



2020 CISANET OPEN DAY

EVENT REPORT

MAKING AGRICULTURE WORK IN MALAWI



Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET)

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Acknowledgements

The Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) would like to sincerely appreciate all the stakeholders who participated in this glorious event. Special thanks goes to our committed core group including the Board and the thematic leaders for their guidance and involvement in the planning and execution of the event. We would also like to acknowledge all our members and partners who sponsored the event: Action Aid, Concern World Wide, Care International, OXFAM, Total Land Care, Trocaire, ACE, AICC, NASFAM, USAID, and FANRPAN. Special recognition also to the Minister of Agriculture Honourable Lobin Lowe for gracing the event as well as to the keynote speaker Mr. Michael Gorelik for a wonderful presentation and discussion at the event.

Executive Summary

On December 3, 2020, CISANET hosted a very glaring open day event at the Bingu International Conference (BICC) under the theme “Making Agriculture Work in Malawi”. The guest of honor was the Minister of Agriculture Honourable Lobin Lowe while the keynote speaker was Mr. Michael Gorelik. The main purpose of the event was to showcase CISANET as an evidence-based, results-focused, accountable, and impactful network that is fit for purpose, whose key role is to enhance the collaboration of CSOs towards their contribution to the national agriculture policy goals. CISANET presented several key priority areas affecting the agriculture sector in the three thematic groups namely; access to profitable markets, livestock, aquaculture, and dairy development, and resilient and nutrition smart agriculture. This was followed by a plenary from which several key issues came out. The guest of honor responded to the issues and pledged to continue working hard to make agriculture work in Malawi.

Acronyms

ADMARC	: Agriculture Development and Marketing Corporation
AHLX	: Auction Holdings Commodities Exchange
AICC	: African Institute of Corporate Citizenship
BICC	: Bingu International Conference Centre
CAADP	: Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Plan
CISANET	: Civil Society Agriculture Network
COVID 19	: Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSOs	: Civil Society Organizations
FAO	: Food and Agriculture Organization
FUM	: Farmers Union of Malawi
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
NAIP	: National Agriculture Investment Plan
NASFAM	: National Smallholder Farmers Association
NGOs	: Non-Governmental Organizations
PPE	: Personal Protective Equipment
PPP	: Public Private Partnership
USAID	: United States Agency For International Development

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1.0 Background and Introduction

The NAP and the NAIP provide a clear and comprehensive policy guidance for agriculture development in Malawi, and aim at addressing the current challenges that make meaningful agricultural development difficult. The policy provides the relevant guidance for all sector players for increased production, productivity and real farm incomes. Notwithstanding, over the years, existence of agriculture related policies has not guaranteed the development of the sector. Malawi Government has consistently exceeded the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) recommendation of allocating at least 10% of the national budget towards the agriculture sector on average for the past six Financial Years (FY), 2013/14 to 2018/19. However, the growth rates in the agriculture sector in Malawi demonstrate a discrepancy between investments made in the sector and the level of growth attained. Attributing factors that hamper the growth of the sector include a mismatch in investment priorities, lack of transparency and accountability on the investments and climate related shocks.

To achieve positive growth of the sector, Malawi needs to (1) strengthen investments that would reverse the declining growth in the agriculture GDP; (2) provide for all budgets required to enhance resilience to climate related risks in the agriculture sector; (3) create an enabling environment for facilitation and promotion of profitable agricultural markets; and (4) reinforce mutual accountability and transparency. CISANET believes therefore that Government needs strong and coordinated support from the civil society towards these actions alongside other key stakeholders including the academia, development partners and the private sector.

In this light, CISANET organized an open day event to bring together civil society actors alongside other stakeholders to discuss current issues affecting the agriculture sector in Malawi and possible solutions towards a vibrant agriculture sector. The open day also provided an opportunity for CISANET members to showcase their contributions in the agriculture sector through displays and presentation. In attendance were 115 people (45 females and 70 males), including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), government officials, the media, academia, international organizations, the private sector, and different interested individuals (see annex A for full participant list). Minister of Agriculture Honourable Lobin Lowe was the guest of honour at the event, while Inosselia Country Director, Mr. Michael Gorelik was the keynote speaker. The theme of the event was *“Making Agriculture Work in Malawi”*.



