

# CAN THE G7 NEW ALLIANCE REDUCE HUNGER AND POVERTY IN MALAWI?



Outgrower at a sugar plantation in Chikwawa, Malawi, © Robin Wyatt



Centre for Environmental  
Policy and Advocacy Malawi

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## CONTENTS

<b>Abbreviations and Acronyms</b> .....	iii
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>1. What is the New Alliance?</b> .....	8
<b>2. How agribusiness is shaping policy priorities in Malawi</b> .....	10
<b>3. Policy reforms: could they increase poverty and hunger?</b> .....	12
3.1 New land legislation .....	13
3.2 New seed legislation .....	20
3.3 The National Export Strategy .....	23
<b>4. The need to scale up investment in public agricultural services</b> .....	28
4.1 Small-scale irrigation .....	29
4.2 Extension services promoting conservation agriculture .....	32
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b> .....	37
<b>Reference</b> .....	39

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BERL	Bio-energy resources limited
CA	Conservation Agriculture
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme
CCF	Country Cooperation Framework (of the New Alliance)
CEPA	Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
CISANET	Malawi Civil Society Agriculture Network
CIP	International Potato Centre
CU	Concern Universal
EAA	ExAgris Africa Limited
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation (of the UN)
FPIC	Free, prior and informed consent (principle in the Voluntary Guidelines and the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment)
GBI	Greenbelt Initiative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IRLADP (Malawi)	Irrigation, Rural Livelihoods Agricultural Development Project
NA	New Alliance
RAI	Principles of Responsible Agricultural Investment (from the Committee on World Food Security)
TA	Traditional Authority – local government authority in Malawi
UIL	Universal Industries Limited
UKAID	UK government aid programme
USD	US Dollars
WEF	World Economic Forum

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition is an initiative launched in 2012 by what was then the G8, now the G7 (following the imposition of sanctions against Russia), to attract new investment in African agriculture. It aims to promote '*value chains*', the goods and services needed to get agricultural products from farm to customers, which offer market opportunities to commercially-oriented smallholder farmers. Malawi is one of ten African countries which have joined the initiative so far. New Alliance supporters hope that new agribusiness investment, combined with additional donor funds and the implementation of new and existing government policies will lift 1.7 million people in Malawi out of poverty by 2022.

In joining the New Alliance, the Government of Malawi has committed to:

- create a competitive environment with reduced risk in doing business for private sector investments in various value chains related to food security and nutrition, while also ensuring consistency and coherence in policies;
- improve access to land, water and basic infrastructure to support food security and nutrition; and
- reorganise extension services, targeting nutrition, agribusiness and cooperative programmes focusing on priority crops in their primary growing areas.

The New Alliance framework is based on an assumption that concentrating government and donor efforts on attracting investment in agricultural export '*growth clusters*' will reduce poverty and hunger through improving incomes for smallholder farmers, women's groups and youth entrepreneurs, and providing job opportunities for the urban poor<sup>1</sup>. However, it is unclear how this strategy will achieve the desired scale of poverty and hunger reduction given that investments to be prioritised are excluding subsistence farmers, who produce 70 per cent of the food in Malawi.

To reduce poverty and food insecurity the government and donors need to put the needs and interests of commercial smallholder farmers, as well as those with the potential to become commercially oriented with the right support, at the centre of agriculture policy. Government policies aiming to transform the agricultural sector will have greater success in reducing poverty if they are developed with the participation of these farmers and their representative organisations.

This report has found that instead of prioritising the needs of resource poor smallholder farmers, government priorities for agriculture reform have been shaped primarily by agribusiness.

So, while serious concerns remain over the government's new land legislation, including the redefinition of land ownership and the potential for increased concentration of land ownership, the government has promised to fast track the legislation and is already committing to large irrigation and land deals with private investors. Similarly, while the

informal seed system sustains food production in Malawi, the government's priority is to fast track legislation to protect the rights of commercial plant breeders, instead of scaling up seed bank provision, supporting local seed markets, and protecting the rights of farmers to use, save and exchange farm-bred seeds. A further government priority is to develop 'growth clusters' in priority export crops such as sugar and oilseeds. But companies who are investing in these value chains are not required to report on the quality of jobs created, the compliance of their business operations with the CFS (Committee on World Food Security) Principles for Responsible Agriculture Investment and the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forests and Fisheries, and how their investments are contributing to food and nutrition security and climate resilience.

Meanwhile, public investment in infrastructure and support services essential for small scale food producers to flourish, is dwindling. This report cites evidence showing that investments in small-scale irrigation and conservation agriculture advisory services, for example, can generate income benefits for a far greater share of Malawi's smallholder farmers, in an environmentally sustainable way. These raised incomes could in turn transform local economies and boost further on-farm investment, which will allow more smallholders to access markets for high value crops.

In view of the findings in this report, to achieve their New Alliance objectives of a reduction in poverty and hunger, we urge the government of Malawi and donors to work with smallholder farmers and civil society to:

- **Improve consultation mechanisms** to allow for the full, informed and effective participation of civil society and farmer organisations in the development, monitoring and implementation of government policies related to agriculture production, investment and marketing, including those prioritised under the New Alliance.
- **Prioritise initiatives and policies that benefit smallholder farmers** in all future agriculture policies. These need to focus on local and domestic market development, and include scaling up conservation agriculture, small-scale irrigation, and increasing land tenure rights and the right to use, save and exchange farm-bred seeds.
- **Implement the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests** through targeted initiatives and developing monitoring indicators in the New Alliance framework that are truly binding - going beyond the current 'intention to' clauses in the framework documents.
- **Scale up the provision of services and programmes that build the resilience of Malawi's smallholder farmers**, and integrate these into Malawi's agricultural development strategies.
- **Require companies who sign Letters of Intent to report on the quality of jobs, risk-sharing strategies, environmental impact and direct food security impact** of their investments under the New Alliance framework. And ensure that clear transparency and accountability measures are in place so that companies are prioritising the needs of smallholder farmers.

