

# The Governance Dimensions of Food Security in Malawi

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## Executive Summary

This report presents findings and conclusions from a governance and food security assessment of Malawi. The first such study undertaken by USAID was in Nicaragua in May 2004. In recognition of the cross-sectoral challenges involved, USAID's Bureau of Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, Office of Democracy and Governance (DCHA/DG) and the Office of Food for Peace (DCHA/FFP) jointly conducted the study. The field work was undertaken in January-February 2005 with the purpose of identifying the underlying governance causes of food security problems. Six key findings and four main conclusions are highlighted by the report:

### Summary Findings

- Owing to a range of factors from declining soil fertility and dependence on fertilizer subsidies to small plot size, its lack of foreign exchange, and its high incidence of HIV/AIDs, Malawi is increasingly food insecure. In recent years it has become dependent on food donations to fulfill its national food need. Most households live below the poverty line, are unable to access a minimum basket of food items through their own food production or by market purchases. The dominance of maize in the weaning diet contributes to the high proportion of children who are severely stunted. With little resilience to climatic, economic and social shocks, households have become extremely vulnerable to food insecurity.
- Food security is perhaps the most visible and sensitive public policy issue in Malawi. Since the Banda era, Malawians have widely identified food security with national self-sufficiency in maize production. Most households raise maize for their own consumption. A compact between government and its citizens regarding targeted inputs entitlements, has become politicized and the subject of policy disagreements between government and donors that are often portrayed with varying degrees of accuracy in the Malawian press.
- Malawians and donors are also at odds over state and market solutions to food availability and access. Because donors provide up to 80% of Malawi's development assistance and some 50% of Malawi's annual recurrent costs (ODA equals \$35 per capita), food security issues have become 'externalized'. Competing views, interests, and demands have polarized stakeholders, compromised policy coherence, and subjected policy-making and implementation to ideological leanings. Hence, policy is marked by erratic swings, and the social contract between the GoM and its citizens is eroding.
- Government capacity for food and nutrition policy implementation is thin. Implementation requires complex, multi-sector efforts between central and local levels, and among governmental, NGO, private sector and donor communities. It seemed to the assessment team questionable whether the Ministry of Agriculture's reduced staff had the political capital and the technical capacity to coordinate food security and safety nets across ministries and agencies. As the food security crisis in Malawi has deepened, donor technicians and international NGOs have filled the vacuum, thus raising sustainability issues.
- Central level commitment to implementing decentralized local governance has been lackluster, but may become a higher priority under the Mutharika administration. Unresolved ambiguities between traditional and modern-state authority plague food security especially as it relates to land reform. Who owns customary land, and who decides how tenure will be awarded constitute one of the hot-button issues confronting

Malawi. It is not apparent that the views of the Malawians most potentially affected have been taken into account.

- President Mutharika has taken a strong public stand against corruption. The response of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture to the ‘maize scandal’ indicates the healthy emergence of checks and balances and accountability mechanisms.

### **Summary Conclusions**

The closer state legitimacy is linked to maize availability, the more likely food security policy will be politicized. To the extent that maize availability and affordability are jeopardized, so too is the ship of state. This truism explains Mutharika’s seemingly rash June 24, 2004 campaign promise, which followed on the heels of Malawi’s worst food shortage in years. Donors could curb the tendency for food electioneering by using their influence for ‘politics smoothing’, that is, by supporting actions that anticipate political manipulation of food policies for political advantage and thus aim to keep the lid on unrealistic promises to dampen down ad hoc policy-making and to prevent critical delays in food delivery as witnessed in 2004/05.

In aid-dependent Malawi, external influences are as important if not more important in determining policy choices than is internal competition. Donor ideologies and interests, which shape the contours of policy debate and policies, bypass local structures. As one Member of Parliament told the team, “Government should come up with a Malawi policy, not a donor policy.” Donors need to recognize that their actions carry political and social consequences, not the least of which might adversely affect food security and contribute to a weakening of the social contract between government and citizens. Donors need to be sensitive to allowing government, private sector interests, and civil society to establish their vision for Malawi.

Ownership leads to institutionalization. Donors and foreign implementing partners have assumed a preponderant role in designing strategies and implementing food programs over the years. Local capacity constraints are often the justification, but incapacitation is the result. Donors need to integrate projects into governance structures, facilitate creative partnerships between food security implementers and various government actors, continue to support decentralized democratic governance, and encourage accountability structures.

The current constellation of forces in Malawi offers donors a window of opportunity to strengthen accountability mechanisms. First, donors could provide financial and technical support to fledgling government watchdogs like the ACB until alternative sources of financing could be found, some of which might come from case recoveries. Second, donors could continue to strengthen the oversight and deliberative capacity of Parliament’s committees. Third, they could support the development of the independent media sector and media associations to increase public awareness of public processes, and hence increase the accountability of government agencies to the public for food security. Fourth, they could encourage civil society participation in local, district, and national governments, and in hot button policy issues such as land reform. Increased citizen participation if channeled peacefully, will affect the policy agenda in a positive way. The opportunity to promote integrity in politics and food security possibly has never been better, but immediate action is required, because policy windows close as quickly as they open.

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# 1 Growing Vulnerability: Food Security Trends in Malawi

## 1.1 Introduction: Growing Food Insecurity and Vulnerability

Malawi is among the most food insecure countries in the world. According to UNDP's *Human Development Report* (2004) only twelve of all 174 countries reporting fell below Malawi on the Human Development Index, and half of these countries were recovering from conflict and state failure. While in the twenty years after it gained independence in 1964, Malawi was fully capable of producing all the food it needed, it is no longer able to either produce or commercially purchase all of the food it needs. The country is now in a near constant state of food shortage with persistently high levels of nutritional deprivation.

Malawi's precarious food security situation is intimately linked to its economic development challenges. Malawi is a small land-locked country with its closest access to the sea at Biera, Mozambique some 1,300 km. away. Having no major natural resources other than Lake Malawi on its eastern border, it has always been heavily dependent on the agricultural sector for its growth and the employment of its people. After a rapid per capita GDP growth from 1964 to 1979, economic growth has stagnated for over two decades (UNDP 2004). In 2003, 37 percent of its GDP was derived from agriculture, despite the fact that 85 percent of the economically active population was employed in agriculture. With few exceptions, agriculture continued to be rain-fed. These conditions have rendered Malawi highly vulnerable to climatic shocks that have precipitated acute food insecurity with increasing frequency over the past 20 years.

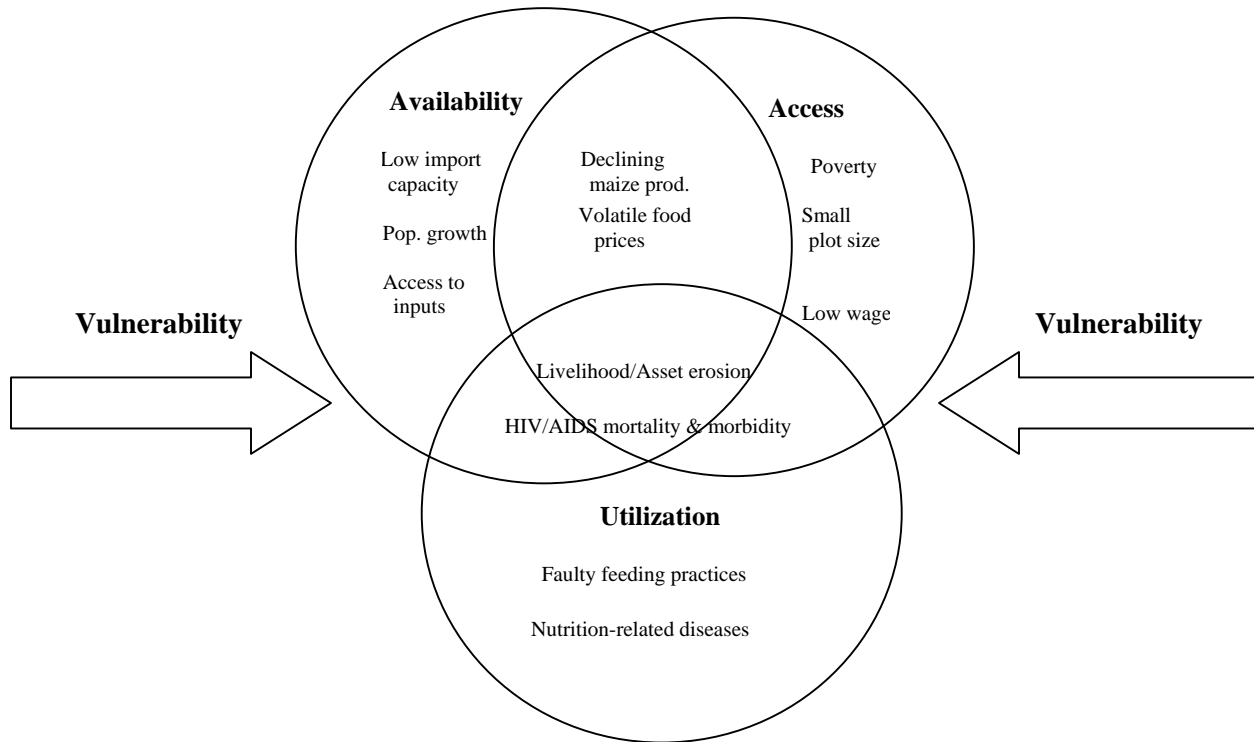
At the turn of the 21st century, nearly two thirds of Malawian households were below the official poverty line, that is, they could not produce or purchase their minimum requirement of 2200 kilocalories per person per day. Not surprisingly, chronic malnutrition among children is deep and persistent. There is no evidence of improvement in chronic malnutrition since 1990, nearly half of Malawi's under five year-old children are stunted, and forty percent of the stunted are severely stunted.

Food security is generally defined as the state "when all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life" (USAID 1995). This internationally adopted definition is composed of three components, food availability, food access, and food utilization. These overlap to characterize the unique food security problem in Malawi (Figure 1.1).

A recent analysis has added a fourth and cross-cutting dimension of "vulnerability," which represents the susceptibility of a country or a region within it to food insecurity due to shocks--either natural, social, or economic in origin (Webb and Roger 2002). A robust resilience to shocks is fundamental to food security. The food crisis of 2001-2002 provided a stark demonstration of Malawi's vulnerability when a relatively minor drought, combined with a dysfunctional policy environment, threatened food availability, access, and utilization, resulting in food shortages, soaring food prices and rising levels of acute malnutrition in children; in short, near famine conditions.



**Figure 1.1: Causes of Food Insecurity**



## 1.2 Food Availability

Food availability is satisfied when there is sufficient food in the aggregate to provide the whole country with its required dietary energy supply. The level of availability has been customarily estimated through the use of food balance sheets. Using this method, the net quantity of the human food produced plus net imports and food released from stocks, less wastage, is compared with the country's food needs. For instance, in Malawi, FAO estimated that Malawi's mean supply for 2000-2002 was 2160 kilo calories per persons per day. That figure hovers on the margins of adequacy, considering that the 2100 kcal is considered the minimum for health and life in refugee situations when human energy expenditures are modest. Nonetheless, this number is extremely difficult to estimate with absolute accuracy in a country like Malawi where statistics are unreliable. In part, the food crisis in 2001-2002 was not anticipated because of the poor crop estimates feeding into this calculation.

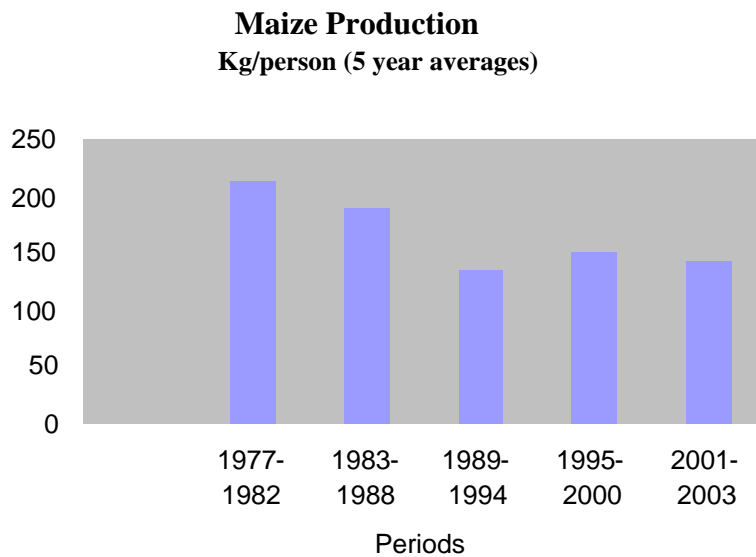
Perhaps a more reliable approximation of the state of availability can be obtained by examining Malawi's cereal food supply. Maize, the highly favored staple, comprises 72 percent of the

calories in the daily diet in Malawi. Roughly, 175 kilograms per person per year of maize is required to fill this requirement (about 200, 000 metric tons (MT) per year all else being equal).

Malawi has become increasingly incapable of availing itself of enough maize largely because production levels are not keeping pace with population, which nearly doubled from six to 11.5 million between 1977 and 2000. Although maize production has trended upward, it has steadily fallen short of population growth and is now more often than not below national requirements (Figure 1.2). Furthermore, because irrigation is only used to a limited extent, national food supply is highly vulnerable to small climatic variations in rainfall.

In addition, productivity of local and hybrid maize has dropped as soils have become depleted. Malawi's soils are now in annual need of nutrient replenishment. Productivity has also been affected by the displacement of maize by tobacco for export. Land planted to maize has dropped from 70 percent to 55 percent of all planted land as some small holders turned to cash crop production after 1990. Finally, it is important to recognize the drain on agricultural labor in households affected by HIV/AIDS.

**Figure 1.2: Maize Production Trends**



Source: Carr (2005)

This loss would not be so serious if other food sources were taking up the slack. The Ministry of Agriculture reported robust increases in root production in the late 1990s, but in fact it was grossly overestimated. This distortion contributed to poor donor advice, combined with Malawian mismanagement of the strategic grain reserve and policies delaying a food import response may have perpetrated the food crisis of 2001-2002 (Rubey 2004a).

While in the past commercial and government imports filled the food gap, Malawi's poor growth and indebtedness now constrain its ability to import its food. Furthermore, recent estimates of commercial imports are not well known. Since the end of the civil war in neighboring Mozambique, the informal trade in maize across Malawi's border has been substantial and data

are only now being compiled by the Famine Early Warning Network (*FEWSNet*) to fully document this trade. *FEWSNet* estimates that during 2004-05, Malawi has imported approximately 76,000 MT of maize, 71,000 MT of which originated from Mozambique. While this has helped to keep maize consumer prices relatively stable in Malawi, drought in Mozambique's southern region and growing shortages in Zambia and Zimbabwe may negatively affect continued access to this source of supply (IRIN 2005).

In any case the country was unable to avert a food shortage in 2001-2002, resulting in a food balance deficit of nearly 600,000 MT of maize, and appealed for a large food aid donation. This dependence appears to be continuing. Up to the beginning of 2005, the World Food Program's (WFP) regional emergency program was providing food aid to nearly 11 percent of Malawi's population.<sup>1</sup> In April 2005, a large shortfall is again predicted, this time for the 2005 harvest, amounting to a maize availability shortfall of 400,000-500,000 MT. That is about 20 percent of the calorie supply required by the country, must be supplied from emergency stocks, commercial imports and or international food assistance (FEWSNET 2005).

### 1.3 Food Access

It's a well known tenet of food security that aggregate availability of food does not assure every household access to it. However, given the dependence on subsistence agriculture, this may be less true in Malawi. As shown in Figure 1.1, the food security components in Malawi are highly interrelated because of its large dependence of small holder agriculture. Most families access food by consuming what they produce or by purchasing food in the growing season from income earned from their harvest time sales or from off-farm work.

The 1998-99 integrated household survey found that 65 percent of household incomes fell below the income necessary to buy a minimum package of food and non-food items (Benson, Machinjili, and Kachikopa 2004). Rural households spend 80 percent of their income on food, and somewhat over half of their expenditure is the monetary value of the home grown food that they consume themselves. The balance is food that they purchased from the market when household stocks are depleted. When faced with shortages, collection of edible plants available in Malawi's small forested regions and informal food distribution networks have functioned to support access to food, the recent income stresses have undermined these household methods of coping (Frankenberger 2003).

Income poverty this severe has led to physical and human asset poverty and general livelihood erosion over time as households have struggled to cope with the droughts that have affected the country from the 1990s through the 2002 crisis. As assets and livelihoods have eroded, the extreme poor have grown in number, food access shortfalls have grown, and the country's vulnerability to food insecurity spikes has increased (Frankenberger 2003).

This pattern of food access puts households who have little land at greater risk of food insecurity from small perturbations in climate. Malawi has both a rising population density, and inheritance patterns that result in land being equally divided among surviving siblings. Average arable land holdings are now 0.23 hectares per capita, in the southern region this figure is even less, Land is far more inequitably distributed than income in Malawi, because much of the best land is occupied by agricultural estates.

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<sup>1</sup> The United States through the P.L. 480 program had provided WFP approximately 34 percent of total regional contributions. See World Food Program (2004: 5, 14-16) and (2005).

Consequently, households exclusively reliant on maize must resort to the market to fill their food needs for part of the year. This places them at the mercy of highly volatile food prices, which tend to be low at harvest and higher during the growing or the “hungry season” (December to March). Also off-farm income is scarce, and growth of non-agricultural sectors is weak. Casual labor wages are especially low in those food-deficit areas when there are more wage seekers than wage buyers. The team was told that the official minimum wage was MK 36 per day (about \$0.29) and that *ganyu* wages are usually below that level.

In April 2004, The Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC)<sup>2</sup> began to implement new methods for predicting food access shortfalls and translating them into estimates of national food need. “Food energy entitlement deficits” (e.g., amount of cereal needed to ensure that household reach a minimum daily requirement) are compared to the capacity of household economies to access food in each of Malawi’s eight regions. Using two scenarios, approximately 1.3 million of Malawi’s poorest would be affected until arrival of the April, 2005 harvest. Assuming a 30 percent price rise would increase the number of affected to 1.68 million, the MVAC concluded that many Malawian households will not have the means to purchase their way out of any significant drop in production – even for a short period if prices do not significantly drop (MVAC 2004: 4).

#### **1.4 Food Utilization**

In 2004, UNICEF recorded only three countries in the world with more serious levels of chronic malnutrition than Malawi--Yemen, Ethiopia, and Burundi. Forty-nine percent of Malawi’s children under five years of age are stunted as a result of chronic malnutrition, and remarkably 40 percent of the children are severely stunted (under 3 standard deviations of normal). The Demographic and Health Surveys show no significant improvement from 1990-2000. Such levels of stunting have long-term effects on human capacity for mental and physical work. In contrast, 20 percent of Nicaraguan and 34 percent of Ugandan children are chronically undernourished.

As a result, an estimated 40,000 Malawian children under five years of age die each year from preventable nutrition-related diseases, such as malaria, acute respiratory infection, and gastroenteritis. However, because Malawi has relative favorable water sanitation, micronutrient supplementation, and other health measures, much death and disease in Malawi’s children can be attributed to food consumption problems. For instance, the Mission’s health officers’ reports and UNICEF data show that child nutritional status and nutritionally related health programs follow the agricultural calendar, growing worst in the hungry season. While recommended breastfeeding practices are quite favorable in Malawi, weaning diets are too high in bulky cereals, such as the maize dish, *nsima*, and too low in other nutrition rich vegetables, fruits, pulses, and animal foods.

