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The Quality of Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes at National Level in Malawi Results from the 2017/18 Malawi Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes Endline Survey

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Introduction

Over the past ten years, there have been several initiatives in Malawi to strengthen the processes through which the design and content of policies, strategies, and programs in the agriculture sector that affect the nation's food security are established. In this report we present results of a study to assess the quality of these policy processes and the institutional framework through which they are conducted and how perceptions of their quality have changed over time. The study is based on a two-round survey of national stakeholders in Malawi on issues centered on agriculture or food security that was conducted in 2015 and 2017/18.

Because of developments in the overall governance of the sector over the past ten years or so, there has been a broadening in who participates in agriculture and food security policy processes. In addition to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Water Development (MoAIWD), which continues to coordinate these processes, a broader and more diverse range of civil society and non-governmental organizations, firms or representatives of sub-sectoral umbrella organizations from the private sector, other agencies from within the public sector, and agriculture and food policy researchers from various institutions all now engage in these processes more regularly. Development partners remain engaged, primarily through the Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security (DCAFS), which provides a consensus perspective of donors on the issues at hand.

The New Alliance Policy Acceleration Support-Malawi (NAPAS:Malawi) project has been funded by the Malawi mission of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) since 2014 to work particularly with MoAIWD on an agenda of policy reforms in the

This brief is a synthesis of Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research Paper 109. See <https://www.canr.msu.edu/fsp/publications/research-papers/FSP%20Research%20Paper%20109.pdf>

Key Findings and Recommendations

- A survey of 55 participants in national-level policy processes around agriculture and food security in Malawi was implemented in 2015 (baseline) and in 2017/18 (endline) to examine the quality of these processes and the institutions involved.
- The 2015 baseline survey analysis showed that assessments of the quality of these processes were positive, even if improvements were still needed.
- However, contrary to expectations, the endline survey of 2017/18 showed increased pessimism among respondents as to the quality of the processes and the institutions involved in them.
- This result was unexpected, as policy developments around agriculture and food security between 2015 and 2017/18 were positive—several important agricultural policy achievements had been realized.
- However, Malawi also experienced recurrent widespread food insecurity crises over this period.
- Consequently, there is a disconnect between the reasonably high quality of the policies and strategies developed through these processes and the results obtained. Respondents to the endline survey were more skeptical than anticipated of the quality of these policy processes.
- Better quality policy processes are not sufficient for achieving better outcomes in Malawi's agricultural sector and food security for Malawi's citizens.
- Effective implementation of the policies developed through these processes is the most important proof of their quality and value. Policy implementation remains inadequate and a continuing challenge.



agriculture sector. One of the objectives of the NAPAS:Malawi project is to support efforts to improve the quality of agriculture and food security policy processes in terms of the institutional architecture within which these processes take place, the value of the discussions on various policy, strategy, and program options being considered, and the degree to which objective evidence is used to guide decision making.

Two of the NAPAS:Malawi project monitoring indicators are indices, first, of the quality of the agriculture and food security policy processes in Malawi and, secondly, of the quality of the institutional architecture within which those processes proceed. These indices are computed from information obtained through surveys of national level stakeholders in agriculture and food security policy processes in Malawi.

The survey and characteristics of the respondents

A baseline survey was done in mid-2015. The results of the analysis of this first survey were published in the Feed the Future Innovation Laboratory for Food Security Policy (FSP) Working Paper 13 in January 2016 and summarized in a related brief.¹

The questionnaire for the endline survey closely replicated that which was used for the baseline survey. The questionnaire for the endline survey was designed to capture from each respondent their assessment of the quality of national-level policy processes on agriculture and food security in Malawi.

The survey questionnaire has three modules. Module A collected basic information about the respondents. All the questions in modules B and C were four-level Likert scale questions in which respondents specified their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement relating to aspects of policy processes on agriculture and food security in Malawi. No 'neutral' or "neither agree nor disagree" option was offered, forcing the respondent to make a judgment on the statement in question.

