



Future  
Agricultures

# Ministries of Agriculture: Structures, Capacity and Coordination at District Level in Malawi

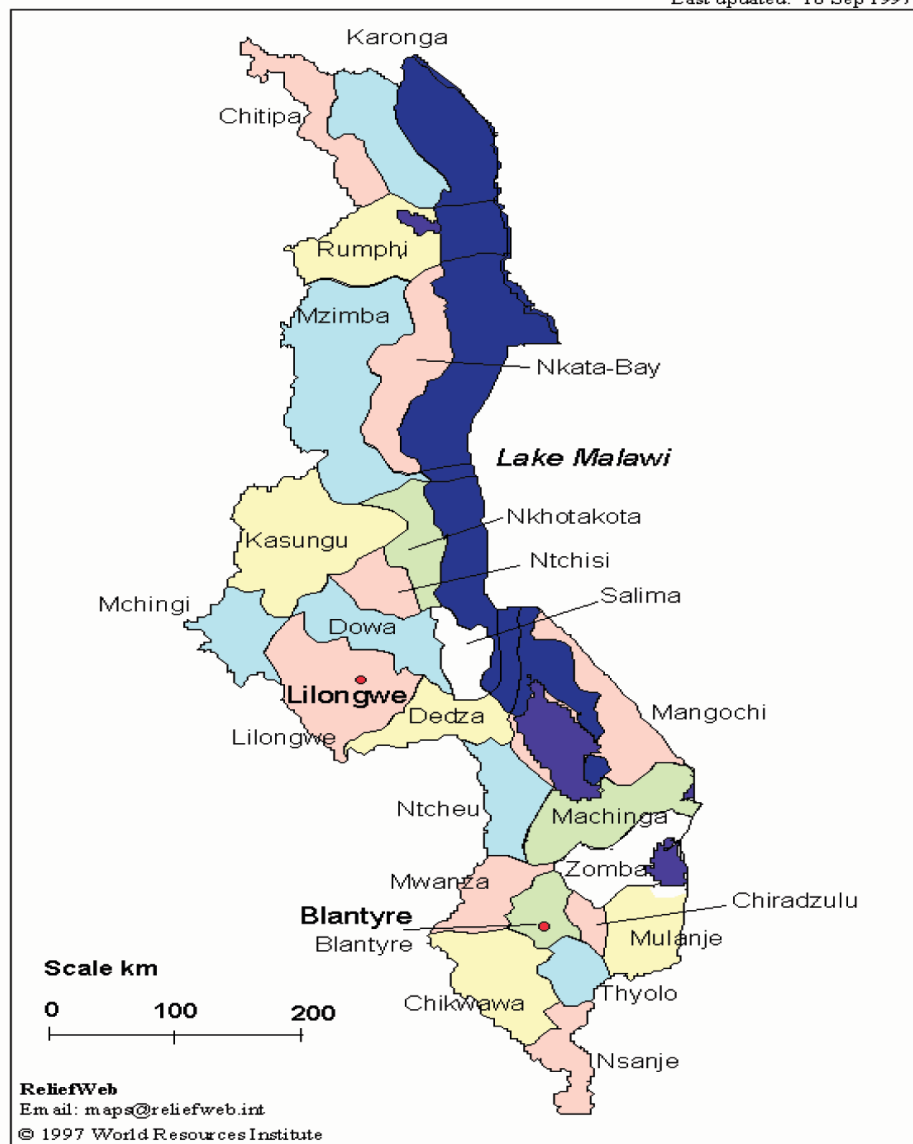
**Blessings Chinsinga**  
February 2008

Figure 1. Map of Malawi

Source: World Relief Institute

## Malawi districts

Last updated: 16 Sep 1997



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background to the Study

This study was carried out under the auspices of the Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC) politics and policy processes sub-theme. Building on the earlier work of the sub-theme on the debates about the Ministries of Agriculture (MoAs) in developing countries, the study was intended as an entry point for grasping the functions, structures, rules, financial and human capacities of MoAs in Africa.

This study was inspired by the apparent return of agriculture onto the international agenda as a primary engine of growth and poverty reduction in predominantly agrarian societies (cf. Timer, 2004; DFID, 2005; OPM, 2007). But this is taking place against the backdrop of three distinct policy narratives about the role of MoAs. These are: 1) MoAs having the capacity and policy clout to address the major constraints of agriculture in which case they ought to be strong and well funded; 2) MoAs taking on a minimal role focused on oversight and regulation whereas the private sector (non-state actors) assume a dominant role in the agricultural sector in a free market environment; and 3) MoAs in partnership with other state agencies should play a key role in addressing the coordination and intermediation of getting markets to work effectively while ensuring at the same time concerted the public efforts targeted to poverty reduction (cf. Cabral and Scoones, 2006).

The major focus of the study was therefore exploring how the MoA interact with other key players at the district level which, inter alia, include other government agencies, farmers, the private sector and NGOs. The underlying idea was to generate evidence on patterns and trends in the scope and leverage of the MoA in devising and delivery of agricultural services and policies with the view to drawing implications

on their capacity to play a coordination role and be demand driven. The justification for studying the MoA at the district level was that it is the best place to get insights into how the ministry interacts and cooperates with other stakeholders at field level which is as close as possible to the point of service delivery. This should in turn generate good insights to feedback up to central policy makers and serve as the basis for informing the subsequent phases of FAC's endeavours. Specifically, the study intended to provide insights to the following four fundamental questions:

- To what extent do MoA perceptions on its key functions match other stakeholders' (particularly farmers) perceptions on what the MoA is doing as well as their expectations on what it should be doing?
- Is there a gap in the functions, activities, services being performed and delivered by MoA? If so, is this gap being filled by other players in the sector (NGOs? Private sector?)
- What impacts do internal constraints have on the ability of the MoA to perform its current functions?
- How has the performance of the MoA changed over time and why?

### 1.2. Methodology

The study was conducted in two districts, namely: Dedza and Thyolo. Malawi is divided into three administrative regions, namely: north, centre and south. These are in turn divided into 28 districts. There are 6 districts in the north; 9 in the centre; and 13 districts in the south. Dedza district is in the centre whereas Thyolo district is in the south. The decision to choose these two districts was based on the following three considerations.

These districts are currently politically prominent. The president comes from Thyolo whereas

the leader of opposition comes from Dedza. The latter has been one of the leading advocates for the fertiliser subsidy programme and used his political clout in parliament to get the government's subsidy initiative extended to benefit tobacco production in addition to maize.

Thyolo faces serious land constraints among smallholder farmers compared to Dedza. Thyolo is one of the densely populated districts and much of the cultivable arable land has been taken up by tea and coffee estates. Dedza is one of the leading maize and tobacco growing districts with relatively manageable land constraints. The average landholding size in the district ranges between 0.7-1ha compared to the national average estimated at 0.5ha.

These districts fall into different agro-ecological zones as classified by the MoA. Malawi is divided into four agro-ecological zones based on altitude. These are Lower Shire Valley (<200m), Low altitude (200-760m), Middle altitude (760-1300m) and High altitude (>1300m). Dedza and Thyolo fall into Middle and High altitude respectively<sup>1</sup>.

The data collection for the study was done for a period of three weeks: one and half weeks in each district. Field work was divided into two main phases, namely data collection at the district and at the community level. Data collection at the district level involved the use of semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders, including MoA officials, other relevant government agencies, NGOs and private sector agents even though these were not readily available (very few private sector organizations operate at the district level). Separate but related checklists were prepared for the MoA and the other stakeholders respectively (see sections 1& 2 Appendix I). Data collection at the community level involved semi-structured interviews with extension workers and focus group discussions (FGDs) with mixed groups of farmers (men and women) focusing mainly on their perceptions about the changes that have taken place within

the agricultural sector as well as the changing role of the MoA regarding its functions (see section 3 Appendix I). A total of 4 FGDs were conducted, two in each district. The same checklist that was used for MoA personnel at the district level was also used for staff at the local level with appropriate modifications. The list of stakeholders consulted is provided in Appendix II. The major limitation of the study was in terms of coverage as it was only carried in two districts in addition to the very limited coverage of the perceptions of private sector actors and donors. The main reason for this is that few private sector actors operate at district level whereas donors do not have representation at district level.

### **1.3. Organisation of the Report**

This report is divided into eight sections structured as follows: Section 1 introduces the scope of the study and Section 2 provides an overview of the structural and organisational set up of the MoA both at national and district levels for purposes of setting the context for the rest of the report. Section 3 examines the status of agriculture in the districts of Dedza and Thyolo districts highlighting key agricultural activities, constraints and opportunities. Section 4 analyses the perceptions of the roles and functions of MoA by farmers and other stakeholders comparing them to the impressions of MoA officials and what is actually prevailing on the ground. In Section 5, decision making processes of MoA district level offices are examined including how work plans are formulated, modified and implemented. Section 6 evaluates the operative capacity of MoA offices at the district level from both technical and financial perspectives and Section 7 examines the forms of interface within MoA and between MoA and other stakeholders paying attention to the inherent challenges. Finally section 8 offers some concluding reflections.

## 2. Organisational Setup of the MoA at National and District Levels

### 2.1. Introduction

This section briefly outlines the organisational setup of the MoA at national and district levels. The main purpose of this section is to set the context for the rest of the report. It is important to note that the MoA has experienced institutional restructuring regularly and this has been motivated by challenges being faced at particular points in time. It used to be known as the Ministry of Agriculture; it became Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Food Security; Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation; and currently it is known as the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security<sup>2</sup>. The Department of Irrigation has been moved to the Ministry of Water Development. The MoA has also experienced substantial structural changes as a result of the ongoing decentralisation policy reforms since the turn of the 1990s.

### 2.2. MoA at the National Level

The structure of the MoA is largely influenced and shaped by the frequent reorganisations. The number of departments depends on the nomenclature of the MoA at a particular point in time. MoA's departments have now been reduced to six following the shift of the Department of Irrigation to the Ministry of Water Development. Current departments are as follows:

- Administration and General management. This comprises of Administration, Human Resource Management and Development, Finance, Internal Audit, Procurement, Transport and Planning Departments
- The Department of Agricultural Research and Technical Services (DARTS)
- The Department of Animal Health and Livestock Production (DAHLP)
- The Department of Crop Production (DCP)

- The Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES)
- The Department of Land Resources and Conservation (DLRC)

The MoA is structured just like any other government ministry. The top management structure is headed by the Secretary for Agriculture below which there are the six departments. Below the departments there are eight Agricultural Development Divisions (ADDs) which replicate the activities of the six departments at the national level. The ADDs are Karonga, Mzuzu, Kasungu, Lilongwe, Salima, Machinga, Blantyre and Ngabu. Each ADD covers several districts but this does not however coincide neatly with regional boundaries. The ADDs used to be split into 30 Rural Development Projects and these have now been restructured into the 28 District Agriculture Development Offices. There are further divided into 154 Extension Planning Areas (EPAs). The EPAs are subdivided into Sections which is the point of service delivery to farmers. In addition, DARTS operates a network of 16 experimental sites strategically located throughout the country. The MoA structure is illustrated in Figure 2.

The overall mandate of the MoA as expressed in its 2003-2008 strategic plan is to promote and accelerate broad based, sustainable agricultural [and irrigation policies] so as to promote economic growth and contribute to poverty reduction. The specific functions of the MoA include the following:

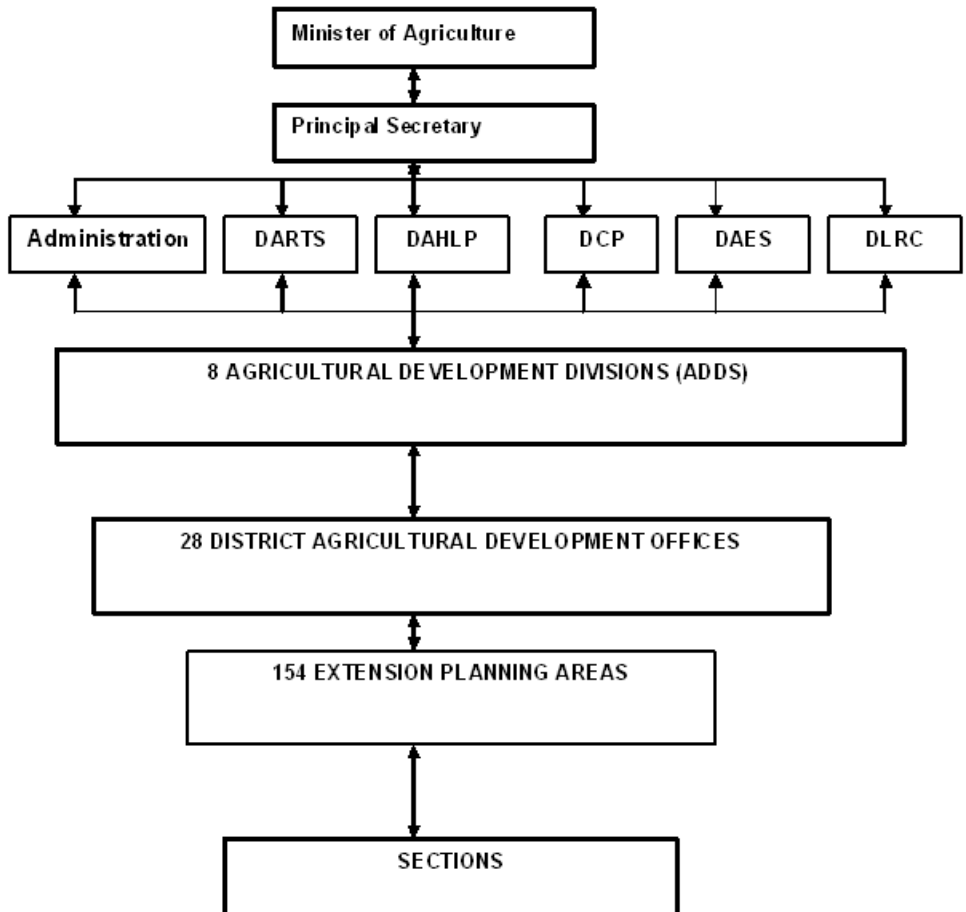
- To attain and sustain household food sufficiency and to improve the nutritional status of the population;
- To expand and diversity agricultural production and exports;
- To increase farm incomes;
- To conserve the natural resources base;

- To promote agricultural policies, legislation and regulations with stakeholder participation;
- To generate and disseminate agricultural information and technologies;
- To regulate and ensure quality control of agricultural produce and services; and
- To monitor and manage the food security situation.

