

Civil society partnerships in Malawi Providing evidence for civil society led advocacy on agriculture in Malawi



Impact Stories

This is one of a series of impact stories from the Future Agricultures Consortium.

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Future Agricultures worked with three civil society organisations (CSOs) which aim to inform and influence agricultural policy in Malawi. We have provided evidence, policy framing and analysis which is being used in advocacy and policy influencing around the issues of input subsidies, land, and national agricultural policy.

Malawi's Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources (PCANR) is a cross-party group of MPs who take evidence from a variety of sources which they report to parliament and use to provide feedback and oversight to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS).

Future Agricultures worked with three CSOs who aim to influence the committee through events and working groups:

- The Civil Society Agricultural Network (CISANET), a network of 130 international and national NGOs, farmer organisations and individuals. Future Agricultures has a primary partnership with CISANET, providing briefing and analysis.
- The Farmers Union of Malawi (FUM), with a membership of 700,000 smallholders, emerging farmers and large scale farmers. Future Agricultures evidence is used by FUM.

- The National Association of Smallholder Farmers of Malawi (NASFAM), with a membership of around 130,000 smallholders. Future Agricultures evidence is also used by NASFAM.

CISANET organises yearly 'Policy Dialogue' events at which Future Agricultures provides speakers. The MoAFS sends a representative and a report is sent to the Ministry. FUM and NASFAM also participate.



Farmer in Nathenge, Malawi.
Credit: Stephen Morrison/dfataustralianaid/Flickr (cc-by 2.0)

Future Agricultures has worked with these organisations around three main topics:

- The **Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP)** – one of the highest profile government policies in the country, comprising at least 60% of the Ministry of Agriculture budget, and with some controversy. Future Agricultures has been involved in a series of evaluations since 2006/7 and published a book on its lessons in 2014.¹

Future Agricultures contributed to civil society advocacy on the FISP which in turn led to improvements in delivery. Our researchers also worked on the political economy of CAADP to broaden the debate beyond FISP in 2012.

- **Customary Land Bill** – the proposal in the land bill to title land through the household does not solve the long standing problem of women's rights. There is concern that untitled land could be at risk of land grabbing, so the land bill aims to extend titling in the name of the household head, which could give male household heads more influence at the expense of women and chiefs. Future Agricultures provided analysis on land grabbing by foreign interests.

- **National Agricultural Policy** – a contested issue, with smallholders' needs set against those of larger farms. Under the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, Malawi is required to develop

an agricultural policy by March 2015. Future Agricultures provided political economy analysis which aimed to shift the focus on how to realistically achieve desired outcomes.

Future Agricultures provided significant input to the analysis and critique of many aspects of current agricultural policy in Malawi. The drafting of a formal policy has provided a 'moment' for this analysis to be fed into the document. CISANET, FUM and NASFAM are now feeding this through formal working groups into the policy development process, though it is still too early to judge the longer-term outcomes of this process.

Key moments

2009 FISP researchers meet and agree to a joint policy brief for unified lobbying. Partnership between CISANET and Future Agricultures begins.

2010 Joint CISANET / Future Agricultures policy paper on FISP.

2012 Policy Dialogue on the future of FISP, organised by CISANET, where Future Agricultures researchers presented research results. This was attended by personnel from Ministries, donors and civil society.

2012 CISANET / Future Agricultures policy dialogue on the Green Revolution. Customary Land Bill introduced to parliament, but defeated due to concerns over weak control of land purchases by foreign actors.

2013 Land Bill re-introduced with stronger controls on foreign interests buying land. Future Agricultures members brief the Parliamentary Committee (PCANR) on risks, but the Bill is passed, then the president refuses to sign it due to opposition from traditional authorities.

Political Economy of Agricultural Policy conference organised by CISANET with presentations by FAC researchers. Outputs widely circulated.

2014 Elections. National Agricultural Policy delayed to March 2015. Land Bill still unsigned by president.

How Future Agricultures contributed to policy debates

Future Agricultures had a strategic aim of 'encouraging others to be catalysts in policy debates and analysis', but this work with CSOs went beyond that to provide research and analysis.

Through working with CSOs, we were able to inform policy discussions more effectively than if we had only approached policy makers directly.

This is one of a series of impact case studies drawn from an independent evaluation of the Future Agricultures, which was carried out by Upper Quartile for the UK Department for International Development and published in 2015. Find out more at future-agricultures.org/impact

¹ Agricultural Input Subsidies – The Recent Malawi Experience: bit.ly/malawibook