

Government of Malawi

Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation

Department of Agricultural Extension Services

**Agricultural Extension in the New Millennium:
Towards Pluralistic and Demand-driven Services
In Malawi**

Policy Document

Lilongwe, October 2000

List of Abbreviations

ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
AES	Agricultural Extension Support Project
APIP	Agricultural Productivity Investment Programme
ARET	Agricultural Research and Extension Trust
ATC	Agricultural Trading Company
DAES	Department of Agricultural Extension Services
CPAR	Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief
CSC	Christian Service Committee
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus / Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome
IEC	Information, Education, Communication
MoAI	Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation
MMPA	Malawi Milk Producers Association
NASFAM	National Smallholder Farmer Association of Malawi
NASSPA	National Smallholder Seed Producers Association
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	Natural Resources College
NSCM	National Seed Cotton and Milling
SPI	Starter Pack Initiative
TAMA	Tobacco Association of Malawi
T&V	Training and Visit system of extension
WVI	World Vision International

Preface

The importance of Agriculture Sector in Malawi is that its performance has a direct impact on the overall economic growth of the country. For this reason, policies that affect growth of the sector similarly affect the national economic growth of the country. This situation is likely to stay until the country is fully industrialized.

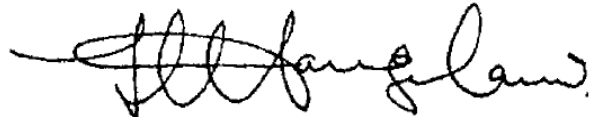
The National agricultural extension services play a very important role in agriculture sector growth and therefore have a very strong bearing on the economic growth of the country. The extension services must be reoriented to transform and modernize agricultural production from subsistence smallholder farming to commercial profit oriented agribusiness. For this to be realized, policy guidelines that are in line with the objectives are necessary.

For a long time agricultural services have been a monopoly of the public sector, this is no longer the case. There are organization like churches, Non Governmental Organizations, Farmer Associations and others that also provide extension services. Inevitably there are variations among the services providers in approaches and methodologies, therefore need to coordinate if extension services are to be effective.

Farmers in Malawi are facing many challenges to which agricultural extension can make an important contribution in response. Farmers are faced with dwindling land holding sizes and declining soil fertility; in addition, HIV/AIDS crisis is causing significant demographic changes among the farming population. The macro-economic environment has changed substantially over the last decade. Among the changes are market liberalization; removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs; de-linking of agricultural credit from extension services; the introduction of the Malawi Rural Finance Company, a market oriented company which charges market liberalization; removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs; de-linking of agricultural credit from extension services; the introduction of the Malawi Rural Finance Company, a market oriented company which charges market interest rates. These changes have created constraints and new challenges to farmers and for them to respond effectively, they will demand access to sound advice and support. Extension services therefore need to be more diverse than was the case previously in order to respond to the demands of different farmers and to bring about sustained impact.

The objective of the National Policy is to accommodate these changes improve the delivery system. The policy is to supports development of pluralistic and demand driven agricultural extension services; recommends changes in resource management by involving stakeholders and promote participatory planning and implementation of agricultural programs.

This document has tremendously benefited from valuable contributions of many officers of the Ministry of Agriculture at all levels. I also wish to acknowledge the vital contributions from NGOs, other government Ministries and Departments, consultant, the private sector and many others. Last but not least, I wish to acknowledge the financial and technical support from the German government, through GTZ, which facilitate the development of the Agricultural Extension Policy. I wish to thank them all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leonard Mangulama', written in a cursive style.

Leonard Mangulama, MP

**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
AND IRRIGATION**

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This document is the culmination of a Change Team appointed by the Secretary for Agriculture and Irrigation in March, 2000, to prepare an Agricultural Extension Policy for the country. The change Team benefited from extensive consultations with many people in both public and private sectors, which included farmers, farmers' organizations and consultants. I would like to thank the following team members who worked tirelessly to develop the concept:

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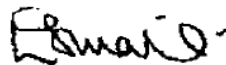
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I wish to give special thanks to Mr. D.D. Kamputa, Director of Agricultural Extension Services for taking the initiative and for providing support and guidance to members of the team. In particular I would like to thank the German Government through the Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) who provide financial resources, facilitated the Change Team in the field tours and provision of external consultants. Finally, I would like to record my gratitude to all provided valuable comments and took part in the deliberations during the consultation meetings.



Dr. E.S. Malindi

**SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE
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Introduction

Since the introduction of multiparty democracy, Malawi has and is still going through some major changes in its approach to service delivery. Previously extension services were mainly provided in a top-down manner, with the major decisions made at a central level. This is no longer in line with democratic principles and the country is, therefore, changing towards a more participatory and pluralistic approach to service delivery. Agricultural extension needs to undergo similar changes, given that it is currently faced with a number of challenges including the decentralisation process, market liberalisation, shrinking public resources and the HIV/AIDS pandemic on top of other killer diseases such as malaria.

Therefore, the objectives of this document are to:

- provide for a new extension **policy orientation** that will effectively respond to the many challenges facing the agricultural sector and extension in particular;
- present a framework for the future of extension in Malawi by highlighting a number of key **guiding principles** and the **roles** that various key actors and agencies can play;
- provide a **mutual understanding** among various key stakeholders on the implications of the challenges facing agricultural extension and have a **common vision** of agricultural extension in the new millennium.

