

# **DECENTRALISATION IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN MALAWI**

**Policies, processes and community linkages**

A Status Report Prepared by:

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## ACRONYMS

<b>ADB</b>	African Development Bank
<b>ADC</b>	Area Development Committee
<b>ADD</b>	Agricultural Development Division
<b>ADMARC</b>	Agriculture Development and Marketing Corporation
<b>BCA</b>	Bunda College of Agriculture
<b>CG</b>	Central Government
<b>DA</b>	District Assembly
<b>DAES</b>	Department of Agricultural Extension Services
<b>DADO</b>	District Agricultural Development Officer
<b>DARS</b>	Department of Agricultural Research Services
<b>DDF</b>	District Development Fund
<b>DEC</b>	District Executive Committee
<b>DPO</b>	District Planning Officer
<b>EPA</b>	Extension Planning Area
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation
<b>FUM</b>	Farmers Union of Malawi
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GOM</b>	Government of Malawi
<b>GTZ</b>	German Technical Co-operation
<b>IDS</b>	Institute for Development Studies
<b>IGA</b>	Income Generating Activity
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>MALGA</b>	Malawi Local Government Association
<b>MASAF</b>	Malawi Social Action Fund
<b>MCFW</b>	Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>MoA</b>	Ministry of Agriculture
<b>MoAIFS</b>	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Food Security
<b>MPRS</b>	Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy
<b>NASFAM</b>	National Smallholders Farmers Association of Malawi
<b>NDP</b>	National Decentralisation Policy
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organization
<b>NFRA</b>	National Food Reserve Agency
<b>NLGFC</b>	National Local Government Finance Committee
<b>NRC</b>	Natural Resources College
<b>NORAGRIC</b>	Institute of International Environment and Development Studies
<b>NORAD</b>	Norwegian Agency for Development
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>RDP</b>	Rural Development Project
<b>SFFRFM</b>	Smallholder Farmer Fertilizer Revolving Fund for Malawi
<b>TCC</b>	Tobacco Control Commission
<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNCDF</b>	United Nations Capital Development Fund
<b>VDC</b>	Village Development Committee

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on the 1998 Decentralisation Policy and Local Government Act, the National Decentralisation Programme in Malawi in 2001 initiated a coordinated process aimed at devolving power and resources to local assemblies, with the District Assembly level playing a paramount role. This report focuses on the decentralisation process in the *agricultural sector* in the context of national decentralisation policies and programmes. Decentralisation involves set of decisions leading to shifts in the locus of power from the centre towards the periphery. In this implementation process, the Ministry of Agriculture was given extensive powers to influence the exercise of devolving (their own) powers, functions and responsibilities to the District level. But there appears to be fragile capacity within the government system in managing this complex reform process. And at higher levels, there is still considerable reluctance to devolve power and decentralise resources.

In the agricultural sector, and more specifically within the area of responsibility of the former Department of Agricultural Extension Services, decentralisation could build on already existing structures at local levels. *Devolution*, however, means that a strictly *top down* system in terms of power, decision-making, accountability and information flow, had to be changed. In the negotiations to change this system, lack of capacity is often used as a multi-purpose argument in the quest to maintain power at higher levels.

In order to move beyond what has so far been achieved in terms of decentralising the responsibility for *extension services* to the District level, a more pro-active leadership and ownership to the process is required in the agricultural sector as a whole. More direct institutional links can be developed between the District level/ Extension Planning Area level and the research and experiment stations under the Ministry's Department of Agricultural Research Services. Eventually, the formerly established Agricultural Development Divisions (ADDs) may be phased out to promote more efficient and effective use of resources. Furthermore, in the implementation of the new Agricultural Extension Policy at the local level, extension officers should be given a special mandate to make sure that the "Those who benefit pay"-principle is not translated into service-provision based on "Those who pay benefit".

Support to capacity and competence building in agriculture and natural resource management should include explicit priorities aimed at responding to the challenges and needs at the decentralised DA, Area and village levels. Programme and project funding from the Norwegian side should be based on a careful scrutiny of to what extent the funded activities may actually undermine fledgling local government structures and decentralised development-oriented activities. By providing funds that are channelled to properly managed District Development Funds (DDFs) – and possibly earmarked for the agricultural sector – participatory-democracy processes of decision-making and agricultural-development initiatives at village level can be strengthened, together with the formally established, but not necessarily operative structures of stakeholder panels within the District agricultural sector. At the same time, village-level agricultural development initiatives could be supported through the DDF mechanism.

Research projects and technology development funded through Norwegian programmes, could be used to forge stronger links between higher education and research institutions, Malawian research and experiment stations, and the decentralised District Agricultural Development Offices and Extension Planning Areas at local levels, thus contributing to promoting demand-driven agricultural research.



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. DECENTRALISATION: BASIC CONCEPTS**

By definition *decentralisation* refers to “the transfer of power from the central government to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy” (Larson and Ribot 2005:3). Within political systems, decentralisation in principle involves decisions made by the *central government*, and sets of changes at least in part initiated from the centre. In developing countries the picture is often quite complex, with decentralisation programmes being key elements in both bilateral and multilateral development cooperation. According to a recent OECD report, over the past two decades decentralisation and local governance support have become “major fields within international development co-operation” (OECD 2004:9). This means that decentralisation processes are also subject to donor incitement, influence, pressure – and conditionality.

Decisions to decentralise must nevertheless be taken by the country government itself. In a much cited work on *The Political Economy of Decentralisation*, Manor discusses why so many governments since the 1980s have actually decided to undertake decentralisation of “one or another type” (Manor 1999:26). On the one hand, he points out that in each country, decentralisation is the result of a country-specific combination of factors and causes. Some general trends can nevertheless be identified. One such trend was up to the beginning of the 1980s for many national leaders to “overcentralize... power in the interests of personal rule” (Manor 1999:27). Then the adverse effects of rising oil prices and deteriorating terms of trade made governments open up for structural adjustment programmes initiated by the Bretton Woods institutions<sup>1</sup> (Harrigan 2003). One result was that both charismatic and neo-patrimonial leadership in sub-Saharan Africa from the 1980s was effectively undermined by “the failure of governments to deliver” (Manor 1999:27).

At this point, *public choice* approaches entered the scene introducing the idea of decentralisation as:

...an option which offers something resembling a free market – bringing together ‘buyers’ (citizens) and ‘sellers’ (decentralised authorities) in a setting where the wishes of the former can impinge effectively on the latter (Manor 1999:28, with reference to Smith 1985).

Drawing upon market models, public-choice analysts promoted the idea that people demanding public services should also pay for them (‘Those that benefit pay’ principle). And local people should ideally also hold civil servants accountable for the quality of their service delivery. Decentralisation furthermore seemed to promise to “off-load obligations from hard pressed central governments onto local- and intermediate-level bodies” (Manor 1999:28).

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<sup>1</sup> That is, IMF and the World Bank.

Thus decentralisation could be seen as a way of getting rid of tasks and responsibilities on the part of the central government. Furthermore it was considered a means to facilitate cuts in public expenditure. These assumptions have later proved to be mistaken in most cases, while the linkage between decentralisation and structural adjustment initiatives actually posed “a serious threat to the viability of programmes of decentralisation” (Manor 1999:107).

At the same time, decentralisation was promoted as a means to bring public decision-making closer to, and more transparent to, local people through the democratic election of a downwardly accountable local government. *Accountability*<sup>2</sup> is actually a key dimension of the most commonly used typologies of decentralisation:

- *Administrative decentralisation* – also called *de-concentration* – referring to the delegation of *tasks* (such as public services) or transfer of certain powers to local administrative bodies or “branches” of central government (OECD 2004:16, Larson and Ribot 2005:3, cf. Conyers 1983). Administrative decentralisation implies that local bodies are in principle *upward accountable* to higher levels of administration for their decisions and performance. While central government is not really giving up authority, but “simply relocating its officers at different levels or points” within the political-administrative system (Manor 1999:5).
- *Political decentralisation* – or *devolution* – involving the transfer of both *power* and *resources* to lower-level authorities or institutions. Through representative-democracy elections, these local institutions are governed by locally elected representatives (Manor 1999:6, OECD 2004:16). The local government institutions are in principle *downward accountable* to their local constituencies through the mechanisms of representative democracy, where democratic elections of representatives form a key element.