## Introduction

The New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition is a G7 initiative launched in 2012, on the back of discussions at the World Economic Forum between African governments, donors, and large agri-businesses. It aims to attract new investment in agriculture value chains which offer market opportunities to commercially-oriented smallholder farmers in Africa. Companies are required to sign letters of intent to signal their future investment intentions and align these to government priorities, while governments commit to policy reforms, and donors commit to fund government policy reforms and facilitate company investments.

Malawi is one of ten African countries which have joined the initiative so far. New Alliance proponents in Malawi hope that new agri-business investment, combined with additional donor funds and the implementation of new and existing government policies will lift 1.7 million people out of poverty by 2022.

In joining the New Alliance, the Government of Malawi has committed to:

- create a competitive environment with reduced risk in doing business for private sector investments in various value chains related to food security and nutrition, while also ensuring consistency and coherence in policies;
- improve access to land, water and basic infrastructure to support food security and nutrition; and
- reorganise extension services, targeting nutrition, agribusiness and cooperative programmes focusing on priority crops in their primary growing areas.

To implement these commitments, the government will revise, enact or implement a total of 32 regulations, policies, and/or laws. In return, G7 donors have pledged to align their aid behind these commitments and support 'high priority, high-impact investments', such as those that add value to export crops such as oil seeds and sugar cane.

Given that agriculture forms the backbone of the Malawian economy and society – about 90 per cent of the working population earn a living from agriculture and 90 per cent of the poor are small or medium-sized farmers – more and better investment in this sector will undoubtedly contribute to large-scale poverty reduction.

The New Alliance framework is based on an assumption that concentrating government and donor efforts on attracting investment in agricultural export 'growth clusters' will reduce poverty and hunger through improving incomes for smallholder farmers, women's groups and youth entrepreneurs, and providing job opportunities for the urban poor<sup>2</sup>. However, it is unclear how this strategy will achieve the desired scale of poverty and hunger reduction given that investments to be prioritised exclude subsistence farmers, who produce 70 per cent of the country's food.

Many more – admittedly not all – farming households in Malawi have the potential to become

commercially viable producers, supplying local, national or in some cases, international markets with food and non-food commodities. More successful farming enterprises could create further employment opportunities and demand for the goods and services of non-farm enterprises in rural areas. To reach this potential, however, would require vast improvements in the provision of **services and infrastructure targeted at smallholder producers** to improve resilience and productivity, and develop market opportunities. To provide these services would require scaling up investment in infrastructure needed by small-scale farmers, extension services, on-farm participatory research and innovation, and institutions that help farmers to self-organise commercially and politically.<sup>3</sup> In addition, national laws and regulations need to be in place and enforced to ensure that investors comply with all national laws and implement internationally recognised social, environmental and labour standards, including the rights of farmers to secure land tenure, and to use, save, exchange and sell their farm-saved seeds and propagating material<sup>4</sup>.

This briefing assesses the potential poverty impact of government policy priorities which are 'locked in' by the New Alliance framework against the evidence showing that investments in services and infrastructure targeted at smallholder producers such as small-scale irrigation and conservation agriculture can substantially reduce hunger and poverty. These, however, are not New Alliance priorities, and are therefore failing to attract sufficient funding from government and donor budgets.

### 1. What is the New Alliance?

The G7 New Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition is a US-led initiative launched in 2012 to 'reaffirm continued donor commitments, made in 2009, to reducing poverty and hunger, accelerate the implementation of some components of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP is Africa's policy framework for agricultural transformation launched in Mozambique in 2003 by the African Union) leverage the potential of responsible private investment to support development, help lift 50 million people out of poverty in Africa, and achieve inclusive, sustained agriculture-led growth in Africa'. So far, 10 African countries have signed country cooperation frameworks with donors and agribusinesses, building on business interest in the World Economic Forum's Grow Africa initiative.

New Alliance partners are hoping that the initiative will attract more agribusiness investment in high value commodity chains, thus supporting the efforts of African governments to attract more private investment into the agriculture sector. The New Alliance country frameworks are supported by local companies, as well as international businesses and governments who are active in the World Economic Forum Grow Africa initiative.

Malawi joined the New Alliance in December 2013. The cooperation framework is based on Malawi's pre-existing national investment plan for agriculture, which in turn was shaped by the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP). Given the government's recognition that 'participation of the private sector is crucial



for inclusive growth in the country'<sup>5</sup>, it has made commitments within the New Alliance framework 'to create a competitive environment with reduced risk in doing business for private sector investments in various value chains related to food security and nutrition, while also ensuring consistency and coherence in policies.'<sup>6</sup>

The first New Alliance Annual Report, published in August 2014, gives a comprehensive update on donor and private sector commitments and performance, and a summary of what the government has done to bring policy further in line with the framework. It measures the success of the New Alliance programme by assessing the number and level of investments made through corporate Letters of Intent, the number of jobs created through private investment, the number of policy commitments made by the government, and the funding disbursed by development partners.

The Annual Progress Report requires development partners who have signed up to the country framework to report on the amount of aid they have committed to New Alliance priorities, as well as the actual disbursement of these funds. Overall international donors have now pledged \$600 million (£406m) to the New Alliance in Malawi. However, they do not report on the amount of funding committed to each priority area, or the progress and impacts so far of this support. There is still doubt over whether donors will actually follow through on their commitments as actual disbursements lag far behind commitments.

