POLICY POSITION PAPER

CLIMATE CHANGE A THREAT TO RURAL LIVELIHOODS, TIME FOR ACTION NOW.

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SUBMITTED TO

CONCERN WORLDWIDE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Government of Malawi developed the National Climate Change Management Policy (2016) to guide programming of interventions for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere, as well as adapting to the adverse effects of climate change and climate variability. The development of the Policy was in tandem with national aspirations, as well as regional and international obligations. The Policy was meant to guide and coordinate implementation of relevant provisions enshrined in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement at the national level. Malawi as a nation has identified sectors that are affected by climate change and these include agriculture, human health, energy, fisheries, wildlife, water, forestry and gender, and has also prioritized climate change, environment and natural resources management among the priorities within priorities of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy. The MGDS III has recognized agriculture and climate change management as first key priority area among other priorities in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals and the Africa Agenda 2063.

In Malawi, the success of many important sectors of the economy such as agriculture, water supply and sanitation, transport, tourism, industry, health and education rely on environment and natural resources to enhance their productivity. However, environmental degradation and climate change have emerged as major development issues that have adversely impacted on food security, water quality and energy security, thereby frustrating efforts to improve the general livelihoods of both urban and rural communities. Scientific evidence in Malawi shows an increase in frequency, intensity and magnitude over the last two decades of extreme weather events. These events include prolonged dry spells, seasonal droughts, intense rainfall, riverine floods and flash floods. Using the results from formal economic models, if Malawi does not act now, the direct overall costs due to climate change will be equivalent to losing at least 5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) each year.

The National Climate Change Management Policy has an overall goal of promoting climate change adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and capacity building for sustainable livelihoods through Green Economy measures for Malawi.

2.0 CLIMATE CHANGE AWARENESS IN MALAWI

In Malawi, climate change awareness among policy makers has improved over years. The Malawi Vision 2020, a first long term development vision for Malawi did not identify climate change as a challenge to Malawi's development. There was no any reference in the vision document in relation to climate change. Additionally, the first mid-term development goal for Malawi, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2006-2011) did also not identify climate change as a development challenge for Malawi, as vulnerability was linked to limited factors of production, economic shocks and disasters. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2011-2016) had identified climate change among its priority areas, recognizing its important role in development discourse. However, it was placed on the last priority among other priorities. The recent Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2017-2021) has however put climate change on the first priority among priorities, effectively recognizing the significant impact of climate change to the development discourse of Malawi. The recognition of climate change has been placed at par with agriculture and water development. However there remains a challenge in translating the policy commitment into practice in many climate change policies (Daniel Kammen, 2013). Despite the clear need for engagement across all stakeholders involved in delivering climate services, it is also evident that 'in many cases, the connections between climate information users and providers is weak or non-existent' (Vaughan and Dessai, 2014). Vincent et.al (2015) found no evidence of the use of short- (1–5 years) or medium- (6–20 years) term climate projections in current sectoral decision making in any of the departments in Malawi. This is despite the availability of Malawi-specific projections (McSweeney et al., 2010) and their use in Malawi's National Communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Vincent et al (2015) found that the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development(MLGRD) only

used ‘immediate’ weather information in their planning, while the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) and Departments in the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development (MoIWD) use 5–10 day forecasts for planning purposes, with daily updates on extreme weather events. There is a lack of advance projection capability within the Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services (DCCMS) as a primary restriction in gaining access to medium-term climate change information, despite them recognizing the value of such information for their infrastructure planning with lifetimes of 6–20-year periods. Vincent et al (2015) had evidence suggesting that seasonal forecasts (on a timescale of 1–6 months) are being used to inform annual planning in sectors such as water, energy, agriculture, and disaster management. The Department of Land Resources and Conservation, Department of Crop Production (both in MoAFS), and DCCMS coordinate to produce the Agricultural Crop Production Survey, which provides advice for farmers that is communicated through extension services and radio. However, as yet, they only focus on the coming season and do not consider decadal to medium-term projections that could usefully inform future agricultural research investments, irrigation and water resource management, planning, and training needs for agricultural extension staff. The Department of Economic Planning and Development (DEPD) in the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development looks at cross-sectoral issues to inform national development strategies and plans, but currently does not actively use any climate information, despite a number of its staff members having participated in the main regional climate change training program. The Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee, also only look to the coming season, with decisions based on past observations of comparative years, rather than model projections. Vincent et. al (2015) found that climate information in Malawi is viewed as inappropriate to spatial and temporal scales of decision making. For example, the Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES) viewed the spatial resolution of available information as not been suitably downscaled to ensure that weather and climate information is not generalized. The Department of Disaster Management is more concerned with knowing the timing and spatial

distribution of extremes, such as heavy rainfall and strong winds, on a sub-annual to short-term timescale, and not medium to long term.