Representation in the sample was sought from five different categories of stakeholders—government, civil society, the private sector, donor agencies, and researchers. For the endline survey, the 86 individuals who made up the analytical sample for the baseline survey were contacted again and asked to complete an online endline questionnaire. In total, 55 respondents completed the endline survey. Of these, 43 were the same respondents, while the other 12 endline survey respondents were replacements for baseline survey respondents who no longer participate in agriculture and food security policy processes in Malawi. These replacements generally are the

current holders of the institutional positions held by the earlier baseline survey respondents.

Table 1, which describes the analytical sample of 55 endline survey respondents, shows that policy processes in Malawi remain strongly male-dominated—only 13 percent of the endline survey respondents were female. The analytical sample is shown to be quite experienced in policy processes on agriculture and food security in Malawi.

Table 1. Institutional Category of Endline Survey Respondents, by Sex and Experience

Institutional category	2017/18 endline survey sample, frequency			Years engaged in policy processes, mean
	All	Female	Male	
Government	21	2	19	10.9
Senior	7	0	7	15.3
Technical	11	2	9	7.5
Statutory body	3	0	3	14.5
Civil society	10	1	9	16.8
CSOs	6	1	5	12.8
NGOs	4	0	4	22.7
Private sector	11	1	10	12.8
Donor agency	7	2	5	16.0
Research	6	1	5	14.7
Non-government respondents	34	5	29	15.0
Total	55	7	48	13.5

Note: Analysis of module A from 2017/18 survey. CSO=Civil society organization; NGO=Non-governmental organization.

Respondents were asked to assess the level of influence of their own institution on recent agriculture and food security policy change processes. Most of those interviewed view their own institution as having moderate to high influence on the direction that these policy processes take. There is no statistically significant difference between different institutional categories of respondents in this regard, although respondents from senior or technical posts in government and from civil society organizations are somewhat more likely than respondents from other categories and sub-categories to have reported that their institution has a high degree of influence.

Results

To analyze the results from the Likert scale multiple-choice responses to the questions in modules B and C of the endline survey, the four possible responses were assigned integer values: 0 for a 'Completely disagree' response; 1 for 'Somewhat disagree', 2 for 'Somewhat agree', and 3 for 'Completely agree'. Mean responses to the questions were then computed overall and by the five categories of respondents. In addition, the responses made in the baseline survey in 2015 for the 55 respondents were

¹ See <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/the-quality-of-agriculture-and-food-security-policy-processes-at-national-level-in-malawi>

retrieved to enable comparison with the 2017/18 endline survey responses.

To test statistically whether the aggregate responses to a question for each of the five sub-sample categories differed significantly between any of the groups or whether the mean response to a question in the baseline survey differed significantly from the mean response in the endline survey, a Kruskal-Wallis rank test was used. The implication of a significant result to the test between categories of respondents is that at least one of the five categories of respondents had, on average, a pointedly different assessment from other categories of respondents on the quality of the dimension of agriculture and food security policy processes being explored in that particular question in the endline survey. Similarly, a significant result for the test between the survey rounds for a question is that opinions expressed by the respondents at the time of the endline survey differed significantly from their responses to the same question when the baseline survey was administered.

Examining the results of the Kruskal-Wallis rank test comparing responses across the two survey rounds, for most of the 40 questions in modules B and C there is a significant decline in the mean score. A statistically significant decline in the mean Likert score is seen for 17 of the 19 questions in Module B and for 13 of the 21 questions in Module C, suggesting significant erosion across all respondents in their perceptions of the quality of agriculture and food security policy processes over the period between the two survey rounds. For none of the questions in either module was an improvement seen in the mean Likert scores between the baseline and endline surveys. Significantly greater misgivings about the quality of agriculture and food security policy processes in Malawi were seen in 2017/18 relative to 2015.