The basic point is that farmers must be better served through more **pluralistic, demand-driven extension services** after a process of stakeholder consultation towards defining **better policy and practice**. A companion document addressing operational issues emerging from the new policy orientation is available.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Importance of Agriculture in National Development

Agriculture is and will continue to be the backbone of Malawi's economy, since the country is not well-endowed with mineral resources. It accounts for about 93 per cent of export earnings, provides more than 80 per cent of total employment and contributes about 35 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture occupies about 56 per cent of the total land area covering 5.3 million hectares of the country's 9.4 million hectares. The agriculture sector is divided between the two sub-sectors; the smallholder sub-sector (small-scale farmers cultivating under customary law) and the estate sub-sector (large-scale farmers on leasehold land). The smallholder sub-sector occupies about 80 per cent while the estate sub-sector occupies the remaining 20 per cent of the land.

Due to the high population pressure on land, some 2.6 million smallholder farmers cultivate less than a hectare of land of which half cultivate less than half a hectare. Due to the low level of farm technology, inadequate irrigation, and a shortage of cash and credit to buy hybrid maize seed and inorganic fertiliser, those with between one-half and one hectare can produce only 40-70 per cent of their staple food requirement, and by June (only a few months after harvesting) many rural people are reduced to eating two meals per day. Agricultural development will be an important component of improving rural livelihoods and addressing many of the vulnerabilities people face.

2.2 The Rising Demands on Extension for Agricultural Development

The agricultural sector in Malawi and farmers themselves are facing many new challenges to which agricultural extension can make an important contribution in response. Not only are farmers in Malawi facing new issues such as dwindling land holding sizes and soil fertility declines, but the HIV/AIDS crisis is also causing significant demographic changes among the farming population. In addition, the macro-economic environment has changed substantially over the last decade. Among the major changes are the market liberalisation; removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs; de-linking of agricultural credit from extension services; and, the introduction of the Malawi Rural Finance Company, a market-oriented credit company which charges market interest rates. These changes have on one hand created new opportunities for farmers to market their produce but have on the other hand created constraints and new challenges for them. In order to respond to these changes effectively farmers will demand access to sound advice and support. Given the many challenges that farmers face now, extension services need to be more diverse than ever in order to respond to the demands of different farmers and to bring about sustained impact.

2.3 *Agricultural Extension in the Broader Policy Framework*

Malawi faces a serious development challenge. Respectively, 60 per cent and 65 per cent of its rural and urban population live below the poverty line. One of the ways in which the appalling level of poverty manifests itself is through the very high levels of both food insecurity and malnutrition especially among children and mothers. Some 48 per cent of children nationally are physically stunted due to malnutrition.

One of the major policy objectives of the current government is poverty reduction. This calls for improved food security and increased on-farm and off-farm incomes for farmers in Malawi. Broadly speaking, poverty reduction will be achieved through good governance and development management in order to achieve sustainable livelihoods in both rural and urban households. Among the many strategies through which this objective is going to be achieved is increased agricultural production to ensure food security. This is manifested through such safety nets as the Starter Pack Initiative (SPI), the Agricultural Productivity Investment Programme (APIP), and food for work programmes. The success of all these programmes is among other things dependent on the type and amount of support farmers receive from extension services. In this way high quality extension services can make an important contribution to achieving the objective of poverty reduction. But changes will be required in the way in the provision and delivery of extension.

2.4 *Historical Perspective of Extension in Malawi*

Extension work began in colonial times as a result of estates requiring better higher agricultural productivity. This gave birth to the then Department of Agriculture in 1907. At that time government sent out instructors to teach crop production practices following a coercion approach because it was considered as the only way to get farmers to follow recommended practices. Violation of these practices resulted in court sentences which ranged from payment of fines to imprisonment.

Later, the concept of Master Farmers was incorporated into the mainstream of extension activities. These Master Farmers who were better off and innovative, received government support in terms of inputs and extension services. They followed recommended practices and therefore acted as demonstrations to other farmers.

An agricultural co-operative programme was instituted in 1948 in order to enhance increased agricultural production. At that time the co-operatives were involved in input supply, commercial crop production, dairy farming and marketing.

Throughout these stages, the predominant extension approach involved individual contact and coercion. Up until 1962 this was considered appropriate for the time.

The importance of a group approach was recognised in the 1970s as a faster way of spreading messages to a wider farming community during a period when major integrated projects were being introduced.

In trying to enhance the group approach, the Block Extension System, a modified Training and Visit system (T&V), was adopted in 1981 with the aim of improving farmer coverage. The group approach then went beyond specialised groups and tried to contact a wider range of farmers, including the resource poor and women.

However, it was observed that the majority of resource poor farmers were not reached with extension messages because of its top-down approach and consequently the adoption rate did not improve. While there have been some positive results, it is evident that the present public extension system can no longer hold.

There have been new players coming into agricultural extension services during the 1990s, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the commercial private sector. Farmer organisations are also of increasing prominence. But low productivity continues to be the major constraint among smallholder farmers often due to promotion of technologies that were supply- rather than demand-driven.