According to the strategic plan, MoA headquarters concentrates on policy formulation and regulation, coordination of training and collaboration with other stakeholders in the sector. The ADDs interpret policies from MoA headquarters for implementation at the points of service delivery, coordinate subject matter specialists (SMSs), supervises programmes, develop technical messages and train SMSs. The District

**Figure 2. The Structure of Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security in Malawi**

Source: GoM (2003)





Agriculture Development Offices (DADO) disseminate messages, train EPA staff and farmers, provides technical advice and supervision of EPA staff. The MoA also has technical responsibilities over several parastatal organisations primarily to ensure that their activities are in tune with government policy priorities at all times. These include Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC), National Food Reserve Agency (NAFRA), Smallholder Farmer Fertiliser Revolving Fund of Malawi (SFFRM) and the Tobacco Control Commission (TCC).

### **2.3. MoA at District Level**

The MoA structure at the district level more or less replicate structures at the national level. The head of the MoA at district level is the District Agricultural Development Officer (DADO) who is assisted by an Assistant District Agricultural Development Officer (ADADO). The District Agricultural Development Office has two a technical and an administrative arm. There are five technical departments at the district level. These include:

- Extension Services with the following subsections: Extension Methodology, Food and Nutrition, Agricultural Communication, Agricultural Gender Roles Extension Support Services (AGRESS) and Agribusiness.
- Crops with subsections focusing on horticulture, cereals, legumes and tobacco. This section is also responsible for plant protection and farm mechanisation.
- Livestock section focusing on animal health and production.
- Land resources and conservation section promoting soil fertility restoring technologies and controlling rampant soil degradation by promoting proper husbandry practices.
- Fisheries section, which has just moved to MoA. It used to be part of the Department of Fisheries and Environmental Affairs in the

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs.

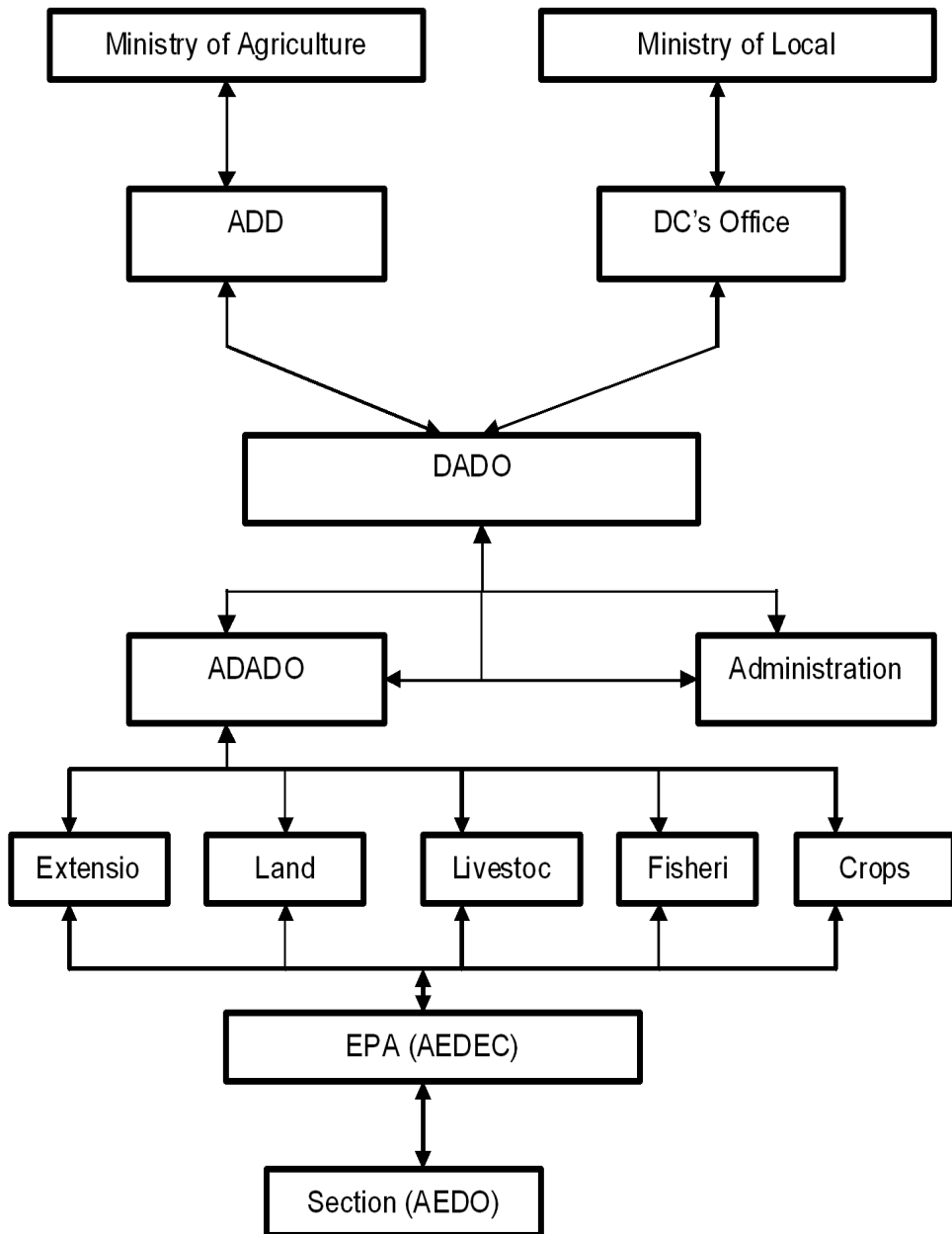
The administrative section of the MoA at the district level comprises human resource management, finance, registry and planning sections. As the overall in charge of MoA at district level, the DADO is the head of administration. He/She is assisted by the ADADO who is designated as the head of technical services. The ADADO works very closely with subject matter specialists (SMSs) in the various sub-programmes in coordinating the delivery of services to farmers working with and through Agriculture Extension Development Coordinators (AEDECs) at EPA levels and Agriculture Extension Development Officers (AEDOs) at section levels. The DADO reports both to the Programme Manager at the ADD level on technical issues and to the District on administrative matters.

### **2.4. Decentralization and Ongoing Changes at District Level**

This dual reporting structure has been driven by the ongoing decentralisation policy reforms. The reforms advocate for the devolution of service provision from the centre to the district level. The main objective of the reforms is to ultimately transform districts into focal points for planning and service delivery with the view to improving efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of service provision. MoA is one of the ten ministries whose powers, functions and resources have been fully devolved to the district level since 2005. The decentralisation policy reforms have entailed the development and the reinvigoration of participatory structures below the district level. The overall coordinating body in the district is known as the District Assembly. Immediately below are the Area Development Committees (ADCs) and at the bottom of the hierarchy are the Village Development Committees (VDCs). The structure

**Figure 3. The Structure of MoA at the District Level**

Source: GoM (2003)



of the MoA at the district level is as depicted in Figure 3:

The structural reorganisation that MoA has experienced at the district level has been greatly influenced by the decentralisation policy reforms. Prior to the creation of the District Assemblies (DAs), the office of the DADO did not exist. There were, as indicated above, 30 Rural Development Projects (RDPs) headed by a Projects Officer. These RDPs did not conform to district boundaries as is the case of DADO. Project Officers reported directly to Project Managers at the ADDs. The 30 RDPs have been reorganised into 28 District Agricultural Development Offices conforming to the boundaries of the 28 districts in the country designated as a unit of operation within the decentralisation framework.

Decentralisation has also influenced significantly the adoption of a new policy on the provision of agricultural extension services. The justification is that decentralisation offers an opportunity to bring the control of extension to the people and offer services that fit better with the local situation. Thus a district must interpret and implement agricultural extension policy in a manner that suits its own special circumstances. The policy aims to develop pluralistic and demand-driven extension services by changing resource management structures to involve local stakeholders and promote participatory planning and implementation of agricultural programmes. The policy recognises that extension services are no longer a public sector monopoly. There are several other actors playing an important role, such as churches, NGOs and farmer associations.

The idea in the new extension policy is to institutionalise the provision of extension service through an institutional framework patterned along the lines of the decentralised sub-district participatory structures. It is envisaged that District Stakeholder Panels will be established. Membership to these panels shall

include MoA officials, service providers (NGOs and FBOs), agro-dealers and representatives of farmers. The panels shall work closely with the District Agricultural Committee of the DAs. The Area Stakeholder Panels are envisaged to comprise at least 50% of smallholder farmers, farmer based organisations, senior traditional leaders, MoA officials and other service providers within the agricultural sector. Agricultural committees shall be established at the village level comprising extension workers, village heads and farmers. The extension policy is being implemented using the model village approach even though on a very much ad hoc basis. The idea is that farmers should be assisted to undertake situation analyses of their agricultural portfolio which will form the basis for them to articulate their demands for extension services to the existing gamut of service providers.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

The organisational setup of the MoA both at the national and district levels is essentially unstable. It is shaped to a great extent by the frequent institutional changes to the MoA. Reorganisation has meant either adding new departments from other ministries or shifting departments to other ministries. These changes have largely been influenced by the recurrent episodes of food insecurity the country has been regularly facing since the turn of the 1990s. These have essentially politically driven initiatives in an attempt find lasting solutions to the enduring problem of food insecurity. Decentralisation policy reforms meant to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness of service delivery have pushed further structural reorganisation at the district level including the adoption of the new policy on extension advocating for the development of pluralistic and demand-driven extension services. Decentralisation has not affected the centre much in terms of structural set-up but rather in terms of shedding off responsibilities to the

lower levels of the ministry's hierarchy particularly with regard to financial and spending decisions.

## 3. Overview of District Agricultures

### 3.1. Introduction

This section provides a quick overview of the agriculture sector in Dedza and Thyolo. This entails, inter alia, an analysis of the key agricultural activities and main opportunities and challenges facing the sector in these districts.

### 3.2. Key Agricultural Activities

Agricultural activities in Dedza and Thyolo are determined largely by their agro-ecological characteristics, the availability of land and their topography. Unlike Dedza, Thyolo has for the most part a hilly terrain and experiences severe land constraints. Much of the cultivable land is taken up by tea and coffee estates.

The major crops grown in Thyolo include tea, coffee, bananas, maize, sweet potatoes, cotton, macadamia and vegetables - it is a major source of vegetables for the city of Blantyre. The major crops cultivated in Dedza include maize, tobacco, beans, Irish potatoes, soya beans, vegetables and a wide range of horticultural crops. Although generally considered in decline, livestock production featured as one of the major agricultural activity in both districts. Chickens, pigs, goats and cattle are raised on a significant scale.

### 3.3. Key challenges and opportunities in the district agricultures

Several challenges and opportunities facing the agricultural sector were identified in these two districts. These challenges were strikingly similar although there were slight differences service providers and farmers. Unique constraints were identified for Thyolo district particularly in relation to the land availability per capita. These challenges and opportunities are summed up in Table 1:

### 3.5. Conclusion

There are several agricultural activities taking place in Dedza and Thyolo districts determined largely by their agro-ecological conditions. While these districts generally face similar constraints in their agricultural activities, there are some constraints unique to Thyolo. These constraints arise from the enormous land pressure and mountainous terrain of the district. The opportunities identified in the agricultural sector are the same for both districts. It is, however, striking to note that there were significant differences between stakeholders and farmers in terms of constraints and opportunities emphasised much as there were in some cases overlaps

## 4. MoA Functions and Performance

### 4.1 Introduction

In this section, the functions of MoA are examined. In particular, the focus is on the divergence between stakeholders' perceptions of the functions and roles of MoA that are stipulated in its mandates against the backdrop of what exactly the MoA is doing at the district level. An attempt is also made to chart out the evolution of the roles and functions as well as the performance of MoA from a historical perspective over the last two decades. This analysis is based on the views of farmers captured in the focus group discussions as the major beneficiaries of the MoA services. It was difficult to do the same with the other stakeholders because the majority of them have been in these districts for a period of less than three years.

