

# Enabling Social Innovation in Malawi

## Country Snapshot



POWERED BY 1Family Foundation



**Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." <sup>1</sup>**

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Malawi's social innovation ecosystem.

Direct focus on social innovation   Connected but indirect focus on social innovation   No focus on social innovation

## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

### Official Definition of Social Innovation



There is **no legal or statutory definition** of social innovation in Malawi. Public actors and development partners use **working definitions** linked to inclusive development, innovation in service delivery, and locally driven solutions, particularly in health, agriculture, youth employment, and governance (c. 2015–).

### Government Body for Social Innovation



No dedicated ministry or agency for social innovation. Relevant responsibilities are distributed across:

- Ministry of Trade and Industry: MSME development, cooperatives, and inclusive business.
- Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare: community-based and social protection innovation.
- Public sector innovation units supported by UNDP within governance and youth programmes.

### Government Strategy for Social Innovation



No standalone strategy. Social innovation elements appear within:

- **Malawi Vision 2063** (2020–): innovation-led, inclusive, private-sector-driven growth.
- **Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III** (2017–2022): human capital, institutional innovation, and resilience.
- **Public sector reform and digital government agendas**, often donor-supported.

### Policies, Laws & Regulations



- **Cooperatives Act** (1998, amended): enables cooperative and solidarity-based enterprises.
- **NGO Act (2000)**: legal framework for civil society organisations.
- **Public Procurement and Disposal of Assets Act** (2017): allows discretion for social and developmental considerations, though social procurement is not explicit.

No legal category for social enterprises.

### Official Statistics



No dedicated official statistics on social innovation. The **National Statistics Office** collects data on MSMEs, cooperatives, NGOs, employment, and informal activity, which partially capture social-innovation-relevant actors.

## Government Programs

Key programmes and instruments:

- **Malawi Innovation Challenge Fund (MICF)** (2014–2023): competitive grants for inclusive and innovative private-sector solutions.
- **Growth Accelerator Malawi** (2018–): UNDP-supported accelerator for youth-led and impact-oriented enterprises.

# ECOSYSTEM

## Stakeholders

Main actors include **mHub**, **Beekeeping Centre for Social Enterprise (BeeBiz)**, CONGOMA, NASFAM, MUSCCO, universities, faith-based organisations, UN agencies, and bilateral donors.

## Networks

Active but fragmented networks include cooperative unions, NGO umbrella bodies, MSME associations, youth and women entrepreneur groups, and regional innovation hubs. No unified national social-innovation network.

## Support Organisations (Non-financial)

Key types: innovation hubs (mHub), incubators and accelerators, NGO capacity-building organisations, universities, and donor-supported technical assistance providers.

## Support Initiatives

Common initiatives include incubation and acceleration, challenge funds, community savings models, entrepreneurship training, and public-sector innovation pilots, particularly in agriculture, health, climate resilience, and youth employment.

## Collaboration

Public–private–civil society collaboration is **common**, especially donor–government partnerships. Innovation challenges, youth hackathons, and SDG forums occur regularly. No nationally branded social innovation award; prizes are mainly donor- or university-led.

# FINANCE

## Financing Schemes

No consolidated national estimate of funding dedicated specifically to social innovation. Financing is largely embedded within development, MSME, and inclusion programmes.

## Key Types of Financing

- **Public & donor grants:** UNDP, World Bank, AfDB, EU, bilateral donors.
- **Challenge funds:** MICF, Growth Accelerator.
- **Microfinance & SACCOs:** MUSCCO, Opportunity International.
- **Philanthropy & faith-based funding.**
- **Impact investment:** limited and donor-anchored.

Instruments mainly include grants, concessional loans, microcredit, and blended finance.



## Inclusiveness of Financing

Targeting of **women, youth, rural populations, and smallholder farmers** is common. Access remains limited for informal innovators and early-stage community initiatives.

# SOCIETY



## Public Awareness ✓

The term “social innovation” is rarely used in public discourse. Related concepts—youth innovation, entrepreneurship, community development, sustainability—are more prevalent, mainly in urban and donor-facing contexts.



## Research ✓ 🔗

Academic research on social innovation is limited and sector-specific (health, agriculture, governance). Practitioner research is led primarily by UN agencies, the World Bank, and development partners.



## Education & Human Capital ✓ 🔗

No formal degree programmes focused specifically on social innovation. Relevant content is embedded in entrepreneurship, development studies, ICT, and public health programmes. Informal training through hubs and accelerators is more significant. No national graduate estimates available.



## Entrepreneurship



**EIU Business Environment:**  
low-ranked globally



**Global Innovation Index:**  
low score; bottom-quartile ranking.



**GEM:** high levels of necessity-driven entrepreneurship; social entrepreneurship not separately quantified.



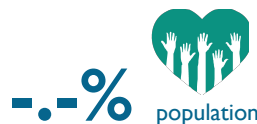
## Social & Environmental Consciousness



**Solidarity**  
strong community mutual aid traditions; no recent WVS wave for Malawi



**Political Participation:**  
low to moderate (EIU).



**Volunteering**  
relatively high participation  
CAFWorld Giving Index



**Sustainability**  
low EPI ranking; high climate vulnerability and increasing focus on adaptation.