The current socio-economic and political environment demands a radical change in the extension system. Malawi is now a multiparty country with democratic principles. The decentralisation process is in progress which is aimed at bringing responsibility for service provision closer to the people. The country is also experiencing shrinking public resources that make it unable to finance the extension service as before. These changes are presenting challenges that necessitate a transformation in agricultural extension.

3.0 Extension Challenges

There are a number of challenges facing extension that require a response from the public sector and other stakeholders. A clear and positive response to these challenges will help shape the future of agricultural extension in Malawi for the benefit of all farmers and the attainment of the broad policy objectives of government. The following are among the key challenges facing extension:

- democratisation;
- market liberalisation;
- decentralisation;
- HIV/AIDS crisis;
- shrinking public sector resources;
- public sector reform;
- co-ordination;
- difficulty to assess extension impact;
- high malnutrition levels among the farming communities;
- low literacy level of farmers; and,
- shrinking production resources.

3.1 *Democratisation*

Democratisation, which has swept Africa in the recent past, has not spared Malawi and as a result society is opening up. People know that to survive they have to be proactive and thus farmers are demanding more from the public sector. For extension services, this is a new challenge because in the past there were fewer demands on the service and the mode of extension did not generate an open, critical response from the people. This requires extension services to reform their approaches in order to respond or deal with the numerous demands effectively.

But the democratisation process is clearly an opportunity for extension to get back to its roots. **Democratic principles are at the heart of good extension.** Extension services, now more than ever before, have a chance to contribute to the democratic transformation of society on the assumption that people will be more open to interact and share ideas.

3.2 Market Liberalisation

In addition to democratisation, market liberalisation has seen the emergence of new players. Farmers are not restricted as to which crops to grow, livestock to keep or which markets to sell their agricultural products to. This has given the farmer greater choice, but in order to take advantage of market liberalisation, **farmers need new skills** not only in production, but also in farm management and marketing. The new demands bring fresh challenges for those who provide agricultural extension especially that there is inadequate capacity among farmers to absorb changes due to inadequate managerial skills and limited land resource. At the same time market liberalisation assumes that market infrastructure is available.

Many farmers can benefit from the new opportunities, but unless something is done, some **farmers will not participate in the market economy**. The challenge for extension is, therefore, to become more specialised and diverse at the same time in order to respond to the new requirements of farmers and the sector as a whole. Expertise must be available to people who want to deal with specialised products but at the same time it is in the public interest to provide also for those in danger of lagging behind.

3.3 HIV/AIDS crisis

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in Malawi is having a **serious negative impact** on the productivity of the agricultural sector, the very backbone of Malawi's economy. Firstly, the impact is felt through the reduction of the productive work force, both among extension staff and the farming community. Practically all the key work force classes in agriculture are HIV/AIDS infected. In 1998 it was found that about 18 per cent of farmers and 12 per cent of the professional and skilled labour force were reported with AIDS. Apart from the human tragedy this also has cost implications in labour turn over, health care, HIV/AIDS absenteeism, recruitment, funeral functions and productivity loss after training. The **demographics of the farming community are changing** with increased numbers of households headed by children and old people. The challenge to agricultural extension is firstly, to maintain a healthy, energetic human resource both in the extension services and in the farming community, and, secondly, to prevent further spread of HIV/AIDS.

This requires integration of HIV/AIDS mitigation measures in the agricultural development programmes on the assumption that a healthy nation is a productive nation. The programme on factoring HIV/AIDS awareness in agriculture should therefore be strengthened. The intensification of labour saving technologies will help to reduce the drudgery on the farming population. The types of training and advice offered must take account of the changing demography. Greater attention also needs to be given to HIV/AIDS and agricultural education in schools at primary and higher levels. This requires **building co-operation with agencies in the health and**

education sectors in the fight against HIV/AIDS crisis. Staff in the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation will also need HIV/AIDS education.

3.4 Decentralisation

With the coming in of the new democratic dispensation, government has decided to **devolve power to the district level** on the assumption that interventions are more effective when the decision making process is at the lowest level of action. The Ministry of Local Government, which has been charged with decentralisation, is calling for the participation of line ministries. **Decentralisation is an opportunity** to bring the control of extension closer to the people and offer services that fit better with the local situation. But this will bring a dramatic shift in roles and responsibilities. The present capacity at the district level, as far as agriculture is concerned, is not adequate to cope with increasing demands for every District Assembly to have quality staff. There is, therefore, a big challenge to enhance both the technical and management expertise at the district level in order to deal with increased demands.

3.5 Shrinking public sector resources

Financial and human resources available to the public extension service in Malawi are shrinking. In real terms, funding from government coffers to the public extension service has been decreasing since 1990. During the same period, there has also been decreasing numbers of staff in the public extension, leaving the service with lowly trained and inexperienced staff to execute public extension programmes. There has been erosion in technical expertise that, together with the financial situation, makes the public service largely ineffective and unsustainable. This has also caused a reduction in staff morale as a result of inadequate operational funds. Farmers are not getting the services they need and deserve on the understanding that poorly resource endowed extension service cannot effectively deliver.