### 4.2. Perceptions of the Functions MoA

#### 4.2.1. Farmers' Perceptions of MoA Functions

The perceptions of the farmers were sought through focus group discussions carried out in the two districts. Besides seeking their perceptions of the roles and functions of MoA, farmers were also asked to characterize the performance

**Table 1. Stakeholder Perceptions of Opportunities and Challenges at District Level**

		Dedza	Thyolo
Challenges	Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High prices of farm inputs (seeds and fertilizer)</li> <li>• Lack of markets to dispose of their produce at profitable prices</li> <li>• Lack of access to improved technology particularly with regard to irrigation</li> <li>• Erratic rainfall patterns in recent years</li> <li>• Exploitation by private traders who offer farmers very low prices</li> <li>• The devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High prices of farm inputs (seeds and fertilizer)</li> <li>• Lack of markets to dispose of their produce at profitable prices</li> <li>• Lack of access to improved technology particularly with regard to irrigation</li> <li>• Erratic rainfall patterns in recent years</li> <li>• Exploitation by private traders who offer farmers very low prices</li> <li>• The devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic</li> <li>• Hilly terrain coupled with very small landholding sizes per capita</li> </ul>
	MoA officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erratic rainfall patterns in recent years</li> <li>• Limited funding leading to substantial scale down of extension activities such as agricultural shows, demonstration farms etc</li> <li>• Serious staffing shortages especially at service delivery levels</li> <li>• HIV/AIDS worsening the acute shortage of personnel and constraining active farmer involvement</li> <li>• Poor road infrastructure to support market functions</li> <li>• Low uptake of technology among farmers</li> <li>• Non-functioning laboratories which make it extremely difficult for the livestock section to make appropriate diagnosis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive land pressure since much of the cultivable land is taken up tea and coffee estates</li> <li>• Land shortages also impacting negatively on livestock production</li> <li>• Poor road infrastructure to support market functions</li> <li>• Limited funding leading to substantial scale down of extension activities such as agricultural shows, demonstration farms etc</li> <li>• Serious staffing shortages especially at service delivery levels</li> <li>• HIV/AIDS worsening the acute shortage of personnel and constraining active farmer involvement</li> </ul>
	Other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erratic rainfall patterns in recent years</li> <li>• Serious shortage of qualified extension staff at service delivery levels</li> <li>• Failure of the MoA to articulate and enforce policy directions and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erratic rainfall patterns in recent years</li> <li>• Serious shortage of qualified extension staff at service delivery levels</li> <li>• Failure of the MoA to articulate and enforce policy directions and</li> <li>• guidelines resulting in lack of coordination and monitoring</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guidelines resulting in lack of coordination and monitoring</li> <li>• Poor road infrastructure to support market functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor road infrastructure to support market functions</li> <li>• Excessive land shortages since much of the cultivable land is taken up tea and coffee estates</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The introduction of the fertilizer subsidy programme (agriculture is alive again)</li> <li>• Introduction of village extension multipliers to meet the shortage of extension staff</li> <li>• The introduction of the new extension system with structures extending down to the grassroots</li> <li>• Complementary efforts by numerous stakeholders (NGOs) in the agricultural sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The introduction of the fertilizer subsidy programme (agriculture is alive again)</li> <li>• Introduction of village extension multipliers to meet the shortage of extension staff</li> <li>• Proximity to Blantyre offering prospects for markets for well organized farmers</li> </ul>
	MoA officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of perennial rivers to ensure irrigation on a sustainable basis</li> <li>• The adoption of the farmer technician concept to alleviate the current serious shortage of extension personnel</li> <li>• An increasing number of projects targeting the agricultural sector in areas of marketing, production, institutional and capacity development, irrigation and farmer organizations</li> <li>• Newly introduced extension policy offering prospects for institutionalised collaboration and coordination among stakeholders in the agricultural sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The adoption of the farmer technician concept to alleviate the current serious shortage of extension personnel</li> <li>• An increasing number of projects targeting the agricultural sector in areas of marketing, production, institutional and capacity development, irrigation and farmer organizations</li> <li>• Newly introduced extension policy offering prospects for institutionalised collaboration and coordination among stakeholders in the agricultural sector</li> </ul>
	Other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The availability of funding for MoA in specialized areas through projects likely to improve capacity</li> <li>• Initiatives to make up for the current serious shortage of extension personnel on the ground</li> <li>• An increasing number of non-state actors within the agricultural sector complementing the services of MoA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The availability of funding for MoA in specialized areas through projects likely to improve capacity</li> <li>• Initiatives to make up for the current serious shortage of extension personnel on the ground</li> <li>• Proximity to Blantyre offers prospects for viable markets for organised farmers</li> <li>• An increasing number of non-state actors within the agricultural sector complementing the services of MoA</li> </ul>

of the MoA in service delivery for a period of over two decades. For the farmers just like MoA officials emphasis was on functions bordering on direct service delivery even though elements of the regulatory role of the MoA was emphasised with regard to marketing. The roles and functions of MoA highlighted by farmers included the following:

- Provision of basic farm inputs particularly improved maize seed varieties and fertiliser including regulating the prices of fertiliser. In Dedza in particular, the issue of facilitating farmers' access to farm inputs through the club system was particularly emphasised. Farmers argued for the resurrection of this alternative due to the fact that most of the existing credit institutions are exploitative. They further argued that if going back to the club system is not possible then the MoA should play a leading role in identifying and linking up farmers with credit institutions with fair lending terms.
- Facilitating access for farmers to markets including regulating the prices offered to them in these markets. In both districts, the farmers argued that they have been victims of market liberalization. They argued that private traders (vendors) are not only dictating prices but are also manipulating the measurement scales to farmers' disadvantage. Consequently farmers are not getting fair returns for their produce.
- Checking the quality of agricultural inputs sold by the small scale private traders (vendors). This was particularly raised with reference to pesticides as both districts are major producers of vegetables. The farmers observed that oftentimes the vendors sell them substandard pesticides (mixed with maize flour, sand and even ash). The pesticides therefore do not achieve the desired impact on the vegetable fields urging the MoA to intervene.

- The MoA should vigorously promote livestock for two reasons. This was particularly emphasised by farmers from in Thyolo. First, livestock is in great decline which has implications for nutrition of the people and income earning opportunities. Second, the promotion of livestock would ease the difficulties encountered in accessing fertiliser due to exorbitant prices by making the manure alternative within easy reach.

#### **4.2.2. Other Agricultural Service Providers' Perception of MoA Functions**

There were striking differences regarding the perception of the functions of MoA at district level between MoA officials and other stakeholders. While MoA officials emphasised roles bordering on direct service delivery, for instance, provision of inputs, extension messages and training particularly in agribusiness, most of the other stakeholders felt that MoA should concern itself with issues of policy, regulation and monitoring. Even in terms of service provision, MoA officials demonstrated bias toward the provision of services that are geared toward the achievement of food security and income enhancement at household level. This should not be surprising since these functions are prioritized by MoA as stipulated in its vision and mission statement (cf. MoA, 2005) (see also section 2.2). MoA functions pertaining to coordination, policy governance and monitoring are intimated but come toward the end of a long list of functions which may well suggest that they are not priorities.

For most of the stakeholders, the MoA at the district level has the following key functions to play which they feel the MoA is currently not performing:

#### **Coordination<sup>3</sup>**

They contended that MoA has a key role to facilitate coordination among various stakeholders in the agricultural sector broadly understood as mechanisms for bringing

different stakeholders together to brief them on government policy regarding the agricultural sector. Coordination was emphasised as extremely vital for purposes of ensuring that all stakeholders in the sector are operating at least on the same wavelength. This observation was constantly made with reference to the competitive tendencies of NGOs, which in the interest of achieving impact at a stroke, tend to cut corners or use conflicting strategies on the same issue. For instance, some NGOs operating in the same area and on similar projects pay beneficiaries for taking part while others do not. This has tended to create confusion on the part of communities as primary beneficiaries of the services. Most stakeholders pointed to the introduction of the DAESS as an opportunity for the MoA to institutionalise coordination as one of their key responsibilities. This is particularly important in view of the pluralism in service provision advocated for by the new policy on agricultural extension services.

### **Policy Formulation**

Stakeholders emphasised that the MoA should assume a leading role in sensitising actors in the sector about government policies. The MoA should not only sensitise the stakeholders about these policies but should also interpret them to ensure that stakeholders' activities are guided by the same operative framework. Many stakeholders interviewed argued that this should be a primary role of the MoA especially since the new policy on agricultural extension services emphasise that districts, now operating in a decentralised environment, must interpret and implement agricultural extension policy in a manner that suits their own special circumstances. Thus according to the decentralisation policy reforms, backed up by the Local Government Act, districts are "key planning and operational level of extension and need to be recognized as such" (MoA, 2000: 32). This means

the role of the MoA staff at the district level must be reoriented accordingly.

### **Monitoring**

Even some of the MoA officials emphasised the critical role of the monitoring function in view of the new policy on extension that advocate for the development of pluralistic and demand driven extension services. The gist of this policy is that the provision of extension services is no longer a monopoly of the public sector. Other key players include churches, NGOs, farmer organisations etc. It was therefore pointed out that it is imperative for the MoA to closely and consistently monitor how these new actors are providing their services to farmers. The idea would be to ensure that the services provided are in tune with the levels of quality and standards as prescribed in the relevant policies and guidelines. The inability of the MoA to perform the monitoring role was expressed as a serious concern because most of the service providers are increasingly employing their own cadres of extension staff who are often under qualified. According to MoA officials, most of these service providers are recruiting their staff from numerous unaccredited training institutions that have emerged following the liberalization of the education sector. The nationally recognized training institution for extension workers did not enroll any students from 1994 to about three years ago. This has greatly compromised the quality of extension services provided.

In short, in performing these functions, the MoA would have been fulfilling the following roles:

- Coordinating and providing leadership for agricultural activities at district level.
- Serving as a source of technical agricultural information for stakeholders such as markets, rainfall data, agro-ecological zones, farm families etc.
- Providing technical support to service providers in the agricultural sector.



- Creating a link between stakeholders in the agricultural sector and the government.

### **4.3. MoA's Failure to Perform Key Functions**

Several reasons were cited for the failure of the MoA to perform the key functions as perceived by other stakeholders.

On their part, MoA officials pointed out that their failure to perform these functions is primarily due to financial constraints. As further demonstrated below, the MoA in both districts has been operating under serious financial constraints which make it impossible for them to carryout coordination and monitoring functions. They argued that these two functions would require a significant amount of resources for allowances, fuel and even functioning vehicles. Besides they argued that that most of the non-state service providers are reluctant to be monitored. They are very reluctant to provide reports of their activities to MoA even when they are specifically requested to do so.

The other stakeholders emphasised different constraints altogether. The main reason given was that perhaps the MoA officials do not know that they are supposed to carryout these functions. They therefore argued that these key tasks do not feature as an integral part of their work plans. However, granted that the MoA staff is aware of these nominal functions, the failure to deliver is attributed to a bias in practice to direct interventions in the sector and the limited of technical capacity in the district - DADO senior officials are often young and recent graduates without the required professional experience.

### **4.4. Farmers' Perception of MoA Performance**

In assessing the performance of MoA over the last 20 years, the farmers distinguished various phases of MoA performance segmented on a temporal basis. In this exercise 1980 was used as a benchmark. Farmers in Dedza distinguished

four different phases. These included: the 1980-1990 phase; the 1990-1995 phase; the 1995-2000 phase; and the 2000-2007 phase. In Thyolo, farmers distinguished three phases as follows: the 1980-1993 phase; the 1994-2005 phase; and the 2005-2007 phase. While there are notable differences in the temporal characterization of the phases between farmers in Dedza and Thyolo, the overall characterization of MoA performance is strikingly similar. Farmers were also asked to rank the MoA performance according to the phases identified. The characterization of the phases and the outcome of the ranking exercise are summed up in Tables 2, 3 4 & 5.

The perceptions of the farmers about the functions of MoA are clearly nostalgic about the historical role of ADMARC, which for a very long period of time played an important role in providing marketing services and supplying inputs to farmers. It is thus not surprising that farmers both in Dedza and Thyolo ranked the first phase as the best period in the agricultural development history of the country. At its peak ADMARC maintained a network of markets extending to every possible corner of the country which provided farmers not only with ready markets for their produce but also for their basic farm inputs. ADMARC has substantially streamlined its market network over the years as a result of structural adjustment programmes instigated by the IMF and World Bank. The majority of the markets targeted under the auspices of these reforms were located in the remote rural areas. Private traders have not filled up this vacuum leaving farmers in these areas without any viable market outlets.

### **4.5. Conclusion**

There are significant variations between the perceptions of stakeholders about what the MoA should be doing and what it actually does at the district level. While stakeholders see coordination, policy governance and monitoring as

**Table 2. Phases of Agricultural Development and Performance of MoA in Dedza**

Trends and Performance	Time Period			
	1980-1990	1991-1994	1995-1999	2000-2007
High points of performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flourishing of vibrant farmer clubs</li> <li>• Very good performance of the tobacco industry and food security at household level</li> <li>• Availability and easy access to agricultural inputs made possible by MoA input loan schemes to smallholder schemes.</li> <li>• Very good contact with the extension workers as they were closer to the farmers and staying within the villages</li> <li>• Excellent farmer mobilisation for various interventions through the Block Extension System</li> <li>• Formation of vibrant village based farmer groups</li> <li>• Practice of low input agriculture owing to good fertility levels – less concerned about soil degradation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of the hybrid maize technologies</li> <li>• Growing use among smallholder farmers of hybrid maize as cash crop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of sasakawa technology</li> <li>• Promotion of land conservation technologies</li> <li>• Promotion of irrigation technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoA intensifies land management campaigns</li> <li>• MoA intensifies hybrid technology promotion</li> <li>• High adoption rates for hybrid maize varieties which was no longer considered cash crop but virtually a substitute for local varieties as the main subsistence food crop</li> <li>• More awareness created on the need for land management practices.</li> <li>• Excellent as MoA intensifies farmer to farmer extension methodologies especially through the introduction of “volunteer” lead farmers or extension multipliers</li> <li>• Monthly meetings and trainings for stakeholder panels</li> <li>• Adjusting to democratization by empowering the farmers to diagnose own needs. MoA more responsive to grassroots farmers problems</li> </ul>

<p>Low points of performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavy handed tactics in enforcing loan payment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High input prices</li> <li>• Disbandment of farmer clubs high default rates. Negative influence of multi partyism with proponents encouraging for loan non-repayment claiming loans were democratic privileges</li> <li>• Abolishment of Block Extension System</li> <li>• Extension worker image severely 'denigrated' as misguided multi party advocates portrayed him/her as an agent of oppressive loan policies</li> <li>• Extension functions adversely affected by poor relations as farmers no longer trusted extension workers</li> <li>• Extension messages lost value amongst farmers because inputs were highly unaffordable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious land degradation levels</li> <li>• High input prices</li> <li>• Food insecurity became an endemic feature of households</li> <li>• Absence of strong linkages between MoA and the grassroots structure e.g. village volunteers as used in Ministry of Health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food Insecurity reaches disastrous levels. Significant number of people died of malnutrition and men were greatly affected.</li> </ul>
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the primary functions for MoA, most of the MoA officials emphasise on tasks bordering on direct service provision. This is clearly the case because of the emphasis on these functions in the official mandates and responsibilities of the MoA stipulated in its vision and mission statement. Much as the perceptions of the farmers are in tune with the popular perception of MoA officials about their roles, it is worth pointing out that the farmers are also keen to see the MoA performing some regulatory functions particularly with regard to marketing. The perceptions of the farmers about the role of the MoA are very much a historical legacy of ADMARC which played a dominant role in providing farmers with agricultural inputs, extension and marketing services. There is a strong feeling in

both districts that MoA's performance is at least improving since the turn of the millennium after a period of near total collapse throughout the 1990s. Stakeholders contend that tasks of coordination, policy governance and monitoring should be the core tasks of MoA at district level mainly due to the adoption of the new policy on extension advocating for the development of pluralistic and demand driven agricultural extension services.