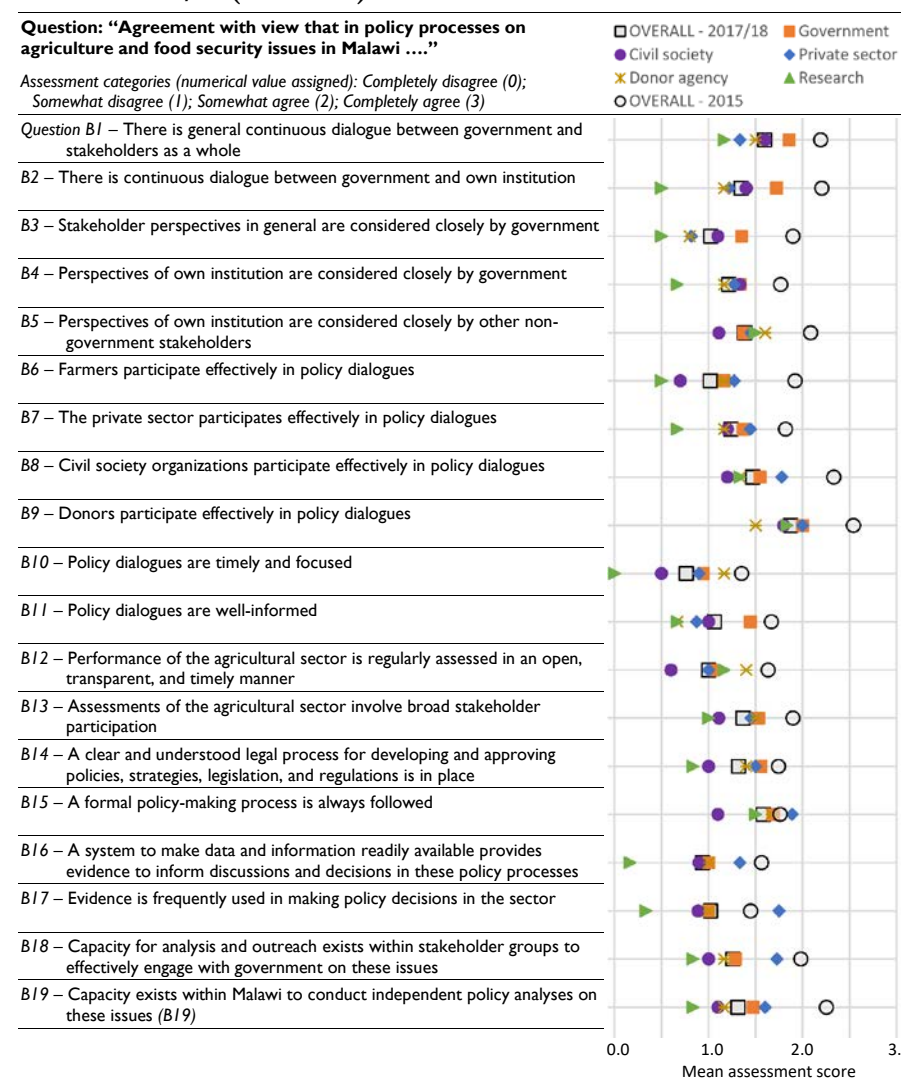
Quality of Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes in Malawi (Module B)

Module B primarily focuses on the quality of the content and inclusiveness of the discussions and debate in agriculture and food security policy processes in Malawi. An underlying assumption to the questions is that government is the principal convener and organizer of these processes, a role it has long played. Starting from this assumption, the

questions investigate the degree to which the perspectives of other stakeholder groups are brought into these government-led processes, how well structured the processes are, and the degree to which evidence has been or could be used to inform the dialogues and debates inherent to them.

The overall question response patterns seen in Figure 1 shows that the average response to the statements posed in the endline survey fall around the ‘Somewhat disagree’ response, with an average assessment score for all questions in Module B for all respondents of 1.25. This pattern contrasts to the pattern of responses in the baseline survey of 2015 where the respondents were generally appreciative of the quality of the processes, while recognizing that there is still considerable room for

Figure 1. Summary of Mean Assessment Scores Concerning Perceptions on the Quality of Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes in Malawi in 2017/18 (Module B)



Source: Analysis of survey module B.

