



Civil Society Agriculture Network

THE ROLE AND EXPERIENCE OF CISANET IN

THE MONITORING OF

FOOD SECURITY ISSUES-THE CASE OF MALAWI.

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1.0 Introduction

Malawi is at an advanced stage of developing a Food and Nutrition Security Policy (FNSP). The implementation of the policy will require a well developed monitoring system. The Technical Secretariat in the Ministry of Agriculture is coordinating the stakeholder input in the development of the impact and output indicators of the FNSP.

This paper covers four areas relating to the role of civil societies in the process of developing the FNSP. The first is a brief background to the FNSP and how it has evolved till the present time, including developing the monitoring system. Secondly, the methodology employed to develop the monitoring indicators. Thirdly, the experience, especially challenges and successes, of developing indicators. It should be noted at the outset that the FNSP's monitoring system is still in the process of being developed.

The development of the FNSP monitoring system is in two phases. In the first phase, impact and output indicators were developed, where a consultant interviewed CISANET members. The second part that is in progress is the development of the baseline that will form the bench mark for monitoring the implementation of the policy. A statistician will be hired in June this year.

However, it is important to look at the agriculture sector and the importance of monitoring the different policy issues that come under FNSP.

2.0 Background to agriculture development and challenges

Since Malawi gained independence in 1964, agriculture has been the main engine of development as this sector accounts for 36% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provides 65.3% of the total income of the rural people who constitute 85% of the country's population. This sector also provides 87% of total employment and accounts for 82.5% of foreign exchange earnings. Therefore, the promotion and diversification of agriculture has contributed to national and household level food and nutrition security.

This has been the case even before attaining independence from the colonial government. Since then, the agriculture system in Malawi has been dualistic, that is, characterized by the smallholder and estate sectors. The former which comprises the largest sector is characterized by: low land holding sizes (with average per capita landholding size being less than 0.5 hectares), the majority of these small farmers are poor, low levels of technology adoption, and low levels of land and labour productivity since it is highly labour intensive as evidenced by the predominance of the hand hoe in farming. On the other hand the estate sector has had advantages over the smallholder in that it utilizes cheap excess labour from smallholders, has access to more land of better quality and fertility, much of which is under-utilised, has access to capital, and produces higher value crops.

However, because of the negative effects of this differentiation, reforms have been taking place in the agriculture sector. Even though this has been the case the experience has produced both negative as well as positive consequences. Some notable reforms include:

- Market liberalization, with the deregulation of markets by Government, enabling smallholder farmer to cultivate higher value crops like burley tobacco, that is the green gold of the country. However, this deregulation has provided insufficient protection from market shocks, such as price fluctuations.
- Subsidy removal programme, with blanket subsidies on fertilizer were removed under World Bank structural adjustment programmes in the mid 1980s. This led to crop production constraints, particularly of the staple crop maize, due to the low purchasing power of smallholders and ever-increasing fertilizer prices.

3.0 Formation of CISANET.

The interventions that were made by the Government lacked the involvement of smallholders in determining the direction of their own development. The change of government to multi-party system provided an opportunity for greater involvement of smallholder farmers and civil society in general in policy dialogue like the process of the formulation of the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP), the Decentralization Policy, and the new pluralistic demand-driven Extension Policy. It is with this background that there has been the need for a greater civil society voice, which led to the formation of the Civil Society Agricultural Network (CISANET) in September 2001.

Since then CISANET guided by its Strategic Plan came up with priority areas where to operate and these are:

- Food and Nutrition Security Policy development and implementation
- Budget formulation and monitoring/tracking
- Agricultural marketing
- Livestock development
- Small-scale irrigation development

It is then with this background that the network started working with the community.

4.0 Origin of the FNSP and monitoring system: the role of CISANET

The Government of Malawi started responding to food insecurity and widespread malnutrition in 1986 through the 'Nutrition Symposium for Principal Secretaries'. This recommended the establishment of the 'Food Security and Nutrition Unit' in the Office of the President and Cabinet so it could influence government policies and coordinate food security and nutrition activities in the country.

During this time, for effective planning and information sharing an inter-ministerial food security and nutrition committee was formed. It was composed of government, UNICEF, NGO, and private sector agencies involved in food security and nutrition. One of the unit's achievements was developing the first Food Security and Nutrition Policy statement in 1990. This became a supplement to the Statement of Development Policies 1987-1996 with the goal of improving the food security and nutrition status of all households in Malawi.