## 5. Structures and Decision Making Processes for MoA at District Level

### 5.1. Introduction

This section examines the decision making processes of the MoA at district level vis-à-vis its organisational setup. Particular attention is

**Table 3. Ranking of the Phases of Agricultural Development and MoA Performance in Dedza**

Rank		Criteria	
		Strength	Weakness
1	1980-1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extension services were very close to the farmers. Extension workers belonged to the community</li> </ul>	
2	2000-2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of extension multipliers and coverage of wide area</li> <li>Good linkage through stakeholder panels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobility constraints and staff shortages</li> </ul>
3	1995-1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of “useful” hybrid technologies through Sasakawa</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retrogressive political agenda as there was no will to advance agricultural development</li> <li>Security breakdown</li> <li>Hostility to extension workers</li> </ul>
4	1991-1994		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extension role severely compromised by credit recovery role</li> <li>Hostility to extension workers</li> <li>No political will as extension workers were largely lazing about and no effort made to motivate extension workers and fill existing vacancies</li> </ul>

paid to the influence and impact of the decentralisation policy reforms on the decision-making processes of the MoA at this level.

### 5.2. Reporting Structures of MoA

Two concerns were raised with regard to the MoA reporting structures at the district level. While the SMSs at the district level are under the DADOs, they report directly to the divisional heads at the ADD level. Likewise, divisional heads communicates directly to the SMSs with copies to the DADOs in both cases. This clearly indicates that divisional heads wield much more power than DADOs. Most SMSs interviewed indicated that there are no standard reporting formats and procedures. One of them in Dedza confessed that they actually don't know what the appropriate procedures are “since nobody

has taken the initiative to orient us on our terms of reference”. Second, DADOs in both districts expressed concern with the current setup of their offices. The Assistant DADO is designated as head of technical services whereas the DADO is the head of administration yet the task of reporting on both technical and administrative matters is exclusively for DADOs. This was seen as a major handicap because by virtue of being the head of administration the DADO rarely goes out to the field on technical missions. They therefore argued that since they are responsible for the overall functioning of their offices, both technical and administrative functions should be primarily be vested in the DADOs. The main problem with this arrangement is that DADOs feel that they take responsibility for activities over which they have no direct control.

**Table 4. Phases of Agricultural Development and Performance of MoA in Thyolo**

Trends and performance of MoA	Time Periods		
	1980-1993	1994-2005	2006-07
High points of performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality extension services that were utilizing vibrant farmer clubs</li> <li>Use of several extension approaches e.g. agricultural shows, residential trainings, food and nutrition and home economics displays</li> <li>Easy coverage of the wide area by extension services since extension workers were resident in communities</li> <li>Easy marketing processes</li> <li>Good soil fertility warranting no land conservation efforts</li> <li>Food security at household level and farm produce stored in granaries outside the homesteads</li> <li>Availability and easy access to fertiliser through a vibrant club system</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MoA intervenes in the input market through the coupons system</li> <li>Extension Services slowly being rejuvenated</li> <li>More awareness created on need for land management practices</li> <li>Intensive campaigns on soil and water conservation practices</li> </ul>
Low points of performance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government literally abandoned the farmer. "Disaster is the catchword for the period characterised by high theft rates"</li> <li>High input prices</li> <li>Vendors controlling ADMARC markets</li> <li>Output markets for crops became almost non-existent</li> <li>Extension service system almost collapsed as there were no trainings and agricultural shows</li> <li>Role and influence of the extension worker diminished</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Official corruption by government, ADMARC, private traders, police in handling coupons for fertiliser subsidy programme</li> <li>Targeted input approach benefited very few farmers</li> <li>Few selling points to cater for all farmers in good time for key agricultural practices</li> <li>Late availability of inputs affecting the utility of the inputs toward ensuring bumper harvests</li> </ul>

**Table 5. Ranking of the Phases of Agricultural Development and MoA Performance in Thyolo**

Rank	Period	Criteria	
		Strength	Weakness
1	1980 -1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vibrant farmer clubs</li> <li>• Easy access to fertiliser and related inputs</li> <li>• Good efforts at promotion of good land husbandry practices</li> <li>• Prominent and effective extension approaches like shows, residential trainings and the block extension system</li> </ul>	
2	2006- 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoA responsive to farmer demands</li> <li>• Introduction of the “subsidy programme”</li> <li>• Availability of good extension services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official corruption in operating the coupon system</li> <li>• Extension messages not appropriate-emphasis on manure against fertiliser which is more effective</li> <li>• High input prices and limited markets for farm produce</li> </ul>
3	1994 -2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of extension multipliers and coverage of wide area</li> <li>• Good linkage through stakeholder panels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoA not responsive to farmer demands</li> <li>• Vendors left to exploit farmers at will</li> </ul>

### 5.3. Decision-making processes

Procedurally work plans for the MoA at the district level are supposed to be prepared in a bottom-up fashion. The introduction of the pluralistic and demand-driven provision of extension services policy further entrenches the centrality of the bottom-up approach to the development work plans. Work plans are critical since they form the basis for budgeting and implementation of MoA activities.

In the spirit of the bottom-up strategy as advocated by the new policy on extension, the starting point for the work plans the district Sections. The AEDOs are expected to consult with farmers in their respective Sections to identify priority needs for extension. The AEDOs then forward these priorities to the EPA where, working closely with the AEDECs, they integrate

these needs into EPA-wide priorities. These EPA-wide priorities are then sent to the DADO where the SMSs scrutinize these submissions to come up with district wide priorities taking into account their own plans of action. The district-wide work plans are then submitted to the DC and to the ADD. The latter is mainly interested with the technical aspects of the work plans while the former focuses predominantly on the finances needed to execute the work plans.

MoA officials interviewed both in Dedza and Thyolo indicated that these work plans are hardly implemented as submitted. They are always subject to extensive revisions because of funding constraints<sup>4</sup> and because these work plans have to take into account centrally determined priorities.

The central MoA priorities are often worked out on the basis of priorities stipulated in the national development strategies often championed by the political leadership. For instance, currently the MoA has to be seen translating some of the priorities laid out in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) into actionable programmes. The other source of priorities is the endless donor funded projects spearheaded by MoA. For most MoA officials interviewed, the challenge becomes how to meaningfully interface the local and national priorities particularly in the context of very limited financial resources.

The concern expressed by the MoA officials was that when faced with a choice between prioritising national and local level priorities, preference is always given to the former. The consequence is that the work plans have to be revised accordingly. It was observed that the preponderance of national over local priorities means MoA at the district levels are operating using work plans with packages of intervention prescribed from the centre when in fact the work plans were supposed to be developed on the basis of problems discerned in the field.

The major challenge arising from this modus operandi is that programmes implemented do not address the actual problems in the field. This is the case because according to MoA officials most of the problems diagnosed during their needs assessment exercises tend to be area specific and as such the universal outputs prescribed by MoA national headquarters do not address the real problems. It was argued that local level priorities tend to be inferior when faced with a choice of what to prioritise since the centrally determined MoA universal outputs tend to be tied to the budgetary ceilings. The view of nearly every MoA official interviewed was that this defeats the logic of the new extension policy which advocates for pluralistic and demand-driven extension services. MoA decentralisation is therefore largely theoretical.

The decision-making processes are further affected by the frequent reorganisation of the MoA. There is a tendency to either bring in new departments or shift some departments out of MoA. For instance, the Department of Fisheries has recently been shifted to MoA from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs whereas the Department of Irrigation formerly in MoA has been shifted to the Ministry of Water Development. Almost all MoA officials argued that these frequent shifts, which are easily done on paper but not in practice, are a huge challenge to local decision-making. For the incoming departments, the challenge is often to create a favourable working rhythm with the rest of the departments and for the outgoing departments the challenge is to create viable coordination mechanisms with the destination ministries without jeopardizing service delivery. This particular change was specially emphasised with reference to the shift of the Department of Irrigation to the Ministry of Water Development. AEDOs are jacks of all trades including irrigation at the point of service delivery to the farmers. The shift of the Department has therefore been largely in terms of resources and not personnel. This is creating problems with regard to irrigation since for the AEDOs to offer irrigation services they have now to liaise with officials from the Ministry of Water Development (MoWD) as MoA no longer controls the budget line for irrigation. The officials from MoWD cannot meaningfully function on their own because they are not well versed with the agronomy of irrigation. This requires some kind of coordination between MoA and MoWD which is not always easy to achieve.

The interaction between MoA officials at the district level and the ADDs with regards to decision making was considered to work relatively well in both districts. This interaction is entirely on technical issues; financial matters are taken to the District Commissioner's Office. The MoA officials indicated that there are a number of

issues that they have to refer to the ADDs for guidance. They felt that the ADDs are generally responsive but the degree of responsiveness varies depending on the issues at stake. Some issues are responded to instantly but most of them take on average two weeks to a month especially if they are matters of policy. This is the case because the ADD officials have to liaise with MoA national headquarters.

#### **5.4. Opportunities and challenges arising from decentralisation policy**

According to this study, decentralisation policy reforms have created much more confusion than facilitating a propitious atmosphere for improved service delivery in the agricultural sector. Nonetheless the major positive contribution of the reforms, as further elaborated in the next chapter, is that it has transformed districts or DADOs offices into cost centres. Prior to the designation of DCs as controlling officers in 2005, budgets for MoA district offices were held at ADDs. Decentralisation has allowed budgetary allocations to be provided for close to the points of service delivery. Each EPA now has a monthly budgetary allocation since 2005 as the districts are now budget holders. Potential opportunities of decentralisation policy reforms for the agricultural sector cited included the following:

- Bringing more ownership among farmers which will in turn provide effective solutions to the challenges and the problems that they face within the agricultural sector.
- Through decentralised structures like Area Stakeholder Panels farmers will effectively monitor the performance of their respective extension workers. Non-performing and lazy extension workers will be exposed and this will act as a motivation for extension workers to work hard.
- The panels will be as an effective tool for effecting desired change among farmers as one of their terms of reference is to provide farmer to farmer extension. This has already

started bearing fruits in Lobi EPA, Dedza where the area stakeholder panel has already been constituted and is quite vibrant.

- MoA has a chance to learn best practices from other players who are well funded and sometimes have access to new innovations.

The decentralisation policy reforms have, as hinted above, brought up considerable challenges that are invariably creating perceptions that provision of agricultural services has been negatively. These challenges relate mainly to lack of clarity of the dynamics of the decentralisation policy reforms to the key stakeholders. According to MoA officials, this is the case because the operational implications of the decentralisation policy reforms have not been fully explained to the stakeholders at the district level. Some of the challenges are as follows:

#### **DADO's dual reporting structure**

DADOs have a dual reporting obligation. They have to report to the DC at the district level and to the PM at the ADD. It was argued that this arrangement has created a silent but destructive tug of war regarding who is who between the DC and the Programme Manager even though DADOs report to them on different issues. The challenge is that both the DC and the PM are at the same rank in the civil service hierarchy and the central government has done very little, if any, to clarify the situation. This has created divided loyalties among MoA staff at the district level especially since the role of ADDs in district agriculture is not clearly spelt out making ADDs more or less redundant. Most MoA officials actually questioned the presence of SMSs at the ADD level as well as the rationale for the continued existence of ADDs within the framework of decentralised provision of agricultural services. The following sentiments are illustrative of the divided loyalties of the MoA officials at the district level:



“To be honest although we are decentralised, we owe our allegiance to, and take decisions as prescribed by the ADD. To the Assembly we just present highlights of our activities. Technical supervision is superior to administrative one.” (MoA official, Thyolo).

“Though the ADD no longer controls other recurrent expenditures and doing very little to assist districts financially, they still retain the supervisory mandate. We therefore owe allegiance to the ADD more than we do the District Assembly since they are the ones who hold the fate of our careers in their hands.” (MoA official, Dedza).

### **Lack of clarity on key issues**

There are a number of grey areas regarding several policy issues, for instance, transfers, discipline and finances. This is an issue because all regulations governing finance and personnel are centrally determined. The huge discrepancy is that while the ADD is responsible for staffing and salaries for MoA personnel at the district level, operational funds for the same come through the DC's office. The paradox is that the DCs control operational resources yet they cannot either discipline or promote MoA staff. The ADD reportedly plays a vital role in lobbying for increases in funding for MoA district offices but they do not have the mandate to audit the MoA finances at this level. The ADDs are unable to keep track of expenditures at district level let alone institute audits because they do not have the mandate since 2005 when DCs were designated as controlling officers. The MoA funds at district level can only be audited by officials from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. The ADDs are simply given expenditure returns. These problems were generally attributed to the apparent incompleteness of the decentralisation policy reforms characterised by lack of clarity of operating principles, standards and procedures.

### **Recentralization tendencies**

Concerns about tendencies toward recentralization were expressed in both Dedza and Thyolo district with regard, for example, to the Farm Mechanisation Programme that was launched in 2004. It was observed that both the ADDs and MoA district level offices do not have control over certain key aspects of the programme that would have been best dealt with at the district level. The programme procured animals and equipment such as tractors and ploughs to facilitate mechanisation on smallholder farms. The MoA officials contended that the programme risks being run down completely as a result of bureaucratic or inflexible decision-making tendencies despite the adoption of the decentralised mode of service delivery. Some animals have overgrown while others have died. The MoA officials interviewed indicated that the programme has not made any progress at all because “a circular from above strongly prohibits officers both at ADD and district levels from replacing or exchanging the oxen even where one paired ox is sick or has died”. This is despite continued advice from the officers on the ground. It was strongly felt that the directive from MoA headquarters regarding the handling of the animals on Farm Mechanization effectively overrules the ADD and district implementation mandate.