Note: The mean assessment score is the average of the four assessment levels, assigning a score of 0 to ‘Completely disagree’, 1 to ‘Somewhat disagree’, 2 to ‘Somewhat agree’, and 3 to ‘Completely agree’. An equal distribution of assessment levels will have a mean score of 1.5.

improvement—the average assessment score for the baseline survey was 1.93, close to the value of 2.0 assigned to ‘Somewhat agree’ responses. The mean rating by respondents in the 2015 baseline survey, depicted by the ‘O’ symbol in Figure 1, for all questions is consistently to the right of the mean rating by respondents in the 2017/18 endline survey, depicted in the figure by the symbol ‘□’.

As was the case with the baseline, in the 2017/18 endline survey respondents from government generally provide the most positive assessments across the respondent categories, with an average score for all 19 questions in Module B of 1.42. However, this is significantly lower than their mean score in the baseline survey of 2.11. The average assessment score for all non-government respondents for the questions in Module B is 1.16, 0.26 points below the average score for government respondents. The mean score in the baseline survey for all non-government respondents was 1.81. Among non-government categories of respondents, private sector respondents had the highest assessment of the quality of policy processes and showed the smallest decline in their mean assessment between the baseline and endline survey. Researchers, in contrast, showed both the lowest mean quality assessment score and the greatest drop in their mean score. In sum, the assessment of all respondents of the quality of the content and inclusiveness of the discussions and debate in agriculture and food security policy processes in Malawi, shows a significant decline between 2015 and 2017/18.

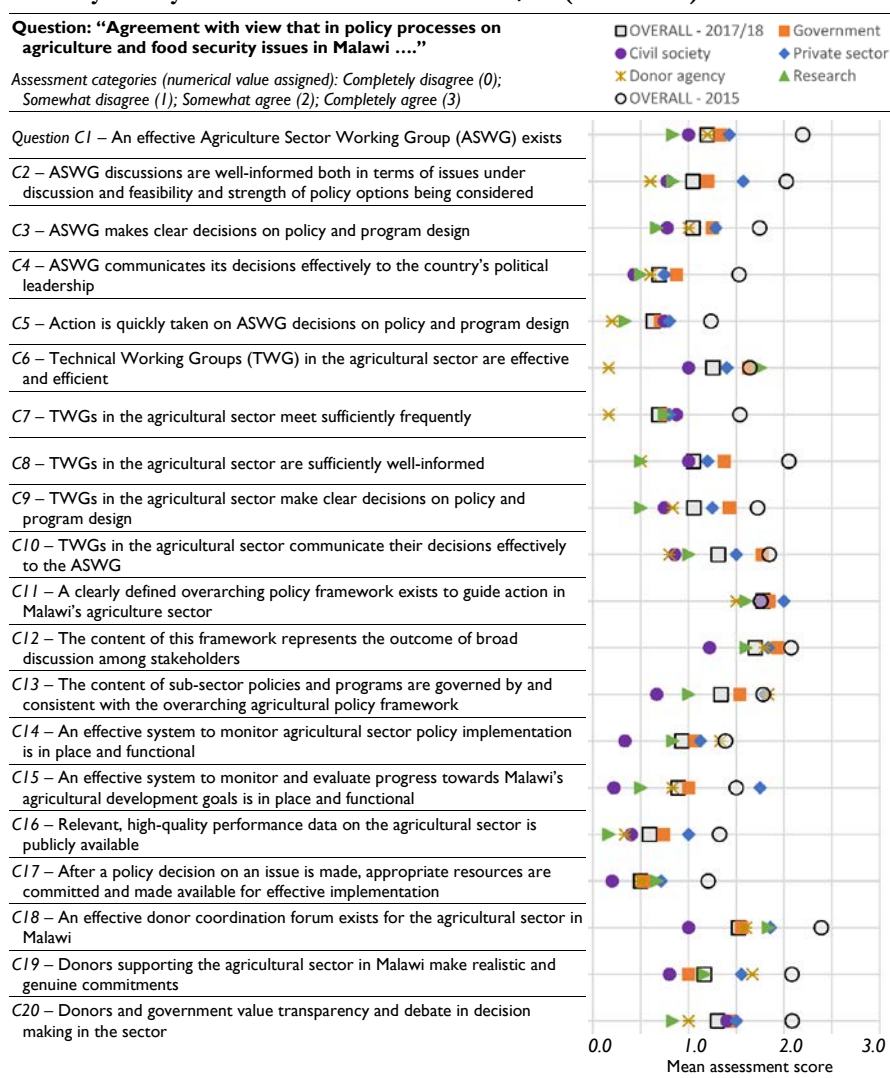
Quality of the Institutional Architecture for Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes in Malawi (Module C)