Though there was this policy in place, a lot of short falls were identified as was evidenced through the food crisis that the country experienced. Some schools of thought point out that this policy failed to warn the Government about the impending food shortage that led to the loss of many lives through hunger related illnesses. Therefore, in view of this, the Government thought of reviewing the existing policy. Some of the reasons for reviewing the existing policy were:

- The policy failed to warn the Government on the impending food shortage
- To bring on board the necessary stakeholder so that the policy should be address issues that have really to deal with food and nutrition security.

The drafting of the FNSP has been coordinated by Food Crisis Joint Task Force / Technical Secretariat (FCJTF/TS) with the Ministry of Agriculture.

4.1 CISANET involvement in the development of the FNSP.

There are a number of things that CISANET has been involved in Government policies especially the one that relates to food and nutrition security. Like in the drafting of the new FNSP CISANET has played a very big role as seen through:

- The community consultation with a view of incorporating the civil society views into the policy
- Development of the monitoring indicators and so far Output and Impact indicators have been developed.
- Monitoring of the Parliamentary Budget and this started in 2002/03 financial year.

CISANET involves itself in relation to its mission statement that of:

‘Promotion of agricultural development and sustainable livelihoods for the poor by influencing desirable change in policies, practices and attitudes of Government, donors, civil society and private sector through effective advocacy.’

CISANET's involvement in this exercise helped overcome a number of constraints faced in monitoring government policies, including the high costs of carrying out the exercise when there had been no support from the state as well as the donor community. Also in

measuring project or policy impact over a long period of time. Previously there has been little synergy with projects, NGOs, associations and other actors of the civil society. Therefore, CISANET's involvement addresses some of these constraints.

The current drafted FNSP focuses on the issues of food and nutrition, each with their own primary objective.

In terms of food security the primary objective is:

To guarantee that all men, women, boys, and girls, especially under fives in Malawi have, at all times, physical and economic access to sufficient nutritious food required to lead a healthy and active life.

In the drafted policy, the concept of food security has six implications, which are:

- All Malawians at all times have both physical and economic access to enough nutritious food for an active , healthy life;
- The ways in which food production is produced and distributed should be environmentally friendly and sustainable;
- Both the production and consumption of food are governed by social values that are just and equitable as well as moral and ethical;
- The ability to acquire food is ensured;
- The food is nutritionally adequate and personally and culturally acceptable; and
- The food is obtained in a matter that upholds human dignity.

Nutrition security's primary objective is to:

Significantly improve health and nutrition status to lead an active healthy life and reduce the burden of diet-related, illness, deaths and disability among men, women, boys and girls living in Malawi.

With nutrition security, this concept implies that:

- Healthy food choices and lifestyles, are easy choices for all Malawians.
- There is absence of all forms of malnutrition that is, protein energy, micronutrient, and over nutrition.
- All Malawians should have access to services for the prevention, timely treatment and proper management of malnutrition and infectious diseases.
- Good nutrition and its role in the context of a healthy lifestyle is a fundamental part of achieving social justice and poverty reduction.

To address some of the challenges with implementing the first food security and nutrition policy, the government through the FCJTF/TS has been organizing a number of workshops where CISANET members have participated. It has been through these meetings that CISANET through its objectives started to be involved in the development of the monitoring system. There have been consultations with communities where the network's members are implementing different interventions dealing with food and nutrition and meeting programme staff at the head offices or in the field. This process has lead to the harmonization of different indicators that are being used by the consortium and non-consortium members. The second phase will involve a baseline study where benchmark information for monitoring of the process will be formulated.

5.0 Methodology for developing the FNSP monitoring system

The involvement of CISANET in the monitoring of the FNSP is at different stages and levels of the implementation of the policy. There has been the development of the monitoring indicators and budget tracking.

5.1 Development of the FNSP monitoring indicators.

Both the Government and the Civil Society organisations felt that for effective implementation of the policy there is need for the indicators that will be used for monitoring. This then triggered the Technical Secretariat to hold a workshop where a number of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that deal with food and nutrition security issues took part and also happen to be the members of CISANET. This workshop had the following objectives:

- To present and discuss the study on the impact indicators for the FNSP
- To present and discuss an example monitoring and evaluation system for the agriculture project

In this workshop, twenty participants were taken through the process of developing the monitoring system, especially focusing on indicators, including:

- 1) Differentiation between monitoring and evaluation;
- 2) Elements of indicators must be simple, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound (SMART);
- 3) Levels of the indicators;
- 4) Approaches for measuring the impact indicators.

