative accounts describe ongoing social mockery of men who take on visible caregiving roles, an unresolved social cost alongside the progress.
- Two of the three original livelihood solutions parents proposed, tailoring and baking, did not survive implementation, independently confirmed by the wider Malawi endline evaluation.

- A Member of Parliament's pledge of chicken incubators had not been delivered at the time of this case study, an unconfirmed, pending commitment.

Lessons and Recommendations

Lessons learned

- Allowing a community to test more than one proposed livelihood solution, and to drop those that fail during implementation rather than at the planning stage, produces a more resilient final model than committing to a single, CBO-selected option from the outset.
- When a pass-on asset's natural cycle does not match a community's felt urgency, communities may spontaneously invent a faster complementary solution on their own, and a CBO's willingness to let this happen without asserting control over it is itself a marker of genuine ownership.
- Tying eligibility for an economic empowerment intervention to a related health behaviour can help drive that behaviour, but the criteria should be revisited and relaxed once the behaviour itself has become widespread, as Nachikodowa did with under five clinic attendance.
- Positive shifts in gender norms around caregiving can coexist with real, ongoing social costs for the individuals making that change, and a case is more credible when it reports the mockery alongside the progress, rather than only the progress.
- When unmet demand for a distributed resource threatens to create a sense of unfairness, resolving the shortfall through an open, multi-stakeholder discussion appears to prevent the resentment that unequal access might otherwise create.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Responsible actor	CDSC stage	Evidence and rationale	Priority
Strengthen documentation of activity timelines, resource flows and adaptations, given this is flagged as a comparative weakness despite strong underlying participatory practice.	Nachikodowa; Firelight	Monitoring, evaluation and learning	The wider Malawi capacity assessment notes Nachikodowa's documentation of timelines and resource flows as weak relative to its strong participatory process.	Medium
Provide a basic animal health contingency plan or fund for pass-on livestock groups.	Nachikodowa; agricultural extension services	Action planning; risk management	A disease outbreak killed roughly half the chickens in at least one pass-on group early in the scheme.	Medium
Provide structured, ongoing support for male care group members facing social pushback for their participation, rather than treating the presence of male champions alone as evidence the norm shift is complete.	Nachikodowa; male champions network	Monitoring, evaluation and learning; community practice	Male champions describe being mocked and called cowards by other community members for taking on visible caregiving roles.	Medium

Recommendation	Responsible actor	CDSC stage	Evidence and rationale	Priority
Investigate the decline in caregivers reporting at least two trusted people for child related support, given it sits at odds with the case's otherwise strong community cohesion narrative.	Nachikodowa; Firelight	Monitoring, evaluation and learning	This indicator fell from 67.5% to 61.5%, despite strong qualitative evidence of improved coordination and trust elsewhere in the case.	Medium

WHAT THIS CASE TEACHES US ABOUT CDSC

Genuine ownership sometimes looks like a community quietly going off script. Nachikodowa did not design the chicken pass-on scheme, did not control how it was shared, and does not claim credit for it. Recognising that kind of unplanned initiative as success, rather than a deviation to correct, may be one of the clearest tests of whether a CDSC process has actually worked.