The 2004 OECD report makes a further distinction, which is also relevant here. The two categories below capture forms of decentralisation focussing on *institutions’* scope of activities and responsibilities:

- *Sectoral decentralisation* refers to the transfer of responsibility for one sector or one type of activity to a local-level institution responsible for this defined function (OECD 2004:16). In Malawi a District Agricultural Development Office exemplifies such an institution.
- *Integrated decentralisation* refers to the “transfer of tasks or authority to local ‘multi-purpose’ institutions with a territorially restricted mandate” (OECD 2004:16). In Malawi, the District Assemblies should in principle be such multi-purpose institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> Accountability refers to the ability and responsibility to account for and explain actions and performance, usually with reference to previously defined goals and indicators. In systems and organizations with some form of hierarchical structure, we can distinguish between *upward* and *downward accountability*.

In the present report, we will describe and discuss decentralisation in the agricultural sector in Malawi in the context of national decentralisation policies and programmes. As a process decentralisation involves set of decisions leading to shifts in the locus of power from the centre towards the periphery. But it still means that the centre will set broad policy guidelines and define more specific objectives for the decentralised units. The process of decentralisation thus involves a series of *negotiations* between central and local offices and different stakeholders. These negotiations will deal with *rules and resources*, as well as with issues of *upwards and downwards accountability*. That is, questions concerning who the decentralised offices primarily are responsible to; the central power-holders or the local communities.

## **1.2. THE DECENTRALISATION PROCESS IN MALAWI**

After independence in 1964, the Malawian government embarked on a process of *centralisation* of functions and responsibilities to the central line ministries. The central institutions in turn established regional and district offices. In 1994, after the introduction of a multi-party system of representative democracy in Malawi, the new government decided to start a process of devolving powers (back) from the central to lower levels in the government structure. An ideal motivating this move was to facilitate “the participation of people at the grassroots level in efficient provision of public services in an accountable manner at the local level” (Malawi Government 2004:4). This would also mean “promoting a democratic system within which government officials can be held accountable to the local people that they are supposed to serve” (op.cit.)

In 1998, a National Decentralisation Policy was approved by the Cabinet. A Local Government Act was also passed by Parliament in 1998, becoming effective in 1999. A National Decentralisation Programme was planned and started its implementation in 2001, with major donor support from ADB, UNDP/UNCDF, NORAD and GTZ (Malawi Government 2005).

A key element in the new laws and policies of decentralisation has been the establishment of District Assemblies. The District Assemblies should, according to the Decentralisation Policy and Local Government Act, consist of elected members (*councillors*) from each Ward in the District, in addition to non-voting members representing Traditional Authorities, civil society, and Members of Parliament elected from constituencies within the district area. The District Assemblies should thus in principle perform an important role in an ‘integrated’ decentralisation of political power, as defined above. They should be THE key ‘multi-purpose’ institutions in the *devolution* of power to the district level in Malawi.

In 2005 the Government of Malawi proceeded to dissolve the District Assemblies without calling for new local government elections. This meant that the democratically elected, downwardly accountable institutions at the district level were not formally functioning according to their mandate at the time when the study was carried out which

resulted in the present report. It was not clear when new local government elections would take place.

The process of decentralisation in Malawi has, however, also included administrative decentralisation or de-concentration of operational powers from central ministries to the District level. Currently, most central government institutions are devolving some of their functions and responsibilities to local government institutions, which in the past basically formed the district-level “branches” of central government. Under the National Decentralisation Programme, ten sectors have eventually begun the process of planning devolution and transferring defined functions to local governments.

One of the sector institutions involved in the process of devolution and transfer of functions is the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Within the agricultural sector, the decentralisation of functions includes the responsibility for service delivery in the form of extension services<sup>3</sup>. This has previously been the responsibility of the Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES), one of the departments in the Ministry. At the national level, a new extension policy was finalized in 2000, and launched under the name: *Agricultural Extension in the New Millennium: Towards Pluralistic and Demand-driven Services in Malawi* (Malawi Government 2000). The policy guidelines indicate a shift from supply-driven to demand-driven extension service provision, including the principle of “those that benefit pay”. The general orientation of the agricultural extension policy is in line with the decentralisation policy, with its aim to empower local level stakeholders to participate more effectively in decision-making, programme development and implementation.

### 1.3. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

When NORAD – Oslo made the request for the present study to be carried out, it was – as interpreted by the review team – motivated by a search for concrete cross-cutting issues, with the aim of creating better conditions for synergies on the ground in two major areas of development cooperation between the Norwegian Government and the Government of Malawi. These two programme areas are *decentralisation* and *agricultural development*.

The Norwegian Government has been one of the Malawi Government’s main development partners in implementing the Malawi National Decentralisation Programme. In this capacity, several concerns have been brought up from the Norwegian side, e.g. in the context of a joint donor approach (NORAD 2005). Issues with particular relevance for the present study have included concerns about:

- The pervasiveness of top-down approaches
- Lack of involvement of ordinary people in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating sectoral ministries’ interventions in rural areas

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<sup>3</sup> *Extension* refers to programmes and arrangements that geographically extends educational and knowledge resources, including the results and new research and technology development, to persons who would otherwise be unable to take advantage of such resources.

- Dominant role of the central institutions/ministries in defining how and what powers to devolve to the districts
- Need for strengthening the districts' role in the ongoing reform process

It has also been argued that:

- The reform process has been slowing down towards a stand-still situation
- There is a great need for capacity building

These are issues concerning decentralisation that will be addressed and further developed in the present report.

In 2004, the Norwegian Minister of International Development launched a new Plan of Action for Agriculture in Norwegian Development Policy (MFA 2004). The action plan identified the following priority areas:

- ❑ Policy reforms for poverty-oriented agricultural development
- ❑ Food security
- ❑ Strengthening women's rights and their participation in agricultural development
- ❑ Promotion of the sustainable use of natural resources
- ❑ Strengthening basic services and poor people's rights of use and property rights to land and water
- ❑ Strengthening education and research
- ❑ Promotion of market development

Malawi was chosen as one of two pilot countries where the Norwegian Government wished to follow up the formulation of this Action Plan with more focussed measures of implementation. The Action Plan also motivated the design of the present study.

#### **1.4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of the study is to provide a status report on the decentralisation process in the agricultural sector in Malawi (see Annex 1). In doing so, it focuses mainly on the decentralisation of agricultural extension services to the District level, by examining the policies and practices of decentralisation both at national level, and more closely in the two administrative districts of Rumphi in the Northern Region and Dedza in the Central Region. The study will address the follow-up of the central-level policy guidelines indicated above, and look into how local (bottom-up) concerns are dealt with. It will examine issues of policy, processes, and community linkages as these relate to and affect the decentralisation process. The issue of how the District Assembly level deals with the challenges related to land and natural resource management will be addressed, the relationships and interactions between District authorities and Traditional Authorities, and the role of local and/or international NGOs will also be brought into the analysis.

In the selection of districts for this study, a range of criteria was taken into account, such as the activities of pilot decentralisation and development projects, the presence of NGOs

and farmers' organisations working in the field of agriculture and natural resource management, the existence of new district-level development projects requiring funding, in addition to the North/South dimension within Malawi itself. The study was planned in collaboration with officers in charge in NORAD's Department for Environment and Private Sector Development, and carried out in collaboration with the newly appointed officer in charge of the thematic area at the Norwegian Embassy in Lilongwe.

## **1.5. RATIONALE**

The rationale of this study is to be a catalyst in developing a clear understanding of the status of decentralisation in the agricultural sector in Malawi. In this regard, it is written with a view to assisting interested parties such as donor agencies, and Norwegian development cooperation in particular, seeking to refocus their approach by taking into consideration decentralisation policy implications in support to the agricultural sector, and vice versa. On the other hand, it is also felt that the GOM will consider the study findings as useful in making further progress within the objectives of the decentralisation process. The overall rationale is to make a contribution to designing more efficient and effective support to the Government of Malawi (GOM) in developing agriculture as a sector of crucial importance to the country, and in strengthening democratic processes in Malawi.

The report has therefore been designed in such a way that it can be of use to any stakeholder whether from the donor or recipient side. It aims at providing information with a certain degree of clarity and comprehensiveness both in the decentralisation and agricultural thematic areas. It employs a systematic approach to addressing decentralisation priority issues and capacity needs/constraints, along with sectoral initiatives and plans, with the aim of providing recommendations that will benefit the Malawi agricultural sector in the country's major quest for poverty reduction – and democratic development.