To respond to the challenge there is need for the public extension service to exercise **greater accountability, transparency and prioritisation** for every aspect affecting the discharge of its responsibilities. Once mechanisms ensuring such attributes are in place, the few staff available will be more motivated to deliver high quality services than at present. **Decentralisation and greater farmer control of their destiny** will both contribute to the necessary improvements. Furthermore, **promoting pluralism** through the mobilisation of other extension providers from the private sector, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) community and farmer organisations will also help respond to the challenge of shrinking public resources.

3.6 Public sector reform

The public sector reform programme, that the Government of Malawi is currently undertaking, is calling for downsizing and streamlining of public agencies on the assumption that a well trimmed organisation becomes more effective and efficient. Ministries and government departments are being required to reduce their numbers of staff and to streamline their roles and functions. On the other hand, extension services in Malawi are highly dependent on the very

public service delivery channels that must shrink. Thus there is a danger that services may become even more inaccessible to many farmers than before, with

fewer experts who will face higher demands arising from such influences as the democratisation process. The opportunity to **promote a greater role of other actors and agencies**, particularly farmer organisations, in the provision and delivery of extension services must be seized. Thus public agencies with a mandate for functions related to extension must take up a role of facilitator and co-ordinator rather than service deliverer.

3.7 Co-ordination

Since the early 1990s there has been an increased number of stakeholders involved in extension, making co-ordination of extension service activities a growing challenge. There are now more farmer organisations, NGOs and private sector agencies, often with different approaches for the delivery of extension services. The lack of co-ordination means that donors tend to introduce approaches of their choice. It has been a challenge to **maintain coherence and quality** in the delivery of extension services in Malawi. In order to improve co-ordination among the many stakeholders in extension there is need to have clear policy guidelines to orient all stakeholders towards complementarity and synergy in the roles they play in the provision and delivery of extension services.

Co-ordination needs to be stratified. A key level for co-ordination will be at the district level, working towards joint planning and implementation of extension services among various stakeholders. There is also need for co-ordination at the national level, of which this document is an important initiative. Diversity and pluralism (i.e. having more extension service providers on various issues and using different methods) need to be embraced, but complemented by effective co-ordination that brings about coherence and partnerships based on common guiding principles.

3.8 Difficulty to assess extension impact

Extension services are only one factor contributing to agricultural development. There are many other economic, policy, environmental and social factors that add to the **problem of attributing either successes or failures to extension**. The impact of extension is also often not immediate. Furthermore, there are often different procedures and approaches used in extension services which add to the complication of tracing cause and effect in the performance of different extension approaches. This partly results in the public extension service being perceived by many as a low class service that does not need adequate funding and highly trained staff. It is difficult to maintain the necessary **political will, commitment and budgetary support** as impact in, for example, infrastructure projects are much more observable. As a result, the public extension service is regarded as less credible in the public eye.

Concern for quality and efficiency makes it imperative that impact can be plausibly traced. Greater farmer involvement in the control and assessment of extension services will be one means for responding to this challenge. In addition, product specialisation, where possible, can also help improve the monitoring and evaluation of activities. Linked to this, privatisation of

extension services will ensure constant and spontaneous feedback through improved private sector relationships with client farmers.

3.9 High malnutrition levels among the farming communities

The high levels of malnutrition among the farming communities is a serious challenge to the extension delivery service. Well nourished farmers can undertake effective agricultural activities. Malnutrition is visibly shown in under-five children, 48 per cent of whom become stunted due to malnutrition. Others suffer from both mental and physical impairment. Considering that they are the future farmers, there is no doubt that their impairment affects their effective agricultural productivity. As the majority of Malawi's population live below the poverty line, malnutrition would also be prevalent. Those in the rural areas who cannot feed themselves throughout the year spend most of their time during the critical period of farm activities working for others for cash or food. The consequence is that they are less productive because they are malnourished and produce less of their own food for the following year.

3.10 Low literacy level of farmers

Malawi is among the countries that have low literacy levels in Africa. It is estimated that male literacy level is at 48 per cent while that of females is at 29 per cent. This is a big challenge to the extension service in the sense that literate farmers understand better the technologies that they discuss with the extension service providers. In the light of low literacy levels among farmers, technology adoption becomes lower and consequently affect effectiveness of the extension service. Effective agricultural productivity goes beyond increased farm produce; farmers must operate like entrepreneurs. To farm like a business person, the farmer requires education of some kind; she/he needs to make calculations and decisions that call upon reasonable literacy levels.

3.11 Shrinking production resources

Farmers face challenges because of shrinking production resources such as land, capital and labour. Smallholder farm land has been shrinking due to increased population and fragmentation of land among family members. It is believed that about 56 per cent of the farming households cultivate less than one hectare of land. Considering that most smallholder farmers are less productive due to the use of unimproved agricultural practices, the small hectareage does not sustain their livelihood. Most smallholder farmers are poor and do not have adequate capital for effective farming. Worse still they do not have access to credit due to lack of collateral. In such circumstances agricultural productivity is bound to be low. Poverty drives most smallholder farmers to hiring out their scarce labour to wealthier farmers during the critical period of agricultural activities. This situation aggravates the availability of labour resource. The extension service faces challenges to improve productivity of such farmers who have these shrinking production resources.

