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ISSUE PAPER ON AGRICULTURE POLICY IN MCHINJI DISTRICT 2021/2022



MCHINJI CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASC:	Agriculture Service Committee
CAADP:	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CISANET:	Civil Society Agriculture Network
CSO:	Civil Society Organizations Network
MNYP:	Malawi National Youth Policy
MAIWD:	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development
MGDS:	Malawi Growth and Development Goals
NAP:	National Agriculture Policy

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the main economic activity in Mchinji district. Over 90% of economically active persons get their income from farming. Mchinji Agriculture sector responds to development policies through various structures at local level. It enhances public private partnership among its sectors stakeholders to ensure increased agriculture productivity for sustainable food, nutrition, and income security. Promotion of irrigation farming, agriculture diversification, agro-processing and market development are among focal interventions to spur the district development agenda.

The agriculture sector endeavors to achieve optimal productivity and development pathways through sustainable agriculture, water and climate change management. However, the various synergies employed face challenges like effects and risks from climate change, post-harvest losses due to pests, unexploited irrigation development, land degradation and underdeveloped market structures and systems. The Government of Malawi recognizes the importance of agriculture in driving economic growth and its contribution to economic and human development of the country, as highlighted in the MGDS II. To this end, the government for the past decade has continually allocated more than 10 percent of the annual national budget to agriculture. This is also in line with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) compact that Malawi signed in April 2010. CAADP stipulates that countries should allocate at least 10 percent of their annual national budgets to the agriculture sector, in order to foster agricultural GDP growth of more than 6 percent per annum.

Malawi government through the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development led and coordinated formulation of 2016 National Agriculture Policy as a policy guide that emphasize on achieving farm-led agriculture transformational and commercialization that entail treating farming as business.

CISANET in collaboration with Mchinji CSO network conducted issue scoping meeting on agriculture policy to identify key priority issues affecting agriculture development in Mchinji district. The meeting was attended by agro dealers, commodity traders, agriculture officers, farmers and civil society organizations. The objective of the meeting was to identify major priority issues in agriculture policy to be included in issue paper. A total of 15 members participated in the issue scoping meeting.

Apart from Scoping meeting conducted Mchinji Civil Society Organizations Network also reviewed some documents i.e. Mchinji Socio-economic Profile and District

Development Plan and other documents to assess issues affecting agriculture sector in Mchinji. Some of the issues raised include;

- 1.2. Empowerment of Youth and Women in Agriculture
- 1.2. Sustainable agriculture production and productivity.
- 1.3. Institutional development, coordination and capacity strengthening
- 1.4. Lack of commercial crops to substitute tobacco

PRIORITY# 1:ISSUE EMPOWERMENT OF YOUTH, WOMEN AND VULNERABLE GROUPS IN AGRICULTURE

ISSUE STATEMENT

The youth according to the Malawi National Youth Policy are energetic, adventurous, industrious, strong, healthy, and willing to learn. They are therefore an important human resource, but their full potential is under-realized, under-utilized, and sometimes misdirected. It is now widely accepted that the well-being and contributions of young women and men are a major determinant of the current and future development of any nation. According to the data from Mchinji Youth Office, District Agriculture Office and the meetings conducted by Mchinji CSOs Network revealed that there is low participation of youth and women in agriculture due to some cultural beliefs and limited access and control of productive assets such as land i.e. Nsenga people, similarly, the youth are marginalized and are taken as passive participants in development of activities hence urban migration leaving farming in the hands of the older generation. In addition, many youths who are into agriculture fail to do more because some have little or no land for agricultural related programs.

GOAL

To ensure that youth and women meaningfully participate in agricultural related programs that contributes to growth and sustained agriculture

ACTION-POINTS

The stakeholders realized that failing to involve the young people and women is a major mistake the district is making because the youth and women have the potential of improving the work-force in agriculture sector, and finally the key stakeholders proposed that the office of the Director of Agriculture, Environment and Forestry should work closely with the Department of Youth and the Department of Gender aiming at coming up with mechanisms that will promote the involvement of youth and women in agriculture sector.

PRIORITY# 2: SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY

ISSUE STATEMENT

Mchinji as a district is failing to produce more due to various reasons these include; poor coordination amongst players, and ineffective agriculture extension delivery that result in low adoption of information and skills by farmers on improved technologies such as seeds, fertilizer, limited access to financial services and inadequate access and control of productive assets such as land is affecting agriculture production and productivity.

GOAL

- To improve coordination of key stakeholders for increased production and productivity of crops, livestock, and fisheries.

ACTION-POINTS

The stakeholders proposed that the Director of Agriculture, Environment and Forestry should ensure that there is good working relationship amongst agricultural technocrats from district to community level (District Stakeholder Panel, Area Stakeholder Panel and the Village Agriculture Committees)

PRIORITY# 3: INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT, COORDINATION AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

ISSUE STATEMENT

Mchinji despite being a food basket but its farmers still fail to produce more due to various reasons that include; poor coordination among stakeholders, lack of capacity and non-functional structures that can help the farmers to access information and skills to enable them produce more.

GOAL

To improve high quality agricultural services and inputs through the agriculture extension delivery, promotion of climate smart agricultural technologies, promote crop diversification, promotion of agricultural loans.

ACTION-POINTS

The Agriculture Service Committee should facilitate effective coordination and networking especially amongst government departments, non-state actors and private sector on agriculture related programs through the Department of Agriculture Extension Services to promote bottom-up approach when implementing agricultural related programs.

PRIORITY# 4: LACK OF COMMERCIAL CROPS TO SUBSTITUTE TOBACCO

ISSUE STATEMENT

The main cash crop in Mchinji remains tobacco and the ban of this cash crop affected Mchinji farmers negatively, during the meeting conducted the farmers lamented that there is no cash crop that is substituting tobacco, the crop contributed a lot to Malawi's economy, the current cash crops like peas, soy-beans, groundnuts, beans and others have no reliable and profitable market and instead they are being bought at lower prices.

GOAL

To find commercial crops for smallholder farmers

ACTION-POINTS

Lobby government to;

- Seek reliable and profitable buyers at international level
- Recognize the importance of moving towards a more commercial farm sector that promotes inclusive economic growth and reduce poverty.
- Reduce tax to smallholder farmers that export farm produce outside Malawi.
- Should set profitable farm-gate prices of the commodities.