## **1.6. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used by the consulting team to obtain data and information included field visits, consultations and discussions, in addition to desk studies of relevant literature and documentation. The starting point was the identification of key and relevant stakeholders, who generally fell into the following broad categories: Government Ministries and Departments, Parastatal Organizations, Academic and Research Institutions, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Private Sector, the Donor Community, Local Community Based Organizations, and Individuals. Given the limited time available for the exercise, it was decided that a number of Lilongwe City based organizations would be consulted first, followed by consultations in the Districts of Rumphi and Dedza. It was also found imperative that the respective Agricultural Development Divisions (ADDs) where these districts are located, namely Mzuzu and Lilongwe ADDs, were included.

As such the entire consultation programme fell into three core parts as follows: Consultations with Lilongwe-based stakeholders between 23-30 November 2005; consultations with relevant stakeholders within Mzuzu ADD which included stakeholders in Mzuzu City, Rumphu District, Bolero Extension Planning Area (EPA), and Jalira-Betere Village Development Committee; and finally, consultations within Lilongwe ADD which included stakeholders in Dedza District, Lobi EPA, and Gwengwere F.P. School in Kaphuka EPA. In total, about 140 individual stakeholders, representing about 32 stakeholder institutions were identified and consulted (see Annex 2).

## **1.7. REPORT ORGANIZATION**

In this report, the consulting team has in *Chapter One* given a brief background for the study, explaining the aim and objectives of the assignment, as well as putting together information covering the methodology used for collecting and analysing data in order to come up with baseline information as far as decentralisation in the agricultural sector is concerned, the rationale for the study, and the structure of the report.

*Chapter Two* discusses the decentralisation policy, its implementation processes, achievements and constraints within the framework of the evolving decentralised governance system in Malawi. *Chapter Three* provides an overview of the current status of the agricultural sector in Malawi, while *Chapter Four* provides a critical review of the decentralisation process within the agricultural sector. *Chapter Five* provides a concluding analysis of findings emanating from the previous review process. Recommendations for possible consideration are highlighted in *Chapter Six*.

## 2. THE DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE SYSTEM IN MALAWI

### 2.1. THE DECENTRALISATION POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Malawi National Decentralisation Policy was approved in 1998. The background for developing this Policy is described in the Decentralisation Policy document as follows:

After about thirty years of a highly centralised one party rule a radical political transformation has occurred in Malawi with the introduction of Multi-party democracy, and the adoption of a new constitution based on the principles of participatory democracy (Malawi Government 1998:1).

The decentralisation of political and administrative authority to the district level is here established as an important element in the process to consolidate the new democracy in Malawi, and at the same time realise the country's development goal of poverty reduction. The aim, according to the Policy, is not only to establish the institutions required to make a representative democracy operative, but to establish a system that also includes participatory-democracy institutions and processes. Thus, among the major objectives of the National Decentralisation Policy is the creation of a democratic environment and institutions that facilitate the participation of the grassroots in decision making.

The policy, backed by the Local Government Act 1998, devolves political and administrative powers and responsibilities to the District Assemblies. The policy also involves the integration of governmental agencies at the district and local levels "into one administrative unit, through the process of institutional integration ..." (Malawi Government 1998:2). Thus, it is clearly stated that the Decentralisation Policy aims at what was referred to above as *integrated decentralisation* (Chapter 1.1). *District Assemblies* will, according to the Policy, be the main institution in the decentralised government system, which states that: "The new local government system will be made up of District Assemblies" (Malawi Government 1998:3). The policy thus also aims at eliminating dual administration (field administration and local government) at the district level, also in order to make the Public Service more efficient, more economical and cost effective.

The Policy transfers "the centre of implementation responsibilities" of a wide range of sector functions and services to the districts (Malawi Government 1998:2). Among the sector functions and services are Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (op.cit. p. 8). The (central) line ministries should, however, retain responsibility for policy formulation and enforcement, in addition to functions such as "inspectorate, establishment of standards, training, curriculum development, international representation, etc." (op.cit. p. 13). As a legal framework, the Local Government Act of 1998 establishes a fairly specific and detailed set of rules for the operation of the District Assemblies, but does not specify *how* services and functions under the sector ministries should be devolved to the District Assemblies.

According to the first-phase implementation programme for the decentralisation process, sector devolution is a complex and demanding process. The programme document says that:

It is recognized that the process of preparing sector devolution plans requires continuous consensus building and commitment in addition to technical expertise. Building consensus in the process of devolution calls for continuous involvement of key players in those line ministries. The technical and financial resources required to devolve functions are substantial and government requires assistance from its collaboration partners (Malawi Government 2001:28).

## **2.2. THE NATIONAL DECENTRALISATION PROGRAMME**

The actual implementation of the Decentralisation Policy first started in the year 2000. The National Decentralisation Programme (NDP) was then developed as a strategic framework for the coordinated implementation of the National Decentralisation Policy and Local Government Act over a period of ten years. It was also intended to serve as a tool for mobilizing resources from stakeholders and development partners wishing to support the implementation of the decentralisation process in Malawi.<sup>4</sup> The programme for the first phase of NDP, covering the period 2001-2004, was presented in 2001 (Malawi Government 2001). The programme was reviewed in 2004 (Malawi Government 2004). This review guided the preparation of the second phase of the NDP, which is presented in the *National Decentralisation Programme II, 2005–2009* (Malawi Government 2005).

The first National Decentralisation Programme had seven components, namely: Legal reforms; Institutional development and capacity building; Building a democratic environment; Fiscal decentralisation; Accounting and financial management; Sector devolution; and Local development planning and financing mechanisms. The Decentralisation Policy was in the NDP designed to be implemented in phases, focusing on the transfer of five key sectors (Education, Water, Health, Commerce and Industry, Gender and Community Services) in the first phase, while building institutional capacity both at the centre and local government levels. However, five more sectors (Agriculture, Lands and Physical Planning, Housing, Natural Resources, and Environmental Affairs) were also included in the decentralisation process during the first phase. This was in part due to the influence of development partners, but there was also a demand from the sectors themselves, which has been explained by the perceived (increased) efficiency in service delivery that would come with devolution.

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<sup>4</sup> The technical and financial requirement for the effective implementation of the first NDP phase was estimated to amount to about US\$ 49.5 million. The GOM and donors committed a total of US\$ 34 million. Donors included the African Development Bank (ADB) with (US\$ 16.155 million), UNDP/UNCDF (US\$ 12 million), NORAD (US\$ 4.5 million), and GTZ (US\$ 3.101 million).

The implementation process also included the building of capacity for the management of the programme through the Decentralisation Secretariat and the establishment of relevant local government Institutions such as the National Local Government Finance Committee (NLGFC), Malawi Local Government Association (MALGA); but also by strengthening existing institutions like the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. The National Decentralisation Programme further sought to support training institutions to enable them run capacity-building programmes in local government management. Other key activities included support to ministries to prepare sector devolution plans and the transfer of functions to assemblies; recruitment and training of staff and systems development in the areas of development planning, fiscal devolution, financial management and accounting, and human resource management.

### **2.3. LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS**

The Malawi National Decentralisation Policy of 1998 establishes a new local government system made up of District Assemblies (DAs), which in turn have powers to create committees at Area, Ward and Village level in order to facilitate local people's participation in the Assembly's decision making. A District Assembly is to be composed of the following people: Chairperson elected from among the councillors (e.g. elected members); one councillor (elected representative) per Ward; in addition to the following non-voting members: Traditional Authority and Sub-Traditional Authority representatives from the local government area, 5 persons to be appointed by the elected members to cater for special interest groups as determined by the Assembly, and Members of Parliament from constituencies that fall within the local government area (Malawi Government 1998).<sup>5</sup>

The functions of the District Assemblies are subject to the National Development Plans and Policies, and are listed in the Decentralisation Policy (NDP), including the following:

- make policy and decisions on local governance and development for the district
- consolidate and promote local democratic institutions and democratic participation
- promote infrastructure and economic development through district development plans
- mobilize resources within and outside the district
- make by-laws which facilitate its functions

The DAs will according to the Decentralisation Policy have a series of functions and services assigned to them. These include: Education Services; Medical and Health Services; Environmental Services; Roads and Street Services; Planning Authority; Land Resource Utilization; Business and local tourism; Natural Resources; Fisheries; Forestry; Water; Community Development; in addition to Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation. According to the NDP, functions and responsibilities under the Agricultural sector should include: livestock extension; control of livestock diseases; land husbandry; crop

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<sup>5</sup> This form of mixed composition of District Assemblies has later been critically reviewed (Malawi Government 2004).

husbandry; food and nutrition; and construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of small dams (Malawi Government 1998:8).<sup>6</sup>

In the performance of their functions, DAs are given the mandate to form Committees. The committees comprise of both Assembly members and other stakeholders. To perform their functions, the DAs are mandated to employ their own staff, with the head of the secretariat also serving as secretary to the Assembly. The financing of activities will, according to the NDP, be based on Central Government transfers (at least 5% of national revenues), locally generated revenues, and locally collected fees (non tax revenue), and NGO assistance.