### **5.5. Conclusion**

The decision-making processes are in theory designed to follow a bottom-up strategy reinforced by the adoption of a new policy on agricultural extension advocating for the pluralistic and demand driven delivery of extension services. These decision making processes are to be mediated through the MoA structures that do go all the way down to the grassroots level. The major challenge is that the practice tends to be entirely different from the policy rhetoric. Local level priorities are often superseded by central level priorities in the development of

work plans. There is thus evidence of district offices trying to be demand driven but they are being constrained in their actions by decisions taken at the centre often influenced by the grand national development strategies and donorfunded vertical projects. While decentralisation policy reforms have created opportunities for improved service delivery in the agricultural sector, they have also brought about considerable challenges. Most of the challenges are arising from lack of clarity on the operating principles, standards and procedures governing service delivery in a decentralised environment largely due to the fact that the decentralisation process itself is incomplete in a number of respects.

## 6. MoA Operative Capacity of MoA

### 6.1. Introduction

This section assesses the operative capacity for MoA at district level from technical and financial perspectives. The justification for this assessment is that the operative capacity of organisations is key to ensuring success in fulfilling their mandates. It is not enough for an organisation to have a technically competent staff complement without the necessary financial capacity to discharge their functions.

### 6.2. Technical Capacity

#### 6.2.1. Staffing Situation

The MoA staff establishment is clearly biased toward the technical personnel which is commendable as often establishment tend to be skewed in favour of the support functions. There are very few positions in the administration section (see Figure 2). In both Dedza and Thyolo districts, the MoA offices are grappling with serious staffing problems. Most key positions are either vacant or filled simply in an acting capacity by people who are highly under qualified.

The SMSs at the district level are supposed to be graduates but in both districts most of these officers are certificate holders. Comparatively the staffing problem is less pronounced in Dedza than Thyolo even though it cannot be described as being satisfactory. There is no sub programme that is completely without personnel in place even though a good number of them are holding these positions in an acting capacity. For example, only 3 of the 6 crops officer posts are currently filled and the same happens for extension officer (3 of 5) and land resources officer posts (2 in 3). In Thyolo, most of the positions are vacant and nearly all the people that are holding the remaining positions are doing in an acting capacity. The staffing situation in Thyolo is captured in Table 6.

The staffing situation is not any better below the district level. Dedza and Thyolo are divided into 10 and 6 EPAs and 169 and 142 Sections,

**Table 6. Established Posts for Graduate SMS Filled in Thyolo District**

Field	Established Posts	Filled (Graduates)	Filled (Certificate Holders)
Extension	5	1	2
Crops	5	0	2
Livestock	1	0	3
Land Resources	2	0	2
Planning	1	0	0

Source: Clerical Officer in the Planning Office, July 2007

respectively. It was found that out of the 10 EPAs, only 5 are filled by qualified AEDECs in Dedza and none of the 6 EPAs in Thyolo is manned by a qualified AEDEC. Out of the 169 sections in Dedza there are only 82 AEDOs to oversee service delivery. For the 142 sections, Thyolo has only 56 AEDOs. Out of the 82 AEDOs in Dedza, 10 of them are on a month to month contract having been called out of retirement. On average therefore the AEDOs take care of 3-4 sections. The serious shortage of staff is reflected in the high extension worker-farmer ratios estimated at 1: 1000 for Dedza and 1: 3000 for Thyolo. It needs not be overemphasised that the current staffing crisis has had significant implications on the reach let alone the quality of service delivery to the farmers. There is no doubt that technical capacity of MoA is substantially compromised by the fact that most of the key positions are yet to be filled by competent people as confessed by an MoA official in Dedza:

“I am only a technical officer with a certificate in agriculture. I am currently holding three positions of which two I am acting. I am substantively the Principal for the Residential Training Centre but I am an acting Food and Nutrition Education Officer and an Acting Agricultural Communications Officer.”

The shortage of personnel coupled with perennial funding constraints as further illustrated below means that MoA is not able to deliver all its mandated services to farmers. The gap in service delivery has been taken up by a

wide range of actors which include NGOs, FBOs, farmer associations and to some extent the private sector. These actors are providing a wide range of extension services to farmers including in some cases facilitating access to markets. There is no doubt that these actors are complementing government’s effort but there are nevertheless concerns that have been raised. These actors rely very much on government extension workers by inducing them with attractive allowance packages. The extension workers are demoralized because of low salaries and as such they either abandon their positions and become employees of these service providers formally or simply accumulate both jobs.

### 6.2.2 Causes and Remedies to the Staffing Crisis

The worsening staff situation in the MoA cadres was characterized as inevitable. The MoA staff has been progressively declining tending toward crisis proportions due to a number of reasons. MoA has lost and continues to lose an increasing number of personnel to the HIV/AIDS pandemic while at the same time an increasing number of the staff are retiring from active service. Death and retirement have had a huge negative impact on MoA’s staff complement because these could not be replaced. The only nationally recognized training institution for extension workers remained closed for a period of more than a decade. It reopened its doors three years ago now as a semi-public institution. Meanwhile the MoA district level offices have been drawing

**Table 7. Incentive Differentials between the NGO Sector and MoA**

Position	Salary in MoA	Salary in NGO
DADO	MK 39,000	MK 250,000
AEDEC	MK 13,000	MK 100,000
Driver	MK 5, 000	MK 78,000

Source: Fieldwork, July 2007

from EPAs for the existing army of acting SMSs. The combined effects of these dynamics have seen the MoA at all levels grappling with serious staffing problems.

The staffing crisis at MoA was further attributed to the failure to retain graduate SMSs. This is the case due to poor incentive packages. Not only are salaries low but the general conditions of service are not attractive at all. It was argued that most of the graduate SMSs simply use MoA as a stepping stone for careers elsewhere. The majority end up pursuing career opportunities in the NGO sector. If they do not move on, they are quickly posted to the ADDs or MoA national headquarters. The NGO sector is an attractive destination for MoA technical officers due to the attractive incentive packages. In Dedza, it was, for instance, observed that “almost the entire technical team for Concern Universal, from managers to field staff, used to be employed by the MoA though not specifically from Dedza district”. Table 6 sums up the incentive differentials between the NGO sector and MoA equivalent positions.

MoA officials further feel that their remuneration packages are low even when compared to some public sector professions especially those in health and education. The concern was that their colleagues on the same grades from these ministries receive professional and risk allowances while they do not. This is apparently demoralizing for MoA employees to the extent that the majority of those interviewed wondered why agriculture sector professionals are not given better treatment given that the sector is the backbone of the country’s economy.

The low salaries have invariably created and entrenched what is described as an allowance culture or syndrome. This is not however unique to the MoA employees. It is a deeply entrenched practice in the Malawian public service. It essentially implies that employees are always looking for opportunities that can spin off allowances even though they do not have a direct bearing

on the accomplishment of their responsibilities. Most of the MoA officials interviewed confessed that the search for allowances has led to the prioritization of planning meetings at the expense implementation. Given perpetual serious funding constraints, a disproportionate share of any funding opportunity is devoted to planning. In short, MoA officials are preoccupied with the struggle for survival. The main motivation for MoA officials to attend workshops is the allowance without which most of them would not turn up. In the words of the DADO in Thyolo “people are motivated to work when there are allowances and the majority of the old employees are hanging on simply to complete their service in order not to forfeit their pension entitlements”.

- The MoA has responded to the worsening staffing crisis in a number of ways without which perhaps it would have collapsed altogether. The strategies have included the following:
- Recalling retired extension workers into active service on a month to month basis.
- The introduction of the farmer technician concept (lead farmers) popularly known as extension multipliers<sup>5</sup>.
- Recruiting school leavers as assistant extension workers subjecting them to the on the job training<sup>6</sup>.

These strategies have not been very effective, however. The MoA’s technical capacity is quite weak and according to stakeholders outside MoA this has been further weakened by insufficient (if they exist at all) renewal strategies to cope with emerging issues granted its diminishing staff complement. These stakeholders argued that the MoA has technically failed to position its staff to adequately respond to the forces affecting modern agriculture. It was, for instance, argued that the existing cadre of AEDOs has been in their positions for the last 10 years yet they were trained to deal with issues based on research relevant 20 years ago. These

cannot be expected to meaningfully adjust to challenges in a highly dynamic agricultural sector. Besides, MoA staff has to endure lack of operational resources to showcase their skills; lack of capacity building programmes; and a poor incentive system that does not recognize and reward good performance. Such a reward system could, inter alia, include performance-based salary acceleration and recognition like upgrading courses for best performers.

### **6.2.3. Career Prospects and Stability of Tenure**

Prospects of career progression for MoA personnel at least exist. This can be achieved either through promotion or training. Career advancement on the basis of promotion is limited by the kind of qualification one has. Those holding diplomas and below cannot ordinarily be promoted beyond the position of Chief Technical Officer (CTO) which is an equivalent entry point for degree holders. Those holding diplomas are now being encouraged to enrol for degree programmes and degree holders to enrol for masters' programmes. Upgrading one's qualification is therefore key to career advancement not only in MoA but in the public sector as a whole.

There were, however, concerns that career progression opportunities vary between sub-programmes within MoA. This was particularly highlighted by those in the Department of Animal Health and Livestock Production. They argued that it is possible for an AEDO belonging to the Department of Agricultural Extension Services at the same grade (Technical Officer) as Assistant Veterinary Officer (AVO) to be considered for promotion to Professional Officer effectively jumping two posts which is not possible for the latter. It is not possible for an AVO to jump posts and one has to serve on a position a minimum of 4 years in order to be considered for promotion.

There is generally stability of tenure for MoA officials below the district level in both districts. There is, however, frequent turnover over of staff at district level due to either posting or resignation. It was observed in both districts that it is very rare for graduate SMSs to serve for over two years before either quitting for greener pasture or being posted away usually to the ADD or the MoA national headquarters. The instability of the top positions was perfectly exemplified in the case of Thyolo. In the last three years, Thyolo has had four DADOs and the incumbent indicated that in the last three years he has been transferred four times. It was argued that that the frequent change of staff at the top has had negative impact on service delivery mainly through lack of continuity as a result of a heavily fragmented institutional memory. The regular transfers are a huge disturbance to service delivery since different officers bring in new management styles and an individual needs a minimum of two to three years to begin making impact.

MoA officials below the district level can stay in the same area for 15-20 years. They are rarely transferred unless there are serious problems with the community in which they work or they have been promoted to take a higher post. The transfers, if they do happen, are often intra district. One of the reasons the transfers are infrequent is that it is costly since posting for this cadre of staff has been decentralised. The stability of tenure is quite important because it enables them to get used to their places of work even though sometimes overstaying risks the extension workers becoming fully absorbed into village life to the extent of neglecting their work.

### **6.2.4 Strategies for Improving Technical Capacity**

A number of suggestions were made by the interviewees with the view to improving MoA's

technical capacity. These included the following:

- Need for regularized and institutionalised capacity building programmes for field staff. They need to be appraised about recent technological developments within the sector.
- Improvement of staff incentives in order to motivate them. The conditions of service have to be revised by, among other things, renovating institutional houses and improvements in transport. Currently extension workers get a monthly push bicycle allowance of MK 180 which is not enough to fix a puncture.
- Establishing more posts at Professional Officer grade and progressively sending the existing cadre of staff for refresher courses and graduate training programmes.
- Investing in technical research on various issues, for instance, new production techniques as well as methodologies for undertaking production estimates.
- Urgently reconsider the remuneration of frontline workers who are always left out when the revisions of allowances are made. They do not basically have activities for which they would be entitled to claim allowances. This leads to AEDOs working for NGOs almost abandoning their positions as government employees.
- Investing in capital resources particularly laboratory equipment as most of the laboratories are currently dysfunctional or in state of disrepair.

### **6.3. Financial Capacity**

#### **6.3.1. Budgeting Process**

The budgeting exercise is closely related to the development of work plans at the development plan but almost entirely divorced at implementation. Thus the MoA budgets are linked to the work plans. The budgeting process is conducted in a bottom-up manner. It starts with extension

workers at the Section level presenting their targets and budgets to the AEDECs who then present the budget estimates to subject matter specialists for consolidation and further refinement into a district-wide budget for the agricultural sector which is presented to the DADO for submission to the DC and the PM at the ADD. In principle, the budgeting process bottom-up starting from EPAs but then the budget priorities are reordered by subject matter specialists to align them with national level priorities.

The budget formulation process is guided by budgetary ceilings given out by Ministry of Finance headquarters. The budgetary ceilings are basically incremental in nature, being adjusted by approximately 10-15% annually. The budget is structured according to a standard classification system which breaks down expenditure by type (eg. Salaries, goods and services). Following the designations of DCs as controlling officers in 2005, MoA offices at the district level have been turned into cost centres. They hold their own budget for recurrent expenditure and no longer have to seek authorization for expenditure from ADDs. They are now self-accounting institutions. The DADO authorizes expenditure subject to the approval of the DC. The transformation of MoA district offices into cost centres has ensured that resources should now at least filter down to the EPAs.

The funds are released from the Treasury to the MoA district offices through the office of the DC on a monthly basis. The procedures for disbursing funds to EPA were found to be different for Dedza and Thyolo. In Dedza, the disbursement of the funds starts by first giving each EPA an equal amount for basic items such as fuel, paper, pens and allowances. The remaining funds are shared proportionally to EPAs. The rule of thumb is that EPAs implementing specific projects get a slightly higher allocation than those without. Sometimes the differential disbursement of funds takes into account the number of sections in each EPA.

The funds are kept at MoA district offices. EPAs simply make claims against their monthly allocation. Each EPA in Thyolo gets 1% of the total budget. Monthly allocations to EPAs are decided on the basis of the 1% staggered over the entire fiscal year. These arrangements have ensured that 'more' resources are allocated to EPAs than to the district headquarters. The annual budgets for Thyolo and Dedza were pegged at MK 1.4 and MK 1.7 million respectively.