The report shows that private investors have made commitments of over \$700 million (£473m) of which \$31 million has already been invested, although it is not clear how much of this investment was committed before the development of the New Alliance framework. For example, one of the key agricultural sector investors in Malawi, the South African company Illovo sugar has long term investment commitments in Malawi. According to the report, this investment has created a combined 2750 jobs and reached 156,000 smallholders but much of this pre-dates the New Alliance framework. One of the key success criteria highlighted by the report is that total exports were \$959m (£649m) in 2013, above the forecasted \$800m (£541m) 2015 target, and that real agricultural GDP growth had risen to 5.7%, well above the 3.9% reported in 2010.

However, the report does not attempt to measure the impact of agribusiness investment on hunger and poverty. It only measures outputs such as the number of jobs created and smallholders reached, but not the quality of these jobs, the level and stability of income earned by smallholder farmers, nor tracks the number of people who are food insecure. The failure to develop and monitor impact indicators that are related to food security shows that there is an assumption that growth in the agri-business sector will automatically lead to a reduction in hunger and poverty. But unless agribusinesses create large numbers of quality jobs and stable market opportunities for smallholder producers and small enterprises, growth will not lead to poverty reduction.

## 2. How agribusiness is shaping policy priorities in Malawi

Within the New Alliance framework the Government of Malawi made a commitment to review, enact or implement 32 existing policies related to agriculture and investment. As of April 2015 the government has started to develop the National Agricultural Policy and review the Seed Policy and Act, the Contract Farming Strategy and the Land Bill. However, none of these policies has yet been finalised. To decide on its policy priorities, the government invited agri-businesses, donors, and civil society organisations, but not representatives of smallholder farmers, to a policy prioritisation workshop at the end of 2014. At the workshop, eleven policy areas were prioritized. These were 'based on the needs of the private sector gathered through round table discussions and consultations', conducted throughout 2013. There is no evidence in the Policy Prioritisation report that the government or donors have made significant efforts to open up the dialogue to a wider group of stakeholders.

CISANET, a Malawian civil society network representing non-governmental, community-based and farmer-led organisations working in the agriculture sector, was invited to the roundtable on the assumption that they would represent all smallholder farmer interests. It would appear that the workshop was primarily used as a platform to put forward the interests of large-scale agribusinesses, even though many of them already have a strong relationship with the government. Agri-businesses and government effectively used the workshop to reach consensus on what should be government policy priorities in the Country Cooperation Framework (CCF). Yet in September 2014, the G7 New Alliance leadership council stated that 'the ultimate goal of our efforts is to benefit smallholder farmers and recognise the importance of consultation with smallholder farmers as a core part of our efforts'. Unfortunately there is little evidence that this is happening in Malawi.

CISANET has welcomed the Malawi government's commitment to increase the allocation of public resources to the agriculture sector and attract private investment in the agriculture sector. However, they have expressed concern at the possibility that increased multinational investment in primary production will lead to a further commodification of food, given that private companies generally prioritise profits over equitable access to food. This, in turn, will further increase the vulnerability of the majority of Malawi's smallholder producers to food price spikes during times of drought, floods, or financial shocks.

This concern has been mirrored by other farmer and civil society groups across Africa. In a recent response to the launch of the New Alliance, African civil society and farmer organisations stated that: *"Currently African food security rests fundamentally on small-scale and localised production. The majority of the African population continue to rely on agriculture as an important, if not the main, source of income and livelihoods. We know that all of these people will not benefit from these new investments. Seen as more inefficient than those producers who are in a position to adopt the new technologies, many will be forced out of agriculture to become passive consumers. Instead of building the broad base of producers, G7... investments, supported by African government policies and resources, will narrow the base of producers."*<sup>7</sup>

CISANET was not invited to participate in the initial drafting of the New Alliance cooperation framework and had little influence over the final document. Equally, there has been no consultation with smallholder farmers or farmer-led commercial organisations during the development of public-private partnerships such as those in the sugar sector<sup>89</sup>, which pre-date the New Alliance.

### 3. Policy reforms: could they increase poverty and hunger?

Although the New Alliance has not resulted in a significant level of new legislation in Malawi, the country framework agreement is 'locking-in' government policy reforms aimed at attracting foreign and local agri-business investment in growth clusters and export oriented agriculture. These policy reforms have been shaped mostly in active consultation with private sector investors, whereas there has been very little effort to consult with smallholder farmers, citizens, and civil society organisations on the content and implementation of New Alliance policy priorities.

A number of the policies that the government has committed to review as part of the New Alliance framework could contribute to, rather than reduce, the vulnerability, poverty and food insecurity of farming households. These include new land legislation, new seed legislation, and the National Export Strategy.

#### 3.1 New land legislation

Land policy in Malawi is now being shaped within the context of the New Alliance framework. The cooperation framework clearly states that all partners to the Alliance 'confirm their intention' to take account of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (Voluntary Guidelines) adopted by the Committee on World Food Security in May 2012, as well as the Principles of Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI), which were adopted in October 2014.

#### **BOX1: Free, prior and informed consent**

A key principle outlined in the Voluntary Guidelines and the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment, is that of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). FPIC is an international human rights standard, which gives communities the collective rights to 'make decisions through their own freely chosen representatives and customary or other institutions and to give or withhold their consent prior to the approval by government, industry or other outside party of any project that may affect the lands, territories and resources that they customarily own, occupy or otherwise use'.

Article 9.9 of the Voluntary Guidelines notes 'States and other parties should hold good faith consultation with indigenous peoples before initiating any project or before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures affecting the resources for which the communities hold.

Such projects should be based on an effective and meaningful consultation with indigenous peoples, through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their FPIC under the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples and with due regard for particular positions and understandings of individual States. Consultation and decision-making processes should be organized without intimidation and be conducted in a climate of trust.