The relationship between Central Government and DAs should be a relationship of support to the DA from line ministries and the Ministry of Local Government in the form of policy guidance, financial and technical assistance.

#### **2.4. ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND EMERGING ISSUES**

The comprehensive review of the first phase of the National Decentralisation Programme carried out in 2004 identified a number of challenges and emerging issues that various stakeholders considered to be of strategic importance to the effective implementation of the decentralisation process (Malawi Government 2004). The review team recognised that decentralisation, in the form of devolution “is one of the most radical reforms any country can make”; and in Malawi it was introduced after “30 years of autocratic centralised governance”, and pursued “in an environment characterised by the persistent influence and power of traditional authorities” (Malawi Government 2004:viii). According to the Review, the implementation of the NDP in the period 2001 – 2004 was “a mixture of some successes but many implementation failures” (op.cit. p. ix).

These failures cannot, however, only be attributed to the specific characteristics of the Malawian context. In the international policy and management literature it has actually been claimed that most such reforms fail (Polidano 2001). But the reforms do not fail because they yield unsatisfactory results. When they fail it is because “they never get past the implementation stage...[and] are blocked outright or put into effect only in ... half-hearted fashion” (op.cit. p. 1). To succeed, government reforms seem to need an “exceptionally high degree of political backing” (op.cit.).

The Review of the NDP in Malawi from 2004 points to slow implementation and “reluctance amongst some key central ministries to put into practice the devolution of functions and resources to Assemblies”. This reluctance was, however, among other stakeholders and civil servants at the DA level countered by impatience with the apparent slowness of the reform and the lack of resources – and autonomy – given to the DA level (Malawi Government 2004:viii). The Review’s main recommendation was in line with the analysis briefly referred to above, when it recommended that: “The President of the

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<sup>6</sup> More on the organisation of the Agricultural sector at DA level will be found in chapters 3.2 and 4.1.2.

Republic of Malawi should provide the leadership and champion the decentralisation process as a priority and reduce resistance to the devolution process” (op.cit. p. x).

The 2004 Review also includes a fairly general assessment of sector devolution. The process of preparing sector devolution plans for the sectors originally included in the first phase of the National Decentralisation Programme started in 2000, when the Department of Local Government provided “guidelines to line ministries on the preparation of sector devolution plans” (Malawi Government 2004:33). In 2001 the first line ministries made their sector devolution plans, but according to the Review, the following progress has been slow. It is observed that “the initial enthusiasm towards devolution appears to have been lost through changes of ...officers ...and the gradual realization of the implications of devolution” (op.cit. p. 34). Reluctance in some sectors to implement the plans in practice is recorded, and the targets set are only met to a very limited extent.

Another problem identified by the Review was that “the process of selecting functions to be devolved was in some instance an exercise which sought to rid the centre of ‘problem functions’... In others, it was more ... of seeking to reduce operational costs” (op.cit. p. 34). The result appeared to be that the central-level sectors were in certain cases ready to devolve some (problem) functions without delay, but also without the financial resources to make the devolution viable.

### **3. THE MALAWI AGRICULTURAL SECTOR**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPMENT AND PRESENT CHALLENGES**

Agriculture is the foundation of the Malawian economy. Contributing about 36% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), it provides 87% of the total employment, and more than 90% of the foreign exchange earnings. Agriculture is the main livelihood of the majority of rural people, who account for more than 85% of an estimated population of 10 million (Malawi Government 2005a:5).<sup>7</sup>

Agriculture provides 64% of the total income of the rural people. Of the total agricultural output, 70% is produced by smallholders, while the remaining 30 is produced on larger scale estates (Harrigan 2003:847). Tobacco is the major export commodity for Malawi, contributing over 65% of the foreign exchange earnings, while tea and sugar respectively contribute about 10% and 11%. Maize is, on the other hand, the major staple food crop, and 60% of the total cropped land is devoted to maize production (Malawi Government 2005a:5).

After independence in 1964, the Malawian Government pursued an agriculture-based development strategy. This strategy, however, to a large extent favoured the estate sector, which enjoyed a monopoly for growing high-value crops such as burley and flue-cured tobacco, tea and sugar. A significant amount of land was transferred from the smallholders to the estate sector, and sector production grew at an annual average of 17% per year (Harrigan 2003:848; Esser *et al.* 2005:7). Smallholders were, on their part, “relied upon to provide a marketable surplus of the staple food crop maize to feed estate and urban workers” (Harrigan 2003: 848-49, ref. to Kydd & Christiansen 1982).

As a key element in this strategy, the parastatal Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) was in charge of marketing both agricultural produce and inputs. This included buying maize from smallholders and, up to the early 1980s, providing them with fertilizer at subsidized prices. When the Malawi Government under President Kamuzu Banda found itself forced to enter into negotiations with IMF and the World Bank for Structural Adjustment Loans starting in 1981<sup>8</sup>, much of the loan conditionality was focused on reforming the agricultural sector, including ADMARC.

Key reforms focused on increasing the production of smallholder exportable crops, namely tobacco, groundnuts and cotton, by increasing the producer prices offered by ADMARC. At the same time maize prices were held down to reduce the relative price of food crops so as to encourage more export crop production (Harrigan 2003:849).

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<sup>7</sup> This population estimate is from 2001/2002. In 2003 the Economist Intelligence Unit’s population estimate was 12 million.

<sup>8</sup> See also Chapter 1.1 in this report.

The Bretton Woods loan conditionality also included removing fertilizer subsidies, which in turn reduced the profitability of maize production, and especially the use of high-yielding improved varieties (Harrigan 2003:849). According to a recent policy paper addressing food insecurity in Malawi, the Malawi Government in the 1980s thus:

... reviewed its role from that of a policy formulator and implementer to that of policy initiator and regulator ... Under the liberalization policy environment, it was assumed that prices would be determined by the market forces of demand and supply. Thus, restrictions on production of some commodities like burley tobacco were removed in the hope that smallholder farmers would participate and improve their livelihood (Malawi Government 2005:6).

According to Harrigan (2003), World Bank staff in their negotiations with the Malawian counterpart in the 1980s argued that food security could best be achieved through market-oriented production of exportable crops, such as burley tobacco. The foreign exchange incomes could, in turn, be used for importing food, if necessary (Harrigan 2003:849). But by 1987 Malawi faced a food crisis. In this situation, the Banda government actually “introduced a new set of smallholder prices at ADMARC, reversing the structural adjustment conditionality” (Peters 2006:323). Maize producer prices were increased by 36% and fertilizer subsidies were re-introduced (Harrigan 2003:850).

During most of the 1990s, agricultural sector policies in Malawi focused on improving food crop productivity, as a prerequisite for expanding the export crop production (Peters 2006:324). Until the mid-1990s hybrid maize seeds and fertilizer were subsidised. In addition smallholders could access credit and sell their produce at supported prices (FAO 2005). Then the Government again turned to a withdrawal of subsidies to smallholder food production. In 1997, a World Bank Country Report again criticized the Government for a “mistaken identification of maize production with food security”, arguing that due to subsidised fertiliser, seeds and credit, the adoption rates for hybrid maize had been “artificially high” (Harrigan 2003:854, quoting World Bank 1997). The role of ADMARC in agricultural markets was also criticised by the World Bank, and the restructuring and privatisation of the parastatal marketing corporation became part of the conditionality for new loans.

However, as an outcome of the work of a Malawian Maize Productivity Task Force set up by the Government in 1996, in 1998 the so-called “Starter Pack Programme” was introduced (Esser *et al.* 2005:vii). Supporting smallholders through the distribution of free packages containing fertilizer and hybrid maize seed, it was met with opposition by both the World Bank and USAID<sup>9</sup> (Peters 2006:324). Express disagreements between the Malawi Government and the Bretton Woods institutions was followed by a process which involved certain steps to rationalize and privatise ADMARC, and the much debated sale of the national grain reserves prior to the food crisis in 2002 (Devereux 2002; Malawi Government 2004a).