### 6.3.2. Budget Implementation

The district MoA offices always experiences budgetary cuts even though the budgeting exercise is guided by ceilings provided by the MoA headquarters. The ceilings were therefore described as mere guidelines. The fluctuations in the funding patterns are perhaps aptly illustrated at the national level for which data was available in Figure III 3. The funding levels for the various sub-programmes have been highly in consistent fluctuating year by year with administration taking up a larger share of the

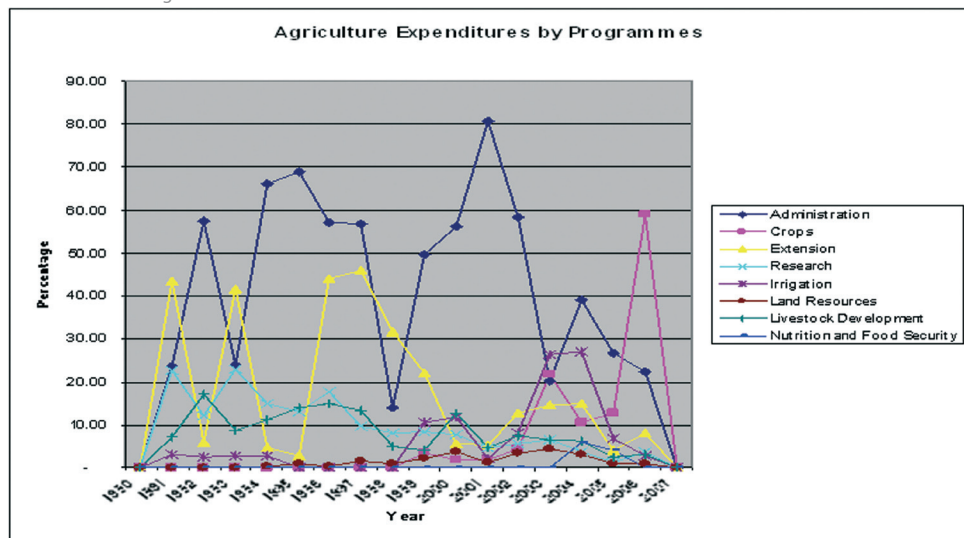
resources. Extension services are treated as a separate budget item separate from administration as illustrated in Figure 4.

The budgetary cuts were described as a normal feature not only for MoA but for the public sector generally. These cuts are sometimes communicated but it was emphasised that the silent rule is that it is of no use to seek feedback since the funds are channelled through a different sector arguing that Local Government officials cannot have the required answers since they merely serve as a conduit for the resources. Usually no reasons are given for budgetary cuts. These announcements do not necessary result in corresponding readjustments of the work plans as reflected in the following sentiments:

"The 'approved budget' is presented sometimes towards the end of the financial year when we have already overspent on some items. This results in chaos because we have to readjust our priorities in line with the magnitude of the budget. In the worst case scenario we completely cancel other important activities but sometimes

**Figure 4. Expenditures by Programmes at the National Level between 1990 & 2007**

Source: Various Budget Documents between 1990 and 2007



we have to borrow from other sub-programmes.” (MoA official, Dedza).

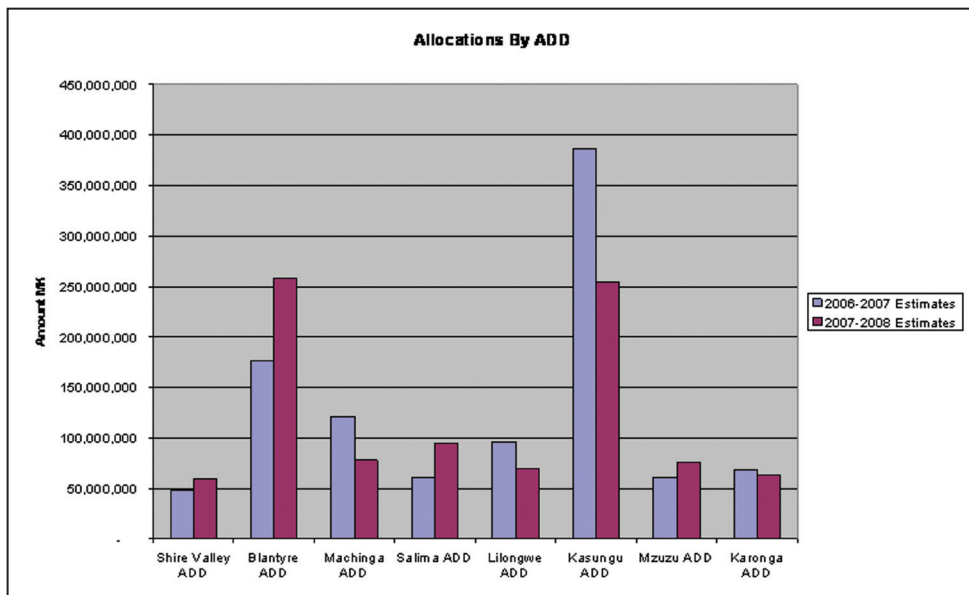
“We are just communicated as to how much we have been funded. Sometimes the cuts are explained by the accounts section as emanating from errors at the Treasury. For example, we might be told that funding allocation to the agricultural sector has been increased but when we query the DC’s office we are told the increase has only been effected for the votes controlled by the MoA headquarters where the ADDs get their funding” (MoA official, Thyolo)

There are no budgetary freezes but the budget ceiling for some expenditure items-particularly fuel, stationary and allowances - is reached before the end of the financial year. The most affected sub-items are fuel, stationery and allowances. They argued that this is mostly the case due to ad hoc programmes often directed from the centre.

There are, however, three major challenges with regard to budget implementation. The quality of the overall budgeting process is very low. In both Dedza and Thyolo, the planning sections in the DADOs’ offices are manned by extremely under qualified staff. The planner in the DADO’s office is supposed to be a graduate in a relevant field but currently in both districts the planning sections are overseen by officers at a clerical officer grade. The ADDs and the MoA district offices are funded differently. The ADDs are funded directly through the MoA headquarters whereas the district offices are funded through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. This creates a management dilemma in the sense that the ADDs cannot audit MoA accounts at district level yet they reportedly play a key role in lobbying for funding increases for the district offices. The paradox is that the ADDs retain a supervisory mandate over

**Figure 5. Budget Estimates for ADDs for the 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 Fiscal Years**

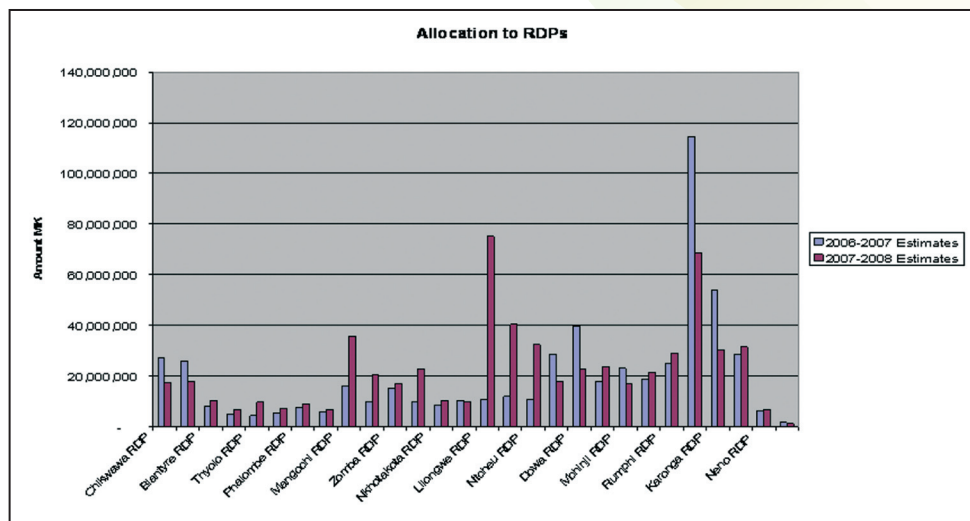
Source: Ministry of Finance Budget Documents 2006/2007 and 2007/2008





**Figure 6. Budget Estimates for RDPs for the 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 Fiscal Years**

Source: Ministry of Finance Budget Documents 2006/2007 and 2007/2008



technical matters in the agricultural sector at the district levels. The budgetary cuts are extremely ad hoc. They do not take into account of sub-programme outputs, targets and activities.

The ad hoc nature of the budgeting process appears to be a normal phenomenon at all levels. There are, for instance, considerable variations in the budget estimates for the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 fiscal years at both Agricultural Development Division (ADD) and Rural Development Project (RDP)<sup>7</sup> levels as depicted in figures 4 and 5 respectively.

It is worth noting as shown in figure 6 above that there are huge imbalances in terms of resource allocation at the three levels of MoA's operation, namely: headquarters, ADD and district levels. The budgetary estimates for the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 clearly show that resources are concentrated disproportionately at the headquarters barely trickling down to the ADD and district levels. The combined volume of resources allocated to ADDs and district

offices are less than a quarter of the magnitude of resources earmarked for expenditure at the MoA headquarters. While it is said that the resource flows to district levels have improved following the adoption of decentralization policy reforms in 2005, the amounts are clearly insignificant to register the desired impact. The disproportionate share of budgetary resources in favour of MoA headquarters means that much is spent on administrative overheads compared to the actual technical work that would positively impact on the agricultural sector.

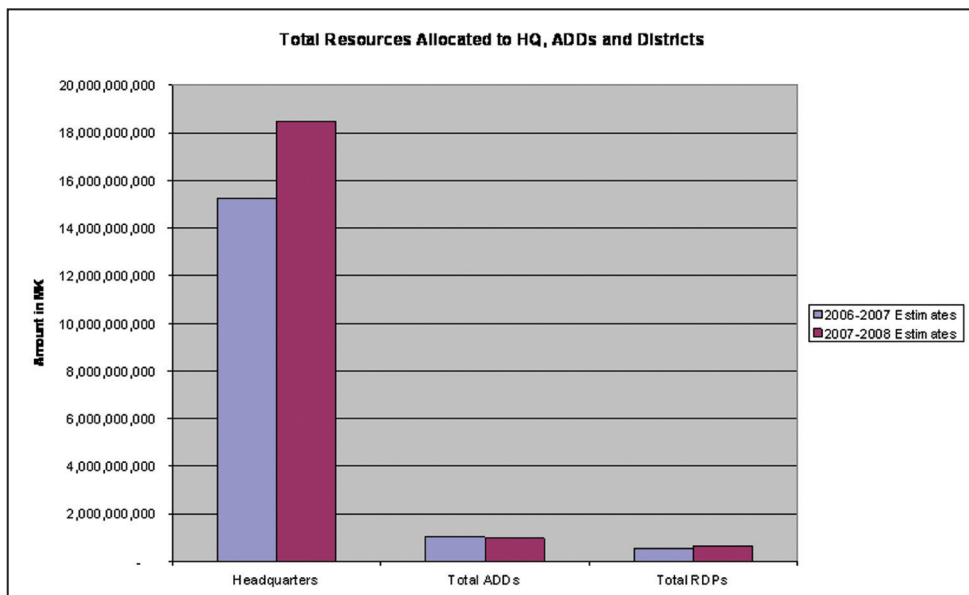
### 6.3.3. Other Sources of Funds

The MoA district offices do get funds from other sources besides the regular budgetary entitlements from the central government which are not generally reflected in the national budget. They get funds from special projects within MoA and from NGOs.

Some of the major projects include the following: Irrigation and Rural Livelihoods Development Programme (IRLAD); Smallholder

**Figure 7. Total Budget Allocations to MoA HQs, ADDs and Districts**

Source: Ministry of Finance Budget Documents 2006/2007 and 2007/2008



Irrigation Project (SHIP); Farm Income Diversification Project (FIDP); Institutional Development Fund for Agriculture (IDAF); and Rural Income Enhancement Project (RIEP). MoA officials at the district level do not however exercise any discretionary powers of expenditure over project financial resources. Expenditure is strictly on activities prioritized by the projects' coordination units at MoA headquarters. Similarly NGOs provide funding only for those areas and activities that are of direct relevance to their respective programme portfolios. It was in fact emphasised that very rarely do NGOs respond to requests for activities that do not fall within their areas of interest but are of particular importance to MoA. Some stakeholders do support MoA's activities on a one off basis. Companies such as BAT Malawi, Toyota Malawi and RAB Processors have supported agricultural shows by making available gifts to farmers. The Ministry of Health has also supported MoA on

the Rabies Week Vaccination Campaign in both districts.

### 6.3.4. Strategies for Improving MoA's Financial Capacity

Several ways in which the financial capacity of MoA at the district level can be enhanced were suggested by various stakeholders. These included the following:

- Budgetary cuts should not only be consultative but should also be communicated in good time with concrete explanations for the district level MoA offices to make the necessary adjustments.
- Approved budgets should be communicated to MoA officials timely. Delayed communication greatly affects implementation because it is not easy to readjust the work plans to conform to the budget which has also been greatly trimmed.

- Careful planning should be undertaken when making policy changes that affect budgetary allocations. An example given was the recent increase of allowances from MK 1060 to MK 6000. This was deemed as a substantial increase which has had tremendous knock down effects on several activities as there have been no corresponding increases in the funding levels.
- Monthly allocations should consider that agriculture is a seasonal enterprise and as such allocations should be seasonally sensitive. Funding allocations should reflect this seasonality

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

The MoA district offices have very weak operative capacity both in terms of technical competence and financial capability to effectively deliver services to the farmers. The MoA district level offices are grappling with serious personnel shortages at all levels. Extension staff at EPA and section levels is in short supply and qualified SMSs at the district level are almost non-existent. The problem of shortage of personnel was particularly exacerbated by the closure of the only training institution for more than a decade besides the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the extension staff cadre. It has also been difficult to retain graduate SMSs because of unattractive conditions of service in MoA. Most of them tend to move on to the NGO sector.

The funding situation for district level MoA offices is hugely unpredictable due to irregularity in funding patterns even though since the designation of DCs as controlling officers, the amount of resources finding their way close to points of service delivery has greatly improved. The major challenge for MoA at district level is that the budgetary cuts are ad hoc and are not communicated to them. This makes it extremely difficult for them to readjust their work plans accordingly. MoA district offices get funding

from other sources such as projects and NGOs but the constraint is that they are not in a position to exercise any discretionary powers over these resources. The usage of the funds is predetermined. The combined effects of weak technical competence and financial capability have manifested in the less satisfactory service delivery by MoA at district levels.

