

# **POLICY BRIEF**

**Vol 1 Issue 1**

**Agriculture extension In the New Millennium:  
Towards Pluralistic and  
Demand-Driven Services in Malawi**

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**Centre for Environmental  
Policy and Advocacy**



**UTVIKLINGSFONDET**

### **Acknowledgement and Disclaimer**

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### **Background**

Agriculture extension services play a significant role in the Agriculture sector of Malawi's agrarian economy. Extension service delivery in Malawi has evolved since the 1950's from a monopoly and block extension service system which were predominantly top down.

Over time, the agriculture sector, particularly farmers in the country are faced with several challenges ranging from dwindling land holding sizes, declining soil the agriculture such as market liberalization, decentralization process, farm input subsidy programmes and changes in the micro economic environment. At the same time, there are new players in agricultural extension services including NGOs, farmer organisations and the commercial private sector.

Against this background, extension services need to be more diverse to respond to the varying needs of farmers and produce sustained impact. The underlying aim of the policy, which was adopted in 2000, is that farmers must be better served through more pluralistic, demand-driven extension services.

### **Challenges in Agricultural extension services**

- Democratization: This has led to increased demand on varying extension services amidst reduced capacity of the public sector providing extension services
- Market Liberalization: Farmers are not restricted as to which crops to grow, livestock to keep or markets to sell giving them greater choice. However, the farmers now require new skills in production, farm management and marketing. These new demands bring new challenges to agricultural extension when there is inadequate capacity of the service providers and farmers. In addition, lack of supporting market infrastructure may undermine market liberalization. Extension services need to become more specialized and diverse.
- HIV and AIDS Crisis: This has led to reduction of the productive workforce among extension staff and the farming community. This also has cost implications on the infected and affected individuals and households.
- Decentralization: The decentralization process involved devolving power to district

level and the present capacity at district level is inadequate to cope with increasing demands. There is a challenge in technical and management expertise at district level.

- Shrinking public sector resources: There has been a decrease in the government funds allocated to public extension programmes. As a result, the number of staff in public extension services has reduced leaving the sector with low trained staff
- Coordination of Extension services: There has been a challenge in coordinating extension service to maintain coherence and quality due to the increase in stakeholders involved in extension often times with different approaches.
- Low literacy level of farmers: In Malawi, literacy levels are approximated at 48% for males and 29% for females. While literate farmers understand and implement agricultural related technologies better, uptake of extension messages is difficult for those with low literacy levels.
- Assessing Extension Impact: Extension services are but one of many factors affecting production and their impact is not immediate unlike other services such as infrastructural projects.

Against this background, public extension services need to have greater accountability, transparency and prioritization for every aspect affecting its operationalization. In addition decentralization, promotion of pluralism and greater farmer participation in choice of extension services is required.

### Policy Vision

“Pluralism in the provision and delivery of extension services that builds on the distinctive competence of the public sector, the private sector and farmer organization that allows for dynamic and evolving service- offer at decentralized levels”

### Guiding principles

#### *Demand driven extension services*

Extension services must respond to the needs of the farmers as the clients of extension services. This implies re-orientation of the relationship between farmers and service providers such that extension service provision responds to farmers’ needs and considers their resource base.

### Accountability

Farmers need to be considered as clients, sponsors and stakeholders in extension services to enhance accountability and bring quality and effectiveness.

- Farmers should be able to choose extension agents especially where they are paying

for the service and services are market oriented.

- Farmers should have a voice in the way extension is planned, implemented and evaluated in services that are not market oriented.
- Farmer organizations, joint planning, implementation and evaluation should be encouraged.
- Financial accountability is required.

### Service at cost

This principle implies that those “who benefit pay” for the services and government does not have to pay for all extension services amidst shrinking resources. Hence,

- public funds should be used for extension services of public interest and the government should prioritise on these; and
- private sector and farmer organisations should mobilise funds for extension services that promote private interest.

### Resources sustainability

Improved management of extension resources through enhanced capacity at district level is required for resource sustainability. In addition, diversifying sources of funding for extension services through commercialization and privatization is a possibility. Enhanced coordination at district level will promote the management of funds and avoid duplication of efforts and compliment investments.

### Equalisation

Extension services should be provided to poorer segments of the society, women, youth and people with disabilities. Moral standards should be upheld to ensure that extension service delivery is carried out to achieve equity and equality especially where public funds are used.

### Promotion of pluralism

Pluralism involves diversity and good quality services among extension providers and deliverers therefore giving greater choice of quality services to farmers. Pluralism welcomes various players in extension services and calls for democratic institutional arrangements to promote public and private sector partnership.

### Decentralised coordination

It is possible to achieve greater coordination and accountability among stakeholders at district through:

- Joint planning and implementation
- Information sharing and training

- Joint financing of extension services

### Policy objectives

- Provide an extension policy orientation that effectively responds to the challenges facing the agriculture sector and extension service;
- Present a framework for the future of extension in Malawi by highlighting the key guiding principles and roles of key actors and agencies; and
- Provide mutual understanding among stakeholders on the implications and challenges facing agricultural extension and provide a common vision of agriculture extension.

### Institutional framework

#### Public sector

##### Central level

The mandate of Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES) is to:

- develop policy guidelines for extension which are flexible creative and innovative;
- play a coordinating role among stakeholders at national level, building their capacity and be responsible for training of extension workers in both public and private sectors;
- provide IEC materials to stakeholders to assist in delivering high quality extension services; and
- create a conducive environment for private sector in extension services.

##### District level

The district level plays a key role in planning and implementation of extension services through:

- interpreting extension policy to suit local circumstances whilst ensuring that farmers play a central role and the contribution of other agencies is recognized;
- coordinating and conducting monitoring and evaluation with other stakeholders;
- allocation of finances; and
- building the capacity of extension staff.

#### Farmer organizations

These include farmer groups, clubs, co-operatives and associations operating at several levels and promoted to represent the diverse interests of farmers. The role of farmer organisations is to:

- offer training and advisory services to members;
- develop the capacity and entrepreneurship of the members; and
- contribute to policy development processes.

### Private sector

#### Profit oriented private sector

These have an important role in the liberalized markets and entrepreneurship as well as planning and implementation of extension services. Examples include ADMARC, seed companies and agricultural entrepreneurship organisations.

#### Non Profit private sector

Such organisations include local and international NGOs and faith based organisations. They have since contributed in extension services by targeting the marginalized in society. In addition they have expertise in capacity building and can ably contribute to policy formulation, planning and implementation of extension services.

#### Other institutions

Research and academic institutions, political and donor organisations also have a role in extension services through training, research and development, innovation and technology, raising awareness and sensitization, and provision of funds, inputs and markets. Similarly they contribute to setting the standards for extension services and policy development processes.

#### Building partnerships

Effective partnerships that recognize the central role of farmers and their organizations will help achieve the agricultural extension vision in Malawi. Academic and training institutions help in building capacity of extension institutions at various levels whilst research institutions are important for innovation. The decentralization process provides for an opportunity of building partnerships in the planning and implementation of extension services. Partnerships among the public sector, private sector, traditional leadership, political leadership, religious leadership and farmer organisations are vital in effectiveness of agricultural extension services.

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