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<sup>9</sup> USAID had been a major donor to the agricultural sector in Malawi since the 1960s, but in the late 1990s turned its support from government institutions capacity building towards private sector development (cf. Kaarhus 2004).

The brief historical overview given here provides some background for the description of the situation of food insecurity and land degradation described in the Report commissioned by the Norwegian Embassy in Lilongwe in 2005; with the transfer of land from the smallholder sector and the increasing pressure on land resulting in a continual fragmentation of plots (Esser *et al.* 2005). Instead of bringing about agricultural intensification, this process has, according to the report, led to smallholders increasingly cultivating land that is not suitable for farming. This in turn has resulted in deforestation and land degradation (Esser *et al.* 2005:7).

The previous overview also provides a background for the 2005 policy paper on food insecurity in Malawi, stating that the “challenges facing the agriculture sector are formidable” (Malawi Government 2005a:7). It is against this background that the Ministry has formulated its *vision* of ‘*a nation with sustainable food security and reduced poverty*’ (op.cit.). To realise this vision, the Ministry has formulated as its mission: “*to promote and facilitate agricultural productivity and sustainable management and utilization of natural resources to ensure food security, increased incomes and creation of employment opportunities*” (op.cit.).

In more concrete terms, present *challenges*, as defined by the Ministry of Agriculture (Government of Malawi 2005a:8), include the following<sup>10</sup>:

- Poor access to agricultural inputs by the majority of smallholder farmers, due to high costs, limited access to credit, limited availability of the inputs etc.
- Poor infrastructure to support initiatives for improved productivity, including markets for products, transport and other communication facilities
- Low adoption of technologies such as irrigation and agro-processing since these are neither accessible nor affordable for most farmers

In addition to:

- Environmental depletion such as land degradation and deforestation, which threaten both the productivity and sustainability of natural resources.

### **3.2. STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE**

The present mandate of the Ministry (according to Malawi Government 2005a:7) is to:

- ❑ attain and sustain household food self-sufficiency and to improve the nutritional status of the population;
- ❑ expand and diversify agricultural production and exports;
- ❑ increase farm incomes;
- ❑ conserve the natural resource base;

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<sup>10</sup> The list as presented here includes the issues of particular relevance for the present report. It is not an exhaustive list of challenges.

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

To fulfil this mandate and perform the necessary activities, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) is organised into six departments, which report directly to the Secretary for Agriculture. The departments are: Administration and General management; The Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS); The Department of Animal Health and Industry; The Department of Crop Production; The Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES); and The Department of Land Resources Conservation.<sup>11</sup>

The Ministry has been further divided, administratively and technically, into eight Agricultural Development Divisions (ADDs), headed by Programme Managers. The ADDs were established as ecosystem-related and geographically-based subdivisions within the three regions of the country, as follows: Shire Valley ADD, Blantyre ADD, and Machinga ADD in the Southern Region; Lilongwe ADD, Salima ADD, and Kasungu ADD in the Central Region; and Mzuzu ADD and Karonga ADD in the Northern Region. Each ADD has specialists representing crop production, animal health and veterinary services, agricultural extension support services, research and technical services, and land resources conservation.

The ADDs were formerly subdivided into so-called Rural Development Projects (RDPs), replicating the professional structure of the ADDs. These were further divided into Extension Planning Areas (EPAs), which were further divided into EPA sections. Under the Decentralisation Programme, the Ministry has reconstituted the former RDPs as District Agricultural Development Offices (DADOs) under the District Assemblies. The EPAs, and their sections, are now organised as the lower level structures under the DADOs – in some cases after a certain redrawing of boundaries to accommodate the EPAs within the boundaries of each district.

The Department of Agriculture Research Services (DARS) has the responsibility to develop agricultural technologies for use by farmers in Malawi. DARS is at the national level operating three main Research stations located in the main geographical regions: Chitedze in the Centre, Mbvumbwe in the South, and Lunyangwa in the North. There are further four so-called Experiment stations spread over the different regions: Makoka, Kasinthula, Mkondezi and Lifuwu. There are also smaller sub-stations in each region where research activities are taking place on a more limited scale within a specific agro-ecological zone (cf. Kaarhus 2004:38).

The Ministry headquarters in principle concentrates in functions to policy formulation and regulation, coordination of training, and collaboration with other stakeholders. The

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<sup>11</sup> In Chapter 4 of this report, the discussion will primarily focus on decentralisation processes with reference to DAES, but also DARS.

key stakeholders in relation to the Ministry are: other government ministries and departments, public sector institutions, NGOs, donors, small and large-scale farmers, farmers' associations, input suppliers, agro-processors, international agriculture research centres, and produce buyers (Malawi Government 2005a:11).

The role of the ADDs within the present hierarchical structure should be to interpret policies formulated at the central level, coordinate technical specialists, supervise programmes, and develop “technical messages” and further training of technical specialists and extensionists.

At the District level, the functions of the District Agricultural Development Offices (DADOs), now include dissemination of messages, training of EPA staff and farmers, providing technical advice and supervision of EPA staff. At EPA level, activities involve imparting technical messages to farmers, formation of farmer groups, conducting farmer demonstrations, and linking farmers to credit institutions.

Within the agricultural sector we (still) find the following parastatals: the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC); National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA); Smallholder Farmer Fertilizer Revolving Fund for Malawi (SFFRFM) and the Tobacco Control Commission (TCC).

The training of professional staff for the agricultural sector is carried out at the University of Malawi – at Bunda College of Agriculture (BCA), Chancellor College in Zomba, and the Polytechnic in Blantyre – and at Mzuzu University. A considerable number of Masters and PhDs have also been completed abroad, while the training of Technical Assistants (TAs) who have the primary responsibility as frontline staff, is done at the Natural Resources College (NRC).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Kaarhus (2004) for more detailed information on training of professionals for the agricultural sector in Malawi, based on a “competence mapping” study.

## **4. REVIEW OF THE STATUS OF THE DECENTRALISATION PROCESS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR**

### **4.1. BACKGROUND**

The Government of Malawi has taken a number of steps towards decentralisation in the sector ministries since the adoption of the Decentralisation Policy in 1998 and the passing of Local Government Act by the National Assembly in the same year. The policy and act, as indicated in Chapter 2.1, aim at an *integrated decentralisation*, which implies shifting the locus of decision-making from the central sector ministries to the local assemblies, with the District Assemblies as the key institutions at the local government level.

In the agricultural sector, a number of tasks and responsibilities were also prior to 1998 delegated along the administrative sector line hierarchies from the centre to level-level branches of central government – down to the EPA (Extension Planning Area) sections, which had the daily responsibility for providing field extension services to farmers. The system produced by this form of administrative decentralisation (or *deconcentration*) in the agricultural sector was a strongly departmentalised system with political decision-making power concentrated at the national level. The system was strictly *top down* in terms of where power was located, locus of decision-making, and information flow. The local branches were, in turn, upwardly accountable for their decisions and performance, reporting from the local levels to their superiors through the sector line hierarchy. However, when preparing the sector devolution plans for the agricultural sector, the Ministry could build on these already existing ‘deconcentrated’ structures at local levels.

Prior to the on-going process of decentralisation, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) was operating through the departments, such as the Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS) and the Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES), at the Ministry headquarters level. The creation of ADDs (Agricultural Development Divisions) was a form of de-concentration of certain tasks and responsibilities, which is not the same as devolution, as described above. The ADDs were further subdivided into RDPs, which in turn were subdivided into Extension Planning Areas (EPAs), and these again into EPA sections at the field level. With these structures representing both flow of information and decision-making, decisions regarding programme planning, monitoring and evaluation was centralized to Ministry headquarters – though sometimes delegated to the ADD level. The financing of programmes followed the same channels. ADDs were controlling districts in all matters relating to general administration and finances, including formulation of local agricultural development programmes.

A recent paper presenting experiences with the decentralisation process within the Ministry (MoA 2005) identifies two sets of problems characterising the period prior to the present devolution process: (1) When agricultural development programmes were to be implemented by the local-level offices, these were dependent upon bureaucratic procedures which meant that most issues had to be ratified by Ministry headquarters – through the ADDs – before action could be taken. This meant delays in programme

implementation on the ground. (2) The districts (earlier the RDPs) were “mostly at the mercy of ADD as regards funding of programmes” (MoA 2005:2). At the district level it was experienced that financing was not readily available for programme implementation, since most of the funding available for the sector was allocated to and absorbed at higher levels in the line hierarchy. But also because of “lack of consideration on district priorities by the officers controlling the finances” (MoA 2005:3).

