



**Building an Effective Advocacy Movement for Sustainable and Equitable
Agricultural Development in Africa**

Advocacy for Sustainable and Equitable Agricultural Development: The Case of Malawi

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Introduction

Agriculture is the most important sector of Malawi's economy in terms of its contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It accounts for 39% of GDP, contributes over 80% of foreign exchange earnings, employs about 80% of the workforce and contributes significantly to national and household food security (Malawi Government- Agriculture Sector Wide Approach (ASWAp), 2009). The agriculture sector is divided into two sub-sectors, the smallholder sub-sector which contributes more than 70% of agricultural GDP and the estate sub-sector which contributes less than 30%. Agriculture is therefore dominated by smallholder farmers. In an attempt to improve agricultural productivity, the Government of Malawi has spearheaded the development of several sectoral and sub-sectoral policies and strategies aimed at addressing some of the constraints faced within the sector especially by smallholder farmers. Despite the various initiatives, including a review of some of the policies and strategies in the agriculture sector, there has been little improvement of the plight of smallholder farmer. They continue to face a myriad of challenges (discussed below) that threaten the viability of the sector and rural livelihoods.

Malawi's socio-economic development agenda is guided by the overarching Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) for the 2006/2007 to 2010/2011 fiscal years (Government of Malawi – 2006). Other major economic activities in Malawi include mining and quarrying, manufacturing, utilities (electricity and water), construction and distribution (Government of Malawi, Economic Report, 2009).

Problem and Context

Out of Malawi's 13 million people, 87 % of the population is based in the rural areas while the remaining 13 % is urban (Government of Malawi, National Statistical Office [NSO]¹, 2008). Population density is estimated at more than 139 inhabitants per square kilometre of arable land, making it one of the highest population densities in Africa. The high population density has contributed to land degradation and accelerated deterioration of natural resources (*ibid*). The majority of Malawi's rural population is engaged in agriculture. Despite its significant contribution to the economy, the smallholder sub-sector is faced with a number of challenges that affect its performance and contribution to the country's economy. Major constraints

affecting smallholder farmers include: (i) low productivity; (ii) limited access to and low usage of modern productive technologies such as hybrid seeds, irrigation, inorganic fertilisers and farm machinery; (iii) poor access to input and output markets and agricultural credit; (iv) skewed land distribution and insecure land tenure; (v) limited access to agricultural extension services; (vi) weak farmer organisations; (vii) limited entrepreneurial skills including low value addition; and (viii) high levels of poverty among the majority of the smallholder farmers, (Government of Malawi, ASWAp 2009).

Malawi has several Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that work within the agricultural sector. They include: the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET), the Farmers' Union of Malawi (FUM), National Association of Smallholder Farmers in Malawi (NASFAM) and the Training Support for Partnership (TSP). These CSOs advocate on behalf of the smallholder farmers for a more enabling environment to improve smallholder farmers' productivity including better policies. Despite the existence of the CSOs on agriculture, there have been limited improvements of the conditions under which the smallholder farmers operate particularly regarding access to better output markets and productive resources such as land, improved technologies and capital markets. This anomaly formed the basis of this study whose main objectives were to identify the critical factors affecting the smallholder farmers and the corresponding policies aimed at addressing the challenges. In addition, it sought to identify the representative and associational forms of agency (organisations) that exist to respond to the challenges confronting smallholders.

Research Methods

The research principally involved a review of literature related to the two basic research questions which were: (i) What policy factors inhibit the sustainability of smallholder agriculture systems? (ii) What forms of organisations exist in the country to respond to the challenges confronting smallholder farmers? Interviews were conducted with representatives of some CSOs on how the CSOs represent (amplify) smallholder farmers' policy interests. The interviews were focused on getting a deeper understanding of the internal operations of CSOs and the nature and efficacy of the networks (local, regional and global) that they have established in the recent past, the nature of CSOs' relationship with farmers, and the challenges that CSOs face in their advocacy work. The consultations also aimed at establishing any debates that the CSOs are engaged in regarding current policy issues such as the promotion of bio-fuels and the possible

effects of climate change. Furthermore, the interviews aimed at assessing the capacity of the CSOs on various aspects including the manner in which they integrated policy advocacy activities within their programmes, management styles and approaches within CSOs, governance, staffing, capacity to raise/attract funding for the identified activities, communication channels, the manner in which the CSOs consult and represent the interests of their constituencies and collaboration with other stakeholders. A capacity diagnostic matrix was developed against which each CSO assessed itself on the aforementioned parameters.

Key Issues in the Agriculture Sector

The Government of Malawi's (MoG) ASWAp observes that there are several key issues and constraints in the agricultural sector, which affect the agriculture sector in general but more specifically the smallholder farmers. The agriculture sector is generally characterised by low and stagnant yields, over dependence on rain-fed agriculture which increases vulnerability to weather related shocks, low level of irrigation development, and low uptake of improved farm inputs (Government of Malawi, 2009). The ASWAp further observes that low profitability of smallholder agriculture is influenced by weak links to markets, high transport costs, few and inefficient farmer organisations, poor quality control and lack of market information. These issues have long been outstanding as the Malawi Agricultural Sector Investment Program (MASIP) also identified similar issues within the agriculture sector as highlighted below (Government of Malawi, 2004).

Low Productivity

Productivity in the agriculture sector has generally been below potential yields. Most of the crops have shown negative rates of productivity growth during the 2000-05 period, with the exception of beans and tea, Figure 1 (Government of Malawi-ASWAp, 2009). This decline in productivity has been particularly evident within the smallholder sector. Low productivity in the smallholder sector is largely attributed to low usage of modern inputs. In addition to low input use, poor agricultural credit, poor access to input and output markets, unfavourable weather conditions, small landholding sizes and weak technology transfer also contribute to smallholders' low productivity. The ASWAp estimates the gap between potential yields and actual yields of most crops in Malawi to be in the range of 38 % to 53 % for cereals and 40-75 % for legumes.

Poor Access to Input, Output Markets and Agricultural Credit

The liberalisation of the agricultural sector witnessed the state's withdrawal from direct interventions in input, output and financial markets in favour of private sector operations. Despite the shift, both input and product markets still function imperfectly. Most smallholder farmers are poorly organised and lack bargaining power over pricing of agricultural inputs and output. Transaction costs remain high due to low economic activity and low traded volumes of agricultural inputs and output. With the collapse of the Smallholder Agriculture Credit Administration (SACA), access to agricultural finance has been limited among smallholder farmers. Commercial banks and micro-finance institutions consider lending to the agricultural sector to be a risky investment, preferring to lend to non-farm sectors, (Government of Malawi ASWAp 2009, Kherallah *et.al* -2001)