**The Guidelines on Responsible Agricultural Investment** state that investors and states have the responsibility to 'engage with and seek the support of those who could be directly affected by investment decisions prior to decisions being taken and respond to their contributions, taking into account existing power imbalances, in order to achieve active, free, effective, meaningful and informed participation of individuals and groups in associated decision-making processes in line with the Voluntary Guidelines.

According to the Guidelines, responsible investment in agriculture and food systems require, amongst others:

- mechanisms for independent and transparent assessment of the economic, social, environmental, and cultural impacts of agricultural investments, involving all stakeholders, in particular the most vulnerable;
- measures to prevent and address potential negative impacts, including the option of not proceeding with the investment;
- appropriate and effective remedial or compensatory actions in the case of negative impacts, or non-compliance with national law or contractual obligations;
- regular assessments of changes and communicating these to stakeholders.

The details of the Land Bill and Customary Land Bill are currently under review by the Ministry of Justice. They are proposed to be tabled in the National Assembly in June 2015. Finalising these Bills is one of the government's policy reform commitments in the New Alliance cooperation framework.

These bills were formulated to implement the Malawi National Land Policy, that was approved in 2002 following a country-wide consultation process. The policy sets out the government's vision for the land sector in Malawi, and aims to redress past inequalities in land access and ownership and protect the land rights of vulnerable groups. It recognises that secure land tenure is a precondition for livelihood security.

The key aspects of the National Land Policy, which have been written into the two Bills include:

- the clarification and strengthening of customary land rights and formalizing the role of traditional authorities in the administration of customary land, which covers 80 per cent of the country;
- providing for all customary land to be registered and protected against arbitrary conversion to public land;
- encouraging all customary landholders (entire communities, families or individuals) to register their holdings as private customary estates in ways that preserve the advantages of customary ownership but also ensure security of tenure;

- allowing private leases to be created as subsidiary interests out of any private land, including registered customary estates, without relinquishing the underlying ownership of the customary landholder;
- a recognition of the long standing authority of Traditional Authority (TAs) but also ensuring more accountability by formalizing the system of land administration;
- providing for all children irrespective of sex to inherit land and other property from parents to address the concern of discrimination against women in access to land;
- strengthening the land rights of women and orphans, and
- regulating land access by non-citizens.<sup>10</sup>

However, while these bills are still under review, the government has already committed in the New Alliance to *'take measures to release 200,000 hectares for large scale commercial agriculture by 2015, ... after conducting a survey to identify idle land and crop suitability under both customary and leasehold'*<sup>11</sup>. This commitment is linked to the government's Greenbelt Initiative (GBI), which has already seen an initial investment of US\$50 million, taken as a loan from the Indian Government. Part of this will be used for the construction of a sugar processing factory at Chikawa in Salima district, which has a history of land conflicts between smallholders and large sugar companies.

This commitment to find land for commercial large-scale investment is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the government has stated that there is enough 'idle' land under both private and customary tenure, which it can re-allocate for large scale agricultural investment. However, this is highly unlikely, given the growing density of the rural population, especially in productive areas – population density is now estimated to be 139 people per square kilometre<sup>12</sup>.

Second, there are still serious issues under debate in regard to both the Land Bill and the Customary Land Bill. Traditional leaders are resisting the creation of new village land committees, which will take over the role of overseeing land allocations, presumably based on the principle of free, prior and informed consent of all landowners. However, it is unclear how this will work in practice. Civil society organisations have also raised concerns about the two bills, including the need for a more substantive land law which goes beyond merely procedural and administrative provisions, the problematic redefinition of land ownership categories, institutional mandates, access to land, and the role of traditional authorities in managing customary land.

Third, many Malawian citizens are concerned about a greater concentration of land ownership. During the consultations leading up to the 2002 land policy, land rights activists in Malawi called for the new Land Bill to provide for ceilings for access to land for specific uses and mechanisms to monitor the use of private land, and ensure that land is given back to the community when leases are not renewed.<sup>13</sup> Fourth, existing compensation provisions for landholders who lose assets, crops, or trees are inadequate.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the current land related bills under negotiation, including the main Land Bill but also the Customary Land Bill, the Land Acquisition Bill and the Registered Land

Bill, are all promoting land registration. This includes the registration of customary land. However, research from other countries in Africa has shown that land titling might not necessarily benefit the smallest and most marginalised farmers in Malawi. In fact, the abolition of communal tenure systems and their replacement by freehold title and the private land market has often led to reducing land rights of smallholders<sup>15</sup>.

The World Bank, in its 2008 World Development Report on Agriculture, stated that the focus on individual titling can weaken communal rights, and recognising customary tenure and communal lands is important to promoting the rights of women and marginalised farmers<sup>16</sup>. The FAO (UN) has also recognised the importance of recognising customary land rights to ensure women's rights are protected<sup>17</sup>. Individual land titling, without community oversight or state support, could lead to wealthy investors accumulating land from small farmers and then selling this land on to speculators.

### **BOX 2: The Greenbelt Initiative**

The Greenbelt Initiative (GBI) is a programme introduced in 2007 by then president Bingu wa Mutharika. It aims to boost commercial agricultural production in Malawi by increasing farmland under irrigation from 90,000ha to one million ha by 2020 through investment in large-scale irrigation infrastructure in an area of land lying within 20 kilometres of the country's three lakes and 13 perennial rivers. The government has so far identified the following sites for the first phase of development: 1000 ha of land in Karonga district; 6,293 ha of land in Salima district where infrastructure development is most advanced; 500 ha of land in Malombe split into two sites of 240 ha and 260 ha each; and 500 ha of land at Chilengo in Chikwawa district.