By 2005 the following departments with service-delivery functions within the Ministry of Agriculture had devolved some of their functions to the District level:

- ❑ Land Resources Conservation Department
- ❑ Crop Production Department
- ❑ Animal Health and Livestock Development Department
- ❑ Agricultural Extension Services Department.

The Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS) has not initiated such a devolution process. The department itself has been re-localised to the major Research station at Chitedze, in the Central region just outside Lilongwe city. But the local presence of DARS in the rest of the country is still through the formerly established agricultural research stations at Mbvumbwe and Lunyangwa, and the Experiment and Sub-stations – totalling 16 – spread over the country (cf. Chapter 3.2).

Within the Ministry, departments where the devolution of functions has been initiated, certain core activities are still maintained at the central level. These include policy formulation and the setting and maintaining of standards in service provision.

Progress in decentralisation reported by the Ministry of Agriculture itself include:

- ❑ Realignment of the former RDPs into the local assembly/district assembly area of jurisdiction. All former RDPs (currently known as DADOs – District Agricultural Development Offices) are now within the jurisdiction of District Assemblies.
- ❑ DADO budgets have been incorporated into District Assembly budgets. From 2005 DADOs are getting the finances directly from the Treasury through the District Assembly.
- ❑ Assets which belonged to the MoA in the districts have been handed over to the District Assemblies or are in the process of being handed over.
- ❑ The role of the ADDs has been redefined to providing technical guidance to the district level, and not controlling the DADOs administratively, as they used to control RDPs before devolution.
- ❑ The MoA through the Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES) has developed a new Extension Policy which is responsive to the decentralisation demands (see Chapter 4.1.1 below).
- ❑ The DAES has also instituted a District Agriculture Extension Services System, to accommodate decentralisation concerns with reference to agriculture extension services at district level (MoA 2005:5).

#### **4.1.1. The new Agricultural Extension Policy**

A new national policy for the agricultural extension services was developed and approved in 2000, focusing on the provision of (more) pluralistic and demand-driven extension services, promoting participatory planning and implementation (Malawi Government 2000). In terms of providing a background for the new policy, the policy document *Agricultural Extension in the New Millennium: Towards Pluralistic and Demand-driven Services in Malawi* says that:

Democratisation, which has swept Africa in the recent past, has not spared Malawi and as a result society is opening up. People know that to survive they have to be proactive and thus farmers are demanding more from the public sector. For extension services, this is a new challenge because in the past there were fewer demands on the service and the mode of extension did not generate an open, critical response from the people. This requires extension services to reform their approaches in order to respond or deal with the numerous demands effectively (Malawi Government 2000:10).

The new Extension Policy document also points to decentralization as an opportunity to bring control of extension closer to the people and offer services that fit better with the local situation (Malawi Government 2000:12). The new Policy formulates the *vision* that: “All farmers are able to demand and have access to high quality extension services from those best able to deliver them” (op.cit. p 18). The guiding principles formulated in the Policy document (op.cit. pp. 22-26) include the following:

- *Demand-driven extension services* – depending on farmers’ needs, they should be able to demand advice, and service-providers should respond to farmers’ demands
- *Promotion of pluralism* – towards greater choice of services and service providers
- *“Those who benefit pay”* – implying that the private sector and farmer organizations are encouraged to mobilize private funds, and promoting the *commercialisation and privatisation* of services where possible
- *Equalisation* – making sure that the poorer segments of society, women, youth and people with disabilities are not left out
- *Decentralised co-ordination* – focusing at the district level.

#### **4.1.2. The new District Agriculture Extension Services System**

The composition and functions of the District Assemblies, as defined by the Local Government Act of 1998, were briefly described in Chapter 2.3 of this report. The structure of local government at the district level also includes a District Development Committee under the DA (the members are DA councillors). Development Committees are also to be elected and formed at Area (intermediate) and Village levels.

In order to operationalise the new Extension Policy at the district level, the sector Ministry has decided to establish a “parallel” structure for the planning, coordination and delivery of extension services. This structure – ideally – consists of three levels:

- *A District Stakeholder Panel* – composed of representatives of farmers and farmers organizations, NGOs and community based organizations, agribusiness and others; with the District Agricultural Development Officer facilitating the formation and operation of the panel.
- *Area Stakeholder Panels* – with basically the same composition as the District Panel, but at the Area level
- *'Model Villages'*<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, at the District 'headquarters' level, a committee with the objective of coordinating all extension services at district level and ensure their quality is to be formed under the name of *District Agricultural Extension Co-ordination Committee (DAECC)*. This committee should be composed of the agricultural extension service providers in the district, including the District Agricultural Development Office, NGOs, and private sector and farmers' organizations providing such services (MoA 2005:6). The DAECC should establish an inventory of district-level agricultural service providers (Malawi Government 2005b).

## **4.2. ADOPTED APPROACH FOR THE REVIEW**

In order to present a review of the status of decentralisation in the agricultural sector, of the many approaches that could have been used to examine policy, process and community-linkage aspects, we have here chosen a perspective focusing on three levels: systemic, institutional and individual. Information and data-collection through stakeholder consultations and the review of available literature, is consolidated and analysed with reference to these three levels.

Basically, at the *systemic* level, we review the policy framework within which individuals and organizations in the sector are operating and interacting. At the *institutional* level, we focus on organisational performance and functioning capabilities of institutions in the sector, as well as institutions' capability to adapt to change. At the *individual* level, our assumption is that decentralisation will necessarily involve a process of changing individual attitudes and behaviour, but also imparting knowledge and developing skills while seeking to maximise the benefits of participation, knowledge exchange, and ownership to the process.

## **4.3 REVIEW OF DECENTRALISATION AT SYSTEMIC LEVEL**

### **4.3.1. Policy framework and development**

Though the general Decentralisation Policy and the Local Government Act are in place with defined goals and mandates, it has been observed that there is limited political and technical will, lack of clearly defined leadership, and limitations with regard to cooperation of all stakeholders in supporting the successful implementation of the decentralisation process at both Central Government and District Assembly levels.

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<sup>13</sup> This structure will be explained below.

It also appears that too little has been done in terms of preparing the MoA for its new roles under the devolution programme. Despite the fact that the process is being executed in a phased manner, some informants<sup>14</sup> feel the implementation process is too fast considering the available resources, while others feel it is slow. There does not seem to be any common understanding concerning the momentum required for an effective devolution process.

Many stakeholders hold that a core function analysis is a key element in the process of decentralising the Ministry's functions. Within the Ministry an analysis of functions was undertaken, but many stakeholders, especially outside the Ministry's central offices, feel it was incomplete, and that they were excluded from the process of analysis. Thus, the result lacks broader stakeholder ownership. Neither does there seem to be a common understanding of the scope of a core function analysis, and what it should involve. The most radical view is that such an analysis should include all institutions and agencies involved in the sector, not only the government structures. From this perspective, the result should define which agencies can perform what functions best, most effectively and most efficiently; including the definition of 'core functions' that only the Ministry can perform or perform better than other agencies; but also what other agencies can do better, such as e.g. NGOs involved in extension service delivery. This perspective no doubt finds support in the new Agricultural Extension Policy document (Malawi Government 2000).

The Decentralisation Secretariat developed (at least draft) guidelines for *Sector Devolution Function Analysis* (Decentralisation Secretariat, n.d.)<sup>15</sup>. These guidelines, however, only refer to devolution within the government structures. Thus they concentrate on: devolution of administrative and political authority to the district level; integration of Government agencies at the district level into one administrative unit; the transfer of implementation responsibilities to the districts; and assignment of functions and responsibilities within the Local Government level. According to these Function Analysis guidelines, the preparatory phase of the decentralisation process should involve Sector Function Analysis and preparation of Devolution Plans. The Implementation Phase should, in turn, involve both the Sector and the Assemblies developing an implementation strategy, in addition to the Sectors developing and implementing change management plans.

The new Extension Policy of 2000 (Malawi Government 2000) briefly described in Chapter 4.1.1, in many ways fits well with the overall decentralisation objectives, as it is formulated after the 1998 Decentralisation Policy and Act, but before the initiation of the National Decentralisation Programme in 2001. The more recent process of implementing the new Extension Policy has taken place within the framework of the National Decentralisation Programme.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Informant' is here used to refer to the people consulted during the data collection process of this review.

