



**Response to the State of National Address by the Civil Society
Agriculture Network**

28/02/2024

We, the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET), welcome the State of the Nation Address (SONA) by His Excellency Dr. Lazarus Chakwera, President of the Republic of Malawi, delivered on February 9, 2024. We commend the government for the efforts made so far with regards to agriculture development, as shown by the consistent 10% budgetary allocation towards agriculture, in line with the Malabo Declaration.

We appreciate the government's recognition of the importance of agriculture as the mainstay of the economy and the source of livelihood for the majority of Malawians. We also acknowledge the government's commitment to implement various policies and programs to enhance the productivity and profitability of the agricultural sector, such as the Affordable Inputs Program (AIP), the National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP), the Agriculture Sector Wide Approach (ASWAp), and the Agriculture Transformation Initiative (ATI).

However, we also wish to highlight some of the areas that we need to improve in order to achieve the vision of a prosperous and food secure Malawi. These are:



1. **Nutrition security:** As opposed to focusing on food security alone, nutrition security should also be prioritized. We need dietary diversity promoted in our programs, such as the AIP, by including legumes and other nutritious crops. We also need the Right to Food Bill to be passed so that we guarantee the right to food to all Malawians, especially the vulnerable and marginalized groups. According to the latest data from FAO, Malawi has a low dietary diversity score of 3.8 out of 10 and a high prevalence of stunting (37%), wasting (3%) and underweight (12%) among children under five years of age.

2. **AIP reforms:** We commend the government for the smart targeting of productive farmers under the AIP, which has increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the program. However, we also urge the government to make the program more eco-zone friendly and promote diversification by providing a range of input options, including legumes and organic manure, to improve soil health and reduce environmental degradation.

3. **Climate change adaptation:** We highlight the issues of climate change and its impact on agriculture, such as erratic rainfall patterns, droughts, floods, pests, and diseases. We call for the government to invest more in climate information systems, early warning systems, weather-based insurance, and climate-smart agriculture practices to enhance the resilience of farmers and the agricultural sector.



4. **Mega farms and market linkages:** We support the government's initiative to establish mega farms and market linkages to create economies of scale, value addition, and employment opportunities. However, we also

urge the government to ensure that the mega farms are climate-sensitive and socially-inclusive, and that they do not displace or exploit the smallholder farmers. We also call for the government to facilitate the access of smallholder farmers to markets, both domestic and regional, by improving the infrastructure, reducing the trade barriers, and strengthening the farmer organizations.

5. **ADMARC restructuring:** We commend the government for restructuring the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) to make it more autonomous and accountable. However, we also need it to be fully functional and operational to improve the accessibility of both food and market for the farmers and consumers. We also urge the government to ensure that ADMARC adheres to the minimum farm gate prices and does not engage in any corrupt or fraudulent practices.

6. **Mechanization and post-harvest management:** We emphasize the continued need for mechanization beyond the production level to even include transportation, processing, and storage, so that we avoid post-harvest losses, which are high at about 30%, especially with fruits and horticultural products. We also need to intensify value addition at all levels



and structure our markets to increase the income and competitiveness of our farmers and agro-processors.

7. **Irrigation expansion and utilization:** We applaud the government for expanding the irrigation potential from 110,000 hectares to 220,000 hectares, which has increased the crop production and reduced the dependence on rain-fed agriculture. However, we also urge the government to make the underutilized irrigation schemes functional and sustainable by addressing the issues of operation and maintenance, water management, farmer participation, and market linkages.

8. **Agricultural research and development:** We stress the need to improve on agricultural research and development, with specific focus on soil health, high value crops, and market intelligence of export markets. We call for the government to increase the funding and capacity of the research institutions, such as the Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS), the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), and the Chitedze Research Station, to generate and disseminate relevant and innovative technologies and information to the farmers and other stakeholders.

9. **Technology adoption:** We encourage the government to promote the adoption of modern and appropriate technologies to keep up with the global



production levels and CISANET standards. We urge the government to support the use of artificial intelligence, specialized technology, and the internet to enhance the efficiency, quality, and traceability of the agricultural products and services.

10. Market fragmentation and quality standards: We highlight the problem of market fragmentation and the presence of so many middlemen, who affect the farmers' profitability and bargaining power. We urge the government to address this issue by creating a conducive and competitive market environment, strengthening the farmer organizations, and enforcing the contract farming arrangements. We also urge the government to reinforce the quality standards for both export value and consumption and health, by ensuring the compliance with the sanitary and phytosanitary measures and the Malawi Bureau of Standards.

11. Food systems transformation: Finally, we reiterate the need for the food systems transformation approach, which is a holistic and integrated approach that addresses the food and nutrition security challenges at all levels, from production to consumption. We urge the government to actualize the transformation pathways that we committed to during the United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021, which include:

- Increasing the productivity and profitability of smallholder farmers
- Promoting sustainable and climate-smart agriculture practices
- Enhancing the dietary diversity and nutrition of the population
- Reducing the food loss and waste along the value chain



- Strengthening the resilience and inclusiveness of the food systems

We, the Civil Society, pledge our support and collaboration to the government in the implementation of these policies and programs, and we look forward to a fruitful and constructive engagement with the government and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector.

We thank you for your attention.

Together for a vibrant agriculture sector in Malawi