Although infection rates are lower than in adjoining southern African countries, 14.2 percent of adults between 15 and 45 are infected with HIV/AIDS in Malawi (UNICEF 2004). This condition not only affects the ability of the infected person to utilize food and maintain health and productivity, it also undermines the capacity of the household to gain access and produce food. AIDS mortality lowering the number of productive adults and increases the number of dependent children in a household. Such households must take time away from productive activities to care

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<sup>2</sup> Chaired by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development comprised of representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Food Security, the National Statistics Office, major donors and FEWSNet.

for sick individuals. Perhaps, this situation along with the generally poor nutritional status of adults explains why UNICEF reports only two countries in the world had maternal mortality rates higher than Malawi's: Afghanistan and Angola.

## 1.5 Summary Findings

Food insecurity in Malawi stems from the fact that it is a landlocked country that has been unable to take advantage of its abundant soil and water endowment. It continues to rely heavily for its food security on rain-fed subsistence agriculture, while depleting soil fertility and subdividing land into smaller and less efficient holdings for the majority of its farmers. Malawi is now among the world's poorest countries from both a human development and economic perspective.

**Food Availability:** *Malawi is increasingly unable to fulfill its growing national food need through its own food production.* This lack of food availability is related to declining soil fertility, and apparent lack of capacity to introduce sustainable production-enhancing technology, including fertilizer, improved seed, and irrigation. Low incomes reduce consumer demand for food from its more productive farmers and impair its ability to import food commercially. Malawi's food crises show signs that the country is becoming dependent on the world community to fill its food needs through international food aid donations.

**Food Access:** Most households are below the poverty line, and are unable to afford a minimum basket of food and non-food items. So access to food is critically dependent on income and food price movements. When the climate is unfavorable, as demonstrated in the 2001-2003 food crisis, high maize prices and low incomes can lead the country to the brink of famine, especially in the rural southern part of the country, where agricultural plots are too small, and the central region, where most of the country's poor are found.

**Food Utilization:** Poor food utilization in the form of inadequate food consumption, and perhaps the dominance of bulky maize in the weaning diet contribute to the extraordinarily high proportion of children in Malawi who are severely stunted. This and the high rate of nutritionally related diseases such as acute respiratory infection and malaria cause an estimated 40,000 preventable child deaths each year in Malawi.

**Vulnerability:** Droughts over the past 13 years have eroded Malawi's household livelihood and productive assets. With little or no resilience to climatic, economic or social shocks, and without coping capacity, households are increasingly *vulnerable* to food insecurity. Land has become a major constraint and source of vulnerability to food insecurity, because more than half of households' income and expenditure comes in the form of food produced by the household.

HIV/AIDS pervades the food security problem in Malawi, where over 14 percent of adults are affected by the disease. It negatively affects household productive capacity, decreasing agricultural labor output and increasing dependency. It depletes the time and resources of care givers, who might otherwise be able to produce food and earn income for food.

## 2 Democratization and Food Security in a Transitional Country

### 2.1 The Banda Regime and the Roots of the Food Security Policy Problem

The deficiencies in the framework for a food secure Malawi begins in pre-independence Nyasaland, a protectorate of Great Britain from 1891 until the establishment of independent Malawi in 1964. Colonial administrators sought to control the population while promoting extractive agriculture. Administration was indirect, using tribal authorities to articulate colonial policy at the local level. Some of the best lands were permanently ceded by tribal leaders to expatriate owners for the 40 plus tea and other export crop estates that occupy over 40% of arable land in Malawi today (IDA 2004: 2). According to local notions of land use, it is unlikely that tribal leaders were aware that they were ceding permanent title over tribal lands with these agreements.

The 30-year regime of Malawi's first President, Hastings Kamuzu Banda adopted similar administrative arrangements. While relying on the estate sector to drive the new nation's export-oriented economy, Banda's Malawi Congress Party became the sole political party and his primary vehicle of patronage. Banda's power was based more on personal charisma rather than legal, impersonal institutions. Banda imposed his tribal origins on the whole country by making *chichawa* the national language to be taught in all primary schools. Disputes were settled in courts based on personal accusation and hearsay evidence, and the party's youth cadre, the Young Pioneers enforced order (Forster 2001). The President and the "democratically" elected Congress Party faithful, filled the parliament, and by 1970 had assumed complete control of the state's resources. After effectively exiling or imprisoning his opposition, Banda's populist ruling style masked the reality that Malawi's land and other resources were open for private gain and use by patrons within the governing class to reinforce their positions of power over their clients. In short, the modern nation state was a superstructure erected over a patrimonial system. Internationally Banda was on safe ground with this policy because at least up to the end of the cold war in 1989, he was one of the west's favored "strongmen" in Africa (French 2004).

Food security policy under Banda became synonymous with national maize self-sufficiency, and indeed, the cultural super food, white maize, was produced in sufficient quantities to meet the nation's needs. Maize prices were predictable, set centrally though the marketing parastatal, the Agricultural Development Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) created in 1971. Values were conservative, citizens were subservient, and the nation was outwardly at peace. The estate sector was highly favored over small holder agriculture, while over a million hectares of customary land were leased to presidential favorites in the form of thousands of Malawian-owned estates. The new estates were heavily engaged in lucrative tobacco exporting, and tobacco revenues as well as Malawian workers' remittances from South Africa fueled the growth of the economy.

This arrangement worked rather effectively during Malawi's first 16 years of independence, at least in economic terms. Its two percent per capita real growth rate was considered robust when compared to other post-colonial contemporaries in Africa. The fragility of Malawi's economy, however, became clear in the late 1970s when the oil crises and the decline in terms of trade hit Malawi hard. In 1980 the country was required to import maize, only the second time in thirty years. This was a humiliating setback for a country that prided itself on post-independence self-sufficiency. Although the World Bank was pleased with the export-driven growth policy and the international market orientation, it had by this time expressed concerns about the failure of small holder sector growth (Kydd 1986). The majority of poor farmers were confined to maize

production and ADMARC had not been passing on work market price increases to them, which functioned as a form of taxation on small farmers. These margins helped keep maize prices low for urban dwellers and allowed ADMARC to finance the growth of the estates. Only after the crisis of 1980 were maize farm gate prices raised to stimulate maize production.

In March of 1986, UNICEF cited Malawi's economy as recovering enough to export over 200,000 metric tons of maize to Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania, and even Zimbabwe when they were affected by shortages in 1983/4. Ironically, significant nutritional problems were found at the same time in Malawian households. By the mid-1980s, Malawi had some of the highest child mortality rates in the world with child stunting ranging from 47 percent to 65 percent in different parts of the country. The country was self sufficient in maize while its households were suffering from household poverty and food insecurity, a clear indictment of the country's agricultural policies and lack an effective food security policy (Quinn, 1986).

## **2.2 Stabilization and Liberalization: Donors, Banda and Muluzi**

The story of food security policy making in the 1980s would be incomplete without reference to donors who came to relieve Malawi's fiscal problems and foreign exchange shortfalls. The Government of Malawi (2004a) claimed that since 1981, it has endured more than 20 structural adjustment programs and eight structural adjustment loan arrangements with the World Bank and IMF respectively. These of course do not include any number of bilateral conditions and arrangements between donors and the government. While a comprehensive analysis of these is beyond the scope of this study, Jane Harrigan's (2003) review reveals prescriptions replete with reversals and inconsistencies, swerving from neo-liberal economic recommendations of the "Washington Consensus of the early 1980s" to "post-Washington Consensus" of the 1990s," to poverty reduction policy and back to neo-liberal advice. Some of the dysfunctional aspects of the Malawi's political culture was tolerated by the Bank and IMF if loan or grant conditions were met, and when they were not, resources could be delayed or withdrawn leading to major program discontinuity (Harrigan 2003: 847-62).

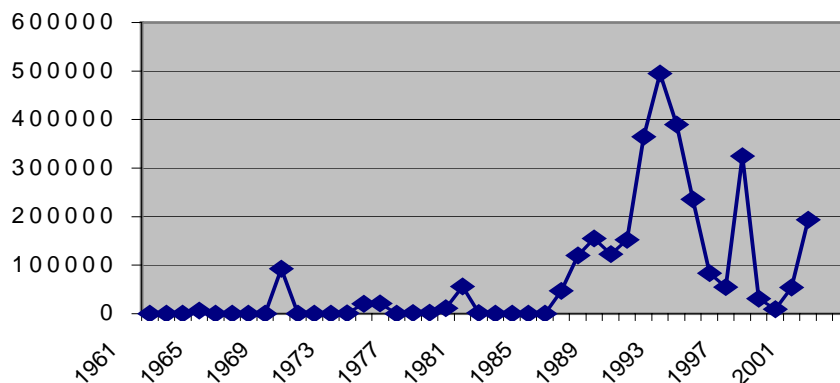
Recommendations in the 1980s were to liberalize markets and let prices find the correct levels, encouraging small holders to export and generate the foreign exchange required for imports and inputs. Fertilizer subsidies were suspended. By 1987, the marketing scheme had collapsed and the country was again in food crisis, farmers had turned away from maize production and food prices soared. In response the government of Malawi openly violated the Bank conditions and intervened in the market. Subsequent World Bank loans have reversed and re-reversed policy toward maize market intervention through ADMARC and fertilizer subsidies.

After 1990, policy advice attempted to address the poverty problem and remove the two-tier agricultural policy and emphasize poverty reduction. This "recovery" was interrupted by severe droughts in 1992 and 1994, which destroyed the credit worthiness of small holders. The civil conflict in Mozambique likewise resulted in a large influx of refugees and breaks in Malawi's access to the sea.

In the meantime, the Department of Economic Planning and Development held a donor consultation meeting resulting in a Food Security and Nutrition Policy Statement that spelled out 46 policy measures. Included were improved agricultural inputs, land policy reform, safety nets, a strategic grain reserve, minimum wage increase, and applied nutrition program linkages (GOM 1990). Though this document was never formally adopted, much of it appears to be on the current policy agenda, to be implemented.

In the early 1990s, Malawi experienced one of its sharpest declines in food production, absorbing one of the worse droughts on record in 1992 (Figure 2.1). During the campaign culminating in the first multiparty elections in 1994 and the election of Baliki Muluzi to the Presidency, maize self-sufficiency and more equitable land distribution were popular issues. The new ruling United Democratic Front identified state “legitimacy” with maize self sufficiency and availability, as had Banda. It was out of this crucible that the newly elected UDF government forged the seed and fertilizer input programs in 1998 and decreased reliance on markets, a clear violation of Bank conditionality. The government cited evidence that the private market was unable to deliver maize when required and reach into uneconomic rural areas, so reliance on ADMARC persisted.

**Figure 2.1: Maize Imports by Malawi in Metric Tons**



Source: FAO

In the mid-1990s, the restrictions on export crop production by small holders were lifted, and in the better off small holders began to grow tobacco. However, now the terms of trade had undermined the profitability of the sector while maize production was displaced to some extent. By 2000, Malawi had been more dependent on imports and food assistance than ever before.

By the advent the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s first decade, Malawi’s growth rate had been stagnating for twenty years, growth remained anemic and markets continued to function poorly with neither private nor public sector capable of damping food price volatility (Rubey 2004). Poverty was deep and widespread, and traditional livelihoods were eroding. Donors provided nearly the entire development budget and official development assistance comprised 27 percent of the GDP. As a result of its aid dependence, the country was highly indebted. Unsustainable ratios of debt service amounted to 19 percent of government revenue.

In 2000, the World Bank, holding 85 percent of the country’s debt, qualified Malawi for relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Program. Malawi stands to gain about \$1 billion in forgiven debt and new assistance over 20 years provided it adopted a poverty reduction strategy acceptable to donors. However, before work on that could be completed the country faced a crippling food crisis requiring nearly 200,000 metric tons of food aid. Unfortunately, a scandal involving the untimely sell off of the Strategic Grain Reserves by ADMARC continues to dog Malawi’s credibility. This also led to the indictment on corruption charges of the former Minister of Finance and the Director of ADMARC during Muluzi’s administration. In reaction to the SRG scandal, the IMF suspended its balance of payments support because of alleged corruption and fiscal mismanagement during the Maluzi’s regime. In May of 2004, a new



President, Dr. Bingu Mutharika was elected by Muluzi's United Democratic Front. Donors remain hopeful that progress will be made on food security issues.

### **2.3 Looking Ahead: The Mutharika Administration**

February and March 2005 marked a realignment of political parties. Bingu Mutharika resigned from the ruling UDF party in February 2005, which freed him from the control of party chairman, former President Bakili Muluzi. Mutharika's new Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) base consisted of a large portion of UDF reformers—at least one-third of UDF's Members of Parliament, nearly all independents in the Parliament numbering about 40 including 23 who had aligned with the UDF after the 2004 elections; and most small opposition parties including two of three UDF alliance partners. It appears that he will control about 90 of 193 seats in Parliament. The MCP generally supported Mutharika's anti-corruption platform, and formed the largest loyal opposition party. The UDF coalition became the smallest in Parliament.

One of Mutharika's first appointments to his newly reformed government was Republican Party leader, Gwanda Chakuamba. For his support of Mutharika, Chakuamba was made Minister of Agriculture replacing Chakufwa Chihana of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD). Other appointments and cabinet reshuffles were underway, but the agriculture ministry stands above peers for the critical national food security policies and resources it influences and controls.

Agricultural policy and food security are high on the Mutharika administration's agenda. As the next chapter discusses, intensive efforts are being made to develop a food security policy through a highly consultative process. The next chapter talks about the current policy environment for food security in Malawi.

## 3 Conflicting Visions for Food Security: Policy and Policymaking

### 3.1 The Policy Context for Food Security

Food security is a politically charged policy issue in Malawi. Since 2000/01, it has appeared in the platforms of politicians, on the agendas of policy-makers, in the programs of public bureaucracies, among the duties of village chiefs, and on the pages of national newspapers. It is thoroughly researched and debated as well. The GoM has made numerous attempts to draft food security policy and view dozens of its policies—each with numerous program actions and recommendations across health, agriculture, trade, employment, land and markets--through a food security lens.

Despite such attentiveness to the topic, there remains a considerable lack of consensus on the proper course of action. Without a clear aim or goal to guide it, policy formulation has been ad hoc, and has resulted in a plethora of policies and programs--sometimes disconnected from and contradictory to each other--spread over central government agencies. The lack of common cause has led to incoherent implementation.

Two broad debates have been instrumental in shaping an array of policies and programs. The first debate concerns the extent to which Malawi should rely on market solutions to ensure access to food and to reduce vulnerability. It pits proponents of laissez-faire doctrines against advocates of economic entitlements and state-managed interventions. The debate is played out in policies that favor or detract from agriculture export-led growth, fertilizer subsidy schemes, consumption and price smoothing, and land reform.

The second debate, related to the first, concerns the overall strategy for achieving food security, and whether national self-sufficiency in maize should be the goal. At the national level proponents for self-sufficiency argue that a landlocked country in a politically unstable and volatile part of the world must hedge against potential interruptions to maize imports. At the household level they advocate for increased household production through the use of inputs, treadle pumps and staple crop diversification. This approach runs counter to a strong push for export-led agriculture that would expand the economic pie and create new industries to get people out of subsistence maize production and into a range income generating activities.

Resolving these debates is complicated by a lack of clear leadership in the food security policy arena. There are many policy stakeholders, including civil society, donors, estate owners, and the smallholders themselves. However, given Malawi's traditional reliance on external funding, it is unclear whether the GoM or its donor partners are in charge of the policy-making process. To the extent that the policy follows the money, the twists and turns of policy formulation mirrors the ebb and flow of resources as well as international donor trends.

With this in mind, we analyze the current and emergent food security policies that appear to be the heart of the government's response to Malawi's current food security problems. Some are not explicitly stated, but serve as "policies-in-use," while others are at various stages in the drafting and approval pipeline. In the analysis we highlight the contradictions in this array of policies, examine the players and policy-makers shaping them and the political processes underlying them.

### **3.2 The Policy Framework for Promoting Food Security**

In order to discuss food security policy, it is important to underscore that food security is not a stand-alone sector. Food security policy is best understood as an amalgam of policies designed to stimulate agricultural production, support rural livelihoods, reduce vulnerability through safety nets, and to stimulate broad based economic growth. In this section, we briefly review the government's explicit food security strategies as outlined in policy documents, as well as considering the 'implicit' policy, that is to say, that can be inferred by the government's actual programs and actions on the ground.

#### ***Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy and National Growth Strategy***

Two policy documents presume to set the framework for national level economic decision-making. These are the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy, conducted as part of the World Bank's HIPC process, and the more recent National Growth Strategy. One outlines a pro-poor agenda while the other outlines an export oriented growth strategy. The question raised by these dual strategies is whether they are complementary or contradictory.

The Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (MPRS) launched in 2002 is the central policy document meant to guide budget decisions (GoM 2002). The MPRS outlines a pro-poor strategy and stipulates budget expenditure and investments in essential social services. It rests on four pillars: economic growth, human capital, safety nets, and governance.

The strategy implicitly addresses the four components of food security. Food availability is addressed through agricultural growth, access through poverty reduction, utilization through human capital development, and vulnerability through productive safety nets and disaster preparedness. While the MPRS has begun to influence the budget process, the "pro-poor" proportion of budgetary outlays remains small relative to the total. Nevertheless, outlays to agriculture and nutrition are in-line with MPRS pillars and are increasing. If implemented, the MPRS would offer the country a framework to organize a broad range of strategies including agriculture, nutrition, safety nets and economic growth which taken together would address essential food security goals.

Not more than a year after the launch of the MPRS, and on a parallel track, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD) drafted a growth strategy. Private sector stakeholders like the National Action Group representing the estate sector worked under the leadership of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development to shape the draft.

The strategy aims to reenergize agribusiness exporters, particularly the tobacco, tea, and sugar estates (which together account for over 80 percent of Malawi's foreign exchange earnings) by providing investment incentives, a reallocation of government resources, and legal/regulatory policy support. Down stream, it is expected that the policy will stimulate medium- and micro-enterprise surrounding the agribusiness and agro-processing sectors. The team was told that this strategy is of "paramount" importance to the Mutharika administration and may become the guiding framework for economic policymaking. The current draft reflects the interests of the estate sector, and it appears to be reasserting its privileged position in national priorities and investment that characterized the role in the two-tier agricultural economy of the Banda era.

Although the strategy is designed to achieve the six percent growth specified in the MPRS, it lacks congruence with the MPRS in significant ways. First, it implies a reallocation of resources away from pro-poor expenditure in order to bolster the estate sector. Second, the strategy does

not explicitly address the relationship of growth to food security. Third, it is unclear whether the economic growth goals outlined in the strategy can be made compatible with the pro-poor policies that characterized the UDF's 2004 election platform. It remains to be seen whether the growing importance of the economic growth strategy within the Mutharika administration will shift agriculture and economic policy from household and national self-sufficiency to an agro-export model.

### ***Draft Food and Nutrition Security Policy (FNSP)***

A specific Food and Nutrition Security Policy (MAI 2004a) is currently being developed in Malawi. In the aftermath of the 2001-2002 crisis, Malawi formed a Food Crisis Joint Task Force, which evolved into the Food Security Joint Task Force comprising government, donors, and civil society organizations (CSOs). At the time of the team's visit, the Task Force was reviewing the sixth draft of a food and nutrition policy document, the Food and Nutrition Security Policy (FNSP). Situated within the Ministry of Agriculture, its four committees tackle critical food security issues: strategic grain reserve, humanitarian assistance, information systems, and the food security and nutrition policy.

The FNSP explicitly addresses all four components of food security. It seeks to: (1) increase household and national food availability of food particularly by stimulating household agricultural production through irrigation, access to fertilizer, and better access to land, (2) sustain access to food through improved rural market infrastructure and household purchasing power, (3) build proper utilization and nutrition through a variety of health and dietary service interventions, and (4) stabilize food security through better disaster management, reserves, market interventions and surveillance and food security information systems. Crosscutting problems are Malawi's failure to honor international human rights commitments, the effect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and unfavorable gender dynamics.