<sup>15</sup> Apparently this document has remained as a Draft – "for comments only". The draft has no date, but was probably developed in 2002, before the MoA joined the Decentralisation Programme.

In the agricultural sector there is, however, still a lack of well-defined sector implementation strategies and guidelines. The change management plans mentioned in the draft Function Analysis guidelines (mentioned above) are also missing. Much as several achievements have been reported, e.g. in decentralising the responsibility for the provision of extension services to the DA level, and some districts are piloting this process, at a general level effective implementation of the devolution process is still considered by many to be way behind the expected targets.

#### **4.3.2. Legal and regulatory framework**

Sectoral acts still need to be harmonised with the Local Government Act to be consistent with the overall policy of decentralisation. At the Local Government level, District Assemblies on their part have limited capacity to formulate (sector) by-laws, which is within their mandate according to the Decentralisation Policy. Furthermore, the present absence of elected councillors and the shortage of competent, well-trained and experienced staff willing to work at the district level, coupled with limited resources at the District Assembly and local levels, are constraints in bringing the decentralisation process further, also in terms of making bylaws.

There is also limited capacity in most DAs to effectively enforce regulations to the extent that there are increased levels of environmental depletion, characterized by land degradation and deforestation threatening the sustainability and productivity of local natural resources. This limited capacity at the DA level is, in turn, being exploited by higher-level institutions and used as a justification for withholding full devolution, and for retaining assets and programmes that should be part and parcel to the devolution process.

#### **4.3.3. Management and accountability framework**

The decentralisation process and local-level efforts to implement decentralisation policies in the districts have raised farmers' expectations. Hence a considerable number of project proposals have been prepared, often facilitated by frontline extension staff, and forwarded to the district level – e.g through the stakeholder panels, where these have been formed. But funding for most of the proposals is not secured. This problem will often be accompanied with a slow feedback to communities on their demands and proposals. Thus, the lack of (relatively limited) funds to follow up and implement such proposals, in combination with weak mechanisms of downward accountability, may easily result in a lost opportunity both for agricultural development and farmers empowerment.

It has also been observed that in the agricultural sector there is still strong resistance, especially from Headquarters (and ADDs), to devolve in full. There appears to be an undercurrent of fear of the unknown, of losing personal powers and control over resources, to the extent that there is open reluctance to relinquish management and operational responsibilities earmarked for devolution to District levels. As mentioned earlier, lack of capacity in the districts is cited as a reason, and used as an excuse. The result is that institutions at both centre and at district levels are not functioning efficiently and effectively in conducting the functions they are mandated to within the decentralised environment. This includes effective service delivery.

Even though local-level representative units, such as Village Development Committees, as well as the mixed technical structures such as Village Stakeholder Panels and Area Stakeholder Panels, have been established in a number of DAs, in most cases these are not yet pro-active. A project in eight pilot districts, aiming to set up the decentralised agricultural-sector structures defined in the policy documents, was carried out with the support of GTZ. Rumphu District is generally considered to have achieved the best results among the eight.

The review team's impression, comparing what we learnt about local processes and perceptions of what decentralisation involves in Rumphu, with similar processes and perceptions in Dedza, is that the decentralisation pilot project in the agricultural sector did have an impact with regard to both local people's and other stakeholders' understanding of what devolution implies. In Rumphu we found that the local people we met, including traditional headmen, distinguished between the role of traditional authorities and the role and functions of elected representatives within a local government structure.

In Dedza there seemed to be less general awareness of the principles of democratic decentralisation also at sub-DA levels. The Chief Executive Officer was very clear on what devolution and integrated decentralisation should imply, in terms of transfer of power and resources from the central to the DA level. But even professionals in NGOs working with decentralised extension services were not always aware of basic elements in sector decentralisation. They might for instance not distinguish between an Area Development Committee or an Area Stakeholder Panel, on the one hand, and the traditional-power position of a TA (Traditional Authority) on the other. This lack of discrimination between traditional power structures and elected representative organs would also influence their interactions with both decentralised government structures and local people. Similarly, we found that local people did not clearly distinguish between the structures of traditional power and the new decentralised structures of local government. Thus, some stakeholder panels clearly suffer from interference from traditional leaders wishing to play more of a management role, instead of their advisory mandate given within the new democratic structures.

It was also observed that the reporting structure was not clear and well elaborated with regard to the relationship between Local Government and the sectors. The result is that in certain situations officers are required to report directly to both the DA- level District Commissioner and to the Central Government (MoA). They find this confusing, problematic, and not in line with the devolution process.

#### **4.3.4. System relationships**

The absence of Councillors, due to elections that are yet to take place (March 2006), is affecting guidance and proper decision-making at both District and EPA levels. This may be one of the factors contributing to a situation where the culture of top-down approaches is still powerful and to a large extent remains unchallenged. It can be argued that the

absence of Councillors is not only counterproductive to the devolution process, but also to the proper functioning of the structures established at DA level – and below.

It has been noticed that institutional coordination arrangements in the agriculture sector, though on paper appearing to be appropriate, are not functioning adequately and effectively. Interaction between EPAs and DAs, MoA and for example research institutions under DARS, lacks clearly defined strategies, and could be said to be on an ad hoc basis. One key reason that is always given is that there are limited available resources. On the other hand, on the part of extension-oriented researchers at the Research stations, it is also held that the most useful institutional link to disseminate research-based knowledge and technologies to farmers is often their link to the Area Extension Development Officer – the EADOs at the EPA level. This is one link that could be strengthened in order to address the problem of weak intra- and inter-sector linkages, and lacking strategies for the use of such linkages as part of sector devolution and decentralised service delivery. At present weak linkages can be seen as affecting effective and efficient implementation of devolved agricultural functions and responsibilities.

On a positive note, Local Government in collaboration with some donor agencies and NGOs, are already making commendable effort in facilitating the devolution process by setting up more punctual development-oriented projects and processes at the DA and sub-district levels. This was observed in Rumphi with regard to facilitating the creation of decentralised structures within the agricultural sector. It was also observed in Dedza, in local development initiatives supported through the collaboration between local government structures, donors and NGOs.

The decentralised structure to organise demand and supply of agricultural extension services established by the MoA/DAES, from the District Agricultural Coordination Committee, through the District and Area Stakeholder Panels, is at the village level represented by the ‘Model Village’ concept. A booklet written for Agricultural Extension Development Officers to facilitate “the process of farmers’ analysing their situations, articulate demands and needs, generating solutions and options and demand quality extension services from service providers available in their areas”. Here it is pointed out that the entry point for development under the decentralised system is the village (MoA 2005a). However, the concept of the Model Village assumes that the village as a “natural grouping of households” is also “a homogeneous grouping of people for effective planning and implementation of programmes” (MoA 2005a:1).

It should, however, be recognised that community development programmes all over the world have run into difficulties because of their reliance on a homogeneous and harmonious conception of the local ‘community’/village. When using the ‘model village’ concept for planning and implementation of programmes involving service delivery, it should be recognised that a village will not only be characterised by “well-defined leadership and [common] norms governing the inhabitants” (MoA 2005a:2). In any village there will be some degree of economic differentiation and differences in access to resources. There will be some diversity of interests, and power relationships that may

involve conflict, as well as an unequal distribution of benefits, even from a participatory planning process. Still, the Model Village may work as a framework, especially perhaps, if it were further developed drawing on the principles of rights-based approaches, instead of assumptions on the homogeneous and harmonious community.

#### **4.3.5. Economic framework**

The dependency syndrome both at smallholder and national levels is still very prevalent. On the other hand, poor access to agricultural inputs by the majority of smallholder farmers, due to high costs of inputs, poor markets, poor infrastructure, limited access to credit, poor communication facilities, limited market information, limited access to technology (e.g. high-yielding seed, pesticides, fertilizer); in addition to limited interface with other service providers in e.g. research, and limited and ineffective participatory approaches in agricultural research in terms of making the process demand driven, and untimely availability of inputs, are some of the factors working against sustainable devolved agricultural production in most DAs. The brief historical overview presented in Chapter 3.1 clearly indicates that the Malawi smallholder sector still needs subsidised inputs and services, if serious food crises are to be avoided. Realizing this situation may lead to questioning the principle formulated in the new Extension Policy of ‘Those who benefit pay’, especially if it is operationalised as “Those who pay benefit”. It definitely need to be balanced up with the principle of ‘Equalisation’ (see Chapter 4.1.1).