The first step in making a response to these challenges is to have a clear vision of agricultural extension in Malawi as a basis for managing positive change.

4.0 Vision and Mission Statements

4.1 *Vision for Agricultural Extension in Malawi*

All farmers are able to demand and have access to high quality extension services from those best able to deliver them. There is **pluralism** in the provision and delivery of extension services that builds on the distinctive competence of the public sector, the private sector and farmer organisations and allows for a dynamic and evolving service-offer at decentralised levels. Extension services are accountable to those demanding and using them, and are able to make a significant contribution to addressing national concerns for the improvement of rural as well as urban livelihoods, increased food security and reduced poverty in Malawi.

This vision of pluralistic, decentralised and demand-driven extension in Malawi is a bold statement of intent and the enormity of the task must not be underestimated. For it to become a reality, a broad coalition of stakeholders is necessary, each making an important and distinctive contribution. Both the farming communities and the service providers need to be transformed to realise this vision.

4.2 *Mission Statement of the Department for Agricultural Extension Services*

The Department for Agricultural Extension Services (DAES) intends to:

- **Set clear policy guidelines** to orient all actors and agencies involved in agricultural extension in response to the broad policy objectives of government, changing needs of the agricultural sector and the challenges facing agricultural extension in particular.
- **Promote equalisation** (i.e. both equality and equity) in agricultural extension service provision through advocacy of gender, empowerment, poverty, environment and HIV/AIDS concerns.
- **Initiate and strengthen co-ordination** among national stakeholders involved in agricultural extension, while enabling districts to develop well co-ordinated, demand-driven agricultural extension services particularly during the transition from a centralised bureaucracy to a decentralised, pluralistic system.

- **Promote pluralism** (i.e. having various players using various methods in addressing the extension issues) in the provision and delivery of agricultural extension in Malawi, with special emphasis on the strengthening of farmer organisations.
- **Encourage market liberalisation** at national and international level.
- **Set and monitor clear standards for the quality** of agricultural extension services through, for example, the promotion of participatory extension approaches in all services and the regulation of extension staff quality.
- **Assess impact of extension** from time to time and reorient the agricultural extension services.
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In the light of the challenges discussed earlier and in order to achieve its mission, DAES will follow and promote certain key and complimentary guiding principles. These key principles include:

- demand-driven extension services;
- accountability;
- “those who benefit pay” (service at cost);
- resources sustainability;
- equalisation;
- promotion of pluralism; and,
- decentralised co-ordination.

5.0 Guiding Principles

5.1 *Demand-driven extension services*

Extension services must be **demand- not supply-driven**. Depending on their needs, farmers can demand advice to which service providers respond. Farmers are then clients or customers of extension services, implying a reorientation in the relationship between farmers and extension services. Farmers are then to be more in control of extension service relationships.

As the processes of democratisation and decentralisation become more institutionalised, with the liberalised market economy, farmers are facing new challenges. The need to get more involved in the market economy creates a **diversity of demands**, such as the type of products required on the market, the type of inputs required and hence the type of production systems they need to go into. Farm planning and management with an understanding of the market will be of increasing importance for many farmers. Extension services will therefore need to **respond to the new demands** farmers will make with special consideration to the resource endowment of the farmers. As such there is need to transform staff, communities and farmers to enter into dialogue to facilitate the evolution of demand driven extension system.

5.2 *Accountability*

Another guiding principle in developing demand-driven extension services is accountability. A democratisation process requires that farmers are not only looked upon as beneficiaries of extension but also as clients, sponsors and stakeholders. This has often not been the case in the past. Clear **mechanisms for enhancing the accountability** of extension services to farmers and their representatives are necessary. Greater accountability will bring **higher quality and effectiveness** of services.

Where extension relates to matters of private interest, it is useful for farmers to be able to **choose among extension deliverers**, particularly where they are the ones paying for the service. This is particularly the case for market-oriented extension topics, which are taking on increasing importance with market liberalisation.

For extension topics of public interest, other accountability mechanisms will become of greater importance. In such cases, farmers will need to have a **voice** in the way that such extension is planned, implemented and evaluated. Political decentralisation and the strengthening of farmer

organisations will clearly assist in this regard. Benefits will also be seen by **broadening accountability to include other stakeholders** involved in providing and delivering extension, through joint planning, implementation and evaluation.

Other mechanisms will include using a flow of funds that engender accountability, for example channelling funds via clients or their organisations. Furthermore, building mutual accountability through greater professionalism in extension are also of importance, for example through codes of conduct of professional organisations.

5.3 “Those who benefit pay”(Service at cost)

The term “those who benefit pay” implies that government does not have to pay for all extension services. With shrinking resources and public sector reform, it is not possible for the government to provide all the extension services as was the case before. The level of funding for agricultural extension has been decreasing in real terms and it is becoming more and more difficult for government to maintain the quality of extension services provided to farmers.