The idea was then to make sure that the participants knew what an indicator is. With this knowledge the participants were expected to have an informed idea on the selection of the consultant to carry out the assignment for developing the indicators. A deadline date was set for each member to suggest the name a suitable consultant.

After this initial step, a consultant was engaged whose role was to:

- Identify a set of common output indicators concerning food security (for all the projects implemented by NGOs / Farmer Associations involved in the consortium). Ensure that the information needed for their construction is available or measurable (in quantity, in quality and frequency), precise and can be easily located in sample fields (“sentinel sites”);
- Define a set of impact indicators of the Food Security and Nutrition projects.
- Determine methods of calculating impact indicators and develop a guide for each indicator. The guide should include user-friendly information such as selection

process of the sample(s), how many samples used, the starting point for collecting the data, practices for investigation, and selection of villages/households.

- Propose the level of sampling and finalised for each output and impact indicator and the methodology used for its measurement.
- Propose a detailed estimation of the collecting costs of the impact indicators and the cost of the monitoring / evaluation system.
- Identify specific indicators for gender, the poorest, and households with a high dependency ratio.

This process ensured ownership of the process by members and an understanding of the concept as a whole, thus facilitating implementation, especially indicator data collection. CISANET members have made an agreement to take part in the monitoring of the FNSP.

Impact indicators allow changes that have occurred in the society after the project or policy's implementation to be measured. They serve as reference points for monitoring a project and show the relationship between the objectives of a policy and its overall goal. Whereas output indicators measure results that have been achieved by the project. These are necessary for an appropriate follow up of any development project. The indicators are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Proposed Food Security and Nutrition Impact Indicators

<i>a) Food and Nutrition Security Impact Indicators that can be collected through Civil Society</i>		
No.	FNSP Impact Indicators	Data source
1	Percent of households with energy food reserves in critical months (December to March)	Household survey
2	Percent increase in real household income	Household survey
3	Percent reduction in households adopting undesirable coping strategies	Household survey
4	Percent increase in production of livestock products	Household survey
<i>b) Food and Nutrition Security Impact Indicators already being collected</i>		
	FNSP Impact Indicators	Data source
5	Percentage change in cases of malnutrition in vulnerable groups (under-five children, pregnant women and lactating mothers)	Indicator already collected by Ministry of Health (MoH) with Action Against Hunger (AAH) support
6	Percent of vulnerable groups (under-five children, pregnant and lactating women) displaying signs of	Indicator already collected by MoH with AAH support

	nutrition related disorders.	
7	Percent of stunted under-five children in the Malawian Population	Indicator already collected by MoH with AAH support
8	Percent of households that have at least two meals per day	Indicator already collected by MoH with AAH support
9	Percent increase in total production of livestock	Indicator already collected by National Statistical Office (NSO)
10	Percent increase in total annual food crop production	Indicator already collected by NSO
<i>c) Food Security and Nutrition Project Output Indicators</i>		
	Output Indicators	Data source
1	Percent increase in the number of households practicing recommended nutritional practices	Household survey
2	Percent of children readmitted to nutritional rehabilitation units (NRU)	NRU records
3	Percent of project targeted households that have access to high quality improved seed varieties and/or planting materials	Household survey
4	Number of farmers that have access to fertiliser	Suppliers reports
5	Number of households that have access to loans or credit schemes for agricultural inputs	Credit service providers records
6	Total hectareage of crop production through small scale irrigation	Crop estimates survey
7	Increase in production per unit area of irrigated crops	Crop estimate survey
8	Percent of households adopting recommended technologies and practices	Knowledge, attitude, and practices survey
9	Percent of households owning different types of livestock	Household survey
10	Percent of HIV/AIDS affected households involved in productive enterprises	Household survey

Source: CISANET, December 2004.

5.2 CISANET Budget Monitoring.

Through the overall goal of achieving ‘sustainable poverty reduction through socio-economic and political empowerment of the poor’ as stipulated in the Malawi Poverty Reduction strategy Paper (MPRP) in the course of its formulation, the government identified programmes that are directly poverty alleviating to be part of pro-poor programmes which in the national budget are identified as ‘priority poverty expenditures (PPEs)’. Looking at the MPRSP there are two features. On one hand the spending on pro-poor programmes are protected and this has got implications in terms of budget cutting.