A number of problems confront the Task Force's Food and Nutrition Security Policy. First, and foremost, the policy has come under fire for advancing a 'laundry list' of activities rather than setting clear priorities. Second, some donors are not convinced that a specific food security policy is necessary, particularly when it might distract from implementation of what they consider to be adequate provision for food security under the MPRS. Third, the plan has not been linked to human and budgetary resources.

Fourth, health officials did succeed adding "nutrition" to what was just a food security policy in an attempt merge it with the draft nutritional strategy.<sup>3</sup> But they question whether the policy adequately addresses non-food aspects of nutrition, such as access to maternal and child health facilities, delivery of vitamin A and iron supplements, or people living with HIV/AIDS.

Taken together, these concerns could make implementation of the FNSP difficult. Its potential to act as an effective coordinating policy, providing a framework for action by the various units within the Government of Malawi, donors and NGOs, remains uncertain. However, the criticism of the policy by some donors may stem from the fact that this policy takes a clear stance on the human right to food. It frames food security policy as the state's responsibility, and less the outcome of market solutions proposed in the growth strategy and the MPRS.

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<sup>3</sup> The draft "National Nutrition Strategy, 2004-2009" proposes six broad objectives including increased availability and access to food, improved consumption, delivery of nutrition services, coordination across sectors, and capacity building, acknowledging the attention health and nutrition has been afforded in the MPRP.

### ***The Malawi National Land Policy (MNLP)***

Land reform has become an important issue in Malawi, and is one with real significance for food security. What is at stake is the balance between land allocated to smallholders and that held by large estate owner, much of which is idle. The findings from a Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Land Policy Reform concluded that potentially as much as 28% of the country's available arable land was lying idle and should be purchased by the Government at fair market value. The Commission's findings were incorporated in the Malawi National Land Policy (MNLP), approved by the Cabinet in 2002 (MLPPS 2002).

The land policy's primary objective is to return idle estate land to traditional customary status to facilitate equitable access. Resolving land policy issues in Malawi requires addressing the complex issues surrounding the roles of traditional authorities, where chiefs have been the legitimate custodians of the land. Disputes with traditional authorities have led to delays in the introduction of the MNLP's enabling legislation and enactment into law by Malawi's parliament. A pilot program is currently being funded by the World Bank (see case study Chapter 7).

Will returning idle estate lands to subsistence production make a substantive improvement in food security? Critics of the policy argue that idle estate land is of mostly poor soil quality, and given projected pressure on land, it is at best a stop-gap measure.

### ***Agricultural Development Strategy***

The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation developed its "*Draft Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation Strategic Plan 2003-2008*" (MAI 2003) to up-date its previous investment strategies and plans from 1999. The strategy seeks to fulfill the Ministry's mandate to "promote and facilitate agricultural productivity and sustainable management and utilization of natural resources to ensure food security, increased incomes and creation of employment opportunities." The strategy seeks continuation of the controversial input subsidy program. Overall, it tends toward a food self-sufficiency approach. But with 23 challenges and an equal number of objectives and strategies to address each challenge, the strategy provides no priorities, budget or approach for implementing its objectives. In effect, the FSNP and the MPRS supercede this as an overall food security approach, and sub-sector strategies will be developed to fill any gaps.

### **3.3 Food Security Programs: Donor and Government Policy in Action**

This section turns now from written policies and strategies to the actual programs being implemented by the Government of Malawi, mainly with donor funding. In this way, we can assess the 'implicit' food security policy, that is, what is actually being done, rather than what is stated as a goal. Earlier we argued that food security is not a stand alone sector. State action in many spheres is needed to address food security, including improved health care, nutrition education, sanitation, provision of basic infrastructure, among others. Much of what the state does can affect food security. However here we look in a more focused manner at what the state is doing to address food access, availability and vulnerability reduction.

This section focuses on two of the most critical roles the Malawian state has traditionally sought to play in promoting food security, first, implementing safety nets programs in order to reduce vulnerability, and second, to promote rural productivity through provision of agricultural inputs and extension services to smallholders. Here we briefly review what the GOM is doing, often with the support of donors, to promote food security.

## ***State Action to Reduce Vulnerability and Support Livelihoods***

The Government of Malawi established a National Safety Net Program in 2001 to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups in society by enhancing their productivity and increasing self-reliance. It establishes a series of programs designed to reduce vulnerability to food insecurity and extreme poverty. The four legs of the program include; public works, agricultural inputs distribution, targeted nutrition and direct transfers for the destitute and HIV/AIDS-affected.

The National Safety Net Program is currently administered by the Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs, and is funded by several different donors.. The first two legs of the NSNP receive the most funding. The World Bank through the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) has been the grantor, designer, and implementer of the first leg.<sup>4</sup> To stimulate local food availability and marketing, the program pays needy individuals cash for work to build irrigation and transport infrastructure. MASAF also funds a wide range of community development activities including health care, education, water and sanitation, transport and communication, and household food security

Targeted Inputs Program: A second critical component of the safety net approach developed is the agricultural inputs program. The Starter Pack Scheme, which provided fertilizer and improved seeds to many smallholders, began in 1998 with technical assistance and funding from DFID. Over time, the universal starter pack program become more targeted and was renamed the Targeted Input Program (TIP). Although TIP was originally conceived as a livelihoods development strategy to shift farmers from subsistence to surplus production, in actual fact it has become a core part of Malawi's safety net. The program is currently funded in large part by DFID, and administered primarily by the Ministry of Agriculture. In the past four years, as many as 2.6 million farmers have received TIP packages, which has had a positive effect on the availability of and access to food for needy households. (See case study in Chapter 5.)

This program is not without its critics. There has been considerable debate about the sustainability of input subsidies and its impact on the private sector. In spite of these issues, the vast majority of Malawians widely support fertilizer subsidies for the majority who cannot afford to use inorganic fertilizer.

ADMARC and the National Grain Reserve: Not included in the National Safety Net Program is the role of ADMARC and the National Grain Reserve as maize consumption safety nets. Food and agricultural policy in Malawi has been shaped by over a half century of governmental market management through a parastatal marketing board, ADMARC. Partly owing to the length of this experience, the GoM continues—against the advice of IFIs and other donors—to guarantee a floor price for maize producers and a ceiling price for maize buyers in all 28 districts. At least one donor maintains that government policy however well-intentioned exacerbated the 2001/02 food crisis by creating disincentives for private sector imports of maize. When ADMARC depots ran out of maize, the scarcity in supply caused hoarding, price spikes, and scalping. The GoM recognizes that any adjustment to ADMARC's social role is sensitive, and a reversal of this policy would likely provoke a political backlash.

The Strategic Grain Reserve is the country's first line of defense against maize shortages. ADMARC officially relinquished control over the SGR to the newly created National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) in 1999. Disagreement over the purpose, management of, and

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<sup>4</sup> The targeted nutrition program and direct transfer programs rely on donors, international agencies such as UNICEF, and NGOs and are implemented by the Ministry of Health.

utilization of the SGR goes to the heart of the debate over self-sufficiency. The IMF in particular has recommended smaller reserves purchased with low cost loans and guarantees, and managed on a cost-efficient basis. However, as with ADMARC, government recognizes the political sensitivities associated with the reserves and is reluctant to depend on foreign sources, foreign rail lines, and shaky infrastructure.

A less salient, but nonetheless a real hangover from previous policies is the residual belief that maize reserves can be released strategically to smooth price spikes. The counter argument to SGR price smoothing is that the market is far too large and would require far greater amounts of maize in order for the SGR to become a mechanism for price smoothing. The bottom line is that previously the reserve did not serve either function well, and failed to mitigate scarcity at the time of the 2001/02 crisis (See case study in Chapter 6).

National Disaster Preparedness Plan: In line with the Malawi Disaster Preparedness and Relief Act of 1991, “*National Disaster Preparedness Plan,*” (DPDMA 2005) has been in preparation over a number of years. While the NDPP is being prepared under the auspices of the Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs, donor assistance to the process has been sporadic. NDPP in its present iteration outlines a situation analysis of Malawi’s vulnerability to various types of disaster threats, conceptually defines the response continuum, but most of the draft plan is devoted to describing an extensive organization and procedures to be followed in disaster management.

Malawi National Vulnerability Assessment Committee (M-VAC). Where considerable progress has been made has in the food security early warning and estimation of food aid needs. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development donor and NGO early warning efforts have been integrated by the *Malawi National Vulnerability Assessment Committee (M-VAC)*. Using a livelihood model, this heavily donor-funded system, attempts to avoid poor signaling to stakeholders of precursor events to Malawi’s last and most serious food security crisis of 2000-01.

The Famine Early Warning System (FEWS) is also active in Malawi. FEWS, a USAID-funded activity, has been monitoring food insecurity conditions in 20 African countries including Malawi for over fifteen years. FEWS personnel maintain watch on Malawi’s “food balance sheet” comprised of statistics concerning several variables including local crop estimates, its marketing, indicators of local shortages, livelihood activities in the rural sector, and patterns of cross-border maize trade. Though not a Government of Malawi program, it provides information to the GOM central to its emergency planning and preparedness.

Ministry of Agriculture Extension Services: Historically, a core part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation’s mission has been to provide extension services to smallholder farmers. At that time, the Ministry loomed large within the public sector, with an extensive field level presence throughout the country and a relatively well resourced research and extension service. The trend toward economic liberalization in the nineties led to a sharp reduction in its role and size. The extension services were particularly hard hit, and the budget and staffing allotted for these services have declined sharply (MAI 2000). Still, the Ministry sees its extension services as a core part of its mission and means to boost the productivity of smallholders. The extension services, and TIP, are seen by the Ministry as important tools to promote food self-sufficiency.

### 3.4 Food Security Policy in Malawi: Finding Policy Coherence

So what does this conjunction of food security policies and programs mean?

There does appear to be some difference among the formal food security policies themselves, and as well as a gap between the stated policies and those actions the state is actually using to promote food security. Table 3.1 below provides a comparative look at the various food security related policies, and where they stand on key issues. In looking at the conjunction of written policies, there seems to be an overall emphasis on stimulating agro-exports as a means to promote economic growth. There also is clear agreement that vulnerability assessment mechanisms should be improved and food aid should be kept to a minimum. Nonetheless, the role of the state in agricultural input and produce markets, the future of ADMARC, the role of imports versus domestic production emerge clearly as some of the more intractable food security issues.

These active state roles, particularly in the area of safety nets, are a central part of the government's implicit food security policy, something which is not so clear from the actual written strategies. Maintenance of grain reserves has become a widely accepted - and expected - role for the state in the eyes of most Malawians. Successive governments have pursued this approach and it is an institutionalized part of the state structure.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 3.1: Prescriptions of Food Security Policies**

Policies	Policy Prescriptions				
	Market Intervention	Maize Self-sufficiency	Export Growth	Food Reserves	Human Rights Focus
MPRS	No	No	Yes +++	--	Political
Growth Strategy	No	No	Yes ++	--	Property
FSNP	Yes	--	Yes	Yes	Polit./Econ.
Agri. Strategy	Yes	Yes	Yes	--	--
Land Policy	--	Yes	--	--	Property
Safety nets	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Economic

+ Denotes degree of emphasis

This also highlights that there are a number of contentious debates confront food security policy-makers as well as donors. First among these is the fundamental strategic decision regarding whether the country should pursue maize self-sufficiency. In the short term it appears that the GoM's approach to food security is centered on this goal, although it is not reflected consistently throughout the written policies. The Ministry of Agriculture draft strategy supports this notion, as do interviews with Ministry officials. The safety net programs also support self-sufficiency

<sup>5</sup> This institutionalization is unlike many other food security units. See the following chapter for a fuller discussion of institutionalization of food security policy and program implementation.



implicitly by advocating the use of subsidized fertilizer, by supporting large strategic grain reserves while rebuilding agriculture extension services. The Ministry of Agriculture, moreover, is implementing an agriculture diversification program based on cassava, also a subsistence crop. On balance, it appears that maize self-sufficiency is the primary public policy goal *vis-a-vis* food security.

It is important to note however, that the supporters of maize self-sufficiency do not reject the notion of export agricultural growth. This two-tiered approach to agricultural development is familiar to Malawians; it was pursued under Hastings Banda. The dual strategy existed in Malawi for years. Maize self-sufficiency was achieved for the small subsistence majority while export growth of the estates drove the economy. All policies, with the exception of the growth policy seem to agree on the need to diversify agriculture into higher value cash crops to improve household income. The growth policy drafters, however, recommend a uniquely, aggressive set of government policies to support the estate dominated agriculture sections—tobacco, tea, and sugar, recalling the favored treatment of these sectors under Banda.

Another somewhat contentious issue concerns government intervention in agricultural markets to affect fertilizer availability and maize prices. The Agriculture Strategy, the Food Security and Nutrition Policy, and GoM approach to safety nets say this is critical to food security, and imply that free markets in Malawi are not up to the task, especially in remote, poor areas. The distribution or subsidization of fertilizer continues to be a key tenet of government food security policy. Moreover, the government believes that maize price stabilization is best achieved by price bands set through the parastatal ADMARC.

The growth-oriented MPRS and growth strategies are silent on these issues, maintaining a free market orientation favored by some donors, who claim that intervention in the market is precisely why fertilizer availability is unreliable in Malawi. As with fertilizer, a clear role of the government or the private sector in maize marketing has not been sorted out.

A related question is over the need for a relatively large food grain reserve for emergency response. The current and previous governments consider the SGR to be an essential safety net, and it is part of the FSNP statement; other policies are silent on the reserve. There is also disagreement over the function and hence the size of the reserve: Is it simply there to reduce vulnerability to emergencies or should it be utilized as a mechanism for price-smoothing under normal market conditions? One might argue that the debate over the grain reserve is related to the debate on maize self-sufficiency. An economy with sufficient cash reserves can import food freely from neighboring countries and the world market as needed. The debate over the reserve has become particularly heated precisely because of corruption and the cost of maintaining it.

Finally, the stance on human rights is also a flag dividing the food security camps. The MPRS deals extensively with the need to empower the poor to participate in the political process and to have their civil and political rights fulfilled by a transparent and accountable government. The Land Policy devotes a large amount of attention to land rights, with due respect to customary land title and use rights, and the growth strategy implies it. The FSNP and the GoM safety net approach strongly suggest that the social contract would include economic and social rights and entitlements of everyone to food and the means to grow it, e.g., land and fertilizer.

These debates have become highly politicized. Maize is central to household food security for most Malawians. As a result, policies that affect maize and fertilizer affect most Malawian family's access to food in a direct way. This has made maize and food policy more generally very politicized. Repeatedly, the team heard that maize is a 'very sensitive issue.' One interviewee

asserted that maize is the ‘single most sensitive political issue in the country.’ Whose voice, then, dominates food security policymaking? How is policy made? These questions are addressed in the following section.

### **3.5 Voice, Interests and Stakeholders in the Policy Process**

A closer look at current policy debates reveals a complex of technical, stakeholder interests, and political forces driving policy-making in Malawi. Who decides and who benefits from policy that affects food security? Whose voice carries the day and whose voice is excluded? Such analysis helps us better understand the driving forces behind policy outcomes, but it can also indicate possible programmatic directions such as strengthening civil society and reconciling stakeholders’ positions. This section identifies the main players in the food security debate, considers their primary interests, and their role in policymaking process.

#### ***Donors Define the Parameters of the Food Security Debate***

The significant position of donors in food security policy-making has remained unchanged if not strengthened by recent crises. In 2004/5 donors financed 83 percent of the development budget of Malawi, leaving major uncertainties among Malawians about the explicit or implicit conditions attached to so much financing.

As discussed earlier, donor advice on policies impacting upon economic growth, agriculture, and poverty reduction has been characterized by shifts and turns depending on the development models currently in fashion in Brussels, London, or Washington. According to some analysts, for many years donors were intent on economic models and ignored the underlying political fragility of Malawi, fueling the systems of patrimony, corruption and gross inequality (Bird, Booth and Pratt 2002). While the stated intentions have been that Malawians should own the MPRS, the FNSP, these are externally imposed conditions for substantial and desperately-needed financial support.

The Bretton Wood institutions and donors in general overshadow the process of policymaking (Bwalya et. al. 2004). The European Union has conditioned its new funding on the country developing indicators for measure progress in MPRS’ implementation, and financed the preparation of the Food and Nutrition Security Policy, in which we see a European emphasis on economic rights. DFID finances and drives policy on fertilizer subsidies. World Bank assistance is conditioned upon progress made on restructuring ADMARC, and the relatively weak position of the GOM vis-à-vis the donors indicates that donor prerogatives likely will prevail. Consumption safety nets policy is largely determined by donors, who have the resources and expertise that government lacks. And, although a matter in dispute, it was on the advice of the International Monetary Fund that Malawi sold off a part of its Strategic Grain Reserve on the threshold of the food crisis of 2001-2002.

Peters (1996) makes the point that this imbalance is not harmless when one considers that donors are accountable externally to their home governments or boards of directors while the GOM must ultimately be held accountable to its citizens. Without this accountability, there is no social contract. Food security, however, is considered fundamental to the social contract by Malawians.

### ***NGO Sector is an Emerging Actor on the National Stage***

Policy-making in recent years has provided more opportunities for participation, but observers note that Malawi's history of dictatorship and patron-client structure has left citizens without the habit or means of voicing their views on government policy. However, over the past four years, progress has been made to represent citizen views through civil society organizations. In particular, NGOs have emerged as an actor on food security issues on the national stage.

Most NGOs involved in food security engage in direct service provision, although a small number of NGOs and coalitions have focused more on policy advocacy. Particularly active was the Malawi Economic Justice Network, which has organized sub networks involved in land, agriculture, and safety nets; these networks seem to be seeking greater government accountability for achieving food security. For instance CISANET (the Civil Society Agriculture Network) is an advocate and government watchdog on issues relating to food security and agricultural policy.

As advocacy organizations, these coalitions and their NGO members are gaining experience engaging in policy dialogue with government. These groups have participated broadly in a number of consultative processes, including the development of the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Food Security and Nutrition Policy. The MPRS process has been given decent marks for being broadly participatory, spinning off a more active civil society in the process (Bwalya et. al. 2004). As watchdogs, these organizations engage in budget monitoring (for the agriculture sector as well as national budget); and have become regular commentators in the media.

Yet, only a narrow range of organizations are actively engaged on public policy issues, most preferring to work directly on service delivery. In addition to the coalitions mentioned above, religious organizations in Malawi have played an important role in advocating for reform, although food security has not been a critical part of their agenda. Increasing the number of civil society voices in the policy arena – beyond the donor created consultative mechanisms – remains a challenge.

The USAID/Malawi DG program has sought to do just that. Through its legislative strengthening activities USAID has supported linkages between parliamentary committees, including the Agriculture sub-committee, and NGOs, on a range of policy issues. This is a rare example of a program that clearly links governance to poverty reduction, including food security issues.

### ***The Missing Voice of Smallholders in the Policy Debate: What Role for Small Producers' Associations?***

The participation of smallholders in agricultural policymaking through producer's organization is limited. The Malawi Poverty Reduction Plan points to the need to stimulate the creation of small producer's group, although emphasis is placed on their service delivery role (Kachule 2004). Most of the agricultural associations that exist represent agro-export sectors, such as TAMA (the Tobacco Exporter's Association of Malawi ).

Most of the small producer organizations that do exist tend to prioritize service delivery over advocacy. One national organization that combines both is the National Association of Smallholder Farmers of Malawi, which is an association which has grassroots farmer's associations as members. Funded through a USAID program, NASFAM has had some successes in advocating for legislative changes that benefit small farmers. For example, they successfully lobbied for the repeal of a 7% withholding tax on small sales of tobacco (Kachule 2004). Small

producer associations can also help small farmers identify themselves as producers and recognize their interests as such.