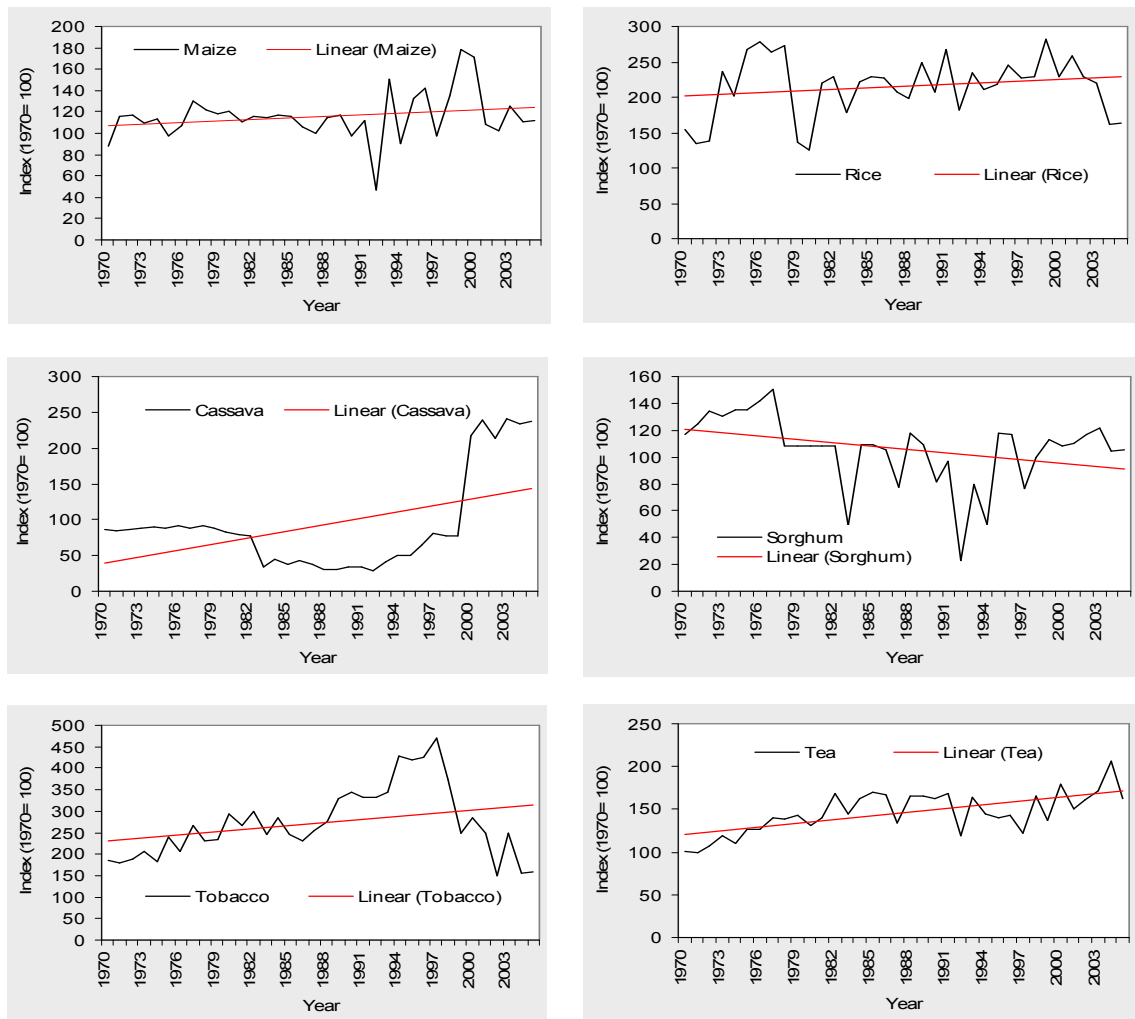


Figure 1: Productivity Trends in Main Agricultural Crops, 1970- 2005

Source: Government of Malawi (ASWAp, 2009)

Limited Access to and Low Usage of Modern Productive Technologies

Smallholder farmers' limited access to and low usage of modern productive technologies such as irrigation technologies, inorganic fertilisers and hybrid seeds is a function of a number of factors. These include low income levels among the farmers, limited access to information through the agricultural extension services and poor access to the technologies due to poor road and transport infrastructure. Low income levels make it difficult and sometimes impossible for the farmers to afford modern technologies whose prices are often beyond the farmers' means. Furthermore, the

large populations within the smallholder areas make it difficult for the few extension personnel to disseminate training on new and modern farming methodologies. These communities have very limited access to alternative sources of information such as the print and electronic media.

Skewed Land Distribution and Insecure Land Tenure

Unequal land distribution has been identified as one of the binding constraints on agricultural productivity in Malawi. However, as long as Malawi continues to depend on agriculture, land will remain one of the most important resources for the economy to achieve growth and sustain people's livelihoods. Chirwa (2004) notes that land is one of the important determinants of the welfare of the people and that access to land is likely to lead to increased economic growth and reduction in poverty. Chirwa (*ibid*) argues that past agricultural strategies have been less successful because they ignored the land question among smallholder farmers. Chirwa observes that access to land via agricultural production is one of the important factors that can translate growth to poverty reduction. Chinsinga (2008) makes similar observations that land is a primary productive resource in Malawi and that it holds the key to poverty reduction. However, despite the fact that land remains the most significant productive asset for the majority of Malawians, it is far from being equitably distributed. Poor access to land and land tenure insecurity are notable causes of poverty and major reasons for low agricultural productivity among smallholder farmers. Problems of land in Malawi therefore revolve around issues of access, tenure security and land use.

The inequitable land distribution is attributed to a number of factors including the 1967 land reforms which mandated that land was construed as a commodity to be governed by market forces. This encouraged entrepreneurs to acquire portions of communal land and convert them into their own private lands. Thus, the 1967 laws instituted mechanisms for converting customary land into private land and reinforced the postcolonial dual agricultural strategy that distinguished estate farming from smallholder agriculture. In essence, the land market that was created following the 1967 laws only provided for one-way transferability of land from customary to the estate sector (Chinsinga *ibid*).

Due to poor access to agricultural land, most land-constrained smallholder farmers are forced to cultivate on marginal lands such as steep slopes, river banks, protected areas thereby causing soil

erosion and land degradation. Kanyongolo (2004) notes that the alienation of peasant customary lands and their conversion to private or state ownership progressively created and expanded a mass of land shortage and landless peasants. As a result, the landless peasants have continued to labour on estates; migrate to urban centres and become part of the underclass eking out a living at the periphery of the formal market; or have engaged in counter-systemic actions, such as resistance against further privatisation of communal land and occupation of private or state-owned lands.

The current pattern of land ownership still remains skewed in favour of a small minority who accumulated vast tracts of land under the auspices of the colonial and postcolonial legislative instruments. Given the colonial and postcolonial injustices that have underpinned the land tenure and ownership patterns in Malawi, it is necessary to implement a land reform programme in the country. Silungwe (2005), observed that while the law states that customary land is the property of the people of Malawi the land vests in perpetuity in the president implying that the legal title in customary land does not vest in the people of Malawi but rather in the president. The declaration that land is the property of the people of Malawi has no legal significance under the Land Act. Silungwe further argues that the Land Act does not grant the people of Malawi any enforceable right at law. Thus, the people of Malawi only have the right of occupancy and use of customary land. The state has powers to dispose of customary land as private land under leasehold, thereby rendering the possibility of the land to be converted into freehold.