So far, the only investment that has taken place is the Chikwawa Green Belt Irrigation Scheme in Salima district, where 530ha out of a total of around 6000ha will be allocated to smallholder sugar outgrowers.

Most of the land targeted by the GBI is currently used by smallholder farmers. The government has proposed three main legal routes for acquisition of this land. Firstly, private companies can enter into contract farming relationships with smallholder outgrowers. Secondly, the Ministry of Lands can negotiate with chiefs to resettle occupying smallholder farmers, then develop the land and invite farmers back to cultivate prescribed crops on designated plots, and enter into contracts with private companies. Finally, the government can repossess idle land from estates, which it can allocate to private investors for management on signing of an agreement that investments will respect government priorities. This creates a 'public-private-partnership', which can last up to 54 years.

The GBI may contribute to worsening poverty and hunger in a number of ways. So far, it has been governed by a top-down approach, with government identifying land without consultation with communities, or obtaining their FPIC. The CFS Voluntary Guidelines clearly stipulate this as an essential requirement for land-based investment. Also, the practicalities of administering resettlement of resident populations have yet to be resolved<sup>18</sup>. The weak land policy framework currently in place means that new GBI developments could displace smallholder farmers from their source of livelihoods without adequate compensation, and without their FPIC<sup>19</sup>.

Also, it is likely that private investors will develop allocated land for production of commercially viable export crops and not local food crops. This could reduce the overall production and availability of local staples, thus further increasing the population's vulnerability to food shortages. Furthermore, the prioritization of large-scale agriculture which demands extensive mechanisation unattainable to resource-poor local communities means they are unlikely to participate in these programmes<sup>20</sup>.

It is unclear whether the GBI is still a priority for the Malawian government. The delays in passing the Land Bills, which could provide legal clarity on land tenure, has also held up the GBI. And given that the GBI originated as a presidential project, aligned to a political party agenda, it is unclear whether it will continue to be supported.<sup>21</sup>

Between 2012 and 2014 the government of Joyce Banda allocated minimal resources to the GBI. Peter Mutharika's government, in place since May 2014, has rejuvenated its support to the GBI, but has allocated little financial resources in the budget for its implementation. The construction of the sugar processing plant, funded through a government loan which has to be repaid to the Indian Government, has all but halted. It may turn out to be a white elephant project, which needs to be repaid from future public income, if there is no further investment in the irrigation infrastructure needed to grow the sugarcane that is the raw material for the processing plant.

### 3.2 New seed legislation

National and local seed systems that produce and distribute quality seed are an indispensable pillar of climate resilient agriculture and global food security<sup>22</sup>.

In Malawi the majority of farmers use seed obtained through informal channels such as seed exchanges among farmers, local grain or seed markets, and saving their own seeds during harvest. With the exception of hybrid maize and tobacco crops, the private seed industry in Malawi does not produce and market sufficient quality seed of improved crop varieties – over 70 per cent of non-hybrid seeds for most of the crops grown in Malawi are exchanged through informal channels.<sup>23</sup> Across developing countries, up to 90 per cent of food grain production relies on informal seed systems.

However, despite its importance, the informal seed system, unlike the regulated or formal system, does not receive adequate support from donors or public institutions. In Malawi, for example, more investment is needed for collaboration between formal research institutions and farmers to breed improved seeds, establish community seed banks, and develop local seed markets that can provide smallholders with higher quality seeds.

**The Plant Breeders Rights Bill**, to be fast tracked under the New Alliance framework, registers plant breeders' rights to sell, reproduce and multiply reproductive material of certain kinds of plants. The enactment of this Bill could have damaging economic, social and nutritional implications for smallholder farmers as they may lose the right to save, exchange, and use seeds that are protected under the Bill.

The Bill will support, and most likely prioritise, the development of new and improved crop varieties for commodity markets which require ‘distinct, uniform and stable’ traits in seeds. This focus is likely to further undermine the traditional knowledge of Malawian farmers and their on-farm plant breeding efforts, which create varieties that are adapted to local agro-ecological and climatic conditions and food preferences. It would also take attention away from the development of local seed markets where diverse farm-bred seed varieties can be traded or exchanged. The genetic diversity of farm-saved seeds is an essential component of future climate resilient food crops.<sup>24 25</sup>

While the Plant Breeders Rights Bill does allow for the use of ‘protected’ planting material for initial breeding purposes and for conserving, reusing, saving, or exchanging ‘protected’ seed under certain conditions, its passing will in all likelihood limit access to a variety of seeds in informal markets for smallholders.

The Plant Breeders Rights Bill is currently being drafted, and the opportunity still exists to ensure that it protects the rights of farmers to use, save, and exchange seeds that are ‘protected’ under the Bill, and that it supports their on-farm breeding efforts. More government support for community seed banks and local seed markets will bring far greater benefits to a larger number of food producers in Malawi, than a law which restricts their informal seed market.

Experience in Malawi has shown that informal seed systems, including village seed banks and local seed trading, can improve access to diverse and high quality local seeds. However, unless there is political support for the development of seed banks or a government agency responsible for seed banks, such as the Plant Genetic Resource Centre in Ethiopia<sup>26</sup>, it is very difficult to protect the rights of smallholder farmers to save and trade seeds.

### 3.3 The National Export Strategy

In the New Alliance framework, the government, donors and private companies have agreed to focus their resources on ‘high priority, high-impact’ investments within the government’s existing agriculture and trade and investment strategies, particularly in the three export growth product clusters – sugar, oilseeds, and manufacturing – identified in the **National Export Strategy**.

These policies have been developed through the government’s trade and industrial strategies. Donors and the government believe that new investment and value chain development will increase farmer incomes which, in turn, will allow them to purchase more nutritious foods and widen the tax base, from which the government can fund social welfare programmes to improve nutrition.