The Farmer's Union of Malawi was established with the express purpose of advocating for farmers. They and NASFAM have started to bring the interests of smallholders to the public policy arena. However, they could not yet be considered mass organizations mobilizing subsistence farmers to better identify and articulate their interests. This leaves Malawi's large number of small holders with few options for voice. In general, however, engagement with policy at the national level will not be in reach for most citizens until there are stronger networks of local and federated structures for interest articulation. The challenge is to increase opportunities for engagement without fueling unrealistic demands on the government that are well beyond its capacity.

### **3.6 The Policymaking Process for Food Security**

A few observations can be made about the policymaking process for food security in Malawi:

The food security policy debate is highly politicized in Malawi. In interviews the team heard again and again how the heart of the food security strategies and policies are hot button, high profile debates. The President and his party disputes were in the news on issues ranging from the maize scandal to the sale of the grain reserve. After a recent split with the UDF, President Mutharika's first appointment to his newly reformed government was a new Minister of Agriculture. High prices of fertilizer and food shortages in parliamentary districts were making the news frequently as parties' jostled for political advantage.<sup>6</sup>

Owing to this overt politicization of food security, fertilizer subsidies over time have become a national entitlement, and thus appear non-negotiable from a political stand-point. Since independence, heads of state have relied on subsidized, targeted inputs for food security to promote their candidacies or political agendas. Indeed, near universal fertilizer subsidies in Malawi have created popular expectation that the government will furnish some form of fertilizer subsidy to small holders. Removal of subsidies would trigger an outcry across party lines in Parliament. In the interests of maintaining popular support, government is pressured to provide inputs annually on a massive scale, and to seek donor assistance to pay for them.

It is also important to consider the fora through which policy dialogue occurs. Policymaking in Malawi is increasingly participatory and consultative. Consultative processes abound. Mechanisms for consultation on policy were created for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Ministry of Agriculture's strategy, and the role of the Economic Growth Plan. However, to a significant degree, however, they are distant from the budget process and formal policymaking processes. They bypass political parties and parliament as arenas for policy dialogue and debates. Moreover, the strong role of the executive in making and shaping policies means that these mechanisms may be distant from the true locus of decision-making.

An example of this is the Food Security Joint Task Force, which while appearing to be the 'big tent' for food security policy dialogue, it is not the locus where decisions are made. As later chapters suggest, inputs policy is decided at more senior levels, in part for political reasons, and

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike Zimbabwe, where human rights groups accuse President Robert Mugabe's party of using food as a political tool by demanding party cards from hungry voters before the March 31, 2005 parliamentary polls, food has not been used as a political weapon in Malawi.

in part because donors have a voice in decisions. Further, the consensus-oriented posture of the Task Force forum does not lend itself to articulating divergent interests, fighting over turf, and ultimately deciding policy. The long list of ‘priorities’ in the Food Security and Nutrition Policy testify to the need for consensus in this forum. Possibly more damaging, is that it is policy in a vacuum divorced from budget processes.

These issues make it unclear ultimately who has ownership of food security policy. Because of heavy reliance on external funding, policy is unavoidably fragmented and subject to donor policy prerogatives. It bears mentioning that several of the key policies that guide food security policy were part of donor conditionality or donor pressure, including the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Food Security and Nutrition Policy. The EU has established two preconditions for its assistance to Malawi: namely that the GoM must make progress on MPRS targets and that the FNSP be finalized.

Compared with Malawian civil society, donors and their implementing partners exert a disproportionate influence on food policy. Weak civil society involvement in policy-making and lack of public deliberation weakens the social contract that binds government to its people. Feeble national ownership of strategy makes it difficult to implement policy because it belongs to no one in particular. On the positive side, parliament has begun to exert its voice on food policy matters, and through its fledgling committee system, has begun to hold government accountable for policy formulation and implementation. Parliamentary debate of maize price bands in the public square offers a recent example of how the status quo is changing in Malawi.

Finally, it is important to point out that while smallholders are poorly represented in the policy arena through their own civil society associations, their policy preference for fertilizer subsidies or direct transfers, is widely recognized. Implicit in the self-sufficiency goal of the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as in other quarters of government, is a focus on assisting smallholders. While there is no consensus that this is the best way to achieve food security in the long term, the point here is that despite the lack of strong small holder associations, their ‘voice’ is not entirely absent from the policy arena.

### **3.7 Summary Findings**

***The extent to which the need for legitimacy continues to affect food security policy bears watching.*** Because regime legitimacy is equated with maize availability in the public mind (Harrigan 2003), interventionist agricultural policy is the norm. The extent to which the need for popular support continues to affect food security policy bears watching. In addition, analysts should pay attention to how this dynamic plays out in state interventionism, market reforms, strategies for food availability, input subsidies and other entitlements. President Mutharika’s anti-corruption stance may gain popular backing, but without the assurance of national food availability his credibility and that of his new party likely will be weakened.

***Food security policy lacks coherence.*** It is not obvious how food security policies relate to each other and whether the sum of the parts adds up to a robust, coherent whole. No single policy links the individual strategies across agencies, or offers clear unambiguous direction to senior-level decision makers and managers across government agencies. Ambiguous policy goals could have an adverse effect on implementation. Experience indicates that clear directives enhance effective policy implementation. Mixed signals translate to multiple, overlapping jurisdictions, inefficient use of resources, turf battles, and a tendency for policy components to fall between the cracks.

***There is a lack of policy consensus regarding the role of the state, not only in terms of market intervention, but also its appropriate role in operating safety nets.*** The pace and vigor of policy reforms such as liberalization can outstrip the capacity of the state and the private sector to provide adequate safety nets and may also result in unintended consequences. Privatizing ADMARC without putting in place sufficient market incentives left the most vulnerable rural communities without access to inputs and agricultural markets and did not resolve the commercial or food security problem confronting Malawi. While there is widespread agreement on the need to reduce vulnerability, there is a serious lack of consensus about the appropriate role of state in addressing vulnerability. In particular, there is widespread disagreement about ADMARC's social role. Donors and Malawians from all walks of life (excepting perhaps the private sector) deeply disagree over the privatization of ADMARC.

***Stakeholder polarization dominates the policy-making process.*** Consumption safety nets policy is largely determined by donors, who have the resources and apparent expertise that government lacks. Peters (1996) makes the point that this imbalance is not harmless when one considers that donors are accountable externally to their home governments or boards of directors while the GOM must ultimately be held accountable to its citizens. Without this accountability, there is no social contract. On the other side of the equation, however, popular demand is often translated into populist policy within a neo-patrimonial system. As a result, economic and social policy debates tend to become polarized.

***Consultative processes on food security policy exist but these are somewhat external to normal government decision-making processes.*** There are potentially both positive and negative outcomes from this. On the one hand, artificial donor processes may by pass and even undermine the role of political institutions such as parliament. On the other hand, they may have a short term positive impact by depoliticizing critical food security decisions.

## **4 Implementing Food Security Policy and Programs: Public Sector Capacities and Constraints**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Having identified the policy debates surrounding food security in Malawi, we turn now to the question of public sector effectiveness and consider the ability of the state to carry out its agenda by implementing food security policy and programs.

Food security is not a stand-alone ‘sector’, with its own ministry, delivery systems, and clearly defined outputs. Nor is it synonymous with agricultural production. State action to promote food security involves a range of policies and programs in the health, education, economic, social and agricultural sectors. A clear policy agenda and effective systems for inter-institutional collaboration are needed to coordinate the multiplicity of actors involved in food security. Public sector agencies need the financial, human and administrative capacity to carry out their mandates. And for genuinely sustainable progress toward food security, all of this needs to be achieved within an economic strategy that promotes growth, increased agricultural productivity and creates livelihood opportunities for the poor. This is a tall order for any developing country.

To assess public sector capacity, the team considered the overall implementation of food security policy and also selected three critical food security issues for in-depth study: access to agricultural inputs for small holders, stabilizing or smoothing access to food, and enhancing access to land. This chapter summarizes some of the public sector effectiveness constraints that emerged from the issue-based case studies that are presented in following chapters. These are:

- Weak inter-agency coordination for implementing food security policy and programs;
- Food security functions and responsibilities are poorly institutionalized;
- Accountability mechanisms for food security are weak but emerging;
- Human and financial resource constraints affect service delivery;
- Local government has an unclear and weak role in food security.

### **4.2 Inter-Agency Coordination for Implementing Food Security Policy**

Food security policy and programs in Malawi are implemented by a wide range of public sector ministries, sub-units and parastatal organizations. Each has their own set of programs and unique mission.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation is widely recognized as the leading actor on food security. So much so, that it was briefly known as Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Food Security, before dropping ‘food security’ recently from its moniker in the interest of brevity. Many observers remarked that the Ministry of Agriculture suffers from a lack of focus, although achieving national self-sufficiency of maize seems to be a primary goal. Other important public sector agencies include the Ministry of Health which operates nutritional programs, the National Food Reserve Agency which manages the grain reserve, ADMARC which sets a maize price band and others. A list of key food security actors is presented in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1 Primary Public Sector Entities and their Food Security Functions**

Public Sector Entities	Food Security Functions
<i>Food Security Joint Task Force</i>	Coordinates and plans responses to food security. Its secretariat is situated within the Ministry of Agriculture, and brings together a wide range of stakeholders including public sector, civil society and donor organizations.
<i>Ministry of Economic Planning and Development</i>	The Ministry of Economic Planning and Development is playing an influential role in setting overall economic policy. The Ministry was dissolved in 1999, marking efforts to reduce the role of the state and liberalize the economy. It was converted into the National Economic Council, reduced in size and lost its Ministry status. In 2002 it was resurrected as an active Ministry.
<i>Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs,</i>	Until recently, the Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs and its National Safety Net Unit was located within MEPD, but this has been recently transferred to the Office of the President and Cabinet. This office plays a coordinating role for safety net activities, and is developing a blueprint for disaster management.
<i>Malawi Social Action Fund</i>	MASAF is a semi-autonomous entity and directly addresses food insecurity through public works programs and local level development activities. MASAF's World Bank funding will total \$240 million over the 12 year life of the program. While MASAF is semi-autonomous, its formal institutional home is the Office of the Presidency and Cabinet.
<i>ADMARC</i>	Until recently, ADMARC monopolized the trade of fertilizer, seeds, farm implements, and maize. It set maize prices and acted buyer of last resort in remote rural areas. In the 1980s, ADMARC was partially privatized. ADMARC continues to set a price band for maize.
<i>Office of the President and Cabinet</i>	The Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) includes a number of sub-units directly involved in food security and related issues. In late 2004, the Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs and its National Safety Net Unit were transferred from the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, to the Office of the President and Cabinet, for reasons that remain unclear.
<i>National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) and the Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR)</i>	The NFRA was established in 1999 under the Ministry of Agriculture as a trust to manage the Strategic Grain Reserve including the purchase of local and imported commercial maize. The SGR is currently designed to function as a bridging facility, to release grain strategically to the market and meet food needs while grain is being imported.
<i>Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation</i>	The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation is widely recognized as the leading actor on food security. In recent years, the Ministry of Agriculture has been the government's primary implementing agency for the seed and fertilizer distribution programs; Starter Pack and its successor, the Targeted Input Program. The Ministry also operates agricultural extension services, although on a much reduced level.
<i>Ministry of Health</i>	The Ministry of Health works in close cooperation with UNICEF, donors, and international NGOs in implementing its community nutrition and primary health care outreach. This includes a network of nutritional rehabilitation units for therapeutic feeding of severely malnourished children, growth monitoring and take home supplementary feeding, and distribution of nutritional supplements.

Weak inter-agency coordination limits the effectiveness of public sector efforts to develop safety nets and implement a coherent food security policy. Public sector coordination around a common food security agenda remains an elusive goal. The absence of clear set of policy priorities for



promoting food security, as outlined in the previous chapter, will continue to hamper the implementation of public sector activities.

Still, the creation of the Food Security Joint Task Force may achieve more modest goals. By bringing together a range of actors involved in food security, and compiling information on food security related activities, the Secretariat has increased available information on the resources and capacities in country; information which is crucially needed in times of crisis. More specific action plans are envisaged for specific topic areas, such as food and agriculture information systems and national grain reserve management, among others. It is expected that the process of developing a national action plan should reduce the problems of lack of coordination that were experienced during the previous crisis. One positive outcome of the Task Force's efforts is that it is likely to encourage a better synergy of efforts among government, donors and NGOs in both crisis management as well as development activities.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation has played a leadership role within the public sector on food security issues, but its role has not remained uncontested. Inter-agency turf issues emerged over control of the Food Security Joint Task Force which hinged upon the Ministry of Agriculture's role as the institutional home for the Task Force Secretariat, and implicitly, as the lead Ministry for food security. Food security is a cross-sectoral issue and as one observer suggested, food security policy can not be "closed with the Ministry of Agriculture". This raises the issue of whether it would be more appropriate to locate the Task Force in a higher-level office within the executive branch that has a specific remit to coordinate public sector activities. Turf battles may result if one Ministry attempts to coordinate actions on issues that fall within the remit of other ministries.

The GoM is challenged by a multiplicity of policies that require implementation by a number of public sector agencies in the absence of effective coordination mechanisms. The National Safety Net policy provides an example of this. Nominally, the safety nets programs are to be coordinated by the Safety Net Unit within the Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs. Yet the implementation of the safety net policy is in the hands of autonomous ministries with their own agendas and capacity constraints. The Ministry of Health handles the targeted nutrition component, while Agriculture is responsible for the inputs distribution program. The most significant program in terms of resources is MASAF, which is implemented by a semi-autonomous agency linked to the Office of the President and Cabinet.

Overall, the Department lacks power to set policy and exercises very limited authority over the various implementers. In its evaluation role, the unit critiques TIP management and weighs in on issues of the minimum wage of public works projects. It may recommend alternatives. But the unit has no authority to impose rules or reforms on any NSNP or actor. The best it can do is to negotiate change with the steering committee, and it negotiates from a position of weakness. The poverty division of the department is now re-drafting the safety nets plan, but with two full-time employees lacks the human resources necessary to coordinate such a wide-ranging set of activities.

Similarly, TIP implementation engages multiple public sector actors. *The Daily Nation* reported the Parliamentary Committee of Budget and Finance as stating that the biggest problem with ETIP is the "poor working relationship among Ministries of Agriculture, Finance and the Office of the President and Cabinet" (January 6, 2005).

### 4.3 Food Security Functions and Responsibilities are Poorly Institutionalized

Responsibilities for food security functions and programs appear to be poorly institutionalized. There seem to be two processes here that undermine the effectiveness of policy and program implementation.

First, the ongoing change in the roles of public sector units suggests that the institutional arrangements are still very much in flux. Sub-units within ministries have been moved, ministries themselves have been closed then later resurrected, and program management shifted from one unit to another. The roles and functions within the public sector are poorly defined, and they are subject to constant redefinition. An illustration of the poorly institutionalized role for addressing food security can be seen in the government's handling of the ETIP program, which transferred management from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Finance, after a failed attempt to transfer it to the safety net unit.

Shortly after his election in May 2004, President Mutharika shifted its management from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation to the Ministry of Finance. The decision was apparently taken in the midst of alleged mismanagement on the part of the Ministry of Agriculture in previous years. According to some observers, it is possible that allies of the new President wanted to enhance their control over the popular program and were able to transfer the program outside of the Ministry of Agriculture, where it had long been housed. Procurement was to be handled by the Ministry of Finance.

According to our respondents, mid-way through the process, the Ministry of Finance tried to shift responsibility for TIP to the Safety Net Unit, now within the Office of the President and Cabinet. After it refused to assume the program citing staff constraints, the Ministry of Agriculture was brought back in to the process in late 2004 to deal with distribution and targeting.

The Safety Net Unit, moreover, was recently transferred from the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development to the Office of the Presidency. Changes in the government's management of the TIP in 2004-05 suggest that the roles and functions of the different Ministries and their related sub-units are poorly institutionalized.

These events illustrate that institutional responsibilities are ill-defined and constantly evolving. Public sector effectiveness requires that the roles and functions of key administrative units within government be agreed to, accepted and understood. In Malawi, these roles are instead subject to constant realignment. It demonstrates the power of the executive to revamp and revise institutional structures at will.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the 'projectized' nature of food security and social safety net activities inhibits the institutionalization of policy and program implementation responsibilities. Many important food security activities are conducted as projects, semi-independent of government, and donor-driven in funding and design. As a result they are implemented with weak links to the public sector. Their self-contained quality insulates them from government authority and contributes little to

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<sup>7</sup> Still, it is worth offering a positive possible interpretation of these events. According to some interviewees, the decision to move the program out of the Ministry of Agriculture, where there were allegations of corruption and mismanagement, may be an indication that the President is fully committed to his anti-corruption campaign. Transferring procurement to the Ministry of Finance might allow for a more transparent process. We must note that Mutharika is pushing an anti-corruption agenda – an agenda that was bolstered by the food crisis.

enhancing government service and management capacity. It also removes them from the push and pull of politics and thereby fails to advance democratic governance.

Two examples of this can be given. The secretariat of the Food Security Joint Task Force is currently funded by the EU. This project nature of the coordinating body impedes long term capacity development in at least two ways. First, the Task Force's secretariat staff are all project-funded personnel; no civil servants have been assigned full time to this unit. This affects not only sustainability of activities of the Task Force, but the institutionalization of knowledge generated. Secondly, the coordinating function of food security policy and programs currently being played by the Task Force is not being institutionalized within the Ministry of Agriculture, or elsewhere within government.

Another example, are the social safety net activities carried out under the World Bank-funded MASAF social safety net program, which is run by a semi-autonomous agency. MASAF came under much criticism in its first two phases for failing to integrate its activities within district assemblies and thus missed opportunities for capacity building and institutionalization of the effort. Recently, MASAF revised its strategy and is working to help district assemblies improve their service delivery, and to become more responsive to community needs.

#### **4.4 Weak but Emergent Accountability Mechanisms for Food Security**

The team noted that the Mutharika administration has undertaken significant efforts to check corrupt behavior. In one example, President Mutharika took measures early on to control corruption in the distribution of agricultural inputs. Based on reports that the Technical Inputs Program (TIP) was being mismanaged by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Mutharika administration transferred it to the Ministry of Finance. To counter allegations that in previous years local officials had distributed TIP packs to supporters of the ruling party, President Mutharika emphasized that ETIP distributions only go only to the poorest households, which would be registered by village chiefs and local extension agents.

In another case--the maize scandal of 2001/02—there was evidence that politicians and senior civil servants working for ADMARC unlawfully sold off grain stocks, produced 'paper losses', and misappropriated public funds. In spite of a legal requirement, ADMARC failed to transfer management of the SGR to the NFRA. Paralyzed by conflicts of interest, the Ministries of Finance, Agriculture and Statutory Corporations—ADMARC parent ministries—failed to fulfill their legally mandated roles as overseers of the process.

The scandal generated an upsurge in scrutiny of the public bureaucracy. Besides the reports that surfaced in the national media, a Presidential Commission, the Anti Corruption Bureau, the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, and an international accounting firm conducted separate investigations into the sell-off of the SGR. In 2004, GoM and donors formed a joint oversight committee of the NFRA to monitor and authorize release of SGR stocks.

