



CISANET UPDATE

APRIL, 2020

Providing Space for Agricultural Policy Dialogue in Malawi

CSO's COVID19 RESPONSE

1. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In the midst of the COVID 19 Pandemic, CISANET secretariat conducted a rapid study to take stock of the response mechanisms that are being implemented by its members in the fight against the pandemic. This was done through a short online survey that was administered among its members. Specifically, the study sought to generate key information on the COVID 19 response interventions that are being implemented by CISANET members in Malawi. The outcomes of the study are expected to enhance coordination of the CSO COVID 19 response among the Network members. The information is also expected to promote complementarities among the members in order to avoid duplication of efforts and enhanced impacts.

In mid-April, CISANET developed an unstructured questionnaire which was circulated to its member through an online platform. The questionnaire was circulated using the updated membership database which currently comprises 38 members. Out of these, 27 responded representing a 71% response rate. The study collected qualitative data which was analyzed based on the themes that were coming out in relation to the objectives of the study.

A comparative analysis was conducted to ascertain alignment of the interventions to the cluster objectives and capacity gaps identified in the National COVID 19 Preparedness and Response Plan (NCPRP) developed by the Government of Malawi. Descriptive statistics were used to explain the geographical coverage of the response interventions. This report serves to provide a summary of the findings and recommendations from the study.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 Key COVID 19 response interventions

Study findings suggest that, for a moment, CISANET members and partners have deviated from their usual agricultural related work to join the fight against the COVID 19 pandemic with the objective of minimizing its impact in the agriculture sector. The findings show that the key interventions being implemented by the Network members address both the preparedness and response aspects of the fight. The key interventions that the majority of the Network members are implementing include but are not limited to: provision of coronavirus materials including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health workers, development of Capacity for Coronavirus case management and awareness creation on COVID 19 among specified target groups and the general public. A detailed typology of the key interventions being implemented is presented in Annex A.

2.2 Geographic Coverage

Figure 1 below demonstrated the geographical coverage of the CISANET COVID 19 response interventions. While 25% of the interventions are being implemented nationwide, 75% of the interventions are split among the 3 regions of the country. At 36% and 32%, the Central and Southern regions respectively claim the lion's share in terms of the interventions. This trend coincides with the trend in case confirmation where Lilongwe (Central region) and Blantyre (Southern Region) are the current epicenters of the disease spread in the country.