Module C primarily focuses on the institutions and the policy implementation monitoring frameworks established to facilitate agriculture and food security policy reform processes in Malawi. The questions investigate the degree to which technical and coordination institutions are effective, policy frameworks are respected, and insights are gained through monitoring of the implementation of policy reforms. As in Module B, the questions in Module C are made up of generally positive statements on these dimensions of the

institutional architecture through which the processes are conducted.

The overall question response patterns seen in Figure 2 for the first 20 questions of Module C shows that the average response to the statements posed in the endline survey in 2017/18 are somewhat more negative, often significantly so, than the responses made by the respondent for the baseline survey in 2015. Whereas for the baseline survey, responses for module C fell somewhat below the ‘Somewhat agree’ response with an average assessment score of 1.80 for the first 20 questions, the average assessment score for Module C for the endline is 1.09 with most respondents selecting a ‘Somewhat disagree’ response.

Figure 2. Summary of Mean Assessment Scores Concerning Perceptions on the Quality of the Institutional Architecture of Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes in Malawi in 2017/18 (Module C)



Source: Analysis of survey module C.

Note: The mean assessment score is the average of the four assessment levels, assigning a score of 0 to ‘Completely disagree’, 1 to ‘Somewhat disagree’, 2 to ‘Somewhat agree’, and 3 to ‘Completely agree’. An equal distribution of assessment levels will have a mean score of 1.5.

Based on this overall trend in the assessment scores, it appears that most respondents have become somewhat disillusioned over the period between the two surveys with how well the institutions and the policy and implementation monitoring frameworks that have been put in place around agriculture and food security issues are performing. Across respondent categories, those from civil society organizations show the sharpest drop since 2015 and the lowest average scores in their assessment in 2017/18 of the quality of the institutional architecture. Private sector and government respondents provide the most positive assessments to the questions in Module C across the categories, although it is important to note that the average assessment score for government respondents dropped substantially between the two surveys.

Overall Quality of Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes in Malawi

It was noted in the introduction that two of the NAPAS:Malawi project monitoring indicators are indices of, first, the quality of the agriculture and food security policy processes in Malawi and, secondly, of the quality of the institutional architecture within which those processes proceed. Here these indices are discussed.

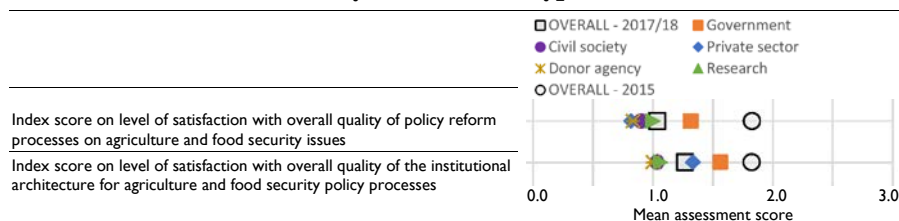
The first index on the quality of these policy processes is derived directly from question C21:

C21: How satisfied are you today with the overall quality of dialogue, coordination, cooperation, and partnership between stakeholders in the sector and government for advancing policy reforms on agriculture and food security issues in Malawi?