CISANET members showcasing their work to the minister

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the event was to showcase CISANET as an evidence-based, results-focused, accountable, and impactful network that is fit for purpose, whose key role is to enhance the collaboration of CSOs towards their contribution to the National Agriculture Policy (NAP) goals. Specifically, the event aimed to: (1) bring together civil society actors alongside other stakeholders to discuss current issues affecting the agriculture sector in Malawi and possible solutions towards a vibrant agriculture sector, (2) provide an opportunity for CISANET members to showcase their contributions in the agriculture sector through displays and presentations, and (3) engage the Minister of Agriculture on salient issues in the agriculture section and necessary actions to address them. Below is an outline of discussions at the event

2.0 Welcoming remarks

2.1 Welcoming remarks by CISANET National Director, Mrs Pamela Kuwali

Mrs. Pamela Kuwali, the National Director of CISANET welcomed the Minister and participants at the event. She expressed her appreciation for their participation in the event and acknowledged the support from the CISANET core group and partners for their contributions towards the organization of the event.

Mrs. Kuwali then introduced the purpose of the event. She also noted that the CISANET board and all the members were grateful to have this opportunity to present to the Minister of Agriculture

and key stakeholders their perceptions as Civil Society on what must be done to make agriculture vibrant in Malawi.

2.2 Opening remarks by CISANET Board Chair, Dr Felix Lombe

CISANET Board Chair Dr. Felix Lombe officially opened the event. He said the aim of the 2020 CISANET Open Day is to bring together civil society actors along with other stakeholders to discuss the current issues that are impeding agricultural development in Malawi. He further added that CISANET also believes that the work of the individual Network members makes significant contributions to the 2025 goals and commitments set in the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Plan (CAADP) at the regional level.



CISANET Board Chair Dr Felix Lombe giving opening remarks to the audience

Dr. Lombe also noted that the Open Day event was happening at a time when the agriculture landscape was rapidly changing in the country as well as across the continent; highlighting an example of how Malawi continues to be a net importer of basic food items, compared to several years back when Malawi could feed itself. He also noted the challenges of population growth versus low agricultural productivity. He also highlighted how the COVID 19 pandemic will push over 1.5 million people into extreme poverty. Dr. Lombe emphasized on the need to strengthen investments in the agriculture sector and to ensure that there is continued contribution to the GDP growth from the sector. He said that Malawi needs to provide the budget that is required to mitigate the risks of climate change and to create an environment that will facilitate the promotion of access to profitable markets.

3.0 Presentations

3.1 Key Note Address: Towards a Vibrant Agriculture Sector by Mr Michael Gorelik



Mr Michael Gorelik making his key note address

Country Director of Inosselia, Mr. Michael Gorelik made the first presentation titled “Towards a Vibrant Agriculture”. He specifically focused on the challenges and the opportunities that exist in the implementation of the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in Malawi. He provided an overview of the NAP and emphasized that PPPs are key in the implementation of the policy priority areas especially those focusing on access to markets and agricultural production. Mr. Gorelik pointed out that PPPs are a means for governments to gain much-needed private sector investment and expertise for economic development. He noted that Malawi lacks infrastructure in such areas as transport, irrigation, and electricity; but is also unable to adequately finance agricultural development projects. In this light, PPPs would be instrumental to cover the gaps through direct foreign investments in infrastructure and project financing.

Mr. Gorelik acknowledged the differing perceptions between the public and private sector; while the public sector is always sceptical of the motives of the private sector that may appear self-serving; the private sector is usually wary of the public sector’s bureaucratic tendencies and mismanagement of resources. Merging the two sides, therefore, is always difficult. He however noted that taken as a model, the Inosselia/Greenbelt PPP has successfully been able to overcome these challenges.

Mr. Gorelik used the example of the Inosselia/Greenbelt Greenhouse based vegetable farm PPP to highlight main success factors for PPP implementation which he said include commitments from a senior political body, pricing, investment, and risk management. He attributed the success of this project to community collaboration, prudent & well-informed oversight, precise PPP & JV agreements, state-of-the-art technology, and excellent on-farm management.