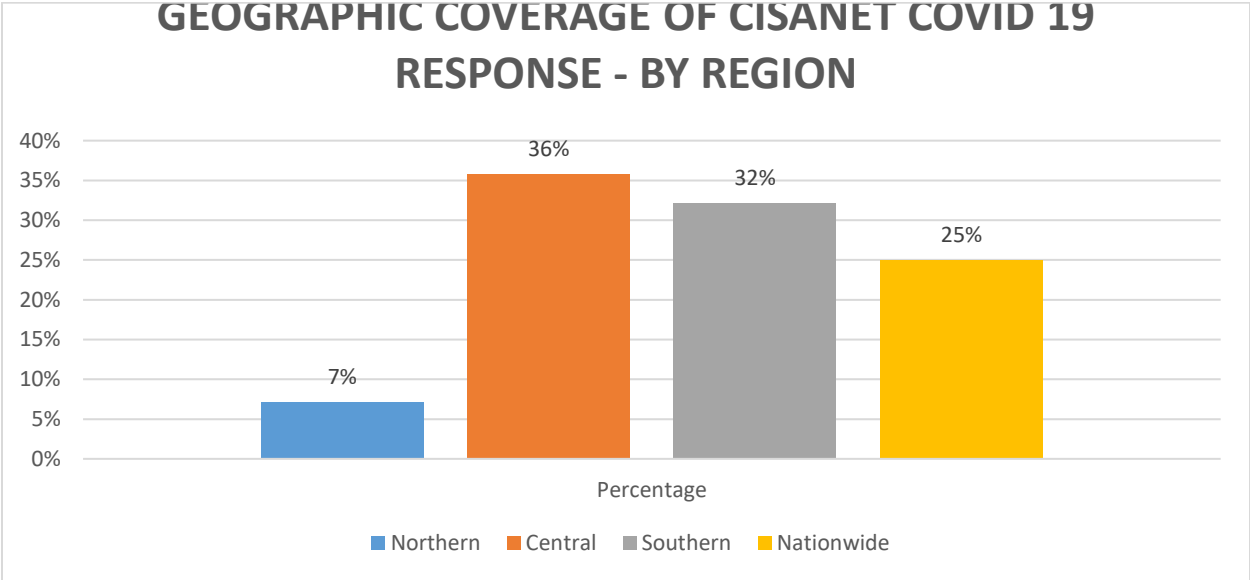


Figure 1: Geographical coverage of CISANET COVID 19 response

2.3 Total CISANET investment budget

The NCPRP earmarks an investment requirement in the region of MK157 billion (USD\$215 million) to combat the COVID 19 outbreak. The CISANET members' interventions are costed to the tune of MK2 billion (USD\$3 million). Computed as a share of the national level investment requirement, CISANET has currently earmarked an investment contribution of around 1.4% of the NCPRP budget.

2.4 Proposed Policy Priority Areas

As part of the survey, CISANET sought its member input on the perceived policy priority areas that the Government needs to focus on in order to mitigate the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic. The information was sought around 6 areas including: agriculture production and productivity; post-harvest management; household nutrition and resilience; access to reliable extension services; access to markets and finance; and livestock, dairy and aquaculture production. Information collected from the survey was categorized in these categories and Table 1 below presents these findings.

Table 1: Suggested Policy Priority Areas

NO.	AREA FOR CONSIDERATION	SUGGESTED PRIORITY AREAS
1	Agriculture production and productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support farmers with solar irrigation • Supporting farmers to access inputs such as seeds • Supporting farmers in intensifying winter irrigation
2	Post-harvest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions activities aimed at ensuring harvesting of different crops • Enabling farmers to have access to packaging materials as well as chemicals like Actellic.
3	Household nutrition and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be provision of safety nets, which can be support packages to sustain livelihoods of farmers, women and youth. • These can also be in form of cash transfers to ensure that they are able to maintain a livelihood
4	Access to reliable extension services;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be use of Radio Programmes; Call Centre, toll free on both Airtel and TNM, SMS Platforms and ICT Hubs in sending out agriculture messages and also agriculture extension advisory services in the Covid-19 context • Support extension service programs to reach the most vulnerable farmers in the wake of Covid-19
5	Access to markets and finance;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support farmers markets in the face of COVID 19 (mostly Horticultural Products which uses food stalls) • Support access to alternative financial services (with VSLAs not being recommended as part of community savings).

6	Livestock, dairy and aquaculture production	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Livestock and poultry management, production to ensure non-interruption of the food supply chain in this area.
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3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings from the study, CISANET recommends the following:

1. *Lobbying for agriculture to be considered as an essential service*: in order to keep supply chains functioning at relatively optimum levels in the wake of the pandemic, there needs to be an exemption for those that deal with inputs and extension services to support farmers even in times when there are movement restrictions in the country.
2. *Promotion of diversified production amongst smallholder farmers*: COVID 19 presents an opportunity for the sector players to promote diversified agricultural production amongst smallholder farmers.
3. *Increased accessibility to agricultural inputs and social safety net programs*: the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic limits farmers' opportunities to sell their produce. Therefore, there is a need to support in terms of inputs and cash transfers for their survival during the pandemic period.
4. *Coordinate efforts around COVID-19 impact assessments* and the short and long-term measures dealing with the pandemic amongst all stakeholders. Engaging in import substitution activities more especially for horticultural products like vegetables. This is in the wake of various border movement restrictions that are in place thereby interrupting imports.
5. *Promotion of business continuity via virtual platforms*: the onset of Covid-19 has brought an opportunity to scale up on use of online platform to ensure continuity of crucial activities in the sector. Therefore, there is need for CISANET members to strategize on the best approaches possible to reach out to affected stakeholders.