Structural checks and balances on public sector performance were emerging as well. In November 2004 with assistance from NDI, Parliament formed an ad hoc committee on agriculture to oversee the formulation and implementation of agriculture policy. In the aftermath of the SGR scandal, the committee summoned witnesses to Parliament, including representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, taped the testimonies, and planned to release its report to the general assembly in March 2005. The committee also was invited to comment on the draft Food Security and Nutrition Policy. The committee also intends to assess TIP distribution, to evaluate its impact and results, and to report to Parliament. The committee chair told the team that his

committee will ask “why after ten years of TIP, is Malawi still food insecure? Is the Ministry utilizing its resources effectively? Are these resources reaching their intended beneficiaries?” MPs clearly show great interest in food security issues and planned to table discussion of the Food Security and Nutrition Policy in the March general session.

Similarly, an Act of Parliament in 1995 created Malawi’s public watchdog, the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), which became operational in 1998. The ACB director, who came from the Supreme Court, impressed the team as a dynamic individual committed to exercising the authority of his office. During the team’s visit he was almost single-handedly pursuing the prosecution of a former Minister for his alleged role in the SGR scandal. The ACB also is reaching Malawian youth and creating greater awareness of accountability issues by sponsoring public events such as ‘Anti-corruption Day’. The ACB director maintains that events like Anti-Corruption Day backed by application of rule of law will send signals to the public that corruption will not be tolerated.

Yet, there are limits to what these accountability mechanisms and structures can do. The Parliamentary committee system is only cutting its teeth. The ACB receives only half of its yearly budget requests, and has not been able to fill four of its five senior prosecution positions. Lawyers working in the private sector earn twice what the ACB can offer. While donors provide some of the ACB’s funding, without sufficient resources to prosecute high visibility cases, it will be in effect a toothless tiger.

Some of the difficulty in establishing functional checks and balances may be explained by patron-client relationships, a dominant form of social relations in Malawi. Typically, decision-making in a clientelist environment is opaque, beneficial to office-holders and their clients, and inequitable in terms of jobs, services, and resources distribution.

Cammack (2001) observes that since independence, neo-patrimonialism has created a public mentality where hierarchy, ‘large power distance’ and authority are the norm. Subordinates are used to being told what to do, while privilege and status are accorded to the elite. On the one hand this submissive attitude creates excessive deference to the ‘Big Men’ and encourages corruption and influence peddling. It also undermines checks and balances, demand for transparency, and rule of law. MCA indicators show Malawi declining on the control of corruption in both 2004 and 2005.

Related to neo-patrimonial attitudes are centralizing tendencies in government. In Phalombe and Chikwawa districts, the team observed that district officials and civil servants in the line ministries were extremely dependent on Lilongwe for overall program direction and guidance. Such dependence makes change difficult because lower-level civil servants are reluctant to take the initiative, and to question policies and rules. The tendency for people to wait for orders rather than to take action based on their assessment of local conditions perpetuates the status quo. It was impossible for the team to determine the degree to which resources such as land, credit, and project locations were determined by neo-patrimonialism. However, accountability in a patron-client society links office holders to a particular clientele rather than to the elected government and its representative institutions.

#### **4.5 Human and Financial Resource Constraints Affect Service Delivery**

In low income countries, it almost goes without saying the financial, administrative and human resource constraints seriously affect public sector capacity. A limited local tax base leads to thin

budgets and dependence on international funding. Malawi's national budget depends significantly on donor funds.

Here we do not review the well understood impact of limited resources on public sector service delivery capacity in sectors ranging from health, to education, to public infrastructure. Rather, we point to just three illustrative problems that have a particularly pernicious impact on food security.

First, is the impact of HIV/AIDS on the public sector, and the agricultural extension service in particular. It is worth noting the growing impact of HIV/AIDS on staff attrition. Malindi (2005, 5) cites a study on the impact of HIV/AIDS and the public sector which found that departments engaged in a significant amount of fieldwork had higher rates of staff death. Overall, staff illness and the need to attend funerals drains staff resources and will continue to affect public sector capacity. AIDS does not only weaken the extension services, but also makes it more difficult to promote rural livelihoods as target households are also affected.

Second, is the existence of unfunded mandates for some critical food security units. The Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs for example, is responsible for the National Safety Net Program. The Department consists of a 'poverty unit' whose job it is to coordinate the safety nets, and a 'disaster unit' to handle disaster preparedness, relief, and rehabilitation. One of the tasks is to finalize a disaster preparedness and management plan that addresses the shocks of drought and floods, pest infestations, geological hazards, social hazards, economic hazards. Notably, it should also show how to utilize the SGR and maize imports.

Despite the immensity of the mandate, the unit is seriously under-resourced. Staffing consists of four professionals and a commissioner. The biggest resource constraint may well be budgetary. If the Department had to respond in the event of an emergency it would be unable to do so because funds that were supposed to be deposited into an interest-bearing bank account for such purposes were never allocated. The Department does not coordinate its own financing, and like other government agencies it must request funds through the Ministry of Finance.

Third, and in a related point, public sector entities have also been slow to adapt to the reduced state role and haven't brought their strategies into alignment with their reduced resources. The Ministry of Agriculture has seen budget reductions, particularly in its research and extension, leaving it with a much reduced role in rural areas. Yet, the Ministry continues to expand its service delivery role, even though it is incapable of performing many of these functions. Fukuyama (2004) argues that good governance requires that the size and scope of the state be in balance with its effectiveness. It is clear in Malawi this balance has not been achieved, as the public sector is greatly overextended, trying to perform expansive social and economic functions with not much effectiveness.

As explained by an official at the Malawi Agricultural Sector Investment Program, the overall institutional infrastructure of the agricultural sector, which includes ADMARC and the SGR, has not been streamlined to reflect the more limited state role in the economy. While the role of the state has changed its structure has not. The Ministry is currently undergoing an assessment process to help it identify its 'core functions', in recognition that it is attempting to provide more services than its current capacity allows. The core function analysis indicates that;

"All the six Departments of the Ministry indicated that they actively provide, to varying degrees, between 71-81% of the services they have on offer. For their part, farmers indicated that of the services offered by the Ministry, the services they actually receive constitute, to varying degrees,

between 27-43%” (MAI 2004b). This finding suggests a mismatch between the ministry’s expectations of its performance and actual capacity to deliver services in the field.

One study suggests that a consequence of the lack of clear set of priorities is that it creates the conditions allowing for ineffective budgeting. Fozzard and Simwaka, noted that; “in the agricultural sector, in contrast, where policies and development strategies have yet to be defined, the bulk of resources are captured by administrative services.” They note that “the Ministry of Agriculture has consistently diverted resources from service to administration during budget execution” (Fozzard and Simwaka 2002: 23). In a setting with an unclear set of policy priorities, programs, and activities, it may be easier to allow funds to be absorbed by administrative costs rather than those associated with policy implementation. Combined with the legislature only weakly playing its oversight role, service delivery is impacted.

#### **4.6 Local Government: Finding a Role in Food Security**

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development has been rolling out decentralization since 1998. Malawi consists of 28 districts each with sub-structures: area development committees (which encompass the traditional chieftaincy), and village development committees (which group individual villages and their village headmen). District Development Committees are in charge of making development plans. In theory, the plans are informed by a participatory bottom-up process. Ideally, line ministries such as Agriculture, implement at the Area Development Committee level.

As elsewhere on the continent, districts have severe capacity issues. Through a complicated formula, districts receive central government transfers. They also receive funding through a donor basket. Nevertheless, they are under-resourced. Many staffing positions in administration, finance, public works, and planning and development are vacant, and some assemblies meet less than once a year for lack of sitting and transport fees.

Districts also are only partially decentralized administratively. The plan to have district line ministry technical staff report directly to the District Assembly is far from reality. In addition, although local councils are elected, district commissioners are appointed by central government making accountability to the local community difficult. The Ministry of Local Government believes that devolving power should be at a measured pace allowing for maturation in local attitudes concerning the notion of citizen responsibility for government.

While there has been weak political will from the Center to speed up decentralization, President Mutharika in his inaugural address and in a speech to open Parliament highlighted the government’s interest in supporting decentralized government. One important indication of this commitment is that there are two ministers and two Principal Secretaries in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. Nonetheless, districts suffer from weak technical capacity in key social sectors such as education and health, and uncertainty in national politics could cause paralysis at the local level. The feeling generally is that because of their limitations, and because of predominant centralizing tendencies, local governments play a marginal role in food security.

Local government’s involvement with food security lies largely with its involvement with the MASAF and TIP program. In the early stages, MASAF existed as a projectized activity outside government structures. At the community level, it attempted to work through chiefs, and in the latter stages has shifted somewhat to working through district assemblies. One interviewee told the team that fear of being tainted by irregular practices caused decision-makers to avoid working

with local government. The most recent phase of MASAF is working closely with local government, and providing capacity building inputs as well as channeling resources through local government.

Local government is also engaged in the targeted of the Targeted Inputs Program, and its successor, the Extended Targeted Input Program. Overall the impact of ETIP and related programs on the institutional capacity of local government is mixed. ETIP has developed a grassroots process for selecting beneficiaries. The village chiefs work with the district assemblies at the local level on the targeting issues. The overall number of beneficiaries per district is decided at the national level. These are divided proportionally by the number of Extension Planning Units (Ministry of Agriculture's planning sub-unit). From there, however, the district assemblies in collaboration with the Traditional Authorities provide the village chiefs with selection criteria for determining which household are considered vulnerable, and eligible for receiving an ETIP pack.

To give an example, the team visited Chikwawa district where there were 80,000 packs available for an estimated 114,000 farming households. In essence, the chiefs were being asked to select a minority within their village that would be excluded from the program. District Economic Planning Officers in Chikwawa and Phalombe described the rather involved process of selecting ETIP recipients in consultation with village elders. Eligibility criteria include orphan heads of households first and women heads of households second, followed by families affected by HIV/AIDs. Nyakwawa (Chief) Thimu of Tondi Village in Chikwawa District observed that he was subject to verbal abuse by more able-bodied farmers who felt they could make better use of the inputs.

The impact on the district assemblies is less clear. The district assembly has played a minimal role in TIP's and ETIP's implementation. Procurement and beneficiary count decisions are made at the national level beneficiary selection is conducted at the village level. It is unclear, therefore, that the program is building either the service delivery capacity of local government or increasing its authority/roles within the communities.

What role local government is able to play to promote food security outside of these donor funded programs? Their thin financial resources place real limits on their ability to promote local development, while their participation in these programs may occupy a considerable proportion of their time. It is hoped that the new phase of MASAF will lead to increased local government capacity, and will begin to institutionalize local development activities as a role for local government.

#### **4.7 Summary Findings**

***Weak inter-agency coordination affects the implementation of food security policy and programs.*** The team found multiple examples of complex policies and programs that engage a multiplicity of public sector actors in implementation. Coordinating bodies, such as the Safety Net Unit, appeared to be weakly able to perform their coordinating role. Lack of effective coordination, according to some key stakeholders, has impacted program implementation in different food security areas.

***Many important food security functions and responsibilities are poorly institutionalized.*** Some critical food security functions are donor funded and 'projectized' and have not become institutionalized into the public sector. For example, the Food Security Joint Task Force, whose

role is to coordinate food security policy and programs, is itself a project with no civil service staff assigned to it. It is important to assess which actions are core state functions and encourage better integration with the public sector.

***Accountability mechanisms for food security are weak but emerging.*** The food crisis of 2001/02 revealed the failure, or absence of, effective accountability mechanism in the food security sector. Allegations of high level corruption and missing grain from the strategic grain reserve had catastrophic consequences for food security. However, there have been promising signs since the crisis. The Mutharika administration is moving forward with an anti-corruption agenda and is investigating past cases of corruption.

***Human and financial resource constraints affect service delivery.*** This has resulted in unfunded mandates for some food security units. In addition, HIV/AIDS has seriously affected the public sector; the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation's extension services have been particularly hard hit. Despite these limitations, some public agencies have expansive aims which overextend their resources.

***Local government has an unclear and weak role in food security.*** The role of local government in food security is growing as the World Bank funded MASAF program has begun to work on a range of local development activities in partnership with district assemblies. To date, the role of local government in actively promoting food security has been limited.



## 5 Food Security Critical Issue: Inputs and Governance

### 5.1 Rural Livelihoods: Increasing Dependence upon Maize

Household production of maize occupies a central role in the livelihood strategies of most Malawians. Although most rural Malawian households are net purchasers of maize, household production remains a vital means of access to food for much of the rural population. Given that more than 80% of the population is engaged in the agriculture, stimulating rural livelihoods by increasing smallholder productivity has been a focus of donors programs and government policy alike.

Many smallholders and their families are trapped in a downward spiral of declining productivity. A combination of deep rooted economic, physical and other constraints erect barriers to increased agricultural and rural productivity that are not easily overcome. A constellation of factors, including competition for casual labor, declining soil fertility, small plots sizes, and HIV/AIDS leaves millions of households in rural Malawi trapped in extreme poverty, with few income generating opportunities.

Dependence on maize has not lessened; it remains central to most household subsistence strategies. And dependence upon maize in Malawi has become increasingly linked to a dependence on chemical fertilizer<sup>8</sup>. During the team's field visits to Malawi's southeastern and southern districts of Chikwawa, Mulange, Phalombe and Zomba, application or the absence of these inputs in adjoining plots growing the 2004-05 maize crop were real and obvious. Timely application of fertilizer and hybrid seeds in the right amounts results in flowering maize plants of full stature while their absence is evident in the pale and stunted plants promising their tillers little or no yield.

The market for chemical fertilizer, however, remains underdeveloped. Chemical fertilizer needs to be imported and is constrained by access to foreign exchange. This problem is compounded by poor rural infrastructure which makes transportation of fertilizer and seed costly, thus limiting supply to the majority of the population below the poverty line. The state has long been the primary provider of inputs (seed and fertilizer) to the majority of the population, through ADMARC under Banda, and in partnership with DFID on a seed and fertilizer distribution program, first known as Starter Pack Program, then Targeted Input Program, and most recently, Extended Targeted Input Program.

Providing fertilizer is one of the primary policy responses of the government of Malawi to increasing food access and availability (both a part of livelihoods). It is both highly politicized as a domestic issue, and remains a somewhat contentious issue among donors. This chapter takes a closer look at the public policy debates surrounding fertilizer, and illustrates a range of governance problems that have affected the availability, timeliness and cost of fertilizer.

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<sup>8</sup> Clearly, more work needs to be done to provide non-fertilizer alternatives for replenishing soil nutrients, such as composting and the use of nitrogen rich legumes and trees. However, introducing these practices also entails costs in inputs, training, and outreach.

## 5.2 The State, Donors and Access to Agricultural Inputs

Fertilizer availability has immediate significance for the livelihoods of the majority of the population making it a high-stakes, high profile political issue. As one prominent interviewee pointed out, the seed and fertilizer targeted input program must be understood as both a political instrument as well as a development tool.

The state has long played an active role in the provision of fertilizer and other inputs in Malawi. ADMARC during the Banda government was the major supplier of agricultural inputs throughout Malawi until the change in government in 1994. In 1980, Malawi adopted a structural adjustment program which stipulated a phased removal of fertilizer subsidies. However, in response to a perceived threat to his popularity caused by an emerging food crisis, Banda reintroduced fertilizer subsidies, violating the Bank's and IMF's conditionality. Simply put, eliminating fertilizer subsidies was not politically viable.

In 1998, DFID began funding the Starter Pack Scheme (SPS), which aimed to furnish packages of maize seed and fertilizer sufficient for cultivation of 0.1 hectares (or 100 square meters) to all rural farming families. Approximately 2.86 million starter packs were provided free of cost through the Ministry of Agriculture's distribution channels. In 2000-01, the starter pack program was modified to be more targeted at the most vulnerable households and was renamed the Targeted Inputs Program (TIP). TIP was scaled down to 1.5 million vulnerable households, including tillers of less than 0.5 hectares.

The SPS demonstrated its fullest potential where rainfall was adequate and its beneficiaries were physically capable of properly applying the inputs. Yet, even in the most suitable conditions, the SPS and TIP programs have failed to move many households from subsistence to surplus production. The conditions of extreme poverty in which much of the population finds itself has meant that fertilizer transfers have instead become part of most household subsistence strategies. Fertilizer transfers are no longer viewed as an effective livelihood development strategy. It has instead become a critical part of the national safety net. Fertilizer direct transfers or subsidies are now needed to keep households and communities from falling below the subsistence line.

Given the centrality of fertilizer to basic household subsistence, how best then to facilitate access to fertilizer and other critical inputs? Donors are not unanimous in their position on inputs policies. USAID promotes a market based approach to inputs provision, and supports programs aimed at fostering open markets in agricultural inputs and production. Concerned about the potentially disruptive market effects of subsidies on Malawi's agricultural sector, USAID\Malawi has not participated in TIP or its predecessors, and seeks instead to build private sector capacity to supply critical inputs. With USAID support, organizations such as the National Smallholder Farmers Association are developing networks of shops supplied by bulk purchases, in an effort to build a new system for supplying fertilizer and eventually other inputs at reasonable prices.

While developing a healthy commercial inputs market is generally agreed to be the long term goal, some donors believe that in short term, broad access to fertilizer can only be met through a targeted, safety net program. DFID continues to fund TIP but it is unclear how long this support will be available. Other donors are pushing broadly for economic liberalization, but are supportive of targeted subsidies or transfers as a safety net for the most vulnerable. The Bank presently views input subsidies in contrast to food imports as a more efficient use of government foreign exchange resources.<sup>9</sup> The World Bank envisioned a targeted fertilizer subsidy as an

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<sup>9</sup> Harrigan (2003: 851) citing the IBRD's 1990 report (P-5189-MAI) on a US \$70m agricultural sector

integral component of its Community-Based Rural Land Development Project. This reflects a shift in the Bank's position on subsidies in contrast to its insistence on complete subsidy removal prior to 1990.

Within the Government of Malawi, however, there is near unanimity that some type of fertilizer subsidy is warranted. The Budget and Finance Committee weighed in on the debate in January, stating that it "implores government to start planning for the implementation of a genuine universal fertilizer subsidy". Both the current and previous administration is strongly supportive if TIP and Malawian civil society is fairly united in support for a subsidy. Organizations such as CISANET, the Farmers Union of Malawi, and others generally believe the state should play an active role in provision of key inputs.

### **5.3 Inputs Policymaking 2004: Vouchers, Universal Subsidies, or Direct Transfers?**

The tradition of universal fertilizer subsidies in Malawi has created a growing popular anticipation that the government will continue to furnish some form of fertilizer subsidy to Malawi's majority of poor cultivators. The intense politicization of the fertilizer issue has resulted in erratic and ad hoc policymaking processes, which have the potential to directly impact food security outcomes. This section thus focuses on the policies and policymaking processes of the Mutharika administration as it attempted to respond to rising public expectations of cheap and plentiful fertilizer; expectations it is largely responsible for creating.

From interviews of various Government of Malawi officials, NGO and advocacy group spokespersons, donor representatives and participants in the agricultural input marketing sector, we learned that work on a voucher scheme was being led by the Ministry of Finance in early 2004, as a possible successor to TIP. During the campaign leading up to the May 2004 election, the United Democratic Front publicly promised fertilizer at reduced or government-subsidized prices. In the absence of details, the public's perception was that this would be a universal subsidy. Shortly after the new administration took power, the Permanent Secretary for the Minister of Agriculture reinforced this perception by announcing in that the Government planned to reduce fertilizer prices. He advised farmers not to purchase fertilizer until the government announced new prices – an announcement that never came.<sup>10</sup>

The expectation that fertilizer prices would fall led to a short-term but sharp decline in demand for fertilizer. Fertilizer importers in this uncertain market environment put their orders for additional quantities on hold in July-August - a time when manufacturer prices are generally most favorable for Malawi since its usually prior to orders from China and India, two of the world's largest fertilizer consumers<sup>11</sup>.

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adjustment. Program.