The aggregate mean assessment score for this index in the endline survey of 2017/18 is 1.0, a decidedly negative response and significantly lower than the mean score of 1.8 in the baseline survey of 2015. The positive developments and strengths in the policy processes around agriculture and food security seen by respondents in 2015 seem to have been obscured by growing discouragement about how to bring positive change in the development challenges Malawi is facing on these issues.

For the second index on the quality of the institutional architecture for agriculture and food security policy processes, no single all-embracing question on the quality of the institutions was asked of the respondents. To generate an index on institutional quality, we use a mean aggregate score derived from four questions in module C that ask respondents to directly assess the efficiency and effectiveness of several components of the institutional

Figure 3. Indices of Perceptions on the Quality of Policy Reform Processes and of the Institutional Architecture within which Those Processes Take Place in Malawi in 2017/18, by Institutional Type



Source: Analysis of survey questions C21 (first index) and mean of C1, C6, C11, and C14 (second index).

Note: The mean assessment score is the average of four assessment levels, assigning a score of 0 to 'Completely disagree', 1 to 'Somewhat disagree', 2 to 'Somewhat agree', and 3 to 'Completely agree'. An equal distribution of assessment levels will have a mean score of 1.5.

architecture for agriculture and food security policy processes in Malawi:

C1: An effective and efficient Agricultural Sector Working Group exists.

C6: For the Technical Working Groups in the agriculture sector in which I have participated in the past 12 months, I have found them to be effective and efficient.

C11: A clearly defined overarching policy framework exists to guide action in the agriculture sector to improve agricultural productivity, increase production, boost food security, and enhance nutrition.

C14: An effective system to monitor policy implementation and results in the agriculture sector is in place and functional.

The aggregate mean assessment score for this composite index from the 2017/18 endline survey is 1.3, somewhat more positive than the first index from the endline survey focusing on the quality of the policy processes, but showing a significant decline since the baseline survey in 2015 (Figure 3). While there was a significant difference between stakeholder categories for this index in the baseline survey, in the endline survey opinions have converged somewhat so that the differences between them are no longer statistically significant. As with the first index, the most optimistic respondents are in government, with an aggregate score of 1.6, while the most pessimistic are from civil society and from donor agencies (1.0).

Discussion

Explanations for the significant drop in the assessment of the quality of policy processes for agriculture and food security in Malawi between 2015 and 2017/18 are not obvious. Policy developments and the context around agriculture and food security in Malawi between 2015 and 2017/18 provides a mixed, but not a wholly negative, picture of progress.

On the positive side, the National Agriculture Policy was adopted in late-2016 following extensive stakeholder consultations. More recently, a broad set of stakeholders were involved in developing the National Agricultural Investment Plan that will guide action to realize the objectives of the National Agriculture Policy. These policy processes certainly were successful.

On the negative side, Malawi has experienced recurrent widespread food insecurity crises in recent years due to floods, drought, and pest infestations. These required significant humanitarian responses that involved considerable reliance on international assistance—the largest, the 2016/17 Food Insecurity Response Programme, targeted over six million vulnerable people in southern and central Malawi.

As was repeatedly noted by respondents in their comments on specific questions in the endline survey, there is a significant disconnect between the reasonably high quality

of the policy documents and strategies that are developed through the policy processes around agriculture and food security issues and the results obtained—the quality of policy implementation does not meet the aspirations of those policies and strategies. This is nowhere made more evident than when millions of Malawians persistently, almost routinely, are at risk of hunger.

This disconnect between policy and strategy formulation and implementation also points to a deficiency in a premise of the survey. We assumed that the quality of policy processes and the effectiveness of the institutions involved in the formulation of policies and strategies on agriculture and food security could be assessed independently of the implementation of the policies and strategies. However, the analysis here shows that it is very difficult to separate the two in any assessment.

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