The New Alliance Annual Progress Report shows that a number of agribusinesses are investing in agro-processing factories and out grower schemes, both for local and export markets. The Report shows that companies have created jobs, contracted



smallholder farmers as out growers, and improved the country's balance of payments, either through exports or substituting imports. Companies are also disaggregating these numbers by gender, and the data shows that of all the jobs created so far only 24 per cent have gone to women, and only 20 per cent of smallholders engaged in out grower schemes are women. The pattern of agri-business investment observed so far is therefore perpetuating existing inequalities between men and women, which is one of the main drivers of poverty.

Investors are not required to report on their social and environmental impact beyond these indicators. However, to assess the contribution of agribusiness investments to the reduction of poverty and hunger in Malawi, company reports will also need to include the following information:

- Wages and working conditions in factories and on large estates;
- prices paid measured against input costs;
- risk mitigation plans to safeguard out growers against financial and climate shocks;
- compliance with CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure and Responsible Agriculture Investment;
- environmental impact assessments;
- specific measures undertaken to conserve water, soil and biodiversity; and
- how the investment contributes directly to the availability of and access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food.

### BOX 3: How the New Alliance business partners report their impacts

**Afri-nut**<sup>27</sup> processes groundnuts into groundnut paste. The company has recently opened a new processing facility in Lilongwe which has the capacity to process 4000 MT of groundnuts a year. The paste can be used as a 'ready to use therapeutic food'. Afri-nut's production has increased incomes for the producers involved. **Bio-energy resources limited (BERL)**<sup>28</sup> is working with 30,000 smallholder jatropha farmers to produce, process, and sell jatropha vegetable oil and seedcake and opened a processing plant in Lilongwe in September 2012. BERL estimates that the planned production of their plant will reduce cooking oil imports up to a value of \$50 million. **Citrefine Productions**<sup>29</sup> has recently started harvesting *Corymbria citriodora* from a plantation in Viphya, Northern Malawi. Citriodora is used to produce Citriodiol, an oil used in cosmetics and insect repellents. Citrefine are employing 280 people at their processing plant in Viphya. With support through the New Alliance framework they have been able to employ a further 200 people. **Dairiboard Malawi Pvt Limited**<sup>30</sup>, with support of the New Alliance, is hoping to invest \$3 million in the small-scale dairy sector creating 450 jobs. However, the latest New Alliance annual report notes that Dairiboard has had trouble attracting suitable partners with land. Malawi Mangoes<sup>31</sup> have pledged to produce and process in excess of 100,000 metric tonnes of fruit a year. **ExAgris Africa Limited (EAA)**<sup>32</sup> farming enterprises are managing an outgrower programme of 10,000 smallholder farmers growing paprika and Bird's Eye chillies across all three regions of Malawi.

Although agri-business investments provide outgrowing opportunities to a few thousand smallholders and have created a few hundred jobs, they are unlikely to have a significant impact on the majority of smallholder farmers in Malawi. Focusing only on the three export growth clusters is unlikely to have any direct or immediate impact on the poorest smallholders given that they lack the land, capital, technical advice, inputs and commercial skills required to grow the quantity and quality of produce demanded by buyers.

Many smallholder farmers will be attracted to the potential income benefits of diversifying their livelihood base to support commercial agriculture, but this might involve financial and food security risks that could increase their vulnerability and deepen poverty, as illustrated in the example below.

#### **BOX 4: Commercialising smallholder agriculture: opportunities and risks**

Universal Industries Limited (UIL), Concern Universal, the International Potato Centre (CIP), the Ministry of Agriculture and smallholder farmers have successfully worked together to produce Irish potatoes for the production and local sale of potato chips (crisps) in Malawi. An analysis of this partnership highlights both the short-term income opportunities but also the risks for smallholders of becoming more market-oriented.

Rosetta potatoes. UIL was offering to supply farmers with potato seed (on loan), buy the potatoes and transport them to their processing plant, and hence provide a guaranteed market.

Responding to a growing demand for high quality crisps in Malawi, UIL approached Concern Universal to develop an initiative to work with smallholder farmers in Ntcheu and Dedza Districts to produce Lady Smallholder farmers were interested in working with UIL to diversify their on-farm income and Concern Universal wanted to support farmers to ensure they got the most out of their contractual agreements with UIL.

Given the complexity of growing the Lady Rosetta variety Concern Universal sought the support of the CIP to train farmers and staff on potato production and conduct trials for various potato varieties to evaluate their performance. Concern Universal identified farmers who wanted to participate in the trial, assisted in site identification, provided inputs to support potato production, and facilitated communication between CIP/UIL and farmers. The government also supported the project through field supervision and provision of extension messages to farmers.

As a result of the initiative farmers gained knowledge on potato production, including land history, field sanitary practices, disease identification, positive seed selection and seed storage. However, farmers faced significant challenges, including high levels of potato plant infestation with bacterial disease, the cost of inputs such as seeds, pesticides and fertilisers, and difficulties with seed storage. The high levels of disease infestation lowered production to such an extent that UIL has not been able to produce export quality chips at its factory in Malawi. Since 2007, the CIP has developed seven other varieties of the Lady Rosetta seeds that will be more resistant to wilt and UI hope to work with farmers again in 2015 or 2016 to source potatoes for their local factory.

During the first growing season, in 2007-08, 75 farmers benefitted from the partnership, increasing their incomes by an average of K30,000 (\$200). Given these high profits there was a strong interest among local farmers to enter into further contracts with Universal Industries after the first year. However, although the first growing season was successful and farmer incomes increased, the disease infestation, coupled with a decision by UIL to stop producing chips for export in Malawi, meant that farmers were unable to build on their initial investments.