Cross (2002) observed that the majority of non-state organisations do not have adequate capacity to engage in a sustained campaign to improve land policies on behalf of the majority of smallholders. In fact, there is no consensus within the existing agriculture-focused organisations in terms of the appropriate tenure mechanisms, appropriate land sizes and functions of local government authorities (including traditional authority such as chiefs) in terms of their role in land adjudication and allocation.

Despite the numerous problems associated with land, opportunities exist for land reforms particularly those that can increase access to land for the landless or near landless. This is based on the observed poor performance of estate agriculture. Some estates have been abandoned while other estate owners are offering their estates for sale (Chirwa, 2004). In addition, Chirwa observes that there is high willingness among smallholder farmers to participate in community

based rural land development programmes. Chirwa (2008) also notes an increase in access to land and financial resources among smallholder farmers that participated in the community-based land development programme. These farmers were more likely to invest in improved maize seeds, tended to be more productive and their overall welfare was better than non-participants. However, Chirwa argues that the positive effects are driven more by access to financial resources than change in land tenure *per se*. This underscores the importance of complementary investments and assistance in order for land reform programmes to have significant impact on poor smallholder farmers. The 2002 land policy advocates for interventions which aim at providing land to the land constrained households, promoting productivity on small land holdings, promoting low cost conservation technologies, integrating gender and HIV and AIDS awareness into land management and ensuring sustainable environmental and natural resource management. However, the policy's effectiveness requires government's commitment, taking advantage of opportunities that exist such as availability of idle land in the estate sub-sector and smallholders' willingness to participate in land reform programmes.

Limited Access to Agricultural Extension Services

The smallholder sub-sector has also witnessed an erosion of extension services due to factors such as a growing farming population, collapse of the farmer club system, deaths and retirement of extension workers, inadequate training of new and existing workers and declining resource allocated to some of the agricultural sub-sectors such as extension. A national survey by the National Statistical Office in 2005 revealed that only 13% of agricultural households got advice from an agricultural adviser on crop and input management. The inadequate extension services have implications on the extent to which developed research technologies can be disseminated, adopted and efficiently utilised by smallholder farmers. The low use of modern technologies has resulted in lower yields within the smallholder sub-sector than in the estate sub-sector (Government of Malawi -ASWAp, 2009).

Weak and Inefficient Farmer Organisations

According to the database compiled by a consortium of three farmer based organisations (NASFAM, FUM and MALEZA²), there are over 2,000 farmer organisations in Malawi. The

² Malawi Enterprise Zones Association

consortium defined a farmer organisation as an organised grouping of farmers other than a farmer club with necessary documents and membership of more than 15 individuals. This includes cooperatives, local commodity associations, and farmer based groups (NASFAM *et.al*, 2008). Although this definition excludes a farmer club, it should be noted that a farmer club is in most cases the basic farmer grouping upon which other organisations (cooperatives, associations and unions) are formed. In fact, the Ministry of agriculture principally works with farmer clubs as avenues for agricultural extension and other related services. Despite the existence of numerous farmer organisations, most of the farmer organisations are poorly organised, inefficiently operated and lack bargaining power over agricultural input and output prices and services. This renders the farmer organisations ineffective. Studies have shown that smallholder farmers benefit from properly organised farmer organisations founded on collective responsibility and democratic principles. Successful farmer organisations tend to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities amongst the members, have adequate resources for their operations and have strong linkages with service providers such as financing institutions, transporters and easy access to input and output markets (Kachule and Dorward, 2004; Kachule and Poole, 2004).

Limited Entrepreneurial Skills Including Low Value Addition

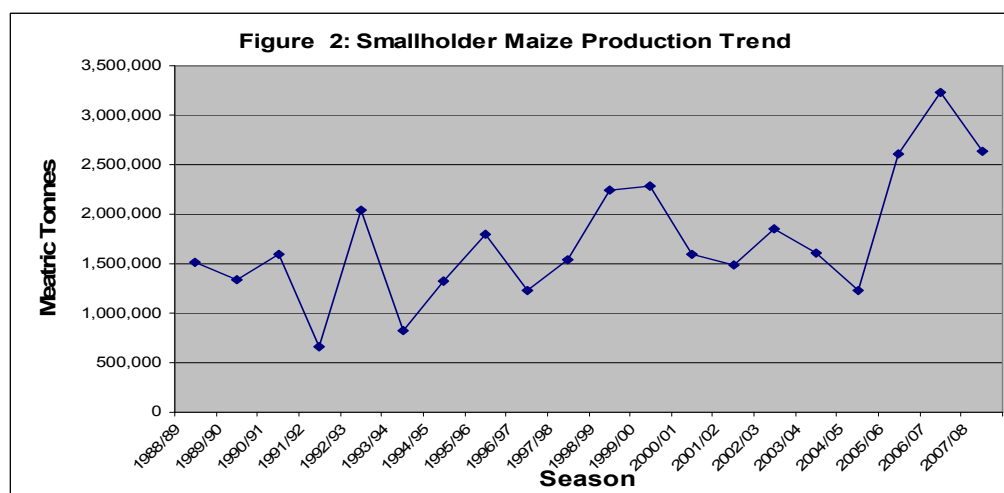
Smallholder farmers are predominantly considered to be subsistence farmers basically producing food crops for their own consumption. Smallholder agriculture is also associated with limited value addition on food crops and on cash crops such as tobacco, groundnuts and cotton. This implies that the smallholders realise lower prices on marketed raw commodities than they would have obtained with value addition. Lack of capital and high cost of agro-processing technologies contribute to limited value adding by smallholder farmers.

Social Outcomes

A number of factors, including those discussed in the preceding sections, have significantly contributed toward high levels of poverty and food insecurity amongst smallholder farmers. The Malawi Integrated Household Survey (IHS) shows that the main determinants of poverty are education, occupation, per capita land holding, type of crops, diversification out of maize, participation in tobacco, participation in public works programs and paid employment opportunities. In addition to poverty, shortage of labour supply is another issue faced by most

smallholder farmers. According to the 2008 population and housing census, the average household size in Malawi is 4.4 persons (Government of Malawi, 2008). The age structure in most households is characterised by children of less than 12 years. These children cannot provide adequate labour for agricultural purposes. The labour shortage at household level is also worsened by the scourge of HIV and AIDS whereby some families have lost the principal family labour suppliers, or in other cases the family spends much of their time caring for the AIDS victims. The HIV and AIDS pandemic has also contributed to increased child headed households which cannot effectively undertake farming activities on their own. The increasing advocacy against child labour is also forcing families to send children to school, thus causing a shortage of labour within the smallholder households.

The majority of the smallholder households are food insecure. Over the past thirty years, Malawi has gone through different political and economic phases which have had different focus on agriculture with varying effects on smallholder maize production over time, see Figure 2 below.



