

Agriculture Policy and Institutional Strengthening (APIS) in Malawi: A National Workshop on ASWAp II

Sunbird Capital Hotel, Lilongwe, October 24–27, 2016

The workshop was hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development and mainly sponsored by the New Alliance Policy Acceleration Support Project (NAPAS: Malawi). It was attended by more than 60 public and private sector participants involved in promoting food security and economic development through agriculture-led growth in Malawi.

The workshop aimed to inform the design of ASWAp II, the second National Agricultural Investment Plan, which is intended to operationalize the implementation of the National Agriculture Policy (NAP) that was approved by Cabinet in September 2016 and formally launched on November 30. As a workshop, as opposed to an academic conference, the major piece of work took place on the third day (Wednesday) when participants formed six working groups — each group corresponding to one of the eight priority areas of the NAP — and each group reached a consensus on the highest priority institutional reforms needed in each priority area.

Prior to this action planning exercise, the organizers put together a program to familiarize all participants with the NAP, to provide a framework for thinking about institutional reforms in the agriculture sector, and to learn about the relevant experiences of other countries with respect to implementing major policy reforms such as the NAP, as well as subsector reforms such as agricultural marketing and intra-African trade. Individual and group exercises and role plays drew upon research that had been done on the various agricultural issues in Malawi, and drew upon the experiences of other African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia) that are also seeking private sector-led agricultural development.

Some key messages that the workshop conveyed included:

- Effective policies must be undergirded by institutional arrangements that create incentives for desirable economic behavior, and minimize opportunities for wrong-doing.
- The process of policy and institutional strengthening is as important as the substance and it is very important to involve key stakeholders in the strengthening process.
- Agriculture is a complex sector. Different strategies are needed for different subsectors, depending on the nature of the goods and services in each subsector.
- The government needs to facilitate, encourage, and celebrate an entrepreneurial culture to grow the economy, and remove obstacles that the state had inadvertently created to such entrepreneurship, especially in the area of trade.

One result coming out of the workshop was the need for government to implement a user-friendly communications strategy to familiarize all stakeholders with the National Agriculture Policy. This should focus on communicating the vision, guiding principles, and objectives, and only a few of the many strategies listed in the document.

Key institutional reforms to implement the NAP that were recommended by the stakeholder participants included:

- 1) Setting up of a Reforms Delivery Unit, similar to the Agriculture Transformation Agency in Ethiopia
- 2) Strengthening and scaling up Water User Associations to enhance efforts on sustainable irrigation and water management
- 3) Implementing market-based reforms to ADMARC and commodity exchanges to enhance market access for farmers.

The National Agriculture Policy is a comprehensive policy framework that cannot be implemented in its totality overnight; it must be implemented in sequence. Building on the initial work of the workshop and the key institutional reforms suggested above, the Ministry should further identify and establish the most important institutional reforms in each of the priority areas of the National Agriculture Policy that the Ministry will start to work on right away. These would also constitute the building blocks of the design of ASWAp II.