## 4. The need to scale up investment in public agricultural services

Large-scale agri-business investment may, under the right conditions, lead to a reduction in poverty and hunger for some smallholder households in Malawi, and create jobs for those who choose to leave farming. However, the majority of farming households in Malawi continue to need investment in services that support their ability to produce more and better quality crops, both for household consumption and for earning an income from marketing the surplus. The FAO has calculated that to end hunger by 2025 would require an additional **US\$42.7bn a year of public investment** globally for rural infrastructure; agricultural research; extension services; storage, marketing and processing; conservation of natural resources; and expanding rural institutions to promote concessional finance and land tenure security.<sup>33</sup> Private companies cannot be expected to invest in goods, services and infrastructure that do not directly contribute to their business. They also very rarely are willing to share the full risk of commodity production with their suppliers.

There is a real danger that the New Alliance framework will streamline and lock-in government and donor policies that focus primarily on attracting agri-business investment in commodity markets, to the detriment of increasing public finances for investments that address the priority needs of smallholder farmers. Experience has shown that investments in areas such as small-scale irrigation and extension services have significantly reduced poverty and hunger in Malawi.

### 4.1 Small-scale irrigation

**Small-scale irrigation** has helped thousands of households in Malawi to reduce food insecurity. A number of research studies have shown that small scale irrigation, using simple equipment and gravity fed irrigation, is easy to replicate and sustain, and directly increases food production on small farms. These schemes are also cheaper to develop than large scale irrigation. According to the World Bank, the average cost per beneficiary of developing small-scale irrigation systems are almost half that of large-scale schemes, USD600 compared to USD1000.<sup>34</sup>

Research carried out by Concern Universal for Irish Aid in 2012 found that small-scale irrigation schemes have a significant positive impact on a range of social and economic outcomes such as food security, dietary diversity and household incomes<sup>35</sup>.

In the study areas, the overall average annual production per household of maize increased from 56kg to 254kg and of tomatoes from 35kg to 41kg. Interviews with farmers found that irrigation schemes had significantly contributed to dietary

diversity in two key ways. First, there was increased production and availability of staple foods, vegetables and legumes. Second, the additional income from sales enabled households to buy other food products such as fish, meat and cooking oil which were normally not readily available in their household.

An independent evaluation of the government-led Irrigation, Rural Livelihoods Agricultural Development Project (IRLADP)<sup>36</sup>, which ran from 2006 to 2012, found an increase of 68 per cent in irrigated maize crops grown by over 300,000 smallholder farmers across 11 districts. There was also an increase in production of all rain-fed crops, with the exception of cassava.<sup>37</sup> The project reduced the risks associated with rain-fed farming by supporting the rehabilitation and development of new small-scale irrigation systems, reservoirs and rainwater harvesting structures on smallholder farms. Real net incomes (real gross margins/ha) realised by beneficiary households from all rain-fed and all irrigated crops increased by more than 43 per cent, this more than doubled the share of household income earned from farming.

*"We used to plant some maize crop in October which was partially irrigated and partially rain-fed. We were planting only small portions of the plots. Most of the maize plants died due to water shortage. The maximum production harvested was only up to a basket full (20 – 30 kg) of maize yet from the same plot we are now able to harvest more than one oxcart full of maize (300 – 400 kg)".*

**Secretary of Livizi scheme August 9, 2011**

#### **BOX 5: The Nambuna irrigation scheme: value for money**

In September 2012 Concern Universal worked with local communities to build the Nambuna irrigation scheme. The small-scale irrigation scheme between Golomoti and Monkey Bay near Lake Malawi comprises a main canal of 640 metres and thousands of secondary and tertiary canals, giving more than 250 farmers access to a reliable source of water for their crops. The irrigation scheme covers an area of common land which was not agriculturally productive due to its tendency to flood for long periods every year. The scheme is being heralded as one of the most cost effective development projects in Malawi.

After consultations and training provided by Concern Universal, the local community decided that an irrigation scheme would make the biggest difference to their agricultural productivity and worked with Concern Universal staff to build the main canal of the irrigation scheme. All the secondary and tertiary canals were completed by the farmers themselves. As a result of the irrigation canals over 100 hectares of land are now covered in rice paddies, a suitable crop for the high flood risk area. During the winter the scheme will also be able to irrigate 20 hectares of land and the farmers intend to plant maize during this time.

The scheme was completed with a UKAID grant of £12,380, with further in-kind contributions such as labour provided by the community. The first harvest of rice, collected in May 2013 produced nearly 138 metric tonnes of rice which had a resale value of £39,960, two and a half times the initial outlay cost. The irrigation scheme has an estimated 20 year lifespan.



*Irrigation channel built with support from Concern Universal, Malawi*

## 4.2 Extension services promoting conservation agriculture

Households that are vulnerable to food insecurity are also highly susceptible to weather shocks and climate hazards such as droughts and floods.<sup>38</sup> Conservation agriculture (CA) has a widely recognised potential to build the resilience of farming systems to the higher temperatures and more varied precipitation characterising Malawi's changing climate.

Conservation agriculture is made up of three elements, which when applied simultaneously in practice, work together to increase crop yields, especially in dryland areas. The first element is **continuous minimum mechanical soil disturbance** through digging planting pits where seeds are planted. The second is **permanent organic soil cover** through the retention of adequate levels of crop residues such as maize stovers and cover crops on the soil surface. The resulting mulch helps to feed the soil through increasing microbial activity when it decomposes, conserve moisture during the rainy season, protect the crop from moisture stress during dry spells and reduces soil temperature fluctuation. Soil cover also reduces soil erosion by holding rain water run-off and increasing water infiltration into the soil. The third element is **diversification of crop species grown in sequence or in association**. Crop rotations and mixtures help to moderate possible weed, disease and pest problems, generate biomass, fix atmospheric nitrogen and serve as nutrient pumps.