Some extension services promote private interests while others promote public interests. **Public funds must be used in the public interest.** Hence, government must prioritise and target its budget to extension services, which promote national policy objectives of the environment, poverty eradication and food security. The private sector and farmer organisations must be encouraged to mobilise private finances for extension services, especially those that promote private interests. One way of promoting private participation in the provision of extension services is by **commercialising and privatising extension services where possible.** There are cases where different parties will benefit with some types of extension, for example being both in the public and private interest, and cost-sharing mechanisms can be explored.

5.4 Resources sustainability

Financing and staffing for public extension structures is limited and this greatly affects the delivery of extension services. The only way is to operate within the shrinking resources, while operating in an effective and efficient manner through **improved management of extension.** This is likely to require capacity building, particularly at district level.

In addition, opportunities must always be taken to promote and mobilise other extension providers, thereby **diversifying the financing of extension.** It is anticipated that over time farmer organisations will become increasingly important in offering services to their members without recourse to public funds.

The challenge of shrinking resources requires a very careful look at the possibilities for **commercialising and privatising agricultural extension activities where possible.** The introduction of fees may be one alternative. However, other more indirect mechanisms of cost-recovery, such as the levies applied by the Agricultural Research and Extension Trust (ARET) or factoring the cost of extension into the produce price, may be more readily acceptable in the short- to medium-term.

With increasing pluralism, co-ordination at district and national level will be an important aspect of managing funds and human resources in agricultural extension more effectively. This will help avoid **duplication of efforts** and improve the possibility for **complimentarities in investment** for extension. Human resources have to be sustained in terms of quality training, orientation and provision incentives. The front line staff are *bona fide* players in implementing participatory extension approaches.

5.5 Equalisation

While encouraging private sector involvement in extension service delivery, the public sector must make sure that **poorer segments of the society, women, youth and people with disabilities are not left out of the development process** for purposes of equity and equality. Those that have a competitive advantage will tend to accumulate more resources and therefore be able to demand and pay for extension services while those that are at a disadvantage will be excluded. In such an environment, government will have a **moral responsibility** to make public good considerations and **target public funds** available for extension in the interest of achieving poverty eradication and food security. Transfer of funds from the centre to decentralised levels can take the form of conditional grants for extension, based on district strategies which will be along the lines of the guiding principles of the extension policy and addressing national policy objective of food security, environment and poverty eradication.

5.6 Promotion of pluralism

Pluralism is about having greater choice, diversity and quality of services among extension providers and deliverers. In a market-oriented economy, a pluralistic approach to extension service provision must be promoted, since extension services need to be more specialised and diversified. This will enable farmers a **greater choice of quality services**, and will also enable them develop new skills for a market-oriented economy.

For a long time, extension in Malawi has been highly dependent on the public service. However, with public sector reform emphasising on downsizing or streamlining the capacity of the public extension service, coupled by shrinking public resources which exerts pressure on extension spending, the promotion of a broad variety of actors in the extension provision and delivery seem to be a plausible proposition.

Pluralism implies changes in governance and development. It opens up to democratic institutional arrangements, such as public and private sector partnerships, so that all extension stakeholders have a say and play appropriate roles in extension planning and implementation.

It is therefore, incumbent upon the public sector, in particular DAES, to recognise its role in promoting pluralism and legitimising the role of the different actors by:

- providing conducive environment for the **private sector development** in the provision and delivery of extension.

- promoting and strengthening **farmer organisations** to take on the role of service providers and deliverers. Farmer organisations are a key to a client-oriented extension services and farmer empowerment.
- building the capacity for **co-ordinating and facilitating** the work of other players.

5.7 Decentralised co-ordination

Decentralised co-ordination means **devolving decision-making power** to lower levels within an organised structure to harmonise plans or activities of various actors into a coherent whole. In the context of Malawi and its decentralisation process, the **focus for co-ordination for extension is at the district level**. Centrally controlled and standardised extension approaches have failed to respond to local priority needs and has been less efficient in the use of scarce resources.

Co-ordination at a decentralised level is of particular importance, especially with greater pluralism, in that, it is possible to achieve stakeholder interaction, linkages and harmony towards fulfilling common goals. Decentralised sectoral co-ordination and linkages will, therefore, **enhance complementarity of efforts**, improve provision of quality services and reduce wastage of scarce resources. Furthermore, it will broaden the accountability among local stakeholders involved in extension.

Possible areas for co-ordination at the District or lower levels might include:

- the development of mechanisms for **joint planning and implementation** of programmes, that respond to clients' needs and appropriate for changing local situations.
- **information sharing and training** for capacity building.
- **joint financing of extension activities**, for example setting up a Development Fund specifically for promotion of extension work.

For decentralised co-ordination to be effective, support is required from central government, particularly in terms of building the capacity of districts during the initial stages of the decentralisation process, and also ensuring that quality services are offered and sustained.

6.0 Institutional Framework

A response to the challenges facing agricultural extension, in a way that builds on the guiding principles presented above, requires a more **open system with a range of stakeholders** (i.e. those who have direct interest or who might be affected by the issue at hand or intervention) each playing their part. But within an institutional framework for agricultural extension farmers are the key actors. Other actors and agencies include both public and private sector research and extension and farmer organisations. The roles and functions of each stakeholder will best be played in liaison with others, with **partnerships** among the sectors being of particular importance. This will require a transformation of the way in which various actors and agencies relate to one another, particularly during the decentralisation process that Malawi is going through.