Data source: Ministry of Agriculture 2007/08 Annual Agricultural Statistical Bulletin

The first of these phases spans the period from independence in 1964 to the time that Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were introduced in the early 1980s. During this period, the majority of smallholders were food secure with respect to maize, the country's staple food crop. Surplus maize production was also recorded at national level. This was possible because of the emphasis that the then regime put on agricultural services targeting smallholders. The period was characterised by increasing emphasis on smallholder extension services through the "Block

system”³. Smallholder farmers were provided with agricultural inputs on credit through the Smallholder Agriculture Credit Administration (SACA). The period was also characterised by government’s massive financial support to the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) which was regarded as the buyer of last resort for smallholder produce. Through these arrangements, smallholders were assured of easy access to agricultural inputs and output markets (Ng’ong’ola *et.al*, 1997; Kherallah, 2001).

The period of structural adjustment from the early 1980s into the mid-1990s saw declining productivity among smallholder farmers due to a number of factors including the removal of agricultural input subsidies. The removal of subsidies resulted in low usage of inorganic fertilisers and hybrid seeds amongst smallholder farmers due to high cost of the inputs. Liberalisation of agricultural markets through the SAPs paved the way for private sector participation in inputs and output markets. Unfortunately, most of the private traders had unscrupulous practices aimed at siphoning the smallholders’ produce such as offering low prices, use of uncertified weighing gadgets and sometimes even robbing the smallholders of their produce under the guise of commodity agents. Reduced government’s subvention to ADMARC as part of SAPs rendered ADMARC uncompetitive against private traders and worsened smallholders’ access to input and output markets. The collapse of the Smallholder Agriculture Credit Administration (SACA) programme, which was replaced by a commercially oriented Malawi Rural Finance Company (MRFC) that offered loans at commercial interest rates, also worsened smallholder farmers’ access to financial capital.

The situation worsened between 1994 and 1996 when agricultural inputs subsidies were completely removed. The removal of subsidies resulted in skyrocketing prices of agricultural inputs which placed them beyond the reach of the majority of smallholders. Smallholders reverted to local seeds and/or recycling hybrids which drastically reduced yields and total production. This rendered most of the households food insecure and drove the nation into becoming a net importer of the staple food crop (Ng’ong’ola *et.al*, 1997).

The year 1994 marked the beginning of a new period; there was another political transformation which saw the country shift from a one party state to a multiparty democracy. During this period,

³ This is where a few neighbouring villages formed a block through which an extension advisor offered services on a regular basis

the government attempted to resolve the crisis in smallholder agricultural access to inputs by introducing the “starter pack” programme. Under this programme, smallholder farmers were given 5 kilograms of both basal and top dressing fertiliser and 1 kilogram of hybrid maize seed. This did not help much since the input package was too little and most households tended to apply the fertiliser over a larger area than scientifically recommended. The starter pack programs ran for two agricultural seasons beginning from 1998/99 to 1999/2000 and benefited about 1.5 million smallholder farmers (Government of Malawi 1998 – 1999). Realising that the starter pack programme did not yield expected results, the government introduced another programme called the Targeted Inputs Programme (TIP). Under the TIP, targeted smallholder farmers received two 50kg bags of fertiliser, one for basal dressing and the other one for top dressing. In addition to the fertiliser, each beneficiary was provided with 2kgs maize seed (Open Pollinated Variety- OPV) and 1kg of an appropriate legume seed. The TIP programme ran from 2000 to 2003 with the number of targeted beneficiaries changing from year to year as reflected in Table 2.

Table 2: Smallholder Households Targeted for starter pack and TIP programmes

Year	Target Households
1998/1999	2.8 million
1999/2000	2.8 million
2000/2001	1.5 million
2001/2002	1.0 million
2002/2003	2.0 million

Source: TIP Logistics Unit (2004)

The low agricultural productivity and continued food insecurity both at household and national levels continued until around 2004. This forced the government, under the leadership of President Dr. Bingu WaMutharika, to reintroduce agricultural inputs subsidies beginning from the 2005/06 agricultural season to the present day. The subsidy programme only targets the poorest households as opposed to the universal subsidies that occurred prior to SAPs. Various studies on the Agricultural Inputs Subsidy Programme (Chinsinga, 2009; Jere, 2008, SOAS⁴,

⁴ School of Oriental and African Studies

2008; Kachule and Chilongo, 2008; Imperial College, 2006) show that the intervention resulted in increased smallholder yields from less than 1 ton/ha to an average of 2.04 tons/ha. This translated into increased production and improved household as well as national food security. For the first time in two decades, the country recorded a surplus of 0.5 million metric tonnes in 2005/06 and 1.3 million metric tonnes in 2006/07 (Jere, 2008). The country began to export maize once again and even donated some to neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe and Lesotho.

Policy Interventions

Over the years, government, intermediary NGOs, CSOs and other stakeholders have put in place a number of policy interventions aimed at promoting productivity in the agricultural sector, through creation of an enabling environment for both production and marketing of agricultural commodities. However, there are factors that have affected effectiveness of the policy interventions. These are discussed in the following section which starts with an overview of the policy interventions from the colonial era through to the post-colonial era, under one party rule to the multiparty and democratic governance which was ushered in the early 1990s.

Most policies in the colonial era and the immediate post-independence period to the early 1980s tended to favour the estate sub-sector and suppressed the smallholder sub-sector. During the aforementioned era, the policies restricted smallholder farmers' participation in agricultural production and marketing. Smallholder farmers were not allowed to produce crops such as burley tobacco in their own right, but rather as tenants to estate owners. They were largely confined to production of food crops especially maize. There were also restrictions on smallholder farmers' produce marketing whereby ADMARC was the sole buyer of smallholder produce, with no direct access to export markets. On the other hand, the estate subsector enjoyed the privilege of selling their tobacco through the auction system and directly exported tea and sugar (Ng'ong'ola *et.al*, 1997). Beginning from the early 1980s, the economy was gradually liberalised, paving room for private sector participation in marketing of agricultural commodities.

The period from early 1980s to mid-1990s saw the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) by the Bretton Woods institutions, World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund (IMF). The SAPs were aimed at liberalising the economy by reducing state interventions in the marketing of agricultural inputs and output and allowing the private sector the lead in the marketing of agricultural commodities. Several other input and output policies were introduced under the SAPs. This included a review of some of the policies that had existed prior to this period, Ng'ong'ola *et. al* (1997). Further policy initiatives occurred between 1997 to date. Recent policy reviews have endeavoured to harmonise inter-ministerial policies to minimise duplication and to foster inter-sectoral policy linkages. Annex 1 at the end of the chapter provides a chronology of some of the major policy initiatives dating back to colonial days.

The policy changes in the agricultural sector have been driven and guided by both national development agendas stipulated in national policy documents and also by sectoral policies. National policy documents have included the Development Policies (Devpols) which were in place from the early 1970s to mid-1980s. The Devpols were followed by the poverty reduction strategies such as the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP), launched in April 2002 in response to the widespread and deepening poverty and aimed at reducing poverty by empowering the poor. The MPRSP was built around four strategic pillars, one of which emphasised the promotion of sustainable pro-poor growth, to achieve the required and sustainable level of 6% annual economic growth rate necessary to reduce poverty by half by the year 2015. Pillar 1 provided the premise for the development of the Malawi Economic Growth Strategy (MEGS) as a tool to achieve the poverty reduction objective. MEGS was developed in close collaboration with the private sector.

