

Malawi's input subsidies Evidence and insight on Malawi's biggest agricultural programme



Impact Stories

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

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Future Agricultures worked with Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture and others to inform the development of the government's Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP).

Background

In 2005/6 the Malawi Government introduced a large scale national programme subsidising agricultural inputs, mainly fertilisers and seeds for maize production. The purpose of this long running work is to provide the Malawi Government and other stakeholders with information on the implementation and impact of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme.

The Farm Inputs Subsidy Programme (FISP) is one of the highest profile government policies in the country, comprising about 70% of the Ministry of Agriculture budget. FISP is supported by the rural majority but tends to be opposed by the private sector. It has been a contested area for the donor community.

The main evidence source contributing to the change process has been a series of annual independent evaluations (being more and less comprehensive in alternate years) commissioned by

the Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security (DCAFS), funded by DFID and implemented by the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)

and Wadonda Consultants. The key evaluators were Future Agricultures members, and Future Agricultures also financed some qualitative information collection.



A village woman in Malawi.
Credit: ILRI /Mann/Flickr (cc-by-nc-sa 2.0)

Working with the Ministry of Agriculture

After some initial reluctance in 2007, Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) started to recognise the evaluators as genuinely independent and producing helpful recommendations, even if they would have preferred the criticisms to be communicated in private. A change of Permanent Secretary in 2010 changed the dynamic, access improved, the MoA started hosting the public feedback sessions, and more recommendations started to be used.

Gender & Social Difference

Gender and social difference was a major component of the evaluation studies and the evaluation team persuaded the MoA to present more disaggregated data.

With limited resources within FAC for direct policy dialogue with Government, resourcing key CSOs who have a seat on various Government policy development tables was an effective strategy.

Key moments

2006/7 1st FISP Evaluation. FAC supports qualitative work.

2009 President re-elected on back of FISP promises. 2nd FISP Evaluation reports. FAC supports qualitative work. National Audit Office evaluation of DFID Malawi and presentation by DFID Malawi and Permanent Secretary cite evaluation evidence on FISP.

2010 Series of meetings leading to a joint policy brief with Malawian civil society organisations on "Lessons from the Implementation of the Agricultural Input Subsidy Programme in Malawi".

2011 3rd FISP Evaluation reports. FAC supports qualitative work.

2012 SOAS/Wadonda team wins the 3rd tender for FISP evaluation for 2012/13 to 2014/15. Future Agricultures presents research to the Civil Society Agricultural Network (CISANET) Conference on Future of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme. Submission to the UK's International Development Committee on 'How can the UK best help improve opportunities for economic growth, job creation and meeting the Millennium Development Goal targets in Malawi?'

2013 FISP Evaluation reports. Book on Agricultural Input Subsidies by Chirwa and Dorward published, with distribution funded by Future Agricultures. Future Agricultures presentations at Political Economy of Agricultural Policy Conference organised by CISANET.

Sharing experience

FAC funded the purchase and distribution of 200 paperback copies of a book summarising project findings¹, and the book was published immediately as a paperback in Africa at a much lower price than the hardback price. The book has also been available as an open access PDF, with around 1000 downloads from over 20 countries (with Malawi the country with the most downloads) in the first six months of publication.

The total of the FISP budget 2008/9 to 2011/12 is estimated at around \$165 million per year. Over the course of this project, Future Agricultures contributed to aspects of FISP's programme improvement, provided evidence to civil society involvement in a critical debate in their country and contributed to sharing an important experience with a wider international audience.

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

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