6.1 *The role of the public sector*

The decentralisation policy highlights the division of the functions between the central government (for example, Department of Agricultural Extension Services, Forestry Extension Services, Fisheries Extension Services, Health Extension Services and Community Development Services) and the District Assemblies. These are to compliment each other in providing high quality services to farmers in Malawi.

6.1.1 Central level

The Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES) has a number of key functions. Firstly, it is important to develop and provide **policy guidelines** for extension to orient all actors and agencies in a way that allows for flexible and situation specific interpretation and implementation. In order that farmers get the services they demand, policy will have to be monitored and enforced. This will help ensure that the quality of agricultural extension is controlled and that it contributes effectively to the attainment of national policy objectives. But it

should be noted that quality control in agricultural extension is best achieved in a way that supports rather than stifles **creativity and innovation**.

Co-ordination is important and will become increasingly important as pluralism in agricultural extension develops further. As such, the DAES will need to play a role in the co-ordination of national stakeholders in extension.

Pre-service training of extension workers is a key function of the central level public sector. All individuals interested to take up professional extension work in both the private and the public sector should undergo requisite training recognised by the central level public sector. This ensures that there are set standards or minimum qualifications for extension service agents, whether from the public or private sectors. The public sector also ensures **in-service or upgrading training** for all the extension service agents to meet their professional needs in accordance with new developments and changing trends in the agricultural sector. In the process of providing quality training the central level public sector has a role to co-ordinate staff training at national, regional and international level.

Another important function is to provide **information, education and communication (IEC) materials**, which should assist the various stakeholders in delivering high quality extension services. It is worth noting that the public sector does not necessarily have to produce them; it can contract competent private organisations to carry out these services.

During the **period of transition** from a centrally-controlled to a decentralised system in Malawi, the central level public sector can play a number of additional roles and functions. At present, the capacity of many districts to effectively undertake their new responsibilities for extension is quite weak. Hence, **building capacity at the district level** in human, financial and material resources management will be a crucial function for which the central level will have to provide during the transition period.

In a pluralistic, decentralised system of providing extension services, farmer organisations become very important. The DAES has a role, particularly during a period of transition, in ensuring the **strengthening of farmer organisations** as they take on new and expanded responsibilities, through, say, leadership training and other forms of support.

Over the years, the private sector has played a rather low-key role in delivering extension services, though they are often very important on a local level or in certain commodities. The vision for agricultural extension in Malawi recognises that the private sector has to play a major role in delivering extension services in the future. That will require that there is a **conducive environment created for private sector development** in agricultural extension. The central level public sector has a role in creating such a conducive environment by introducing relevant statutes and support programmes, where necessary.

6.1.2 District level

The Local Government Act stipulates that the **districts are responsible for extension services**. The districts are then the key planning and operational level for agricultural extension in Malawi and need to be recognised and supported as such.

A district must **interpret and implement agricultural extension policy** in a manner that suits its own special circumstances. In doing this they must give special emphasis to the pivotal role farmers play in demand-driven extension services and the important contribution other agencies can make in joint planning and implementation. Districts will also need to arrange for monitoring (including community-based monitoring) and evaluation of extension activities, in collaboration with other stakeholders involved in extension. This **co-ordination function** will be of particular importance so that the provision and delivery of extension services is ensured and all the stakeholders, especially farmers, are involved in the process and consequently have their needs met.

The districts will be expected to **allocate locally generated finances** for agricultural extension activities. It is anticipated, however, that these will need to be supplemented with funds from central government, in the form of conditional grants, and other sources. In the public interest, districts must be able to demonstrate that these funds are targeted at issues such as poverty, gender, HIV/AIDS and the environment that may not be of interest to the profit-oriented private sector. While public sector will still need to finance such services, this does not mean that it must deliver them. Various alternative arrangements that fit the local circumstances should be encouraged to emerge.

Districts will also have a responsibility to **build the capacity of their staff** through upgrading courses and other aspects of staff development, in line with national policy guidelines. In addition, a deliberate effort to build the capacity of the farmers, especially local farmer organisations, will be necessary. This function of **strengthening and empowering farmer organisations** should be emphasised during the transition period of the decentralisation process. Districts will also **provide markets and set standards for quality**.

6.2 The role of farmer organisations

The transformation of the agricultural sector into one that is more market-oriented needs **strong and dynamic farmer organisations** which include farmer groups, clubs, co-operatives and associations. They must be promoted in order for them to adequately **represent the interests of farmers and provide services to their members**. Farmer organisations will be an important component of farmers gaining greater control over their own development and improving rural livelihoods.

Farmer organisations can exist on different levels. There are already several examples of farmer organisations operating on a national level, including the Tobacco Association of Malawi (TAMA), Malawi Milk Producers Association (MMPA), National Smallholder Seed Producers Association (NASSPA), National Smallholder Farmer Association of Malawi (NASFAM), Cotton Growers Association and Poultry Association of Malawi. They may also operate on a more regional or local basis, with others falling within a category of what might be called community-based organisations. Examples of the local farmer organisations are: Shire Highlands Milk Producers Association (SHMPA), Bvumbwe Milk Bulking Group in Thyolo as part of SHMPA, Zipatso Association in Mwanza, Lilongwe Herbs and Spices Association, Njolomole Vegetable Growers Association in Ntcheu, Lobi Vegetable Growers Association in Dedza, Bumbunyika Vegetable Growers Association in Mzimba and Joka Vegetable Growers Association in Rumphi.