3.2 Presentation by CISANET: The Agriculture We Want: Optimal Agricultural Production and Vibrant Markets by Daqhuir Bashir



Mr Daqhuir Bashir making a presentation to the audience

Mr Dhaquirs Bashir of Concern World Wide gave a presentation on behalf of CISANET entitled “The Agriculture We Want”. In the presentation, he introduced CISANET’s strategic priorities and thematic areas namely; access to profitable markets, livestock, aquaculture and dairy development and resilient and nutrition-smart agriculture. Among other things, the presentation covered the following key issues:

CISANET’s contribution to the fight against COVID 19. It highlighted that CISANET members had contributed 1.4% of the National COVID 19 preparedness and Response Plan (NCPRP) budget. Thus about MK 2billion (USD 3million). Key interventions from members included: provision of equipment and other infection prevention materials such as personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers, buckets, soap etc., capacity development for

coronavirus case management, COVID 19 awareness campaigns (target groups and the general public) and Supporting the government/the districts on joint preparedness and response.

In the “**access to profitable markets**” thematic area, Mr Dhaquirs highlighted the following priority areas;

- i. Lack of structured markets for some key crops such as horticultural commodities. CISANET noted that horticultural production is very low in Malawi with less than 5%, yet it is the fastest growing sectors in most sub-Saharan African countries. The slow growth in Malawi was attributed partly to lack of formal markets.
- ii. Limited storage, transportation and telecommunications infrastructure to facilitate access to profitable markets. CISANET noted that value chain players i.e. farmers are not willing to pay warehouse/storage costs leading to negative implications on perishable goods. Furthermore, transportation costs are also high with regards to hiring of vehicles/trucks.
- iii. Inefficient price and export regulatory policies for cereals in the commodity markets.

CISANET suggested the following recommendations to address these problems:

- i. The government Fast tracks the Export Mandates for Grain and Grain commodities.
- ii. Review and enforce Contract Farming and Enhance and improve the Warehouse receipt system.
- iii. Address unstructured markets by putting in place policies to enhance use of structured markets
- iv. Subsidize rates on warehousing to make it more affordable to farmers. CISANET proposed that ADMARC should outsource expertise on warehouse management or give up space for the private sector to manage warehousing at a fee.
- v. Enhance ICT and digital marketing arrangements to explore the export markets.
- vi. Form a national agro-dealer association for input and output market that will look into issues of infrastructure as part of storage. And review the pricing of commodities in the formulation of farm gate prices and gazette the farm gate prices for enforcement and also to Strengthening/Enforce contract farming.

In the “**livestock, aquaculture, and dairy development**” thematic area, the presentation highlighted the following priority issues:

- i. Considerably high losses of revenue from milk due to the recent chaos in the transport sector. CISANET noted that processors are not able to collect and transport milk (a very perishable product) due to the continued strike from truck drivers as a result dairy farmers are losing over MK22 million in revenue and the whole sector is losing over MK40 million in value addition per day.
- ii. CISANET noted that there are cheaper milk powders in the market that crowd out local milk farmers and do not provide a level playing field for the Malawian produced milk that is in infancy and does not have similar economies of scale.

CISANET suggested the following recommendations:

- i. The government engage with the Ministry of Trade and Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture to address the issue of continued strikes by truck drivers.
- ii. The government to engage Ministry of Trade on the Malawi offer for the African Continental Free Trade Area.
- iii. The government to introduce/increase duty or exercise tax on all milk powders and milk products under tariff heading 0401 of 25% and that they control/regulate milk powder imports to ensure that local production and Malawian small-scale farmers have a market for their milk and milk products.
- iv. It was also recommended that they reinvest the proceeds of taxes on imported milk and milk products to local dairy in order to develop the smallholder dairy sector in Malawi.

In the “**Resilient and Nutrition Smart Agriculture**”, one priority issue was flagged out. This was:

- i. The imbalance in financial support across NAIP intervention areas. CISANET noted that despite the increase in allocation for nutrition, there is still an imbalance in allocation to other key intervention areas in the NAIP, which will affect the development of a resilient and nutrition friendly agriculture. It was also pointed out that the current focus on maize in the AIP does not give room for crop diversification.

CISANET gave the following recommendations;

- i. The government to have an equitable credit, financing and advisory systems to assure access to agricultural resources for everyone,

- ii. Advancing the use of climate smart approaches and technologies,
- iii. Increase agricultural biodiversity,
- iv. Support for post-harvest management
- v. The government to conduct, document, and disseminate research and programme lessons.

