Ministry of Agriculture

Agro-Ecology Hub Malawi

Hosted by LUANAR, PO Box 219, Lilongwe

Supported by
McKnight Foundation

Profile of Policies, Strategies and Major Programmes Supporting Agro-ecological Intensification in Malawi

Kefasi Kamoyo[1*], Gertrude Kambauwa[1], VH Kabambe[2]
[1]Department of Land Resources Conservation, P.O Box 30291, Lilongwe
[2]Agroecology Intensification Hub, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, PO Box 219, Lilongwe
Email:* kamokefa@yahoo.com Phone: +265999951981/+265885551981
Published August 2021

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Malawi, agriculture, dominated by smallholder farmers, is the mainstay of the economy accounting for 30 % of Gross Domestic Product (Malawi Government, 2015). Most soils in low to mid altitude area experience soil loss of 0-10 t/ha. However in steep mountainous areas, soil loss can be as high as 39 t/ha (Vargas & Omuto, 2018). However, agricultural productivity is low, with maize yields of 1.4-2.2 t/ha being compared to potential yield of 6-12 t/ha (Min. Agric., 2020). In addition, climate change and variability adversely affect agricultural production and productivity. A growing global approach in food and agricultural systems is the use of agroecological principles to prevent further land degradation and restore productivity and resilience of the landscapes. The FAO (2018) defines agro-ecological as 'an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems'. The FAO has listed 10 elements as important in guiding the transition to sustainable food and agricultural systems. These are: diversity, co-creation and sharing of knowledge, synergies, resource use efficiency, recycling, resilience, human and social values, culture and food traditions, responsible governance, and circular and solidarity economy. Several other authors have suggested similar broad base definitions and approaches (eg Gliessman, 2015; Atieri, 1995).

The Department of Land Resources Conservation (DLRC) in the Ministry of Agriculture is the technical arm of Government of Malawi (GoM) mandated to provide policy guidance, land resource information and training in order to achieve sustainable land resources management and prevention of land degradation that will increase and sustain its productivity for agricultural growth and development. In this bulletin, we highlight the current policies, strategies, action plans and programmes that support agroecological intensification by the GoM and other stakeholders, coordinated by the DLRC. The objective is to allow stakeholders appreciate the extend and level of priority and efforts already in place, and encourage every stakeholder to share common goals, and appropriately position themselves in complementing, collaborating and providing synergies with these efforts.

2.0 MANDATE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND RESOURCES CONSERVATION (DLRC)

In order to achieve the above-stated mandate, DLRC has the following functions:

⇒ development of policy standards and strategies relating to land resources management;
⇒ planning and coordination of programmes on land resource management;
⇒ providing land resources information services;
⇒ monitoring and evaluating land use/cover changes;
⇒ providing training in land resources management, and
⇒ providing technical support in land resource management.

Conservation agriculture systems encourage use of mulch which protects soil from erosion & conserves soil and moisture

Sound measures to control erosion are solid bases for agroecology based farming systems

3.0 RELEVELANT POLICY STANDARDS, FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES THAT DLRC IS USING IN PROMOTION OF AGROECOLOGICAL INTENSIFICATION (AEI).

The major policies, guidelines and frameworks advocating for promotion of agro-ecological intensification in Malawi are as below.

3.1 The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi. The Malawi Constitution of 1995 lays a strong foundation for policy and legal reform in environmental governance. Section 13 declares:

"The State shall actively promote the welfare and development of the people of Malawi by progressively adopting and implementing policies and legislation aimed at achieving the following goals:
To manage the environment responsibly in order to:

(i) Prevent the degradation of the environment;
(ii) Provide a healthy living and working environment for the people of Malawi;
(iii Accord full recognition to the rights of future generations by means of environmental protection and the sustainable development of natural resources; and,
(iii) Conserve and enhance the biological diversity of Malawi."

3.2 Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (2017-22). The objective of the strategy is to move Malawi to a productive, competitive and resilient nation through sustainable agriculture and economic growth, energy, industrial and infrastructure development while addressing water, climate change, environmental management and population challenges. One of the five key priorities of the strategy is Agriculture, Water Development and Climate Change Management. The goal of this priority area is to achieve sustainable agricultural transformation and water development that is adaptive to climate change and enhances ecosystem services.

3.3 National Agriculture Policy (2016-2020). The policy goal was to achieve sustainable agricultural transformation that will result in significant growth of the agricultural sector, expanding incomes for farm households, improved food and nutrition security for all Malawians, and increased agricultural exports. Policy priority # 1 is on Sustainable Agricultural Production and Productivity, and policy Statement 3.1.4 states: 'to promote investments in climate-smart agriculture and sustainable land and water management, including integrated soil fertility management and conservation and utilization of Malawi's rich ago-biodiversity'.

3.4 The Affordable Inputs Pogramme (AIP, formerly Farm Input Subsidy Programme). For the past 10-15 years the GOM has been supporting farmers to access inputs such as seeds and fertilisers through a subsidy programme. Under this programme, farmers are being encouraged to integrate fertiliser with manure and other organic resources.

3.5 The National Land Resources Management Policy and Strategy (2000). The goal of this policy is to promote the efficient, diversified and sustainable use of land based resources both for agriculture and other uses in order to avoid sectoral land use conflicts and ensure sustainable socio-economic development.

3.6 Malawi National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP) 2017/18-2022/23. The NAIP is a prioritized and co-ordinated Agricultural Transformation Plan for Malawi. The NAIP Program B is about resilient livelihoods and agricultural systems. Program A , about capacity building, has a component on training front line staff on Conservation Agriculture.

3.7 The Malawi Agricultural Sector Wide Approach (ASWAP SP II, 2017-2019). This is a partnership project between Malawi Government and its donor partners, which supports components of NAIP, including the sustainable Agriculture Productivity and Diversification Component.