With regard to agricultural extension, farmer organisations can take on a number of functions. Firstly, they can **offer training and advisory services** to their members either delivered from within their own organisation, by hiring staff or farmer-to-farmer, or in liaison with other competent agencies. As such they will take on an important role in **developing the capability and entrepreneurship of their members**, whose activities they can assist in monitoring.

As key stakeholders in agricultural extension, it is important that they make a **contribution to policy formulation** and participate in **joint planning and implementation** of various extension activities at the district level. But it is clear that at this time in Malawi the farmer organisation sector is still underdeveloped. This calls for a clear strategy for their strengthening.

6.3 The role of the private sector

Private sector organisations, including those for-profit and others not-for-profit, are a vital component of a **strong and evolving agricultural sector** that contributes to national development and the improvement of rural livelihoods. The DAES recognises that such organisations also have an important role in the provision and delivery of effective extension services. Conditions necessary for their development need to be in place in order for extension services available to farmers to be of the highest quality. It is also envisaged that they may take on a role in delivering some publicly-funded agricultural extension activities.

6.3.1 Profit oriented private sector

The profit-oriented private sector such as, National Seed Cotton and Milling (NSCM), Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC), Agora, Farmers World, Cheeta, Agricultural Trading Company (ATC) and Chemical and Marketing, is of particular importance during a process of market liberalisation. It is important to recognise their role in **developing entrepreneurship** as more farmers are drawn into the market economy. Such organisations clearly need to have a **voice in policy formulation** in order for their interests to be taken into account. Furthermore, they can be increasingly drawn into **joint planning and implementation** of various extension activities, for example by commercialising and privatising where possible.

6.3.2 Not-for profit private sector

There are many private organisations that operate on a not-for-profit basis and are more value-based NGOs, such as, Christian Services Committee (CSC), Action Aid, World Vision International (WVI) Plan International and Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR). Within a pluralistic system, it is useful to recognise the contribution they make often **targeting the more marginalised in society**, for example women and resource poor people. In some cases

they have particular expertise in **capacity building** from which a range of actors and agencies benefit. NGOs must also be valued for the contribution they can make to **policy formulation**, and the key role they can play in **joint planning and implementation** of extension activities.

6.4 Other institutions

Other institutions include academic, research, political, industry and donors. These are of importance in the **provision and delivery of training** to extension staff, **research** and **monitoring and evaluation** of extension system; **development and dissemination of technologies**; **advocating for and sensitising farming communities**; **provision of markets for agricultural produce, inputs for use by farmers, funds for the extension service and set standards for quality**; **provide funding** as well as **training for extension staff, respectively**. They also contribute towards **policy formulation**.

6.5 Building partnerships

Moving towards the vision of agricultural extension in Malawi will require dynamic relationships among different actors and agencies on different levels, at both the national and district levels, focused on **building effective partnerships**. Such partnerships offer the means to achieve specific objectives of agricultural extension services by maximising the effectiveness of each institution's resources and sharing risks. While building partnerships the **central role of farmers and their organisations** will be key. This is particularly important in **building accountability to farmers**.

Academic and training institutions are vital for building and sustaining capacity at central and district levels. Academic and training institutions with an extension component in Malawi include: Bunda College of Agriculture, Natural Resources College (NRC), Malawi College of Fisheries, Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife and Magomero Community Development College.

These institutions will also need to respond effectively to the challenges facing extension, and particularly the growing need to develop well trained private sector advisors and technicians.

Research is crucial for the innovation that sustained agricultural development needs and research-extension-farmer linkages are a crucial aspect of any innovation system. Key aspects of these linkages include the participation of farmers in research field days, joint visits, farmer study tours, on-farm field days, participation of farmers in research and extension priority setting sessions and collaborative technical message development sessions. Greater pluralism and decentralisation in extension will also bring their own challenges to these linkages and clear strategies for these need to be developed that balance district responsibility with the economies of scale required in certain research activities.

The district focus under **decentralisation** provides an opportunity for building new partnerships in the planning and implementation of agricultural extension activities. This ensures the development of a strategic district agricultural extension plan, which takes into account: a clear purpose based on the guiding principles, participation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms,

progress towards stated goals, consensus decisions, dialogue, institutional commitments and accountability.

Partnerships among the **public sector, private sector, traditional leadership, political leadership, religious leadership and farmer organisations** are crucial to the effectiveness of the agricultural extension services in defining priorities, forms of accountability, financing mechanisms and the flow of funds among sectors for extension activities.

And so this is our challenge, to **build partnerships** towards a vision of pluralistic, decentralised and demand-driven agricultural extension services for Malawi in the new millennium. A broad coalition of stakeholders is necessary, each making an important and distinctive contribution in the provision and delivery of high quality services for the benefit of all farmers in Malawi and the overall development of the country. We encourage every reader to participate with DAES in working towards this vision.