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) was formulated following the MEGS and it is the overarching operational medium term strategy (2006/07 – 2010/2011) for the attainment of the country's Vision 2020. The main thrust of the MGDS is to create wealth through sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development as a means of achieving poverty reduction. This is expected to transform the country from a predominantly importing and consuming economy to a predominantly manufacturing and exporting economy. The MGDS, which is coordinated through the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, represents a policy shift from social consumption to sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development. It places emphasis on six priority areas: a) agriculture and food security; b)

irrigation and water development; c) transport infrastructure development; d) energy generation and supply; e) integrated rural development; and f) prevention and management of nutrition disorders, and HIV and AIDS. These six priority areas are expected to accelerate the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the areas of health, education, gender, environment, and governance. The MGDS is expected to rejuvenate the rural economies and transform them into potential engines for economic growth that translate into increased redistribution of wealth. The MGDS also identifies five thematic areas in which progress must be made if the overall strategy is to be successful. These thematic components are: (i) Sustainable Economic Growth; (ii) Social Protection; (iii) Social Development; (iv) Infrastructure; and (v) Good Governance (Government of Malawi, 2005).

The emphasis on agriculture is based on the assumption that an improved agricultural sector will potentially enhance economic growth, through production of food and cash crops and value added for domestic and export markets. The MGDS aims at increasing agricultural productivity and food varieties by: (i) increasing value addition to agricultural products by smallholder farmers and orienting smallholder farmers to greater commercialisation; (ii) strengthening the linkages of farmers to markets through infrastructure development; and (iii) enhancing irrigation and water development. Food production and income generation from agricultural activities are key in achieving food security through own production and/or incomes realised from sales of agricultural outputs. Such agricultural activities need to ensure that natural resources are used in a sustainable manner (Government of Malawi ASWAp, 2009).

The development of the MGDS involved a participatory approach, aimed at incorporating views of all stakeholders. Amongst those involved in the development of the MGDS were all the arms of government (executive, parliament and judiciary), civil society, and multi-lateral and bilateral donors. The MGDS draws from the issues defined in the MEGS, lessons from the implementation of the MPRS, the Malawi Public Sector Investment Programme (MPSIP), current government policies and other works and studies done by civil society based research institutions.

In an attempt to harmonize policies, the Government of Malawi has recently reviewed various national development strategies, agricultural strategies and agricultural-related legislation and policies and produced an Agricultural Policy Framework (APF). The APF summarizes the

objectives of agricultural development, strategies and policies that will be pursued to achieve both stated and commonly perceived agricultural objectives. The purpose of the National Agricultural Policy Framework (NAPF) is therefore to increase agricultural productivity to ensure food security and sustainable agricultural growth and development (MoAFS, 2006).

At sectoral level, the agricultural sector has designed policies that seek to convert the national goals into specific sectoral and sub-sectoral strategies and activities. Key strategies include the Agricultural and Livestock Development Strategy and Action Plan (ALDSAP) and the Agriculture Sector Wide Approach (ASWAp) which is the most recent harmonised Agricultural development agenda. The ASWAp, spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security is part of the GoM's efforts to reduce poverty. The ASWAp is aimed at increasing agricultural productivity by contributing to 6% growth annually in the agricultural sector, improving food security, diversifying food production to improve nutrition at household level and increasing agricultural incomes of the rural people. The ASWAp is based on the priorities established in the MGDS and it is also consistent with the AU led CAADP (see introduction to this book). ASWAp has identified three focus areas which are:

- i) **Food security and Risk management:** To be achieved through increasing maize productivity, reducing post-harvest losses, diversifying food production and managing risks associated with food reserves at national level. ASWAp aims to reduce malnutrition through agricultural diversification that includes the promotion of legumes, vegetables, fruits, small stock such as goat meat (milk), pigs, rabbits, chicken, guinea fowl meat, eggs, and fish.
- ii) **Agri-business and market development:** This will entail promoting commercial agriculture production involving smallholder farmers, agricultural diversification, agro-processing for import substitution and value addition, developing the domestic and export markets for inputs and outputs, and developing more public/private partnerships involving producers, buyers, input dealers, service providers, and policy makers in the value chain.
- iii) **Sustainable management of natural resources:** This will focus on sustainable land and water utilisation. Emphasis will be on conservation farming, afforestation, protection of fragile land and catchment areas, and rehabilitation of degraded agricultural land. The strategy will also focus on water use efficiency and expanding the area under irrigation.

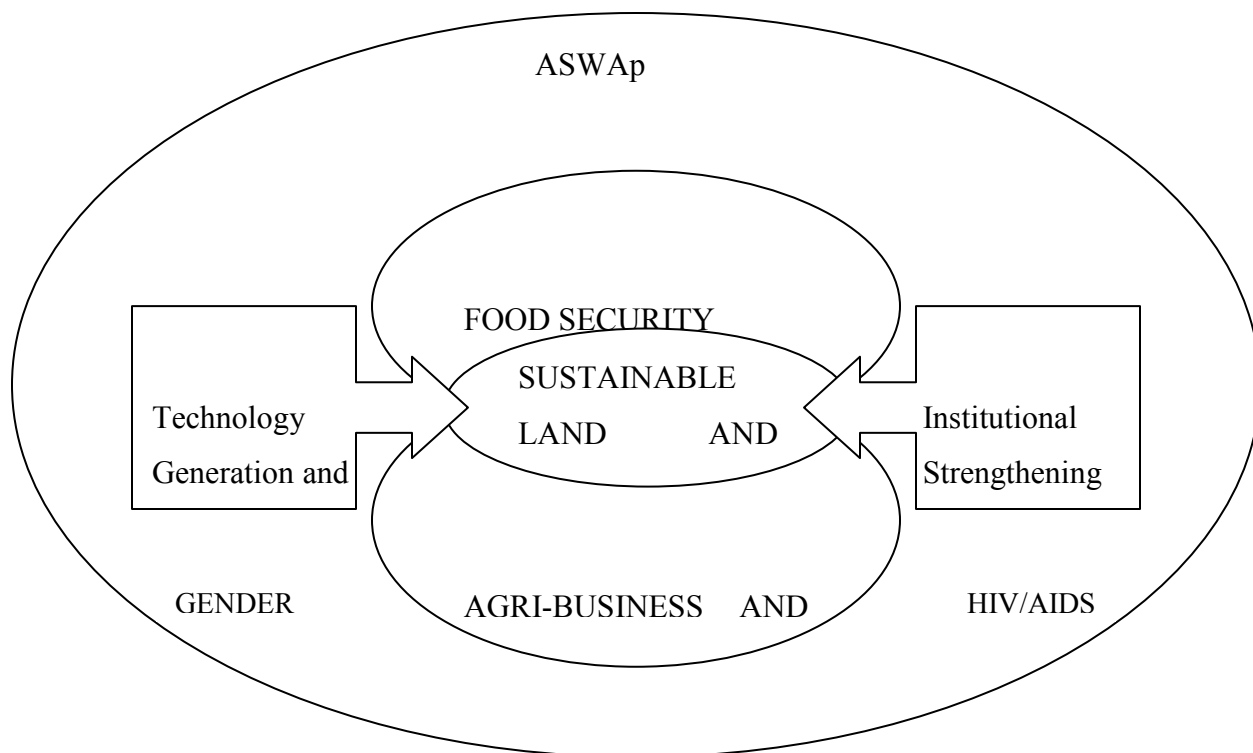
The ASWAp also has two key support services which are:

Technology generation and dissemination: ASWAp aims to improve research services with a focus on result- and market-oriented research on priority technology needs, as well as technical and regulatory services needs of the stakeholders complemented with efficient farmer-led extension and training services.