<sup>10</sup> *The Nation*, June 25, 2004: "Fertilizer price to go down, says PS" Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Charles Matabwa speaking at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the National Smallholder Farmers Association was quoted as saying: "...We are sure that fertilizer [prices] will go down and government will come up with a statement on the matter...I would advise farmers to wait until government announces the new prices." The following October, the President allegedly remarked at an event in Katuya that the price of fertilizer should be no more than MK 1,400 per 25 kg bag and if they were paying more, they were being cheated. This further reinforced in the public's mind that a fertilizer subsidy would be announced.

<sup>11</sup> According to some sources, negotiations between fertilizer importers and the government over the voucher program broke down, due to disagreements in procurement procedures, specifically, the pre-positioning of funds in an escrow account.

In August the new President announced that 50,000 MT of fertilizer would be made available for an expanded version of TIP, known as ETIP. ETIP would be made available to 2.1 million small farming families - a significant increase over the 1.5 million targeted in the 1999-00 program - but falling short of the implied promise made earlier of cheap fertilizer for everyone.

By then, fertilizer importers, acutely aware of sharply rising prices propelled by the inexorable rise in petroleum, chemical fertilizer's main ingredient, were trying to signal the government that the window for delivery in time for the harvest was rapidly closing. Malawi's fertilizer supply pipeline is 8-12 weeks (or longer) from placing orders to delivery. Not until October 25, 2004 did President Mutharika formerly unveil the ETIP program, close to the December planting season. It was also announced that ETIP would be also scaled up further to cover 2.8 million beneficiaries with a package of 26kg of fertilizer and five kg of seed.

This untimely and erratic making of policy toward fertilizer imports had a number of consequences. **First**, it had an impact on the private sector's ability to secure sufficient supplies of fertilizer on a timely basis. Tenders for fertilizer and seeds for ETIP which should have been issued in July or August were delayed until October. Operating under these circumstances, fertilizer importers, despite intense international competition for fertilizer at prices reminiscent of the 1973-78 "oil shocks", congestion at the Port of Biera, Mozambique, rail and trucking mishaps, still managed to deliver to Malawi over 90% of the level of fertilizer imported the year before.

**Secondly**, distributions to villages in some parts of the country were made in January after most of the maize crop had been sown. Although fertilizer through ETIP and commercial channels may reach farmers in time for a second (top dressing) dose provided it gets down the distribution chain by the end of February, the effect of these delays on yields are uncertain. The delay in getting ETIP inputs into the hands of subsistence farmers may have a particularly detrimental effect on the most vulnerable households that depend on ETIP, not just for fertilizer, but for the maize seed itself. It is too soon to tell if the late planting of the crops and mistiming of fertilizer application, will affect overall maize production in 2005.

**Third**, these events have prompted the opposition and various advocacy groups to charge the Mutharika Administration with not delivering on its promises; namely making the ETIP inputs available in time for planting by the poorest (delivery was late in some areas of the country) and for not reducing the price of fertilizer for the rest of Malawi's producers. Articles in the popular press had reported that President Mutharika had claimed that his administration would keep fertilizer prices below MK 1,400 (USD 12.72) per 50 kg bag. Yet most rural outlets were selling what stocks of fertilizer they had at MK 3,000 (USD 27.27) by January, 2005, according to The Daily Times (January 18, 2005: pg. 1).

In addition, local government officials from district assembly and agricultural extension officers to village chiefs had to face growing concerns of both potential recipients of ETIP and more prosperous farmers as to where the fertilizer was. Officials interviewed in Chikwawa and the more remote Phalombe District indicated that during November-December - a period of peak demand, fertilizer was difficult to obtain, had gotten quite expensive and as stocks ran down, of deteriorating quality. The late arrival of ETIP inputs placed particular burdens upon the village chiefs in many parts of the country since they were charged with deciding on who receives ETIP inputs; then explaining why they arrived late or not at all.

**Finally**, it was clear from our interviews that the confidence of both fertilizer wholesale importers and retailers has been shaken by this experience.

It is difficult to estimate the potential impact of the Government's mismanagement of policies on fertilizer and seed availabilities since they may not affect Malawi's maize security as much as the vagaries of its single rainy season. Nevertheless it is clear that Mutharika's government is caught in a significant credibility gap largely of its own making.<sup>12</sup> The lack of transparency in the government's policymaking as it affected the procurement process has exacerbated competition for fertilizer and quality seed putting both out of reach of the majority of farmers during the planting and most of the growing season.

#### **5.4 Lessons from the Fertilizer Policy: the Drivers of Policy Mismanagement**

In order to understand how such an undesirable outcome was arrived at, it is important to consider what drives the fertilizer policy in Malawi. Intense political competition in the newly democratic system has led some political leaders to offer bold and possibly unrealistic promises during the electoral campaign. Several expert observers noted that the political legitimacy of the Mutharika administration has now become wedded to the successful implementation of ETIP.

Many sources told us that fertilizer programs should not be viewed purely as a development programs. Rather the issue of government-subsidized inputs has become a prominent part of the political landscape in the post-Banda era. According to one prominent political scientist, the SPS, and TIP became quickly politicized by Muluzi's administration which was looking to build a wider base of support. Now Mutharika as well has used the promise of fertilizer to bolster support for his new government.

The high degree of politicization of the fertilizer question has contributed to erratic policymaking. Part of the problem is that public policy dialogue about input subsidies in recent months was dominated by political actors seeking political gain. Although the desire to deliver on a populist platform may be a product of the intense political competition in the multi-party system, it is important to highlight the fact that issues of fertilizer and maize are of heightened political sensitivity in Malawi. Availability of agricultural inputs is a bread and butter issue affecting virtually all Malawians. The intense politicization of this issue has led to ad hoc policy pronouncements, apparently uncoordinated within the government itself. Politics trumps technically based decisions from guiding policy.

There is no clearly articulated policy on fertilizer, and mixed signals to the private sector may inhibit private investment. There appears to be an implicit policy based on the notion of some type of subsidy or transfer, but the government has failed to articulate a vision for the medium term, that clarifies its stance on several key issues, such as whether a program would be targeted or universal; fully or partly subsidized; time limited or long term.

The underlying problem is the persistence of a neo-patrimonial system in which leaders seek to maintain their position by promising and delivering goods and services to their followers. Diana Cammack et. al. (2003) and others have pointed to the persistence of patron-client relations, which have been integrated into national political and partisan structures. Fertilizer has long been

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<sup>12</sup> The popular press has made the fertilizer availability issue a major topic of discussion...at least among their readers. For example *The Daily Times*: "Fertilizer shortage blamed on UDF" *ibid*; "Bingu [Mutharika] admits fertilizer shortage" Jan. 27, 2005. An open letter published in the English and vernacular press "The Mess of the New TIP: Call for Remedial Action" by the Farmers Union of Malawi and CISANET on December 26, 2004 accused the Government of non-transparent fertilizer tendering procedures and sanctioning unethical practices in the procurement of seeds for TIP that failed to germinate.

an essential resource that Malawians are accustomed to receiving from the state, mediated through their local leaders. There is a growing sense that providing fertilizer at reduced or no cost is one of the government's obligations. A fertilizer subsidy program, which involves a physical resource that is relatively easy to deliver in a short period of time (unlike improved health services which involves major reform), is an attractive program to propose. The resources of the state are limited, and TIP may be the clearest set of readily transferable resources. This system of neo-patrimonialism also exists at the local level. In the past, there have also been allegations of TIP distributions being used by local officials to reward party loyalists.

Neo patrimonialism however provides only a partial explanation. It is important to situate this debate within the wider discourse on development within the Malawian government. There continues to be a belief among many in the government that there should be an active state role in the economy and in addressing key development issues. This is indicated by the widespread support for fertilizer subsidies of some type, as well as the belief that parastatals like ADMARC should play an important social and economic function.

## **6 Food Security Critical Issue: Safety Net Failures - ADMARC, the NFRA and the Strategic Grain Reserve**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Serious governance issues within ADMARC, the NFRA and the Safety Nets Program have weakened Malawi's safety nets. One of these safety nets, which have existed for decades is the price and consumption smoothing role of ADMARC, the agricultural marketing board. The other, a more recent creation, is the Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR), managed by the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA). In 2000-01 several thousand deaths due to starvation in south and central regions occurred, and were blamed rightly or wrongly in part on the failure of the national grain reserves to respond to the emergency. Shortly thereafter, reports surfaced that prior to and during the crisis high-level officials in the government and ruling party profited from the buying and selling of maize from the SGR.

This case looks at two processes that have impacted food security from a safety nets point of view. First, it examines the privatization of ADMARC and its effect on the most food insecure. Second, it identifies the governance issues that affected state capacity to manage the SGR effectively and efficiently. The evidence from this part of the case illustrates several governance failures, but it also offers an encouraging response to deficiencies in the system.

### **6.2 Privatizing ADMARC**

ADMARC evolved from the colonial Farmers' Marketing Board (FMB), a parastatal creation established after World War II. In addition to holding a monopoly on inputs such as fertilizer, seeds, and farm implements, ADMARC was the sole trader of maize, and the buyer of last resort. Any farmer could sell beans, tobacco, and other produce to ADMARC if no one else would buy it. Prices were set jointly by the Ministries of Agriculture and Finance. ADMARC would also sell back produce in the event of shortfalls. At its apex, ADMARC operated warehouses located every 8 to 10 kilometers apart across the country.

In the 1970s and 1980s, African marketing boards came under fire for rent-seeking, corrupt practices, and for subsidizing industry or cheap urban staples while denying farmers the real price for their produce (Bates 1981). In Malawi, proponents of structural adjustment found similar reasons to reform ADMARC. Its market infrastructure was inefficient, required heavy subsidies, drained the national treasury, and created disincentives for private sector entry into the maize market<sup>13</sup>.

By 1987, government had introduced private trading of maize, thus ending ADMARC's monopoly on marketing of the national staple. The following year was marked by a first round closure of ADMARC markets, in which 125 seasonal markets were closed due to low volumes of trade. In subsequent years, government liberalized produce and input pricing, and opened up agricultural marketing services to the private sector. Unrelenting deterioration of ADMARC's

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<sup>13</sup> It has been argued that in 2001/02 the ADMARC price of MK17/kg. was too low, which generated little private sector interest and high demand for cheap maize led to stock outages. With few private sector imports to offset the demand, prices skyrocketed. In contrast, in 2002/03 there was little price volatility because the ADMARC price of MK17/kg. was too high resulting in much private sector interest, sufficient supply, few sales by ADMARC, but stable prices (Rubey 2004a).

financial performance hastened the calls for privatization of ADMARC as recommended by the MPRSP. One proposal called for the closure of 204 unit markets and conversion of others into temporary markets. Additionally, donors demanded a divestiture of portfolio investments and loss-making subsidiaries in order to improve ADMARC's financial position.

Of perhaps greatest consequence to the food insecure was an effort to dispossess ADMARC of its non-core 'social functions', which included management of the national strategic grain reserve, and the maintenance of a maize price band. The price band aimed to stabilize maize prices and make maize affordable and accessible to the poorest Malawians by establishing floor prices to protect farmers' incomes, and ceiling prices to protect consumers from price gouging. However, critics maintained that the existing ADMARC structure was too costly, and they argued that it had very little impact on the most food insecure.

Predictably, government resisted implementing the change if for no other reason than to avoid risking popular support. Subsequently, the two sides reached a compromise to decompress the price band gradually. Nonetheless, given the millions of people affected by the action, the potential political costs of the policy to government were very high. Government therefore dragged its feet, and on one occasion just after a visit by an IMF team, reneged on its promises and reverted to a narrower price band once the IMF team had left the country.<sup>14</sup>

One adverse effect of restructuring was the unanticipated closure of ADMARC's least profitable markets. These markets were the most remote and hardest to reach, and therefore the most costly to operate. From a profit motive it made sense for ADMARC to close them. Without additional incentive, these markets were the least attractive to entrepreneurs, went underserved, and ultimately increased the level of vulnerability in these areas.

Studies, including a survey funded by the World Bank, found widespread cheating on measurements, and price gouging. Decompressing the price band forced the poor to sell maize after harvest when prices were lowest, and to buy back in the hungry season when prices were highest.<sup>15</sup> The studies concluded that liberalization had benefited wealthier rural households at the expense of poorer households which were forced to engage in more *ganyu* labor to survive. Many of the survey respondents expressed their opinion that ADMARC problems were not at the level of rural markets, rather they were a result of poor management and investment practices at the national level (Mvula, Chirwa and Kadzandira 2003).

### **6.3 The Strategic Grain Reserve and the 2001/02 Food Crisis**

This part of the case examines the events surrounding the sell-off of the Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR) and subsequent efforts to police the state, and to improve accountability mechanisms. Here we see the results of failure to institute adequate checks and balances, leading to mismanagement, administrative misconduct, and defrauding the government. On the bright side, governance failures are countered by actions to bring wrong-doers to justice and attempts to safeguard management of the SGR.

The SGR holds 60,000 MT of maize in silos located on the outskirts of Lilongwe for emergency use. However, the SGR was sold off just before the food crisis of 2000-01 struck, which turned

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<sup>14</sup> Devereux, 2002a, p.17. He tells the story that in the late 1990s, the government and IMF had reached an agreement on widening the band, only to have the agreement abrogated by the government as soon as the IMF economists left town.

<sup>15</sup> Peters (1995; 1996) in Devereux, 2002a, page 17.



into a national scandal. Owing to maize purchases after the 1999 bumper harvest, the SGR stocks had reached 180,000MT. The IMF argued for a number of reasons that it no longer made sense to hold reserves at this level. First it was argued that it was too expensive to maintain this level of reserve; the NFRA had taken out commercial loans to buy the maize, and service on the loans was extremely costly. Second, losses occur as stocks age. The IMF therefore recommended liquidating old stocks, repayment of the commercial loans, and a much smaller reserve.

Subsequent to this advice, the NFRA sold grain to Kenya and to Mozambique to avoid dumping it on the local market. No grain was purchased in 2000/01 because it was believed that the bumper harvest of 2000 would be an adequate supply and that storage would be costly. Inaccurate Ministry of Agriculture data led to an overestimation of the domestic food supply, which combined with a lack of clarity regarding how much of the reserve remained, resulted in delays in the delivery of food assistance.

From 175,000MT in July 2000, the stock ran out one year later. By the time the newspapers reported widespread food shortages across the country, hundreds of people were dying of hunger, and thousands more were suffering from acute malnutrition. Complaints were heard that government officials were selling maize at scalpers' prices. Indeed, in September 2001, the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) logged a complaint that top UDF officials and cabinet ministers had bought SGR maize cheaply and resold it at high prices.

Media coverage and public outcry over what seemed unconscionable behavior launched a series of investigations by the ACB, a Presidential Commission, an international accounting firm, and the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture. These investigations found examples of serious conflicts of interest in contracting arrangements, possible evidence of personal enrichment, access by officials to NGR grain through unreimbursed loans, among other irregularities.

The Presidential Commission also blamed donors for their mishandling of the SGR. The World Bank was blamed for nonperformance of promises to provide seed money for the NFRA. Specifically, the report blamed the World Bank and IMF for "overdriving the Government towards acceptance of the creation of NFRA without adequate preparation and before putting in place the mechanisms usually associated with such a highly leveraged program. The idea of forming NFRA to take over the responsibility for managing the SGRs from ADMARC when the Government had no readily available resources to establish the institution was a seedling for failure." The report faulted the IMF and World Bank for suggesting that the reserves could be limited to 30,000MT and stated that the grain reserves should not be "imposed by donors." It also admitted that Malawians were opposed to the privatization of ADMARC and that "the probability of ADMARC continuing in its existence is more real than speculative." (P.20)

Based on its investigations the ACB recommended in July 2002 that the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) order investigations into charges of criminal recklessness and negligent acts against seven people, including the Director of ADMARC, who later became Minister of Finance. Similar investigations were launched into the SGR by the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and by the Office of the President, under former President Muluzi, commissioned in November 2002. The report by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry dated 24 August 2004 was submitted to President Mutharika (GoM 2004b). A tabling of the SGR issue was scheduled for the March 2005 session of Parliament.

## 6.4 Accountability Mechanisms

Each of the investigations revealed a number of governance deficiencies that led to the crisis. Among them were nepotism, institutionalized conflicts of interests, opaque maize transactions, mismanagement of documents, lack of accountability on the part of senior officials, the absence of accountability mechanisms, failure to exercise technical and budgetary oversight, and political interference.

At the level of ADMARC, bad grain management was compounded by a lack of transparency and accountability that allowed senior managers to distort information and to conceal their malpractice. ADMARC and NFRA officials mishandled procedures for paper and physical stocks of grain, failed to account for spoiled grain, mixed ADMARC grain with NFRA stocks, and counted grain that appeared on the books, but had already been sold. Investigations into the sell-off revealed that ADMARC continued to manage the SGR two years after the NFRA had been established for that purpose.

Because of conflicts of interest between the board of directors and trustees of NFRA, and the executive management of ADMARC and the senior officials of Finance, Agriculture, and Statutory Corporations, government was unable to sort out the confused lines of authority between ADMARC and NFRA. The result was decision paralysis. Without sufficient political will to install safeguards against nepotism and conflicts of interests, oversight was compromised, and ad hoc policy-making trumped sound management. In a neo-patrimonial sense, cronies within the senior ranks of government profited from a dysfunctional institutional arrangement that allowed them to squeeze rents from the ADMARC cash cow.

In light of these failures, privatizing ADMARC made good sense. However, as the first part of this case showed, market failures can and do accompany public sector failures, and when neither sector operates effectively--either alone or in tandem--food insecurity is made worse. Thus, resolving governance issues becomes more complicated when market distortions and public sector incapacity are subject to external tensions and ideological leanings between free market and public intervention strategies. Perhaps, a more focused examination of the efficacy of governance mechanisms—checks and balances and accountability structures—would have foreclosed opportunities for rent-seeking behavior and held political expediency in check.

Nonetheless, accountability mechanisms are emerging. The response of the national media, the ACB, Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, the Presidential inquiry, and President Mutharika himself provide ample evidence of popular pressure, checks and balances in the political system, and political will that did not exist prior to multi-party democracy. Civil society organizations are also engaged with these issues. The investigatory process despite its capacity limitations of funding, resources, and expertise shows signs that holders of state authority are willing to execute the law and hold accountable high-level officials who cannot exercise power without legal foundation.

## 7 Food Security Critical Issue: Access to Land

### 7.1 Introduction

In an agrarian society such as Malawi land is an asset critical to the achievement of food security. Besides being the country's primary economic resource, land is the basis for most livelihoods. Issues relating to land administration (tenure) and its management (utilization for production) have direct relationships to two elements of food security in Malawi: availability through production of food crops (primarily maize); access through income earned from production of cash crops (primarily tobacco, rice and vegetables) or agricultural labor, including *ganyu* labor on someone else's land.

Over the last decade or more, the combined effects of rapid population density, eroding farm labor due to HIV/AIDS, degrading soils and inconsistent farm inputs, and lack of viable income alternatives, has affected rural livelihoods. The availability of sufficient arable land has become a major constraint to food security, especially in the southern part of the country.

Following the first multiparty elections and installation of a new government in 1995, land scarce farmers in Thyolo and Mulanje districts in Malawi's southern region seized land from freehold tea estates, resulting in forceful eviction. It is not surprising that these events led to the establishment of the Presidential Enquiry into Land Policy Reform in 1995 that conducted an inquiry, and, with donor support, designed a national land policy. The Malawi National Land Policy (MNLP) was approved by the government administration in 2002, but has yet to be debated and implemented. With a \$27 million World Bank grant, plans are underway to implement a pilot which includes purchasing and redistributing idle lands to land land-stressed farmers.