For example, when the revenue falls, there should be a reduction on non-priority expenditure programmes. On the other hand, monitoring of the pro-poor programmes on a monthly basis with the use of expenditure returns from the line ministries (IMF, 2002). It is then with the background through which this strategy was formulated that makes CISANET to take an active role in the activities of the government in terms of the monitoring process. The MPRS preparation process was designed to ensure that consensus on the strategy was built across Malawian society. Government, political parties, civil society, donors and private sector representatives, as stakeholders, were engaged in the process on an equal footing in order to achieve broad ownership, generate commitment to the implementation of the MPRS and spark interest in the monitoring of the strategy (MPRS April 2002).

CISANET has started making a follow up on the implementation of the budget especially relating to pro-poor expenditure in the Ministry of Agriculture with key emphasis on outputs, outcomes, and impact of PPEs on agriculture development. The PPEs focus on three key issues, namely: agricultural extension, small-scale irrigation, and targeted inputs programmes (TIP)¹. Monitoring of these focal areas is done through CISANET members in their respective operational areas.

In view of these three areas, on the ground, the following is the scenario that CISANET through its monitoring has found (CISANET July 2003):

a. Agricultural Extension, the following is the situation across the country:

- Major factors constraining agricultural extension services, namely, lack of transport facility (76%), lack of extension worker training (57%), incidence of funerals (48%)
- Shortage of extension workers with 3000 sections where extension worker operate there are 1500 extension agents
- Priority activities in the formulated work plans of the extension workers in terms of actual implementation are on the least

b. Targeted Input Programme and the following is the scenario:

- TIP resulted into better yield among 56% of the recipients
- Targeting of the beneficiaries is still a problem
- Average maize yield increased from 1046 kg/ha (2001/02 season) to 1264 kg/ha (2002/03 season)

c. Small-Scale Irrigation and the following is the scenario on the ground:

- Out of 50 000 treadle pumps to be distributed, only 16438 (32.9%) were distributed
- Irrigation is the second highly demanded irrigation technology by farmers in the country

¹ TIP will phase out in the next farming season and instead the Government will subsidise the price of inputs so that they should be accessible (Daily Times, May 2005)

These statistics give an indication of the area that requires improvement if poverty has to be tackled. Currently there is need for the government to revamp the agricultural extension services support without which then smallholder agricultural production is at stake.

5.3 Other food security monitoring: the role of Malawi VAC

The Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) is involved in assessing food security. This is the main source of information used by donors in Malawi for responding to acute food insecurity caused by shocks or hazards such as drought or dry spells. The MVAC uses the Livelihoods Based Vulnerability Approach (LBVA), drawing on a range of secondary data and field assessment to gain an indication of where and what households are likely to face food shortages following crop production failure.

Secondary data includes Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Food Security (MOAIFS) crop estimates, remote sensing data, FEWSNET/World Food Programme cross border trade reports, and nutritional surveillance information. This information is triangulated with field assessment focus group and key informant interview data.

The MVAC is currently chaired by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (EP&D), with voluntary membership comprising: other ministries, mainly MOAIFS; United Nations agencies, including WFP, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Only two NGOs regularly participate in the MVAC, however in the April 2005 harvest assessment six NGOs participated. In the past two years, the MVAC has concentrated on responding to acute food insecurity issues caused by production failure. In the future, the MVAC hopes to do more work on chronic vulnerability and poverty.

6.0 Advocacy in the FNSP formulation process.

As has been noted, the 2001/02 food crisis that the country experienced was partly put on the policy that existed by then that it failed to give adequate warning to the nation. The other school of thought was that there was no involvement of the community in that policy. This then led to the revised one to incorporate issues of the civil society. Through a meeting that CISANET had with the six drafting experts of the policy consultative meetings took place across the country and in areas where the network members work. The aim was to incorporate communities understanding of food and nutrition security issues. The results were then presented by a representative group of community in the 'National Consultation Workshop on FNSP Formulation'.

7.0 Conclusion/ Lesson learnt to CISANET involvement in the FNSP formulation process.

There are a number of lessons that can be put together:

- Government and CISANET are able to dialogue as partners though the road has not been all that easy.
- Government and CISANET have identified areas that need capacity building jointly.
- FNSP process has allowed incorporation of the views of the community and not only of the technical experts.
- Monitoring indicators for the FNSP have been developed in a consultative way with the civil society and the Government.
- Government has committed itself to provide financial and technical support for the monitoring of the Impact Indicators to the civil society organisations.
- CISANET at the present time does not have a mechanism for monitoring some of the activities problems that are faced by the communities. Instead it resorts to issuing out of the press statements which is just a 'fire fighting strategy'.
- CISANET Secretariat does not have a stable funding.

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