## **7. Interface between MoA and other stakeholders**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This section explores the extent of interface between MoA and other stakeholders at district level not only in service delivery but also in terms of policy design, budget preparation and, mobilisation of resources. The main purpose is to establish areas of interface and whether there are constraints faced and how these constraints can possibly be alleviated. The issue of interface borders on coordination and collaboration among stakeholders in the delivery of a service to beneficiaries in whatever sector.

### **7.2. Forms and levels of interface**

Several forms and levels of possible interface between MoA and other stakeholders were discerned during fieldwork. There is need for interaction between different parts of MoA; interface between MoA and other closely related public sector agencies; and interface between MoA and other stakeholders particularly NGOs, FBOs and the private sector actors. All these forms of interface can take place at district and community levels. The possible areas of interface between MoA and other stakeholders include policy design, budget preparation and service delivery which can be achieved through consultation, briefing, exchange of information, mobilisation or provision of resources, service delivery etc.

The new policy on extension makes the interface between MoA and other stakeholders imperative. The gist of the policy, as stated

elsewhere in the report, is that farmers must be served through more pluralistic and demand-driven extension services after a process of stakeholder consultation towards defining better policy and practice. This is aptly captured in the following observations made in the policy itself.

“Coordination at a decentralised level is of particular importance, especially with greater pluralism, in that, it is possible to achieve stakeholder interaction, linkages and harmony towards fulfilling common goals. Decentralised sectoral coordination and linkages will, therefore, enhance complementarity of efforts, improve provision of quality services and reduce wastage of scarce resources.” (MoA, 2000: 26).

This is further underscored by MoA’s new model village operational strategy. The model village approach advocates for a multisectoral approach to development with the view to benefiting from synergies arising from collaboration with other stakeholders (government ministries and departments, NGOs, FBOs and private sector) in a wide range of rural livelihood activities. The first stage in developing a model village is therefore joint assessment of village needs, planning possible interventions and implementation.

### **7.3. Mechanisms for coordination and collaboration**

A systematic coordinating structure for agricultural related activities does not exist at the district level. The potential coordinating framework for agricultural activities at this level is the District Agricultural Extension Support System (DAESS) which is still very much in the pipeline, under the auspices of the new policy on agricultural extension services. It is, as intimated elsewhere in this report, envisaged that the institutionalisation of the DAESS will see the constitution of District Stakeholder Panels bringing together key actors in the agricultural sector for purposes of not only charting out the

overall agricultural agenda for a district but also ensuring that stakeholders work toward a common goal. The institutionalisation of the DAESS is waiting for funding to be provided by IDAF.

In the absence of DAESS, the District Executive (DEC) deputizes as a coordinating framework for agricultural activities in the district. DEC is a technical advisory body to the District Assemblies that bring together heads of sectors and NGOs operating in a district. It has several sub-committees including the District Agricultural Coordinating Committee. Most of these committees, according to the consultations carried out, are non-functional. DEC’s are scheduled to meet on a monthly basis but this is rarely the case due to funding constraints. For this reason, DEC’s are not seen as effective vehicles for information exchange, discussion and strategizing on technically orientated issues as reflected in the following sentiments:

“At district level, there is no sharing of information and DEC meetings are only held at the convenience of NGOs and the only way to raise an issue is through AOB.” (MoA official, Thyolo).

“We have several burning issues to raise with MoA but for some reason we do not have a communication channel. We assume the SMSs know how we should operate but the problem is that the information does not trickle down through to EPA staff.” (NGO official, Thyolo).

“There are no clear mechanisms for coordinating sectoral issues at district level. Sectors with burning issues do call for DEC meetings. These are often impromptu and usually are called by outsiders. If a sector has an issue it is tabled as AOB and at this time participants are tired and little is gained in discussing technical issues.” (NGO Official, Dedza)

“As things stand, there are no regular meetings amongst stakeholders not even to talk about technical meetings. The only time interaction takes place is during DEC meetings and

these are usually called by a department or agency that has a specific issue to communicate to DEC. And DEC meetings are hardly a conducive forum for addressing technical issues since the only time MoA or any agency is given an opportunity to share its activities, programmes and issues is through AOB and practically there is little to be gained through this approach.” (MoA official, Dedza).

“Stakeholders interact through DEC meetings but these are irregular and the agenda and membership changes almost all the time so issues cannot be properly followed up. In all fairness, this is not the right forum because in most cases sector heads tend to delegate to very junior staff and (sometimes administrative staff) who do not have the required capacity to discuss technically orientated issues at this level!” (MoA official, Dedza).

The conclusion is therefore that there is very little interface between MoA and other stakeholders on policy issues (see also section 4.2). The new policy on extension mandates districts to develop district specific agricultural policies taking into account the uniqueness of their circumstances. In both Dedza and Thyolo, the policies are yet to be produced and this was attributed to the excessive delays in institutionalising DAESS.

## **7.4. Status of interface between MoA and relevant stakeholders**

### **7.4.1. Intra MoA interface**

Internal MoA problems of interaction and coordination exist. These can be attributed to frequent reorganisation of MoA and to the endless introduction of special projects within MoA. Departments that are brought into the MoA fold feel that they are very much outsiders. It was argued that this is the case because joint sub-programmes meetings in MoA are irregular and most of the activities where there is close collaboration are ad hoc in nature. For instance, the Department of Fisheries has been shifted

to MoA but unlike the rest of its departments, the Department of Fisheries continues getting funding directly from the headquarters. These problems are also encountered between sub-programmes that have always been an integral part of MoA. MoA officials in both districts, for instance, argued that there is practically no interaction between crops and agribusiness sub-programmes in as far as deriving synergistic effects from their converging niches is concerned. In providing services to crop-based associations, there is no evidence of joint planning or even sharing of information by these sub-programmes right from the planning stages. On paper, there is supposed to be joint technical backstopping on production and organisational from the crops sub-programme, and on marketing from the agribusiness sub-programme. Instead their efforts are isolated and not complementary. The result is that most crop-based associations are struggling with marketing as a result of lack of proper interface between the sub-programmes.

Special projects within MoA also jeopardise interface mainly due to infighting amongst sub-programmes. These projects are often integrated or multifaceted in nature. Fights arise over which activities constitute the core yet it is obvious that MoA by its very nature is a sector that thrives on strong complementary intra-sector linkages. Several MoA officials confessed that cases abound of failure of MoA integrated projects due to coordinators' inability to account for the inputs to be provided by other sub-programmes. In the process, other players are effectively blocked from fully implementing their designated functions in the project.

### **7.4.2. Interface between MoA and other public sector agencies**

The adoption of the model village approach portended a platform for deepening interface between MoA and several other relevant public sector agencies in the areas of planning,

implementation, service delivery, resource mobilisation, monitoring and evaluation. In both districts, the experience with the model village approach with regard to deepening interface between MoA and the other public sector agencies was regarded as less satisfactory. Stakeholders interviewed indicated that the interface did not go beyond diagnostic exercises. This was attributed to limited funding, lack of commitment from field staff and bad experience with operationalising multisectoral approaches.

Beyond the model village approach, the problematic interface between MoA and other relevant public sector agencies was attributed to the lack of a culture of intersectoral collaboration even where it is obvious that the success of the activities concerned is dependent on the sectors working closely. In both districts, this challenge was exemplified by the problematic interface between MoA and the Department of Forestry. DoF officials accused MoA of not only disregarding collaboration but also as intruding in its areas of jurisdiction using sometimes distorted and divergent approaches. The following sentiments underlie the lack of proper interface between MoA and DoF:

“There is conflict on land use as regards river bank cultivation. DoF’s recommendation allows cultivation about 30 m from the river bank but with the introduction of the treadle pump technology this is not considered.” (DoF official, Dedza).

“There is duplication of efforts for example in the Rural Livelihoods Support Programme where in the same village MoA and DoF officials are setting different nurseries and conducting different trainings on the same aspects of nursery management and agro-forestry respectively.” (DoF official, Thyolo).

“Collaboration efforts are partly being hampered by the greed of the officers involved. Occasions abound when MoA officials have secured donor funding to implement

predominantly forestry activities like bee keeping. Oftentimes, MoA have facilitated production of beehives with wrong specifications and only invites DoF officials when they encounter serious technical problems.” (DoF).

In a broader scheme of analysis, problems of proper interface exist because these public sector agencies are at different stages of decentralisation which makes coordinating decision processes fairly challenging. While for instance MoA is decentralised, DoF is still centralised. This means that officers at the same level have differing mandates to make decisions at the point of service delivery. It is therefore argued that until all sectors and departments are fully decentralised, it would be expecting too much to realize meaningful interface among public sector agencies in the areas of planning, mobilisation, service delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

#### **7.4.3. Interface between MoA with other agriculture sector stakeholders**

MoA’s interface with other stakeholders particularly NGOs is probably the most challenging. Interface between MoA and the private sector is virtually non-existent. The interface between MoA and NGOs is largely on a bilateral basis and it is generally characterized by accusations and counter accusations. The major accusation by MoA officials against NGOs is that they prefer to go it alone consulting only after they encounter problems in the field. NGOs accuse MoA officials of scaring them away because of the unnecessary demands for allowances. This is perhaps aptly captured in the following sentiments:

“Some activities for which allowances are demanded do not meet the criteria for payment because they are a core function for MoA like supervision.” (NGO official, Dedza official, Dedza).

“MoA officials demand night allowances for jobs done while at their workstations. NGOs are

therefore finding it hard to pay high allowances for government officials. It was affordable when their allowances were pegged at MK 1060. Now, MK 6000 is too high.” (NGO official, Dedza).

Despite these constraints two NGOs were particularly singled out as working very closely with MoA at all levels: planning, budget preparation, service delivery, monitoring and evaluation. These are Concern Universal in Dedza and Oxfam in Thyolo as highlighted in the following observations:

“With Oxfam, there is a systematic mechanism. It provides funding for sector specific planning and review sessions; multisectoral planning and review sessions; and joint field supervisory visits as well as community review sessions where community leaders and extension workers from all sectors discuss progress of various development interventions.” (MoA official, Thyolo)

“Of all stakeholders, Concern Universal is the one that has a systematic approach because we plan together at district level and we also implement hand in hand at EPA level. Others despite that they do not have the technical capacity do not involve MoA structures but only consult when something goes wrong.” (MoA official, Dedza)

Strikingly the level of interface between MoA and NGOs is relatively deeper at the EPA level than is the case at the district level. MoA officials at the EPA level even work closely with the emerging network of agro-dealers. Agro-dealers work with MoA staff at this level in carrying out demonstration plots for new varieties of crops and brands of pesticides. One of the agro-dealers interviewed observed that “there are no formalities involved in our interaction with EPA staff. They are close by and we just work with them as it is within their job description”. NGOs pointed out that it is easier for them to interface much more with officials at EPA than at district level because they do not demand huge allowances. For most MoA officials, NGOs are forced

to interface with MoA structures at this level because they do not have the requisite technical know how to execute their programmes.

The interface amongst NGOs themselves is not any better. Incidences of rivalry between NGOs were frequently reported in both districts. There is a widespread tendency among NGOs to oversubscribe to a particular area when other areas in the same district are not served at all implementing almost the same interventions. They thus largely view themselves not as partners but rather as competitors. This is the case because NGOs are very much concerned with achieving significant impact at a stroke in order to retain or court further donor support. Attempts in both districts have been made to establish an NGO consortium as a forum for entrenching modalities for partnership, coordination and collaboration but the initiative has not been a success. This was attributed to the lack of powers of censure in the office of the DC. The point is that the recommendations of the NGO consortia would be meaningless if not backed up by any sanctioning power, which should ideally reside in the DC’s office in their capacity as controlling officers.

## **7.5. Strategies for Improving Interface between MoA and Stakeholders**

Several suggestions were put forward regarding how the interface between MoA and its stakeholders can be improved. These include the following:

- Strictly enforce the draft MoU with the Council of Non Governmental Organisations (CONGOMA) on the protocol of NGOs operations in the agricultural sector.
- Accelerate the institutionalisation of the DAESS as a mechanism for interaction of the stakeholders in the agricultural sector at the district level so that stakeholders learn from each other. This would, inter alia, help curb the competitive tendencies among stakeholders especially NGOs.

- Redefining the roles and functions of MoA district staff. They should not regard themselves as implementers but rather concern themselves with much more strategic issues such as policy governance, coordination and monitoring.
- Providing for the sanctioning powers in the office of the DC for deviant stakeholders in the course of service delivery in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

## 7.6. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the interface between MoA and other stakeholders is far from ideal. There are problems of interface with all the three forms of MoA interface. This means that there is very little interaction among stakeholders within the agricultural sector bordering on planning, implementation, resource mobilisation, monitoring and evaluation. It is striking that MoA interface with other stakeholders is much deeper at EPA level than is the case at the district level. For NGOs this is the case because of the excessive demands for allowances by the district level staff whereas from the perspective of MoA officials, NGOs are forced to interface with MoA structures because they simply do not have the necessary capacity to undertake their programmes effectively. The interface among NGOs themselves is not without problems either. They regard each other not as partners but rather as competitors. The bottom line is that the interface between agriculture sector stakeholders has to be improved.

## 8. Concluding Reflections

There is little doubt that the MoA is undergoing through a period of significant transformation at the district level spearheaded by the ongoing decentralisation policy reforms. The reforms have driven significant structural changes to MoA at district level. Prior to the reforms there were no MoA district offices. Service delivery at district level was coordinated through the Rural

Development Projects (RDPs) whose areas of jurisdiction did not necessarily coincide with district boundaries. The decentralisation policy reforms have also led to dramatic changes in the funding modalities for MoA district level offices. Instead of getting funded directly from MoA headquarters, MoA district offices are funded for their operational costs through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. The funds are disbursed to MoA district offices through the DCs' offices. The share of budgetary resources is, however greatly skewed in favour of the MoA headquarters, with relatively insignificant amounts finding their way to the ADD and district levels even though it is generally said that there have been significant improvements in resource flows from MoA to the district level since the reorganization of RDPs into offices under the auspices of decentralization.