Donors find the effort to implement the Malawian National Land Policy proceeding slowly but well when compared with other countries in the region. The new policy seeks to formally recognize, protect, and codify customary land holdings. It would remove dual systems that penalized the poor, customary land holder, but concerns persist that given fungible title, the poor will quickly sell their land when short-term survival is a stake, leaving them destitute and land more concentrated in the hands of the relatively better off.

Controversy and complexity of the policy has delayed formal parliamentary debate and enactment of its enabling legislation. The roots of the controversy revolve around governance issues. Central to the debate is the need to harmonize the decentralized traditional authority structures with the state's authority. Titling threatens to disassociate land from social, kinship, and the symbolic connections of Malawian's to their land. The policy also raises questions surrounding who is a non-Malawian and what land rights a non-Malawians should have.

### 7.2 Land, Livelihoods and Food Insecurity

Land pressure is high in Malawi, with a per-capita land holding size of less than 230 square meters or 0.23 hectares. With a population growth rate of over 2.2% per year, the decline in per capita land holding size, which began, in the mid-1970s, will without remedial measures, continue (Kishindo 2004: 217-18).

Of the approximately 7.7 million hectares of available land for farming, 1.2 million hectares are held by large scale estates. Estate agriculture is primarily conducted on forty freehold estates that trace their legitimacy from treaties of cession signed between colonial authorities and local chiefs between 1881-93. These holdings produce primary agricultural exports such as coffee, tea, tobacco, bananas and macadamia nuts that continue to be the foundation of Malawi's export economy. Labor on the estates provides income to a substantial percentage of the country's rural population, in Malawi's southern districts of Chikwawa, Mulunge, and Thyolo in particular. Ownership of most freehold estates has been passed to foreign-based investors or corporations while the leasehold estate land remains granted to Malawi citizens.

Patterns of land allocation directly affect livelihoods in at least three ways. First, given the diminishing size of land holdings, "micro land holder" families are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain sufficient food to sustain minimum caloric requirements. Results of a Government of Malawi survey of conducted in 1998 found that over 64% of rural families were below the national poverty line.<sup>16</sup> Paul Kishindo in his commentary on the MNLP observed that by 1997, the average family holding in Malawi was estimated at less than 0.400 ha. Without access to alternative sources of land other than previously uncultivated hillsides, cultivators are compelled to use their small plots continuously. This results in further degradation of already relatively infertile land (Kishindo 2004).

Secondly, increasing land pressures make households more vulnerable by threatening what has traditionally been a key asset and safety net. Over eighty percent of Malawians are employed in agriculture and urban dwellers consider access to land to be part of their social security system in old age. In addition, salaried dwellers of Blantyre and Lilongwe expect to retire to ancestral villages and work the land to supplement their pensions (Kishindo 2004).

Finally, there is increasing competition for *ganyu*; that is employment working the land of others, as a growing number of smallholders and landless seek alternative sources of income. The situation for the landless and most small holders becomes especially acute during the January-March "hunger season" when available food supplies and *ganyu* labor opportunities diminish until the harvest commences in early April.<sup>17</sup>

This combination of factors has meant that land pressures have become an increasingly significant constraint to rural livelihoods and agricultural productivity. Equitable opportunities for access to arable land and the conditions that enable investment in it and its efficient transfer are therefore necessary--though not sufficient—for the country to achieve food security.

Policy options for address the critical shortage of land are limited. The Malawi National Land Policy, discussed below, focuses on the voluntary purchase of idle land and resettlement of households. The Government of Malawi and other stakeholders including donors, civil society and land tenure experts however agree that putting more land under small holder agriculture might only marginally increase total agricultural output. This by no means offers a complete solution to Malawi's chronic and increasing poverty. Some experts suggest easing land pressures

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<sup>16</sup> Defined by the Govt. of Malawi's *Integrated Household Survey 1997-98* as having sufficient resources to meet minimum daily requirements of 2200 kcal per day plus costs of basic non-food items costing MK 10.47.

<sup>17</sup> Onset of the "hunger season". Traditionally this occurs around end-December when maize from the harvest in April have begun to diminish. Over the past decade, the "hunger season" now begins in chronically food deficit areas of Malawi as early as November and lasts until the new crop is harvested the following April.

will only happen through migration to other, less populated areas in the region, such as Mozambique.

The appeal of land redistribution shouldn't be assumed. In the areas the team visited, there were those who were not in favor of the reallocation of large estates. Those interviewed by the Assessment Team in Chikwakwa, Mulange, Phalombe and Zomba Districts included academics, district-level agricultural and planning officials, NGO representatives and a village headman near Nyombe, Chikwawa District. We found that the freehold estates were viewed as sources of employment, health care, schooling and loans.

According to Oxfam's representative in Mulange, survey of tea estate workers in the District conducted by Oxfam-UK Intl. found that 90% of the respondents did not want to participate in reallocation of freehold estate lands. This suggests that despite low wages in the estate sector, employment reduces vulnerability and is viewed as a fundamental part of livelihood strategy – at least for those able to access it.

### **7.3 Land Crisis and Government Response to the Problem**

Issues concerning land administration and management of its resources have been dominant themes in Sub-Saharan African history since the advent of European settlements and the establishment of extractive colonial economies.<sup>18</sup> Regardless whether the purpose was agriculture, mining, administrative control or trade, land and property rights became the subject of intense imperial competition, conflict and in most cases, were at the root of the postwar African freedom struggle (Okoth-Ogendo 2004).

The action of the British colonial administration to appropriate the best lands for export agriculture, and the subsequent actions of the Banda regime to annex customary land in pursuit of an outward-oriented export growth strategy undermined the traditional and customary systems that governed land use. Banda aggressively pursued an export-oriented growth strategy, that brought the freehold estates, traditionally controlled by chiefs or headmen (customary land), into a reservoir of public and private holdings thus reinforcing the colonial practice of rural freehold estates based on adopted precedence of English Common Law. Banda also parceled out estates on 99-year leases to loyalists within his government and the Malawi Congress Party. These policies resulted in the removal of over one million hectares of customary land from traditional authority.

After the fall of Banda's one party rule in 1994, violence around squatting on estates in the south put the land situation high on the new government's agenda. Newly elected President Muluzi appointed a Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Land Policy Reform in 1995. Its findings released in 1996 and the results of other studies undertaken by DANIDA, DFID, the European Union, FAO, the World Bank, and USAID completed by 1999 concluded that potentially as much as 28% of the country's available arable land was idle. The primary recommendation was that the government purchase this land at fair market value and return it to traditional customary status to facilitate its access on leaseholds not to exceed fifty years (MLPPS 2002). Malawian estate holders on 99-year leases presently holding non productive land will be surveyed for purchase. In many cases, they have lacked the incentive, access to capital or both to make their holdings economically productive.

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<sup>18</sup> Land administration concerns the determination, recording and dissemination of information on the tenure, value and use of land. Land management relates to utilization of land and its resources from economic and environmental perspectives.

The Commission's findings were incorporated in the Malawi National Land Policy (MNLP) and approved by the Cabinet in January 2002. It is an effort to resolve what the Government perceives as constraints to Malawi's social and economic development resulting from its lack of a comprehensive policy of land administration and management.<sup>19</sup> To redress gender and other inequalities associated with traditional land inheritance practices and grant equal rights to both women and men the MNLP also called for registration of land allocated on a leasehold basis as "private customary estates".

With the rational but equitable policy of land administration and land management promised by the MNLP, it is conceivable that along with better utilization of the land, i.e. in higher value crops such as vegetables, cotton and fruit, that the poor rural majority of Malawians, could benefit. For instance, lack of investment capital, bad management and high rates of default has curtailed growth of agricultural production credit in Malawi. Legal clarification of property rights in a formal system of land transactions would eventually open the way for consolidation of fragmented pieces of land, and extension of credit by agricultural production cooperatives. Much will however depend on their ability (women in particular) to gain access to land either as new holders of private traditional estates or as lessees (Cammack et. al. 2003: 33).

#### **7.4 Challenges to Implementing the Malawi National Land Policy**

Government response to the land constraint to food security in Malawi has been slow and faces some constraints typical of countries in east and southern Africa. The challenges are rooted in five central questions:

1. Who is the legitimate authority over the land and who has rights to it?
2. What are the legal systems allocating land or adjudicating land disputes?
3. Are there social mechanisms for opposing forces to compete for setting policy and implementing the policy?
4. Are any groups systematically excluded from the dialogue over policy setting and thus opportunities to access land?
5. Does the capacity exist to implement the policy?<sup>20</sup>

The World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) has designed a \$27 million dollar grant in support the Government of Malawi's decentralization process. This pilot scheme will initially strengthen the capacities of the Districts of Machinga, Mangochi, Mulange and Thyolo to interact with landowners, local governments and NGOs involved in the land reallocation process. Disbursement of the grant remains dependent on passage of legislation enabling implementation of the Malawi Land Reform Program. The funds will be made available

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<sup>19</sup> The MNLP's primary objectives are to: "...ensure equal opportunities for the acquisition, use and enjoyment of land for its citizens..." and "...by clarifying and strengthening customary land rights, formalize the role of village chiefs in the traditional administration of customary land. Kishindo, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Adams (2004: 39).in citing research into the impact of formal titling in Kenya noted that the Commission of Enquiry into the Land Law System of Kenya led by the Hon. Charles Njonjo noted in its findings released in 2002 that formal titling when accompanied by a corrupt land administration can have a lethal impact upon the livelihoods of the poor.

to the districts through the government's Social Action Fund over a five-year period to increase the incomes of approximately 15 thousand families benefiting from a community-based land reform approach. Specifically, the IDA-funded activity will support: (1) community acquisition and equitable reallocation of land voluntarily sold by estate owners and/or transferred to adjacent communities by the government; (2) financing shelter and basic inputs and extension services (3) implementation of transparent procedures of titling, and registration of beneficiaries' property rights (IDA 2004: 2,4,7). Assuming this pilot activity produces favorable results, a scaled up version will expand into other land-stressed districts in the Southern Region including Chikwakwa, Chiradzulu, and Zomba.

Some of the key issues raised by the role of the state in attempting to address the problem of land access include the following:

First, larger than any other constraint is the need to resolve the issue of who is the legitimate arbiter of the ownership of customary land – the state or traditional leaders. Since most of land of smallholder is held under customary tenure arrangements, addressing this issue involves addressing the issue of how traditional systems of land distribution come into play. Land under traditional authority or customary land comprises holdings of a kinship group under the leadership of a headman or chief usually coming from a single lineage or descent group who symbolizes kinship unity. Although ownership of customary land passes through the kinship group, the chief acting as the village's de-jure administrator must sanction allocations of land to others according to current practices. In traditional systems, chiefs allocated "god given" land based on family needs, lineage affiliation, and evidence of productive utilization. Although weakened, these systems continue to be seen by villagers as the legitimate authority over land. Land continues to be vitally connected with cultural identity, family, and community life.

The MNLP recognizes the importance of providing those who assign their property rights (via mortgages, sale, rent, lease or bequeath) and those who receive them (creditors, lessees, inheritors) confidence in their transactions. While the MNLP claims it will improve security of tenure by registration of private customary estates and streamline this process, there is evidence of considerable misunderstanding, distrust, and resistance by traditional authorities to the state being the owner of last resort.

Thus, while the team was in Malawi, the press reported that local chiefs a seminar orienting them to the provisions of the new land policy resulted in vocal protest to policy provision 5.8.3 because it conferred power to the state to "appoint chiefs." "[No] person shall be recognized as a Chief unless the President is satisfied that the persons is fit to be a Chief, and has the support of traditional leaders to assist in the general administration of the District in which his area of jurisdiction is situated."

A related concern is derived from past alienation of lands from villages. Holders of "private customary estate land would conceivably obtain full legal status including the right to lease to a non-Malawian citizen and use it as security for a mortgage loan. Remaining to be clarified however is whether during the half-century lifespan of the lease, lessees would be permitted to re-lease or use the property in conjunction with other partners who may not necessarily be Malawi citizens. Ending access of foreigners to freehold or usufruct rights<sup>21</sup> to land in a country like

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<sup>21</sup> Rights in land held by a member of the land holding community (private customary land) or someone outside the kinship group who has obtained an express grant from the holding community. At times referred to as a customary freehold, or proprietary occupancy or determinable title. *Malawi National Land Policy*, Sect. 5.4: "Protecting the Interests of Customary Estate Holders" (MLPPS 2002).

Malawi is certainly understandable. Of concern to the chiefs however is whether a member of the kinship group having statutory “private customary” title could pass on usufruct rights to a lessee in the guise of a renewable fifty-year lease. For the chiefs, many of who are aware of the Treaties of Cession agreed to by their forefathers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, have expressed much concern about this issue (*The Daily Times*, Jan. 20, 2005). In recognition of this the policy states that the amount of freehold land in Malawi owned by non-citizens *will be frozen and limited to freehold land already registered to non-citizens as of 17<sup>th</sup> January 2002*. Non-citizens will no longer be allowed to acquire title to any new freehold estate.

On January 26 2005, the Minister of Lands, Housing and Surveys Bazuka Mhango announced that the Malawi Land Reform Program Implementation Strategy’s enabling legislation will not be tabled for Parliamentary debate when the March session opens as had been planned. It thus appears that the Ministry is sensitive of its need to clarify legally and programmatically these and other controversial aspects of the MNLP. Minister Mhango nevertheless remained firm in his position that the MNLP had recommended that land should be vested in the Republic and that powers to administer it should be vested in land management committees (*The Daily Times*, Jan. 27, 2005: 4).

Secondly, informal land transactions are expanding outside any enacted rule of law, as the land bill awaits enactment by the Parliament. According to several sources interviewed, it will also address the needs and legally formalize and add transparency to a growing informal market in land sales, leasing and other arrangements. The informal land market is growing as more of the country’s semi-urban and rural areas are drawn into developing urban economies and Malawi’s deep poverty encourages distress sales and loss of land-based livelihoods during times of social shocks, increasingly the result of food insecurity and severe food shortages. Reports to the team from civil society organizations and the Anti-corruption Bureau suggest that disputes over land are a high priority. While actions of the land poor to capture land from freehold estates is always a potential, the team found that when villagers were surveyed, they viewed the estates as sources of income support and other benefits and had generally benign attitudes toward them.

Third, the team was encouraged that the land policy was developing in an atmosphere of healthy policy dialogue and debate around a potential contentious issue. Although it was beyond the scope of this study to trace the debate, DFID claims that its funding of a participatory discussions of the presidential report the MNLP drafts has prevented land from becoming a “political football”. Overall, the upcoming parliamentary debate, free media coverage, and the network of civil society organizations addressing land issues encouraged the team that the policy dialogue was open and vigorous.

A variety of civil society organizations including the Civil Society Advocacy Taskforce (working closely with the Ministry and the Special Law Commission on Land), National Farmers Association of Malawi, National Smallholder Farmers’ Association of Malawi, the Malawi Association of Bankers, the Tea Association, The Small Holder Tobacco Association, as well as various local advocacy groups and NGOs are following the process. In October 2000, the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Surveys convened a National Conference Workshop in October, 2000 at which an early draft of the MNLP was reviewed and stakeholder consultations have continued since, many of these have received media attention.

The Muluzi and Mutharika governments appear have gone about the promulgation of a comprehensive land policy thus far in a bipartisan and transparent fashion may result in Malawi’s avoiding the bitterness and often strife prevailing in rural Kenya some 30 years after enacting its national land reform policy.



Fourth, it should be pointed out that the group most excluded from the policy debate and likely to benefit least from the policy is women, who suffer a lower status than men. There are problems of inheritance affecting both men and women when land passes through lineages, kinship and marriage practices--depending on the rules of inheritance that are patrilocal or uxorilocal where men relocate to women's land after marriage. However, women are not highly active in the policy debate, and although the policy claims to be gender neutral, it is unclear if land can be titled to women. Certainly in the patrilineal system, women do not inherit their husband's land. It instead passes to his closest male relative usually a brother or an uncle. If a woman's marriage ends in her husband's death or by divorce, she is in most instances forced to return to her home village. An uncle or other maternal relative might allocate her a small plot but she cannot count on an inheritance of land, even from her parents.

As a result of such traditions, women more often than not, the poorest of Malawians find their ability to access food by growing it sharply curtailed. Their ability to access food by purchase with whatever income they are able to eke out, may also be affected. In fact, most women in the countryside who are widowed or divorced fall into permanent debt while trying to meet their basic nutritional needs. This problem is worsened by the costs of child-rearing and in the midst of Malawi's growing HIV/AIDS epidemic and the burdens of prolonged medical care and funerals. A study commissioned by CARE/Malawi found that female-headed households in patrilocal communities had 50% or less the level of agriculturally productive assets held by male-headed households.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the state faces the challenge of decentralizing land administration in a way that can be harmonized with traditional authorities' role. Assessment of the policy process prepared for DFID in December 2004 noted delays in introducing the enabling legislation might be problematic. Expert opinion warned of several heretofore unforeseen complexities of the proposed reforms; chief of which would be to ensure that registration of customary rights do not extinguish common law rights and replace them with statutory rights of lesser content. They claim that the proliferation of local land committees is excessive. Experience in Sub-Saharan Africa shows that framers of these policies have underestimated the complexity of land issues and overestimated the capacity in state land institutions to implement reforms.<sup>23</sup> However, if done correctly, the process could spin off a number of other good governance outcomes important to poverty and food insecurity reduction more generally, e.g., transparency and popular participation at all levels.

However, to date traditional leaders' role in allocating community land under their stewardship, and the legal status of titled leaseholds are still not well understood by local government officials, village headmen (chiefs) or potential parties to land transaction in Malawi. Requiring further clarification in particular are the relationships and responsibilities of the chiefs and the "land management committees." Our observations suggest that village headman or chiefs fear that the MNLP, its provision for land management committees to be involved in land administration and management will lessen their authority while greatly increasing their responsibility to make the policy work. Many chiefs are apparently concerned that while the Policy will result in further erosion of their traditional authority while forcing them to be the arbitrator of complicated but contentious issues concerning tenure and property rights.

Local government units, i.e. district commissioners, planning, and agricultural extension officers would most likely carry the greatest burden in implementing the MNLP which, if it is to achieve

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<sup>22</sup> Tango (2004) citing C. Pinder's study: *Economic Pathways for Malawi's Rural Households*, page 4.

<sup>23</sup> Annex 3: "Note on Titling and Registration of Customary Land" in Adams (2004: 38-40).

maximum impact on Malawi's food security, must be accompanied by a sustained effort in better land utilization. A role they are presently poorly equipped to carry out.

An apparent issue that the team was not able to explore is the extent that the ruling elite in the Government in Malawi have leasehold estates carved from customary land by the Banda government. An estimated 30,000 smaller estates producing primarily tobacco and maize, (two-thirds of which comprise less than 20 hectares are held by Malawians). A governance constraint could arise if key officials' interest in their estate land militates against the acceptance and implementation of a policy that would favor the interest of small holders with access only to customary land.

## 8 Conclusions: Governance Constraints to Food Security

Achieving food security is among the most significant development challenges facing Malawi. In fact, many would say it is the most urgent task facing the country today. Achieving sustainable food and nutrition security requires a complex of public and private actions. It implies reaching a number of development goals, including stimulating agricultural production, expanding livelihood opportunities, increasing incomes, and improving nutrition directly at household level. As we began to discuss food security with key stakeholders, it became clear to us that for Malawi, food security had become virtually synonymous with development.

This study reviewed food security policy and public sector effectiveness in Malawi, and examined how three cases--access to inputs, safety nets, and land reform--illustrated examples of each. We saw which constituencies most influenced policy and we saw how public sector capacity affected policy implementation and outcomes.