3.3 Remarks by Guest of Honor: Minister of Agriculture, Hon Lobin Lowe

The guest of honor Honorable Lobin Lowe, started by acknowledging that the Open Day event that CISANET had organized was a significant one, he encouraged that many more events of this kind should follow. The honorable minister emphasized that it is time the country moved from poverty reduction to worth creation using the available natural resources. He acknowledged that the country has many valuable natural resources like water which covers one-third of the country yet it is not fully utilized by the small holder farmers.



The Minister Of Agriculture Honourable Lobin Lowe addressing the audience

In his remarks, the Honouble Minister of Agriculture urged CSOs present and all relevant stakeholders present at the event to "always put the farmer 1st" if the country is to make agriculture work. He challenged the stakeholders that fixing the sector is not the sole responsibility of the government but all the stakeholders involved. He bemoaned the lack of markets in the country and committed that in the next harvesting season, the government will buy maize and other produce as early as "April or May" before unscrupulous traders take advantage of the farmers.

The minister pointed out that the government is now more willing than ever to work hand in hand with CSOs on issues that affect the agricultural sector. The minister acknowledged the current challenges in the sector and agreed with CISANET to put a special focus on issues to do with markets for a farmer, strengthening farmer's resilience to weather and market shocks. He then assured that the government is aware of all the challenges that CISANET had presented, and is working hard to respond to them through sufficient budget allocations and policy implementation.

He also acknowledged that most agricultural commodities do not have structured markets except for tobacco. He reiterated the fact that there is an over-emphasis on maize production, such that the crop has been turned into a political tool. He however assured the group that this will change.

Referring to a young entrepreneur present in the meeting, the minister emphasized that entrepreneurship is the way to go as a country if we are to attain significant development. He encouraged banks to consider financing local farmers so that they are empowered to produce. He also asked Mr. Gorelik to engage a lot of local farmers to explore the external market.

3.0 Plenary

One key issue that came out of the discussion was that of structured markets. It was noted that the current regulations allow everyone including foreign traders to purchase commodities directly from farmers in the rural areas at very low prices leading to losses. It was noted for instance that at M'gona many tracks are seen purchasing groundnuts from the local farmers and exporting outside the country but there are no records of such at the ministry of trade. It was proposed that government should put in place regulations that make everyone sell their commodities through the existing structured markets at ACE and AHL Commodities Exchange to allow competition from the buyers and make the prices better for the local farmers.

Another key issue was concerning the agricultural commodity exports and the possibility of increasing the volumes exported by bringing farmers together. In response, Mr. Gorelik said their organization will be exporting its horticultural produce to Mozambique, Zambia, and South Africa. He said they are working on organizing exporters together and increase the volume to reduce the holding cost. Mr. Gorelik further said in the long run, a certain percentage of their profits will go to the government.

Of particular interest was the issue of sustainability. It was noted that usually when such initiatives as the one Inosselia is doing phase-out, there are no capacity-building exercises to the government staff, as a result, the country loses the important knowledge. In response, Mr. Gorelik pointed out that they have been engaged in several capacity-building exercises, the most recent being the capacity-building activity they conducted in Lumbadzi. He also said that Inosselia in itself has the capacity and all the necessary materials to support the project that they are implementing.

From the discussion, an important issue about inclusive wealth creation and self-reliance was raised. It was highlighted that small-scale farmers can commercialize as demonstrated by Mr. Gorelik. It was suggested that to create worth, there should be alliances between the government and the private sector and the inclusion of the communities and creation of anchor farms that can connect the local and international markets,

5.0 Closing Remarks

In closing the CISANET board chair Dr. Felix Lombe pledged to take the sector as their responsibility and not just the government's. He said if there is to be inclusive wealth creation, all of the stakeholders will have to hold hands in order to succeed. "We should focus on wealth creation and poverty will be eradicated," said Dr. Lombe. He finally thanked the participants for coming and assured the group that this was just the beginning of many more event of this kind that will follow.

6.0 Annexes

A. Participants list

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B. Picture highlights



Mr William Kawenda of AHL Commodities exchange (left) and Ms Melina Dzowela of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (right) making contributions to the discussion



Other key participants at the event



Key participants including Mr Thomas Munthali of NPC giving their feedback after the event



Mrs Pamela Kuwali CISANET National Director and Mr Robert Chingaye Interacting with the Minister of Agriculture Hon Lobin Lowe and the Principle Secretary Madam Erica Maganga