According to the 2010 United Nations Country Assessment Report for Malawi, climate change poses a serious threat to Malawi's development agenda such that in the short-to-medium-term it will significantly affect the functioning of natural ecosystems, with major implications for several weather-sensitive sectors, namely: environment, agriculture, forestry, water resources, energy and fisheries; and human systems, particularly human health and human settlements. In the long-term, climate change will undermine the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals and exacerbate poverty (UNDP, 2010). Non-Governmental Organizations play an increasing role as brokers and intermediaries of climate information (Guido et al., 2016). The Non-Governmental Organizations have in principle many of the advantages that includes their close engagement with individuals and communities, along with their ability to facilitate interactions between scientists, decision-makers and local communities. Despite a consensus on the seriousness of climate change, climate change communication is ineffective with misinformation presented by contrarians and the failure of media to distinguish between scientific debates about detail versus significance (Gordon & Hengeveld, 2000). Dougill et al (2017) reported climate change communication to farmers (e.g. advocacy on conservation agriculture) has been largely driven through NGOs, such as Sasakawa Global 2000, Total Land Care, Care Malawi, Concern Worldwide, World Vision International and Concern Universal, all of which remain active across Malawi. This had led to internationally-funded climate change communication projects operate in the absence of nationally-developed strategies. There is therefore a great need for Malawi as a country to effectively and efficiently communicate the science of climate change into practice especially for the rural communities who are the most affected by climate change.

The welfare of people and societies is increasingly linked to their ability to manage risks and opportunities related to a changing climate (Hewitt et al., 2012). With this in mind, climate

change communication services are a key factor in ensuring that relevant information is guiding strategies to cope with and adapt to climate variability and change (Tall et al., 2014). Vincent et al. (2015) generally found low use of climate information for medium to long term planning in Malawi.

According to policy study done by CISANET (2019, unpublished), the level of awareness of the existence of climate change in the Nsanje and Mangochi was 70%, however only 36.8% really understood as to what was causing the climate change. 72.4% of the respondents understood the effects that climate change is having on their communities, while 82.8% reiterated to the fact that climate is continuing changing. Despite the lower awareness of the real causes of climate change, overall there has been a good awareness of climate change in the two districts. The awareness was as a result of extension through both public and private as supported by the Government extension system and the NGO sector, radio and peer to peer extension. However, on crop choice, only 38% factored climate change in their choice of crop to be planted as others had other factors rather than climate change. The study further found out that while 82.8% of the respondents understood that climate is changing calling for need for action, only 60% were willing to take a personal action towards climate change mitigation and adaptation. However, almost all of them cited tree planting as the action being taken for climate change mitigation. Over 90% of the respondents practice land management practices that includes one of the following zero tillage, hand ploughing, mulching, crops cover, compost manure, crop rotation, early planting, box ridges, contour ridges, terracing. This offers a huge opportunity for scaling up climate smart agriculture in the communities.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

There has been good level of awareness of climate change among rural communities in Malawi especially those communities that suffer the effects of the climate change. Communities are able to describe climate change based on the effects that are associated by the changing climate such as floods, dry spells, extreme heat, drought among others. However, few are able to describe what really causes the changing climate. Those that try to describe link it with deforestation. There is need to create more awareness on the causes of climate change among rural communities in a simpler way that could easily be understood by them. This would help to suggest local mitigatory strategies that communities would be practicing as part of the climate change mitigation.

There has been a notion of belief by other quarters to the fact that since Africa, Malawi inclusive, are not major emitters, there is no need to talk more on climate mitigation. This belief would be misleading going into the future as Africa population grows to unprecedented levels and rates of urbanization increases, the continent will likely increase its emissions. Malawi like all other nations around the globe as signatories to the Paris Agreement must do their part according to the level of their ability to mitigate against climate change. Apart from tree planting, there is need for increased awareness of other mitigatory practices that communities and individuals can do to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

Stakeholders will need to build capacity of rural communities on climate change adaptation emphasizing more on decisions that communities can make on their own as part of adaptation. These decisions would range from the choice of the crop to grow, the variety to grow, farming system to use on their land, off farm activities they can engage in to increase their income sources among others. There is need also to vision with them into the future, so they are able to foresee the likely impacts of climate change in the future and what they need to do now, to lessen the effects of the changing climate in the future. Most often rural

communities have focused more on the interventions of Government and its stakeholders on addressing their needs, and have not been innovative enough in terms of what themselves can do for their resilience.

It is pleasing to note that Government has engaged an extra gear for local resourcing for climate change funds through various ways including carbon tax. However, Government will need to be more transparent and accountable with the management of the funds collected so that they are channeled towards climate change adaptation programs. Lack of transparency and accountability will likely lead to diversion of the funds to other sectors of the economy and thereby defeat the very purpose the fund was set for. It would be essential that Government account to parliament as to how much funds were collected and what adaptation projects have been used for.

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