Furthermore, decentralisation reforms have led to the adoption of a new policy on extension advocating for the development of pluralistic and demand-driven agricultural extension services through the involvement of stakeholders and promotion of participatory planning and implementation of agricultural programmes. The policy envisages the establishment of a participatory institutional framework patterned along the lines of the sub-district participatory structures currently in place under the auspices of the decentralisation policy reforms. These changes have also been taking place against the backdrop of frequent tendencies to reorganize the MoA depending on the prevailing challenges at particular points in time. The reorganisation has involved either shifting departments out of MoA or bringing new departments into MoA fold. The major issues arising out this study can be summed up as follows:

- Service providers and beneficiaries emphasised on different constraints and challenges



facing district agricultures even though they were some overlaps.

- There are significant variations between the perceptions of stakeholders about what the MoA should be doing and what it actually does at the district level. While most MoA officials and smallholder farmers emphasised on tasks bordering on service delivery, other stakeholders see coordination, policy governance and monitoring as the primary functions for MoA.
- While decision-making processes are designed to follow a bottom-up strategy strongly reinforced by the adoption of a new policy on agricultural extension advocating for the pluralistic and demand-driven delivery of extension services, the practice tends to be entirely different from this policy rhetoric. There is evidence of the MoA district offices trying to be demand driven but they are being constrained in their actions by decisions taken at the centre usually driven by the grand national development strategies and donor-funded vertical projects.
- Much as the decentralisation policy reforms have increased opportunities for improved service delivery in the agricultural sector, it has also brought about considerable challenges. Most of the challenges are arising from lack of clarity on operating principles, standards and procedures governing service delivery in a decentralised environment largely due to the fact that the decentralisation process itself is incomplete in a number of respects.
- The MoA district level offices have a very weak operative capacity both in terms of technical competence and financial capability to effectively deliver services to farmers. The MoA district offices are grappling with serious personnel shortages at all levels due to several factors: the closure of the only nationally accredited training institution for nearly a decade; the

devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and an increasing number of staff proceeding on retirement without replacement. The funding situation is hugely unpredictable due to irregularity in funding patterns coupled with the fact that budgetary cuts are ad hoc and rarely communicated to MoA officials in good time. The combined effects of these constraints have tremendously negatively impacted on service delivery to the farmers.

- The interface between agriculture sector stakeholders and internal coordination within the MoA are problematic. This means that there is very little interaction among stakeholders within the agricultural sector regarding planning, implementation, resources mobilisation, monitoring and evaluation. It is, however, striking to note that MoA interface and NGOs is relatively deeper at EPA level than is the case at district level. The interface among NGOs themselves is not without problems either. They regard each other not as partners but rather as competitors.

Given the current operative capacity and environment for MoA district level offices, it would be expecting too much for them to meaningfully play a coordination role and be demand-driven. While a policy framework for the MoA to assume a coordinating role in a demand-driven fashion exists, the MoA district level offices are clearly constrained by limited technical and financial capacities. The MoA district offices are grappling with acute staff shortages at all levels coupled with teething financial problems to provide even the most basic services. The majority of the existing staff complement is orientated toward roles and functions bordering on direct service provision and it would require reorienting them toward executing strategic functions such as coordination, policy governance and monitoring. It is,

however, doubtful whether this would be a success given that the majority of the people holding key posts at the district level are highly under qualified.

The capacity of MoA to play a coordinating role at the district level is further constrained by the delays in the institutionalisation of the DAESS under the auspices of the new policy on agricultural extension services. The potential of the DAESS may, given the current orientation and capacity of the existing cadre of MoA staff, be overestimated. Moreover, it is relatively easy to put structures in place but very hard to make them function effectively. This is related to the apparent contradictions between rhetoric at the policy level and the actual practice. While advocating for the provision of extension services on a demand-driven basis, the MoA district offices are constrained by the continued dominance of the central over the local priorities in framing work plans for implementation within the agricultural sector. This is further compounded by challenges brought about the implementation of the decentralisation policy reforms. A number of issues remain unclear and unresolved that if clarified and resolved would go along way in propping up the capacity of MoA to assume a coordination role and be demand-driven. In the final analysis, it is imperative that the core functions of MoA district offices be redefined to prioritize tasks of coordination, policy governance and monitoring especially following the adoption of the new policy on extension advocating for the development of pluralistic and demand-driven agricultural extension services.

## Appendix I: Checklists for Field Work

Three sets of questions are proposed to guide the field work: one to be used in interviews with

MoA officials, one to be used in interviews with non-MoA informants, and one for focus group discussions.

### Section I: Questions for MoA officials:

These should include DAEO, Crops Officer and 2+ extension officers

Issues	Guiding questions
Context – the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the key agricultural activities in the district?</li> <li>• What are the key challenges associated with those activities (factors constraining growth, profitability etc)?</li> <li>• What new opportunities for agriculture in the district?</li> </ul>
MoA functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the key functions of the MoA at district level? How do these functions link with the policy objectives for the sector?</li> <li>• What services/activities does the MoA provide/carry out in the district?</li> </ul>
Technical capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many staff do you have in the district? What is the proportion of administrative/technical staff? Try to get numbers by rank/type (e.g. extension officers, DAEO)</li> <li>• How does this number compare with that 5 years ago, 10 years ago? (get trend if not actual figures, but actual preferred)</li> <li>• What is the qualifications profile of technical staff in the district?</li> <li>• What are the career progression opportunities for technical staff?</li> <li>• What are pay levels for field level technical staff, and for District level officers? How do these compare to (a) work with NGOs, (b) work in private sector (e.g. a fertiliser company)?</li> <li>• How long have are field staff usually in post before transfer? How long are District officers in post before transfer?</li> <li>• How adequate are this structure and staffing levels to perform the MoA functions and pursue its policy objectives?</li> <li>• [For extension officers]: how many farmers within your area are you in regular contact with?</li> </ul>
MoA structures and decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To whom are district-based agricultural officers accountable? How are objectives and workplans set at district level?</li> <li>• Ask: tell me about the last time you had to refer to a higher level to get a decision – what was the issue, how long before you got an answer, and was it useful? Then tell me about the time before that.</li> </ul>
Financial capacity (resource mobilisation and use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are you involved in annual budgeting? Do you submit a budget? To whom? How do you do this? What factors do you take into account? Are you given clear guidelines and ceilings? Is budgeting just done by District MoA, or do other actors participate?</li> <li>• How do your submissions turn out? Do you normally get all you request, or just a part? Are you consulted about cuts?</li> <li>• How long does it take for AIEs (authority to incur expenditure) to arrive when the budget has been drawn up at HQ?</li> </ul>

Issues	Guiding questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you suffered further cuts to your budget during the FY, or had freezes on spending imposed?</li> <li>• Do budgeted non-salary funds (e.g. fuel allowance) last the whole of the financial year? If not, how many months are you without such funds?</li> <li>• Do you access funds from any other source than your own Ministry?</li> <li>• Resources are always scarce: if it were up to you, would you allocate staff and resources to their current tasks? What changes would you make if you had your way?</li> <li>• What additional changes would you make if you had a bigger budget?</li> </ul>
MoA interface with other players in the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the MoA interact with other government agencies in the district? Of particular interest is interaction with other NR-based ministries (e.g. livestock, forestry, water, cooperatives).</li> <li>• How does MoA interact with non-governmental stakeholders in the district?</li> <li>• For each of the above groups, explore: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there clear and structured mechanisms for interaction?</li> <li>- What type of interaction – exchange of information, provision of resources or services...?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• With whom do you regularly exchange information?</li> <li>• Do you plan jointly for some activities with other agencies?</li> <li>• Are there projects where implementation is shared?</li> <li>• Do you allocate funds to other agencies, or receive funds from other agencies?</li> <li>• How well does co-ordination work, in your opinion? How might it be improved?</li> </ul>

### Section I: Questions for MoA officials:

These should include staff of other ministries, NGO representatives, farmers (or farmer organisation representatives) and private sector stakeholders (e.g. input stockists, crop buyers)

Issues	Guiding questions
Context – the ag sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the key agricultural activities in the district?</li> <li>• What are the key challenges associated with those activities (factors constraining growth, profitability etc)?</li> <li>• What new opportunities for agriculture in the district?</li> </ul>
MoA functions, structures and decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think should be the key functions of the MoA?</li> <li>• What does the MoA actually do?</li> <li>• If there is a discrepancy between these two answers, why do you think this is the case? And are the functions being performed by other players (NGOs? Private sector?)?</li> </ul>
MoA interface with other players in the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any needs that you would wish the MoA to assist you with or issues that you would wish to raise with MoA? If yes, how would you present these needs/issues to the MoA?</li> <li>• In your experience, how responsive is MoA to such needs/issues?</li> <li>• Do you have any regular interaction with the MoA in the district? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there clear and structured mechanisms for interaction?</li> <li>- What type of interaction/exchange – information/dialogue, resources, services?</li> <li>- With whom to you interact in the MoA?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Issues	Guiding questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How frequently does interaction occur?</li> <li>- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the interaction?</li> <li>- What could be done better? What might be the obstacles for improving interaction?</li> <li>• Does the MoA bring stakeholders in the district (or sector) together? If so, for what purposes?</li> <li>• How well does co-ordination between stakeholders within the district (or sector) work? How might it be improved?</li> </ul>
Performance and evolution of the MoA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your opinion on performance of the MoA – highlight strengths and weaknesses?</li> <li>• Has there been any significant change in the MoA during the time that you have worked in the district – in terms of functions, structures, decision-making, interface with other players?</li> </ul>

## Section II: Questions for focus group discussions:

Each focus group should assemble 4-7 older farmers with a long-term perspective on agriculture within the district. The groups might be organized on the basis of agro-ecological zones within the district

Issues	Guiding questions
Performance and evolution of the MoA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The discussion should explore the following issues:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- distinguish time periods (since 1980? Since Independence?) according to how well agriculture in the district was performing. Note what was doing well or badly in each period;</li> <li>- assess what the MoA did within the district during each period. Where the same activities are listed for each period, get respondents to assess performance of these activities in each period and give their reasons for differences in performance over time</li> <li>- ask respondents to rank periods by strength of MoA performance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Appendix II: A List of Stakeholders Consulted

### Dedza District

Name	Organisation	Position
Kamlomo T.	MoA	Acting DADO
Mangani G.	MoA	Acting AGRESS Officer
Dzonzi W.	MoA	Extension Methodologies Officer
Hara O.	Self Help International	Project Manager
Chizimba L.	Concern Universal	Project Manager
Kumwenda B.	Concern Universal	Project Manager
Chizonga J.	District Assembly	Acting Director of Planning and Development
Dzimбири K.	MoA	Principal Residential Training Centre
Gausi H.	MoA	District Animal Health and Livestock Development Officer
Gondwe M.	MoA	Assistant Veterinary Officer
Kabuli H.	MoA	Agribusiness Officer
Nyoni M.	MoA	Grain Legumes Officer
Njobvu T.	MoA	District Fisheries Officer

### Thyolo District

Name	Organisation	Position
Limbani L.	MoA	DADO
Kaphuka K.	District Assembly	Director of Planning and Development
Nkhata G.	World Vision International	Capacity Development Officer
Fatchi H.	MoA	Acting ADADO/Extension Methodologies Officer
Magombo P.	MoA	Acting Land Resources Conservation Officer
Muthali G.	MoA	Fisheries Assistant
Joshua C.	MoA	Fisheries Assistant
Chikanda A.	MoA	Assistant AEDEC
Nangwale B.	District Forestry Office	Assistant District Forestry Officer
Malobe P.	Malacha Agro-dealers	Partner
Kamgwira Y.	Oxfam	Programme Coordinator

## End notes

<sup>1</sup> Middle altitude zone (760-1300m) covers 75% of the country's agriculture. It is the main agricultural area with maize, tobacco, tea, groundnuts grown as the main crops where as High altitude (> 1300) includes highlands and mountains with mean temperature ranges between 10-15 degrees and with annual rainfall above 1200m.

<sup>2</sup> These changes have mainly been as a result of political initiatives independent of the ongoing public sector reforms at the national. The shape of the MoA at the district level has been greatly influenced by the decentralization policy reforms. The main influence in the constant reconfiguration of MoA at the national level has been the regular episodes of the hunger crisis.

<sup>3</sup> It is important not that from the fieldwork, the notion of coordination is multifaceted. It means different things to different stakeholders. This is to say that stakeholders tend to emphasise on different aspects of the notion of coordination. Aspects of coordination intimated included the following: sharing of information about what different actors are doing, establishing partnerships between different players, organising events to make the parties meet to carry out reviews and monitoring activities etc.

<sup>4</sup> The exercise of developing work plans usually starts before indications of funding ceilings are given out but then even when the work plans are developed on the basis of indicative budgetary ceilings, these ceilings are rarely honoured. The work plans are therefore revised in accordance with the funding finally made available.

<sup>5</sup> These can be simply be described as village based AEDOs. The design is to train 10 lead farmers per village: 2 in land resources; 2 in food and nutrition; 2 in AGRESS; 2 in Agribusiness; and 2 in agricultural communications. The concept was introduced two years ago and the idea is that the lead farmers should deputize for the absence of extension workers. They interact with qualified extension workers for capacity building at monthly intervals.

<sup>6</sup> These are attached to qualified extension workers for purposes of mentorship. They are then offered scholarships to study for a diploma at the Natural Resources College (NRC) signing a bond that after completing their studies they would work for the government for a period of at least five years. The experience to date is not promising. The turn over of the first cohort of NRC graduates is quite high regardless of having been bonded to MoA for a period of five years. Most of them are taking up lucrative positions in the NGO sector.

<sup>7</sup> It is quite surprising that the budgeting is still done at the RDP level when the district is now the operational level following the reorganization of RDPs into district agricultural level offices.

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