When combined, these practices increase organic soil matter, improve water retention, soil fertility, and crop productivity, reduce soil erosion, weed infestation, and the use of labour and other farm inputs.

Conservation agriculture increases moisture storage in the soils. A 2012 Concern Universal study found that farmers in Mzimba who practiced conservation agriculture reported that their maize survived a three week dry spell. Farmers in the study

attributed greater availability of soil water to a mulching effect of crop residue on the soil surface that reduced water loss by evaporation, reduced run-off and improved water infiltration. Households practicing conservation agriculture can therefore cope better with drought and dry spells, which are increasing as a result of climate change.

Recent research on the effects of CA practices on crop productivity, profitability and soil quality over a six year period in both drier and wetter areas of Malawi<sup>39</sup> has found that maize yields, incomes and soil quality were higher under CA production systems than under conventional practices. The positive benefits on maize were seen in the drier environment from the first season onwards, while it took longer in the wetter environment. CA also increased incomes of farmers, given higher yield and labour savings of 35 per cent in CA sole-maize cropping systems and 20 per cent in CA maize–legume inter-cropping systems, compared to conventional cropping systems.

Another study found that on-farm yields under CA between 2000 and 2005, averaged 5.1 tonnes across the country, compared to 3 tonnes for non-CA yields. Potential yields for hybrid maize could rise up to 8 tonnes a hectare.<sup>40</sup>

An FAO study compared conservation agriculture and ridge tillage cultivation on three sites in the Balaka District for the 2009/10 cropping season. The results show that CA has increased yields in all small-holder systems. In some cases harvests of maize increased from 1600kg to 4200kg per hectare. A further study conducted in 2013<sup>41</sup> found that, on average, maize yields on CA plots exceeded those on conventional plots by up to 23 per cent. Evidence from a review of a project which



**Photo:** Mrs Christina Chalendewa in Chiwiri Section, Mitundu EPA, on one of her maize plots under SIMLESA where no till and soil cover with crop residues were used.

did field tests on millions of smallholder farms in Eastern and Southern Africa, also found that CA can lead to improvements in productivity<sup>42</sup>.

However, a recent evaluation conducted for Christian Aid on the adoption of conservation agriculture among smallholder farmers in nine districts of Malawi found that there is still a low uptake of all the components of CA among vulnerable farmers, despite the proven benefits. Farmers mentioned the following reasons for their reluctance to adopt CA: insecure land tenure, lack of improved seeds, and a lack of support from government extension service providers. One of the most important factors determining the successful uptake of CA – and other low input technologies that improve yields – is sustained and good quality training, support and innovation – from peer farmers, extension advisors, and the agricultural research community. To provide this support at scale would require a reorientation and massive scaling up of public institutions and interventions, to complement the ongoing but piecemeal efforts of development organisations and other service providers.

Malawian civil society organisations have called for the government's new agriculture policy to include support for conservation agriculture and other climate resilient technologies. While the government has stated publicly that it believes CA is one of the pathways to sustainable agricultural production systems and can also mitigate the effects of weather variability and climate change, there has been no concomitant scaling up of public support for the adoption of CA<sup>43</sup>.

Furthermore, while DFID and other bilateral donors are supporting conservation agriculture and small-scale irrigation as part of their New Alliance commitments, the funds are mostly in support of the efforts of non-governmental organisations, which lack the institutional and political capacity to provide extension services at scale across the whole of Malawi.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This is the first report being written jointly by Malawi and UK civil society looking at the impact of the New Alliance. **CISANET, CEPA, Concern Universal, and Christian Aid will engage with the Government of Malawi, and key donors and stakeholders, to ensure that agriculture policy, including the New Alliance framework, benefits poor farmers.**

To reduce poverty in Malawi, agriculture policy needs to focus on the interests and needs of all smallholder farmers, including women and those who are resource poor. Government policies aiming to support and transform the agricultural sector will have a greater impact on poverty if they are developed with the participation of these smallholder farmers and their representatives, rather than prioritising the voice of the agri-business sector when developing policies and priority interventions.

In October 2014 the UK Department for International Development (DFID) stated that it is their priority to ensure that agricultural investments made under the New Alliance framework are 'responsible and inclusive', and that they are committed to investing in rural infrastructure, agricultural research, social protection, and programmes that help smallholder farmers build resilience. They also stated publically that they are strongly committed to ensuring smallholders are actively involved and part of the in-country dialogue on investment issues<sup>44</sup>. However, so far there has been very little visible implementation of these priorities in Malawi.

In view of the findings in this report, to achieve their New Alliance objectives of a reduction in poverty and hunger, we urge the government of Malawi and donors to work with smallholder farmers and civil society to:

- **Improve consultation mechanisms** to allow for the full, informed and effective participation of civil society and farmer organisations in the development, monitoring and implementation of government policies related to agriculture production, investment and marketing, including those prioritised under the New Alliance.
- **Prioritise initiatives and policies that benefit smallholder farmers** in all future agriculture policies. These need to focus on local and domestic market development, and include scaling up conservation agriculture, small-scale irrigation, and increasing land tenure rights and the right to use, save and exchange farm-bred seeds.
- **Implement the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests** through targeted initiatives and developing monitoring indicators in the New Alliance framework, going beyond the current 'intensions' clause.
- **Scale up the provision of services and programmes that build the resilience of Malawi's smallholder farmers**, and integrate these into Malawi's agricultural development strategies.
- **Require companies who sign Letters of Intent to report on the quality of jobs, risk-sharing strategies, environmental impact and direct food security impact** of their investments under the New Alliance framework. And ensure that clear transparency and accountability measures are in place so that companies are prioritising the needs of smallholder farmers.



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