3.8 The Malawi National Climate Smart Agriculture Framework (2017). This Framework provides broad guidelines for the planning and implementation of climate smart agriculture interventions such as conservation agriculture in Malawi.

3.9 National Conservation Agriculture Task Force (NCATF)/Sustainable Agriculture Trust.

The NCATF was established and relaunched in 2007 with the following roles:

⇒ To facilitate networking among conservation agriculture (CA) players and implementers;
⇒ To advocate and influence agriculture policies and other policies related to CA;
⇒ To facilitate the development, packaging and dissemination of CA through stakeholder consultation;
⇒ To facilitate capacity building among stakeholders;
⇒ To participate / represent at regional and global CA and related forums;
⇒ Develop strategies for the roll out and adoption of CA; and,
⇒ Seek financial support for expansion of CA activities in Malawi.

One of the major outputs of NCATF was the development of CA implementation guidelines in 2016. CA guidelines were developed to harmonize extension messages on CA and minimize confusion and controversy over definition and practice of CA in Malawi. The Sustainable Agriculture Trust (SAT) has been established and registered in 2017 to replace NCATF

4.0 COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

4.1 Sustainable Land and Water Management Technical Working Group/Resilient Agricultural Systems. Under ASWAP I, a Technical Working Group (TWG) on sustainable agriculture was created and operationalized AEI through Sustainable Land and Water Management (SLWM). The main objective of the TWG was to support line departments on technical issues and methodologies for implementation of activities. With NAIP in operation now, the SLWM is embedded into Resilience and Agricultural Systems (RAS) TWG. The goal of RAS TWG is 'to strengthen resilience and improve agricultural systems for sustainable livelihoods'.

4.2 Soil Mapping Steering Committee. One of the major challenges hindering productivity is poor access and utilization of fertilizers by smallholder farmers. Smallholder farmers have been using a blanket fertilizer recommendation, which accounts for over 50% of the fertilizer market and its prolonged use has resulted in the soil undergoing mineral and nutrient depletion (IFDC, 2018). With the technical guidance of this committee, the country is aiming to move away from the general old blanket recommendation to come up with appropriate and area specific fertilizer blends to improve use efficiency.

4.3 Annual Conferences of the DLRC. In these conferences the department and partners meet to deliberate pertinent issues on AEI practices and principles focusing on SLWM. The conference also assesses performance against targets and identifies key challenges that define the focus on SLWM for the next season. Some of the stakeholders invited and present at the event are Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, CISANET, ICRAF, Department of Agricultural Research Services, Centre for Environmental Protection Agency (CEPA) among others.

4.4 The Malawi Watershed Services Improvement Project (MWASIP). The MWASIP is funded by world bank for five years. The Program Development Objective is to restore degraded landscapes in priority river basins and improve water security, agricultural productivity and livelihoods. The DLRC will work with LUANAR on the impact evaluation to build evidence base for sustainable land management decision making.

4.5 Annual Manure, Fodder Conservation and Catchment Conservation and Management Campaigns. These are conducted annually, usually with a national launch by a cabinet minister. Many partners are involved. Within the Ministry of Agriculture, staff and farmers agree on targets of certain activities, such as numbers of compost mounts, with monitoring systems in place. The main objective of the campaign is to raise the profile of sustainable land management in general and soil health in particular by integrating organic sources of soil nutrients with inorganic fertilizers. In a well conserved and protected landscape to achieve dual objectives of soil fertility management and protecting the production base from erosion and continued degradation.

Local governance systems that encourage controlled grazing further allow farmers to grow a diverse range of crops including pigeon peas and cassava which grows deep in the dry season after the harvest of maize.

5.0 RECENTLY CONCLUDED COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

5.1 Joint implementation of Agroforestry Food Security Programme. In this programme, the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) with funding from Irish Aid Malawi and its partners (DLRC Inclusive), conducted activities that included procurement, sourcing and distribution of quality tree seed to farmers through its partners, establishing biophysical suitability and niches of agroforestry species using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, training farmers and extension staff in agroforestry technologies among others.

5.2 Soil Health Consortium of Malawi (SoHCoM) and Agro-ecological Intensification Hub – Malawi. The DLRC has worked with Soil Health Consortium of Malawi under Lilongwe University Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR). The DLRC and Department of Agricultural Extension Services had the mandate to coordinate ISFM research and disseminate ISFM research finding to the farmers. The objectives of the Consortium were to furnish current and new Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM) extension service providers with information on a range of ISFM technologies, equip practitioners with skills to design ISFM practices for their projects and facilitate sharing among the community. The consortium published a book on 'Status of Fertilizer Recommendation in Malawi', disseminated profiles of ISFM technologies, policy briefs, fliers and technical briefs. The consortium also convened a ISFM technical workshop and ISFM policy workshop with published proceedings.

6.0 Conclusion

The Department of Land Resources Conservation is in close collaboration with its partners to promote agro-ecological intensification. Further there are policies and frameworks that give opportunities to upscale agroecological intensification in the country. There is need to harmonize the programming and even implementation of AEI based on identified gaps so that farmers in the country can fully benefit from practising agro-ecological intensification.

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CORRECT CITATION:

Kamoyo K, Kambauwa G, Kabambe V. (2021). Profile of Policies, Strategies and Major Programmes Supporting Agro-ecological Intensification in Malawi. Department of Land Resources Conservation, Lilongwe Malawi.

This publication has been made possible with support from the McKnight Foundation through the Malawi Agro-Ecological Intensification Hub (AEI-HUB Malawi).

Contacts: knjira@luanar.ac.mw. Website: http://www.bunda.luanar.mw