Institutional strengthening and capacity building: This will focus on strengthening public institutions, building capacity on public management systems and improving resource allocation for effective implementation of agricultural programs.

Furthermore, ASWAp recognises the importance of two cross cutting issues of HIV and AIDS; and Gender disparities whereby issues related to HIV and AIDS will be mainstreamed in the ASWAp program. The aim is to minimise morbidity and mortality attrition, enhance resilience and household coping mechanisms and also reduce HIV infection risks and vulnerability. Gender issues are mainstreamed in the ASWAp document, in order to reduce gender disparities and enhance capacity of the youth, women and men to contribute to agricultural productivity. Figure 3 is a summary of the ASWAp focus areas and crosscutting issues.

Figure 3:ASWAp Focus Areas, Support Services and Cross-cutting Issues



Source: Ministry of Agriculture, ASWAp, 2009

In addition to sectoral policy reviews, there has also been a review of most sub-sectoral policies including the Malawi National Land Policy (2002), the National Nutrition Policy and Strategic Plan for 2007 to 2012 (Government of Malawi- undated), the Extension Policy (2000), the Irrigation Policy (2002), the Water Policy, the National Water Policy (2003) and the Livestock Policy (2005). Alongside the policy documents, strategies have also been developed for some related areas such as capacity building (Government of Malawi, 2005), HIV and AIDS specifically for the agriculture sector (Government of Malawi, 2003).

Despite the existence of several agricultural sub-sector policies, there is no specific sub-sector policy document on agricultural input and output marketing. As a result, statements regarding input and output marketing are often made by the executive wing of government, giving directives on how certain inputs and output are to be marketed and priced. A recent example of this practice occurred when the Government of Malawi reintroduced targeted agricultural input subsidies, as a result of what others have called part of the ruling regime's political manoeuvres to entrench itself within the rural electorate. The directive's goal is to improve the food security

status of the majority of smallholder farmers; through establishing controls on maize pricing and exports and the setting of minimum prices for commodities such as tobacco and cotton.

Factors Affecting Effectiveness of Policy Interventions

The preceding section has outlined some of the policy interventions that have occurred in the agricultural sector to date. However, it should be noted that policy design, although vital, is only a part of a bigger process and is highly dependent on effective implementation of the agreed policies. The following subsections discuss some of the factors that negatively affect the successful implementation of the policies.

Lack of Commitment to Macroeconomic Reform Programmes

Malawi has undergone three different political regimes⁵ which have had varying commitments to macroeconomic reforms of the economy. The immediate post autocratic era (1994 – 2004) is considered to be one of the poorest in terms of fiscal discipline. The era was characterised by increasing domestic debt from MK9.1 billion in June 2001 (8% of GDP) to MK47.1 billion in 2004 (25% of GDP), high inflation and interest rates and little investment by the private sector. These factors were partly attributed to non-adherence to agreements with institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), coupled with increasing corruption (Government of Malawi, 2009).

Political Instability

Malawi has had a reputation for managing political disputes peacefully with no record of civil strife. However, political instability manifested itself between 2004 and 2008, while there was a minority government. The government faced significant challenges in passing certain bills. Prolonged debates before the passing of the budget and other important bills, characterised parliamentary deliberations during the 2007/08 financial year. This affected the implementation of the agricultural inputs supply programme (subsidy programme), which eventually resulted in delayed access to the inputs by smallholder farmers.

Policy Inconsistency

Inconsistencies surrounding policy formulation and implementation are some of the elements that negatively affected the performance of the agricultural sector, including private sector

⁵ 1) Colonial era; 2) one party/autocratic; and 3) democratic/multiparty era.

investment. Examples of policy inconsistencies which have created uncertainties in the farming and business communities include the grain market liberalisation, the maize export or import ban and liberalisation or privatisation of agricultural marketing, (Ng'ong'ola et.al, 1997, Government of Malawi, 2009). Liberalisation of agricultural markets included the grain market. However, because of the strategic importance of maize as the country's staple food, government has tended to impose ad hoc bans on maize exports and this creates uncertainty among maize traders.

Lack of Policy Harmonisation

The sequence of policy implementation can demonstrate the degree to which policies are harmonised. During the structural adjustment period, liberalisation of input markets preceded liberalisation of output markets. This implied that input prices were high compared to output prices, since output markets were still under state control with no competition from the private sector. This translated into lower revenue realised by smallholder farmers to afford the purchase of inputs (Ng'ong'ola et.al, 1997). Such a scenario contributed reduced demand for treated seeds and inorganic fertilisers, which consequently negatively affected productivity levels. There is need to develop a consensus amongst the concerned stakeholders (government, market actors and smallholders) on priorities within the agriculture sector. Such consensus will potentially contribute towards more coherent sequencing of policy implementation and most likely contribute to achievements of the desired increased productivity within the sector.

Inadequate Financing Mechanisms

Adequate financing is one of the prerequisites for effective policy implementation. An analysis of Malawi's budget allocation to the agriculture sector shows that it has surpassed the minimum 10% requirement of the overall national budget, as suggested by the Maputo Declaration of 2003 (Kachule, 2009). However the analysis reveals that despite the increase in budget allocation to the agriculture sector, more than 51% of the agricultural budget is being allocated to recurrent expenditure compared to development/investment budget. This is partly attributed to large expenditures associated with management and logistics of the subsidy program (Kachule, 2008). The large allocation to recurrent expenditure implies less funding to development programmes that would enhance performance of the agricultural sector, particularly the smallholder sub-sector, hence the need for policy commitment in financing development related activities. Table

3 below summarises Malawi's national budget allocation to the agriculture sector between 2000/01 and 2008/09 financial years.