This chapter reflects on the links between governance and food security, and considers the different ways state action affects food security. First, there are things the state does that may undermine food security, intentionally or unintentionally. Many of these are unrelated to food security policy. They may involve discrimination against a certain ethnic group, the percent of budget spent on military, confiscatory land policy, and conflict. Second, there are the governance constraints that limit the effectiveness of state interventions such as safety nets, feeding programs and extension services designed to improve food security. Third, there are sins of omission--what should the state be doing (but isn't) that contributes to food security?

We use these questions, as well as concepts from the Democracy and Governance Assessment Framework (USAID 2000), to discuss the governance links to food security in Malawi. Hopefully, the assessment tool and the findings from the study will help USAID and its partners assess the policies and performance of various agents involved in land reform and in shaping food safety nets, and will suggest appropriate development responses for these and other food security problems.

### 8.1 Governance: What Role in Food Insecurity?

Malawi has grown increasingly vulnerable to food insecurity. There has been a gradual but steady deterioration of agricultural productivity per capita while eroding livelihoods. With the majority of the population depending on subsistence agriculture as their primary food source, much of the population is vulnerable to acute food insecurity from economic, climatic or other shocks.

This study has pointed to multiple contributing factors to this vulnerability of food availability, food access and food utilization. First, is the continued decline in Malawi's already depleted levels of soil fertility, which contribute to low crop yields without the intensive application of fertilizer. Second, this problem is greatly compounded by the increasing pressures on land. Average plot sizes in Malawi continue to decline.

A third problem has been the weak performance of tobacco as a cash crop for small holders. World prices for tobacco prices have dropped over time, leaving small farmers without the expected boost to their incomes in tandem with lowered production of maize. Fourth, as a result of population growth, and swelling numbers of youth, there is intense competition for *ganyu* labor

on estates, suppressing wages. Off farm employment opportunities are even scarcer. The absence of rural employment opportunities, or urban opportunities for that matter, reinforce household dependency on subsistence agriculture for food security..

Fifth, the impact of HIV/AIDS and malaria on human health and productivity must be underscored. Malawi has one of the higher HIV prevalence rates in the world. The impact of illness and poor health which saps strength and affects household productivity is hard to quantify, but is clearly significant.

This partial list of factors contributing to vulnerability illustrates that Malawi suffers from many development problems that are hard to overcome. Land-locked and bereft of valuable natural resources, Malawi's problem has been referred to by some observers as the "perfect storm"; characterized by poverty, disease, and climatic shocks (Sachs 2005). Its small size and lack of strategic importance to donors further complicates its problems.

What role, then, does poor governance play in this maelstrom? Poor governance is clearly not a single factor explanation for food insecurity in Malawi. The team found that poor governance may not even be the primary causal factor that has led to Malawi's increasing vulnerability to food insecurity. In the absence of conflict, institutionalized forms of ethnic exclusion, profoundly distorted agricultural policies (such as Zimbabwe under Mugabe); and given the presence of structural sources of vulnerability, the team suggests that poor governance could be considered a contributing factor in this case, rather than a primary causal factor. State actions did not appear to be the driving force behind most significant causes of vulnerability and food security. Where governance has had a more significant impact has been in the limited capacity to implement effective policy and program responses to address vulnerability and meet these development challenges.

This is not to say that the state actions have not had, at times and in certain policy areas, negative impacts on food security. The mismanagement of the Strategic Grain Reserve was a case of poor governance having a devastating impact on food security. When the Reserve was most needed, it failed terribly, attributable to poor information systems, bad management and outright corruption.

While the issues of the Grain Reserve are unquestioningly the result of bad management, there are other issues where there is more debate. Some argue that the dearth of fertilizer is due in part to heavy state interventionism in the fertilizer market, which inhibits private sector involvement. Similarly, the government intervention in the price of maize is believed to have contributed to problems with access.

Overall critics of the government's handling of food policy focus is its continued interventionism, and its disincentive effect. Others counter this argument, believing the private sector is too weak to fill in the gaps left by ADMARC the buyer and seller of last resort for maize in remote and hard to reach rural areas, or that the lack of income of the population is an inherent limit to the extent to which a fertilizer market will develop.

The team felt that the more significant constraints lie in the public sector's ability to develop and implement policies and programs to address the food security problems facing the country. The three case problems outline a range of governance constraints in the Malawian government's efforts to develop food safety nets to ensure access to food, provide inputs to increase maize availability and distribution land, thus providing assets to vulnerable households. Public sector organizations exhibited numerous capacity problems. The failure of institutions to deliver services effectively and fulfill their mandates is the result of more than resource limitations, as

real as those may be. Institutional weakness can be driven by broader patterns of political competition, as well as formal and informal ‘rules of the game.’ The key elements of democracy and governance as outlined in the DG assessment framework can be used to help us understand the forms and sources of institutional weakness in Malawi.

## **8.2 Key Elements of Democracy and Governance**

Five variables are included in the democracy and governance (DG) assessment framework: consensus, rule of law, competition, inclusion, and good governance (USAID 2000). Consensus asks whether a basic consensus on the fundamental rules of the game exists, and whether the political contest is played by those rules. Rule of Law looks at whether life, liberty, and property are bound by a rule of law. Competition includes but goes beyond elections to examine whether there is competition of ideas, media, and a healthy set of checks and balances in government and civil society. Inclusion gets at whether parts of the population are excluded from meaningful political, social, and economic participation and whether participation is high or low. Good governance refers to the way in which public and private sector institutions actually work. What is the capacity for good governance in the state and social institutions? It was not our intention to apply these concepts in a broad sweep of the DG sector, rather we attempted to adapt the principles meaningfully to the issue of food security policy and the policy making arena.

### Consensus

Consensus issues in Malawi that affect food security surround the question of the role of the state. There seems to be a general consensus among Malawians, reflected in government and throughout much of civil society, that the state should play an active role in meeting basic needs. The government’s reluctance to further scale back the roles of ADMARC and NGR, despite donor pressure, is partly a response to public expectations that the state should ensure access to maize. The consensus issue, therefore, is not a domestic one. There exists a difference in vision between Malawians and donors concerning the role of the state in addressing food security. Donors are an influential ‘stakeholder’ in the food security policy process. This push and pull of interests - while not between domestic actors as ‘consensus’ issues are normally defined - has nonetheless generated tensions that have a ripple affect throughout policymaking, and public sector governance more broadly.

### Rule of Law

The land access case study reveals a fundamental issue of how to harmonize the roles of traditional authorities with formal state structures. There exists a need to resolve the issue about who owns customary land, and who makes the rules about tenure. Since most of land of smallholders is held under customary tenure arrangements, addressing this issue involves dealing with how traditional systems of land distribution come into play, and where the authority lies to make decisions regarding tenure. The issue is very complex, and on one level juxtaposes modern state authority residing in government and agency bureaucrats against traditional cultural authority residing in clans and chieftaincies. It is a question if law can resolve the land issue because in the minds of Malawians is lay outside the scope of the state, thus making it an issue belonging more to state consensus.

In addition, a weak framework for land ownership and titling allows informal land transactions to expand outside any enacted rule of law. A codified land law still awaits enactment by the Parliament while. The growing informal land market is a factor of Malawi’s increasing poverty,

which encourages distress sales and loss of land-based livelihoods. This gap in rule of law increases vulnerability to social shocks and severe food shortages, and reduces longer-term resilience to economic and climatic shocks.

### Competition

Political competition in the multi-party era has contributed to the politicization of food security policy. This in turn has widened the gap between popular policy visions and technical prescriptions favored by donors. To Malawians maize is life giving and synonymous with food. As such, its importance to politics and to its place on the policy agenda cannot be underestimated. It is 'political dynamite' as one observer told us. In part democratization has created a crucible for political competition around food security issues in their simplest forms. Issues such as maize prices, immediate food relief from real or perceived shortages, fertilizer price subsidies, and access to free inputs have entered the debate. Which politician can promise the biggest fertilizer subsidies? Is maize self sufficiency tied up with popular perceptions of state sovereignty, as it once was? Should prices be controlled?

Another form of competition is that of ideas. Free and open deliberation and openings in the public realm increasingly characterize current events. The scheduled tabling for the March 2005 session of Parliament of the SGR maize scandal indicates that public policy decisions and rule making are beginning to become part of a process that provides elected representatives and citizen groups opportunities to access information and to conduct free and open debate of public issues. Similarly, coverage in the national newspapers of the SGR scandal is indicative of the respect for civil liberties, freedom of expression, and the opening up of the public realm in Malawi. Civil society organizations moreover are regular commentators in the media on different policy issues. Such action is critical for access to information, for providing input to public policy debate, to ultimately to checking state power and strengthening governance processes.

### Inclusion

Inclusion was not as significant an issue as the team had expected. Food insecurity doesn't affect a particular ethnic or geographic grouping. Certainly there is a small relatively wealthy elite with disproportionate access to land and the policy-making apparatus, that has growth from the estate two tier economy. But the government seeks expand inclusion of the population affected by food insecurity in policy-making, which affects the majority of the people in one way or the other.

Perhaps the group most excluded from the policy debate and likely to benefit least from the policy is women, who suffer a lower status than men. There are problems of inheritance affecting both men and women when land passes through lineages, kinship and marriage practices--depending on the rules of inheritance that are patrilocal or uxorilocal where men relocate to women's land after marriage. However, women are not highly active in the policy debate, and although the policy claims to be gender neutral, it is unclear if land can be titled to women. In fact, most women in the countryside who are widowed or divorced fall into permanent debt while trying to meet their basic nutritional needs. HIV/AIDS has intensified land grabbing of lands belonging to widows of AIDS victims.

### Governance

Critical food security problems, such as access to inputs and land, are visibly linked to governance and public sector capacity in multiple ways. Weak institutions are challenged by the complexity of the food security problem, and the lack of clarity of government vision on how to

pursue food security. Consultative mechanisms exist, so there is increased openness in policymaking, but often these consultative bodies are not where real decisions and power is exercised. Weak accountability has impacted public sector effectiveness for food security at the national level (e.g., the National Grain Reserve mismanagement), while donors have pointed a lack of accountability at the local level, and have in the past worked outside of local government on safety nets.

Weak commitment to decentralization has hampered capacity. A more robust commitment to implementing decentralized local governance would balance the advantages and disadvantages of centralized rule and involve Malawians more fully in a social contract with the state. It should also prove an opportunity to sort out ambiguities between traditional and modern-state rule.

One underlying factor that contributes to weak governance is the patrimonial legacy of the Banda era affects government leadership and the functioning of the state. Food (primarily maize) and inputs are resources that can fuel the patronage systems.

### **8.3 Reflections on Future Directions**

As this report was being prepared in mid-May for technical review, Malawi was expecting a national maize shortfall of between 400,000 to 500,000 MT. Maize production was expected to drop by 25% from 1.7m MT in the previous season to 1.4m MT, representing about 20 percent of Malawi's calorie needs. It was anticipated that *ganyu* opportunities would be limited, and when maize prices rose households would be forced to sell livestock to generate cash to buy food unless appropriate interventions were taken to cover the shortfall. The government announced its intention to purchase 100,000 MT of maize for sale to the public, and, with DFID's assistance, it had already put out a tender for 29,000 MT of maize to replenish the Strategic Grain Reserve.

According to a *FEWSNET* bulletin, the crop losses were due to a combination of poor rains, a shortage of basal dressing fertilizer during the first half of the season, and late distribution of free inputs under the Targeted Input Program (TIP). The bulletin noted that the rains quit just when they were most needed as the maize went to tassel and began to cob. Two out of three of these reasons for crop failure could have been prevented through better governance.

What would need to change from a governance point of view to improve food security in Malawi? Considering the findings in this report, the team advances several conclusions and examples of actionable recommendations.

#### ***State Legitimacy and Food Security are Inextricably Bound***

Politicization of food security is nearly unavoidable given that state legitimacy is so dependent on maize availability. It is almost inconceivable that a government would long survive in Malawi if maize availability and affordability were jeopardized. This truism perhaps explains Mutharika's seemingly rash June 24, 2004 campaign promise, which followed on the heels of Malawi's worst food shortage in years. The more people affected by food insecurity, the higher the issue moves up on the policy agenda and the more political and immediate it becomes. During Banda's time the crisis of 1987 precipitated policy changes (from Malawians in exile). After 1994 Presidents Muluzi and Mutharika have had to cope with internal political pressures for social protection policies.

'Politics smoothing' actions are one possible solution. Politics smoothing actions would anticipate political manipulation of food policies for political advantage and would aim to keep the lid on unrealistic promises, prevent erratic policy swings, dampen down ad hoc policy-making, and avoid critical delays in policy implementation as witnessed in 2004/05. If utilized effectively, they would lend more predictability to state actions that encourage private sector investment.

One example of such action would be a multi-year inputs plan as part of a longer-term strategy to ensure availability of fertilizer and seeds to vulnerable small holders in a sustainable way. The plan would assume that the small holder sector will exist for the foreseeable future, that inputs are vital to food production, and that some system--whether subsidies, transfers, vouchers, or something else--needs to be articulated. Public debate over the plan ideally would take place in an off-election year to discourage the type of political manipulation that occurred in 2004/05.

### ***A Strong Social Contract Requires Local Ownership of Food Security Policy***

A strong social contract between a people and their governments is the hallmark of legitimate and effective political competition in democratic societies. It is characterized by functional institutions such as political parties, vibrant civil society and free media each of which links people in some way to government.

In aid-dependent Malawi, choices in public policy are determined as much if not more for reasons of donor influence than as a result of internal competition for popular sovereignty. Donors possess the resources that government needs. Government can and does push back on donor influence. However, donor ideologies, policies, and programs implicitly, if not explicitly, shape the contours of policy debate and the food security policies. They also shape programs from treadle pumps to tubers. As one Member of Parliament told the team, "Government should come up with a Malawi policy, not a donor policy."

Donor advice on growth, agriculture, and poverty reduction changes depending on international development trends at the IFIs, and throughout the donor community. In retrospect, the timing, pace and substance of liberalization reforms were inappropriate for Malawi. Not only did they weaken the public sector, but they also exacerbated poverty and malnutrition. Local ownership of the process would not eliminate policy swings, but the swings would be Malawian-driven.

Policy debates have been taking place mainly between donors and government rather than between and among Malawians. Because donors are accountable to their home governments and boards of directors, the locus of this debate has cut citizens out of the policy loop and weakened the social contract between citizens and their government. If ultimately government is not accountable to its citizens, there is no social contract, and therefore no meaningful voice, participation, ownership, representation—the nuts and bolts of democratic governance, which stems from the relationship. The absence of such a contract led to public blame of the IMF for the scandalous behavior surrounding the SGR on the grounds that IMF concern about Malawi's lack of fiscal prudence outweighed its concern for national food security.

A Malawian-centered debate needs to involve Malawian citizens, civil society, associations, and the private sector. As the findings from the report indicated, two of Malawi's key sectors—civil society and the private sector--have been marginal to food security. Where they have been involved, it has been through formal and temporary channels such as by invitation to comment on the MPRSP process, or to attend the National Food Security Joint Task Force meetings.



Greater participation by these groups is possible through various venues and mechanisms. Representative political institutions such as Parliament ought to be playing a larger role in food security matters, especially when it comes to major policy decisions such as inputs, and major debates over state intervention versus laissez-faire or self-sufficiency versus export-led agriculture.

Similarly, farmers associations such as the NUF and the NASFAM should increasingly articulate the interests of small holders. Donors could support nascent NGOs and civil society sector networks like MEJN who are opening up the arena to the voices of some of the weakest members of society. Donors could be supporting efforts to build meaningful associations of private sector entrepreneurs to revitalize the sector, to strengthen their business skills, to increase their knowledge of the policy process and how to engage government and civil society to promote their aims and find the common good. Finally, donors could strengthen local independent media to increase popular awareness and understanding of issues, and participation in national and local food security processes.

### ***Institutionalization of Food Security is Vital for Capacity-building and Sustainability***

Ownership leads to institutionalization. Donors and foreign implementing partners have taken perhaps a too large role in designing strategies and implementing food programs over the years, which has compromised local ownership of and responsibility for food security. Capacity constraints are often the justification for this, and continued incapacity is the result.

Food security presents its own challenges. It is difficult to implement across agencies in transitional environments. Health and agriculture extension are seriously understaffed, and local governments require capacity-building. It is doubtful whether the Ministry of Agriculture had the political capital and the technical capacity to coordinate the food security policy. Given that lives are at risk, the tendency is to take the most expeditious route to implementation, which means donor technicians and international NGOs fill the vacuum.

At the national level, an egregious example of this tendency was the way the core technical unit of the Food Security Joint Task Force within the Ministry of Agriculture operated without any Ministry civil servants. It was staffed exclusively by contract staff. However, it was clear that once their funding and contracts ended, so would this valuable contribution to food security.

At the local level, a weak commitment by central government to decentralization has hampered capacity-building. Consequently, the lack of requisite skills on the ground means that donors would rather engage their own consultants and staff rather than risk failure. As a result, development becomes projectized, bypasses government channels, and dodges the more difficult job of creating sustainable interventions. TIP, MASAF and other programs are missed opportunities to institutionalize programs and to develop local capacity.

One way to strengthen local responsibility for food security would be to encourage community grain banks. In the Oromia region of Ethiopia some grain banks are owned and operated by local associations, many of them organized wholly by women. The members are drawn from the immediate community. They elect their officers and train accountants and managers to operate the banks, and offer members better than market prices both at harvest and lean seasons. Government and donors may provide the start up capital or contribute to building the storage facilities. Through developing bylaws and operating principles, the grain banks have become school houses for democracy.

A second example would be to encourage creative partnerships between food security implementers and various government actors. The team saw an interesting case of a US PVO that was working closely with the local Ministry of Agriculture extension office to provide services to villages. In view of the need to capacitate local government, it would make sense to encourage service delivery in partnership with local government structures. Even the slightest investment in the financial, administrative and political skills of local government and line ministry personnel could prove valuable in responding to natural disasters, reacting to emergencies, estimating harvests, projecting food shortages, and distributing food aid.

### ***Support Accountability Mechanisms***

Accountability mechanisms are emerging. The response of the ACB, Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, and the Presidential inquiry to the abuses encountered in the sell-off of the SGR, provide examples of checks and balances in the political system that did not exist prior to multi-party democracy. Despite its capacity limitations of funding, resources, and expertise, the ACB indicates that holders of state authority are willing to execute the law and hold accountable high-level officials. Reforms to improve management of the SGR also show that when political will and donor commitment are available in sufficient quantity, reforms can be made quickly and effectively.

The SGR maize scandal proved to be a focusing event that galvanized media, civil society, donors, and eventually the government and head of state. President Mutharika has taken full advantage of it to advance a strong anti-corruption agenda. Indeed, his urban base of support materialized because of his distance from the UDF. The government, the ACB, and influential MPs presently constitute a policy community for reform—for transparency and accountability. The attraction of the movement is seen in the popular bandwagon effect for President Mutharika's new political party (DPP).

The current constellation of forces in Malawi offers donors a window of opportunity to strengthen accountability mechanisms. First, they could add more financial and technical support to fledgling government watchdogs like the ACB until alternative sources of financing could be found, some of which might come from case recoveries. Second, they could continue to strengthen the oversight and deliberative capacity of Parliament's committees. Third, they could support the development of independent media and media associations to increase public awareness of public processes, and hence increase the accountability of government agencies to the public for food security. Fourth, they could encourage civil society participation in local, district, and national governments, and in hot button policy issues such as land reform. Increased citizen participation if channeled peacefully, will affect the policy agenda in a positive way. The opportunity to promote integrity in politics and food security possibly has never been better, but immediate action is required, because policy windows close as quickly as they open.

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