Table 3: National Budget Allocation to Agricultural Sector (Billion Malawi Kwacha)

Financial Year	National Budget	Agric. Budget (Recurrent and Capital Expenditure)	Budget for Recurrent Expenditure	Budget for Capital Expenditure	Agric. Budget as a %age of national budget	Recurrent Budget as a %age of total Agric. budget	Capital Budget as a %age of total Agric. Budget
2000/01	31.5	2.3	1.7	0.6	7	73	27
2001/02	42.3	3.8	2.5	1.2	9	68	32
2002/03	45.3	4.0	2.5	1.5	9	63	37
2003/04	41.7	4.2	2.5	1.6	10	61	39
2004/05	85.6	7.0	5.3	1.7	8	75	25
2005/06	138.7	15.2	12.8	2.4	11	84	16
2006/07	134.7	28.1	17.1	11.0	21	61	39
2007/08	162.9	37.0	21.0	16.0	23	57	43
2008/09	208.1	57.2	32.2	25.0	27	56	44

Source: Kachule (2009)

Lack of Capacity and Commitment to Institutional Reforms

Since 1996, Malawi has adopted the decentralised policy with respect to planning and financial management. This implied planning, implementation and management of programmes, including resources, being controlled by district assemblies and line ministries at district level. The decentralised policy has however been implemented before most district assemblies and ministries were not provided adequate internal capacities to manage programmes. Most district assemblies and ministries do not have the necessary personnel and institutional framework to adequately plan, implement and manage resources on various programmes. The decentralised policy also implied that CSOs and people at the grassroots take an active role in planning and implementation of various programmes at district level. In the agricultural sector, this requires existence of strong and active farmer organisations which are lacking in most districts. The Ministry of Agriculture appreciates that one of the challenges of decentralisation is lack of capacity at the local level (Ministry of Agriculture, 2000).

In order to ensure that the decentralisation policy is successful, there is need to build the capacity of personnel involved in local government and also to clarify the institutional framework in a coherent and systematic manner. Such clarification should explain, not only the role of the

district assemblies and line ministries, but also that of chiefs, civil society organisations and other stakeholders. Attempts at the improved mobilisation of smallholder farmers should be supported. Organisations representing smallholders need to be accorded more opportunities in policy implementation. This can be achieved by having a clear core functional analysis and clearly defined roles of all stakeholders in policy documents and strategies. This would enhance effective implementation of policies and strategies such as the ASWAp (Government of Malawi, 2009).

Key Actors in the Policy Making Process

Prior to the decentralisation process in 1996, formulation and implementation of national and sectoral policies, strategies, programmes and projects largely entailed a top-down approach. With the advent of decentralisation, the responsibility of planning and implementing programmes and projects shifted from central government to state and non-state institutions as well as the general public at district level. This shift meant an increased role and responsibility of the grassroots institutions and the general public in planning and implementation of programmes and projects within a district. The recent national, sectoral and sub-sectoral policy reviews have therefore encompassed the decentralisation policy, by involving various stakeholders both state and non-state at district level. The non-state actors are expected to take an active role in the planning and implementation of programmes including agricultural programmes and delivery of related services at district level.

At national level, key institutions in agriculture policy formulation include the Ministries of Agriculture and Food Security; Irrigation and Water Development; Trade Commerce and Industry; Local Government and Rural Development; Economic Planning and Development; the Office of the President and Cabinet; and Department of Public Procurement. However, policy implementation has been affected by overlaps and duplications. In view of the overlaps, there are currently various on-going institutional reforms within the agricultural sector. This entails changing roles, especially between central and district level institutions on one hand, and between state and non-state actors on the other. Such reforms include the Core Function Analysis (CFA) initiative by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS) which aims to define the roles of state and non-state actors in the planning and delivery of programmes. This exercise will culminate into identifying the core functions that the public sector should retain,

those that can sub-contracted, and those that should be privatised (Government of Malawi, 2009).

The GoM considers the smallholder farmers as the principal partners in agricultural development. However, the government recognises a number of challenges facing the smallholders which include: the highly disorganised manner in which the smallholders operate with very few cooperatives and associations in existence; high levels of illiteracy resulting in difficulties in adopting new technologies and understanding of farming as a business activity; and very little linkages between farmers and private firms that provide services to the agricultural sector. Because of these challenges, smallholder farmers tend to have little influence on policy developments and project activities that influence their environment (Government of Malawi, 2009).

State of Policy Advocacy

Despite these challenges among the smallholders, there are many institutions and groups including CSOs, faith based institutions, and academic and research institutions which have varying capacities in fostering agricultural change in Malawi through lobby and advocacy. In order to develop a full appreciation of the role of the various CSO and other related institutions in policy advocacy, it is important to have an understanding of the typology of organisations engaged in promoting smallholder agriculture. This section analyses in more detail the manner in which organisations are constituted and some of their strategies.

Typology of CSOs Engaged in Policy Advocacy

There are several CSOs and NGOs that are working on issues related to the welfare of the people the majority of which are smallholder producers. These institutions can be categorised by their background and areas of focus. Within the CSO community, some focus on issues related to agriculture while others focus on human rights issues and yet others focus on gender related issues. However, the common feature among these CSOs is that their constituents are predominantly smallholder farmers, implying that despite the area of emphasis by any particular CSOs there are common issues related to agriculture that affect the plight of the CSOs constituents. Thus, CSOs are not mutually exclusive of each other in terms of the advocacy activities.

Apart from the CSOs focusing on purely agricultural policy advocacy, there are other NGOs that focus on agriculture but with a developmental perspective. Thus, they are not necessarily focused on policy advocacy but rather they devote their energy to providing services that could lead to improved agricultural productivity amongst the poor and marginalised smallholders, in turn improving the smallholders' livelihoods. Such NGOs tend to work on a cross-section of issues including provision of agricultural inputs (seeds, fertiliser and equipment such as motorised and treadle pumps for irrigation); post-harvest technologies (modern grain banks/storage); micro-finance services; market linkages; soil and water conservation; and general agricultural advice/extension services.

Who is engaged in Policy Advocacy?

As discussed in the preceding section, there are a number of policy advocacy oriented CSOs in Malawi. However, just a few of the CSOs are actively involved in agricultural policy advocacy and they have different areas of interest with overlaps in some cases. Major organisations involved in agricultural policy advocacy in Malawi include the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET), the National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM), the Farmers Union of Malawi (FUM), and the Training Support for Partnership (TSP), the Centre for Social Concern (CFSC), Actionaid Malawi, Plan Malawi and World Vision Malawi. Some of these organisations are member based CSOs, for example, CISANET⁶, NASFAM and FUM while others are intermediary NGOs (Action aid Malawi, Plan Malawi and World Vision Malawi) and others are registered as Trusts (such as TSP) but operate in a similar way to intermediary NGOs and others are faith based (such as CFSC).

Achievements by Some CSOs

Despite inefficiencies in most farmer organisations, achievements have been made by some of the CSOs to the benefit of the smallholder farmers. CISANET's advocacy work on the current input subsidy programme led to significant changes in subsequent subsidy programmes. Such changes included pan-territorial pricing for all fertiliser types, inclusion of hybrid maize seed in addition to open pollinated varieties and inclusion of private sector participation in the programme. CISANET also successfully lobbied for the development of irrigation equipment

⁶ Other CSOs as members as opposed to NASFAM and FUM whose members are smallholder farmers through their individual organisations (associations and cooperatives)

standards and also assisted the Department of Irrigation Services to develop the standards. Technical working groups are currently developing draft standards.

The Farmers Union of Malawi, alongside other players, lobbied Government to adopt a consultative process with key actors in the agricultural value chain, when setting minimum prices for agricultural commodities. As a result the GoM established the Agricultural Marketing Advisory Council to lead consultations with different stakeholders in the Agricultural Value chain. FUM has also successfully lobbied for the increase in import duty on dairy products to protect smallholder dairy farmers. This was effected by Government of Malawi in the 2009/2010 National Budget. Furthermore, in 2008 FUM and other stakeholders lobbied the Government of Malawi for the introduction of National Identification Cards to ease the challenges of farmers' traceability and targeting for public and private programs. Currently, the Government has commenced a National Identity Program. Box 1 also presents successful cases of addressing smallholder constraints by the Mzuzu Smallholder Coffee Association and NASFAM, as a result of proper organisation and efficient management.

1: Mzuzu Smallholder Trust

Coming from a background of poor organisation and inefficient functioning, Mzuzu smallholder coffee associations transformed legally into production cooperatives, with an umbrella organisation as a union. This transformation invested in training smallholder farmers on how to manage coffee farming as a profitable business. The Union is responsible for marketing smallholder coffee and central procurement of inputs needed by the farmers. The cooperatives employ technical advisers that train contact farmers in extension services and other business skills. The Union has also created a Savings and Credit Union as a micro-finance program servicing smallholder coffee growers, by providing savings facilities and input credit managed by the cooperatives. The Savings and Credit Union had a fund of MK58million comprising 40 % equity (shares by smallholder growers) and 60 % capital grant from the European Union. This facility is managed by growers and it has contributed towards significant improved access to agricultural credit among smallholder farmers (Government of Malawi ASWAp, 2009)

2: National Association of Smallholder Farmers in Malawi (NASFAM)

Founded on the principles of collective action and democratic governance, NASFAM is currently the largest independent, smallholder-owned membership organisation in Malawi. NASFAM started as a USAID funded project to support and organise smallholder tobacco production. Over time the association has diversified into production of other cash and food crops such as groundnuts, soya and birds eye chillies. NASFAM is a legally registered institution under the Trustees Incorporation Act. The association operates nationwide and provides its members with support and guidance on how to organise themselves to farm as a business. The association also provides marketing support to its members, whereby it facilitates bulking of members' produce to secure access to most profitable domestic and international markets. NASFAM also accords its members the opportunity to access farm inputs in a timely manner and at competitive prices, through its network of Association Farm Supply shops. NASFAM also incorporates issues of food security, HIV and AIDS and gender within its programmes. Other services offered by NASFAM include farmer training which uses a farmer to farmer concept where skilled farmers train fellow farmers in their locality in life skills; policy advocacy; and infrastructure development. Currently NASFAM has a membership of over 100,000 across the country.

Conclusion

Malawi is still an agro-based economy with the majority of the producers being smallholder farmers facing a number of constraints. These include poor access to input and output markets, limited access to agricultural credit, limited access to and low usage of modern technologies, fragmented land holdings and weak farmer organisations. Secure access to land remains one of the major factors negatively affecting agricultural productivity. There is definitely a need to consider a land redistribution and tenure reform programme to ensure equitable access. The current pattern of land ownership is skewed in favour of a small minority which accumulated vast tracts of land under the auspices of the colonial and postcolonial legislative instruments. Despite the many constraints confronting the smallholder producers, this group has the potential to improve productivity within a conducive environment characterised by well-organised and efficient farmer organisations as avenues for agricultural services, access to input and output markets and capacity building.

A number of policy interventions have been implemented to address the constraints faced by the smallholder farmers and there are several non-state actors that lobby and advocate for better conditions for them. However, the literature indicates that effectiveness of the policy interventions is a function of several factors including: commitment of government and other stakeholders to adhere to macroeconomic reforms, political will as well as political stability, harmonisation of policies and consistency in policy implementation. Furthermore, there is need for capacity building at various levels such as government institutions, civil society organisations and, more importantly, at farmer level through efficiently organised and managed farmer organisations that would minimize hurdles faced by the smallholder farmers. Collaboration among the various state and non-state actors is essential since they all serve the same constituency, irrespective of their areas of interest.

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Annex 1: Chronology of Major Agricultural Policies

YEAR	POLICY, STRATEGIES AND REGULATORY INTERVENTIONS
1949	Maize Control Board (MCB) established to regulate and control maize marketing.
1956	Agricultural Produce and Marketing Board (APMB) established and replaced MCB.
1961	Markets for all smallholder crops liberalised except for cotton and tobacco.
1962	Farmers Marketing Board (FMB) established and replaced APMB. State monopoly on marketing of virtually all smallholder crops re-imposed
1971	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) established and replaced FMB.
1981	Special Crops Act introduced and prohibited smallholders from producing and Marketing high value crops such as burley and flue cured tobaccos. Commencement of Stabilization and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) supported by financial and technical assistance from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and bilateral and multilateral donors.
1987	Marketing of smallholder produce liberalised except for cotton and tobacco. Producer prices for the smallholders were still being set by the government. Agricultural Produce (Marketing) Regulation Act introduced and banned private exports of groundnuts, beans and pulses.
1990	Special Crops Act amended and smallholders allowed growing burley tobacco for the first time.
1991	Cotton production and marketing liberalised.
1994	Agricultural Produce (Marketing) Regulation Act revoked and ban on private exports Of all agricultural produce lifted with the exception of maize.
1995	Tobacco marketing liberalised. Pricing for smallholder produce liberalised except for Maize. Price band for maize set for the first time.
	INPUT POLICIES
1983	Smallholder Fertiliser Revolving Fund (SFRF) created and took over the procurement and distribution of smallholder fertilisers from ADMARC.
1988	Smallholder Farmers Revolving Fund of Malawi (SFRFM) established as a trust fund and took over responsibilities of SFRF.
1990/91	MH17 and MH18 hybrid maize seed released as result of research policy to focus on development of high yielding flint maize varieties.
1993/94	Fertiliser market liberalised. Production and marketing of maize seed liberalised.
1994/95	Hybrid maize seed subsidy removed.
1995/96	Fertiliser subsidies completely removed. Drought Inputs Program (DIP) involving distribution of free hybrid and/or sorghum seed and fertiliser to over 800,000 households affected by the 1994/95 drought.

1996	Fertiliser, Farm Feed and Seed Remedies Act amended by Parliament. Licensing, registration and reporting procedures for importing, selling, distributing fertilisers, farm feeds and seeds Streamlined.
2009	Agriculture Sector Wide Approach
2008	Green Belt Initiative
2005/06	Targeted agricultural input subsidies
2005	Food Security Policy
2003	HIV and AIDS Agriculture Sector Policy and Strategy
2005	A New Agricultural Policy
2003	Increased budget allocation to the agricultural sector in compliance with the 2003 Maputo declaration
2005	Livestock Policy
2000	Extension Policy
2009	Nutrition Policy
2005	National Land Use Planning and Management Policy
2005	A Strategy for Capacity Development for Decentralisation in Malawi
2005	National Water Policy
2004	National Environmental Policy
2002	Micro-Finance Policy and Action Plan
2002	Malawi National Strategy for Sustainable Development
2000	National Irrigation Policy and Development Strategy
1998	Integrated Trade and Industry Policy
1997	Competition Policy for Malawi

Source: Ng'ong'Ola *et.al*, 1997