Though District Development Funds (DDFs) have been established at DA level as a mechanism for pooled funding, for reasons of monitoring and accountability not all donors are supportive of this type of basket funding initiative. Such a pooling mechanism at the district level, including MASAF<sup>16</sup> funds, and streamlining accountability mechanisms, would be an important move to support the decentralisation process. At a District-level multi-sector meeting attended by the review team, a clear message was the following: Empowerment has to come with resources!

#### **4.3.6. Financial resources**

District Assemblies are currently (since 2005) getting direct funding from the MoA for agricultural programmes. This funding is supposed to be based on budgets made at DA level. Despite an increase in funding levels, these are still below budgets and the timing of disbursements is still unreliable. Some project funds earmarked for district activities are not devolved to DAs, but are still being controlled by the MoA, donors and NGOs in the name of control and proper monitoring. These practices no doubt counteract the essence of decentralisation.

There is no doubt need to build capacity at DA level in order to promote financial accountability. It has e.g. been observed that budgets for agricultural functions devolved to Assemblies are not clearly reflected in the overall MoA budgets or in the Assembly’s budgets. It has also been observed that the way funds are distributed to lower level institutions, such as EPAs, may be a cause for concern. Some EPAs have not been properly funded for almost one year. This observation cuts across the board to other sectors within the DAs. Irregular and inadequate funding has had the consequence of

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<sup>16</sup> MASAF – Malawi Social Action Fund, originally established by the World Bank.

limiting the implementation of crucial activities at DA level and below. These activities include training, and organizing meetings such as the stakeholder panel and district coordinating committee meetings, supervision, monitoring and evaluation.

From the data-collection process for this review, our impression is that the agricultural sector at District Assembly level may be experiencing fewer delays in funding than other sector offices at district level. However, the general effect of funds being retained at the central level, whatever the reason, is counterproductive to the integrated decentralisation approach as delineated in the Decentralisation Policy. Thus, the whole disbursement process needs an overhaul and proper streamlining.

Though some DAs are managing a few income-generating activities (IGAs) at both district and lower levels that could generate additional funds for their operational activities, there seem to be no well organized strategies to maximise the local benefits from such a income-generation undertakings. One major disincentive is that such revenue generally goes to the government central account, and is not directly reinvested in the district. In the spirit of devolution this need to change, so that District Assemblies are encouraged to embark on more IGAs, knowing that the district itself is the ultimate beneficiary.

#### **4.4 REVIEW OF DECENTRALISATION AT INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL**

##### **4.4.1. Strategic management and structural competences**

A set of management and implementation guidelines for devolved agricultural functions have been developed, such as the *Concept and Operational Guidelines for Practitioners* (MoA 2003), in addition to the *District Agricultural Extension Services System Implementation Guide* (MoA 2004), the *Model Village Approach* (MoA 2005a), and the *District Agricultural Extension Services System Implementation Manual* (Malawi Government 2005b). Their implementation is, however, still in the primary stage and relatively ineffective.

The *Concept and Operational Guidelines* from 2003 delineated a “pilot learning approach”, with reference to the pilot project mentioned in Chapter 4.3.3. According to this Concept document, information exchange is critical. Thus, the pilot districts “will gather and share their learning experiences with all stakeholders including those interested outside the district” (MoAIFS 2003:26). It should be recognized that the pilot success in Rumphu DA, is busy sharing their experiences with others – including this review team. On the other hand, a more systematic collection and dissemination of lessons learnt across several districts through the pilot experience is still lacking.

Perhaps with the exception of extension services to some degree, agricultural (and other) functions and responsibilities more generally appear not to have been effectively and successfully transferred to DAs. There is a lack of clear strategies to guide institutional development and capacity building programmes in the agricultural sector (and other relevant sectors) at DA level. As a result, crucial activities are not well elaborated.

National level staff are not fully assisting DAs, EPAs, or stakeholder groups in reorienting them towards decentralised sector operations through effective planning, quality management, monitoring and evaluation. Though an attempt was made by MoA to define core agricultural functions at DA level, this appear to have been conducted without the involvement of all relevant stakeholders to the extent that some stakeholders feel such functions are not representative of their interests. NGOs are this category. In line with this problem definition, it appears that the respective roles and functions are not well-defined when Local Government staff and NGOs collaborate in the provision of extension services. In many cases, externally funded NGOs have the financial resources carry out programmes and project, with objectives usually defined outside the district. They enter into collaborative arrangements with local government staff, who lack funds but can provide the labour and skills necessary to implement the projects. On the one hand, the NGOs claim that such collaboration provides necessary capacity building and human development opportunities for the local staff. The local staff themselves may, however, find that the NGOs take the credit for the good results, while the Government remains with the blame for the failures.

According to the new Extension Policy, for an effective devolved agricultural extension process to work, there is a need to involve multiple service providers at all levels. Against this background, it is proposed that NASFAM, FUM, and other similar organizations should be more involved in both planning and implementation processes at DA, as well as Area levels in the districts. There is a need to build and strengthen capacity at DA level through skills transfer, as well as further resource allocation. In addition, direct links should be established between the Districts and the Research and Experiment stations under DARS.

Much as the DAs have been developing socio-economic profiles and district development plans since 2000, and most of them have recruited a District Planning Officer (DPO), there is no explicit coverage of district- or area-specific *agricultural strategies* in these documents. It is also unclear how district planning relates to other processes, such as the national budget, the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (MPRS) and national agricultural planning frameworks. Despite various stakeholders being members of planning committees at DA level and below, and districts developing DDPs every 3 years, apart from project development and implementation monitoring, there are no clear planning, monitoring and evaluation strategies specifically designed for a particular district, to foster an effective and more efficient implementation of decentralised sectoral activities, bearing in mind that each district is characterized by it own unique set of attributes, in terms of both socio-economic and environmental conditions.

#### **4.4.2. Information Resources and Infrastructure**

Adequate information material exists that can assist in the effective implementation of the devolution process, especially regarding the decentralisation of extension services in the agricultural sector. A major constraint is that stocking and dissemination of such information material is not well organised. It may be available on request, but often in a limited number of copies. Such information may, however, not be readily understood or

used at the district level in the way it was intended due to capacity constraints. On a positive note, the MoA is striving to promote the dissemination of information through print and electronic media in a simplified manner, including the use of local languages.

Though most DAs, and EPAs have some infrastructure such as buildings, offices, vehicles and office equipment, most of these are in poor condition or obsolete requiring maintenance or replacement. With regard to the transfer of assets from the MoA to the DAs, there are contradictory messages. Whereas the former alludes to the fact that the process is being conducted effectively, the latter is complaining that it has not formally received the assets it was promised such as vehicles and office equipment. At the district level, the reluctance to transfer assets and other resources from the central level is explained by the linkage of resource control and power, and thus attributed to the perceived reluctance at Central level to actually devolve power to the District level.

#### **4.5 REVIEW OF DECENTRALISATION AT INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

##### **4.5.1. Job and skills requirements and training/re-training**

Organizational and job structures have been determined at the DA level and below. The major set back is that appropriate job descriptions have not been set. It has been observed that most staff members at DA levels, including those in the agricultural sector, are not formally qualified for the positions they have been attached to. However, the present report will not go further into the general challenges of capacity development in the context of decentralisation, since at present it is addressed much more in depth in a separate study carried out by a team specifically commissioned to develop *A Strategy for Capacity Development for Decentralisation in Malawi* (Malawi Government 2006).

In the agricultural sector, institutions such as Bunda College of Agriculture, Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife, and Natural Resources College (NRC) are providing crucial training opportunities both for agriculture and other sectors related to natural resource management. But they are at present not in a position to satisfy the demand. The major reason is their own limited capacity to expand on their current commitments, combined with high attrition levels in the government structures. In certain instances, their tuition fees are found to be unaffordable to many impending students. Despite various types of assistance, especially in the form of scholarships, this is inadequate.

In line with the devolution programme, it is commendable that these training institutions, working on the request from MoA and other stakeholders, revise their curricula to accommodate the requirements of the devolution process. In areas such as extension, agriculture research, but also business development and management, a stronger emphasis on demand-driven and participatory-oriented approaches in research, training and dissemination of knowledge is no doubt necessary. A reorientation of programmes towards the needs at the district level would also be required for the programmes of training institutions to follow up the basic principles of decentralisation.

#### **4.5.2. Career prospects**

Though modalities for career progression do exist at the DA level and below, especially with the current restructuring most members of staff consulted were found to be relatively less motivated, and their morale was in many instances low. The major reason given was the lack of resources, such funds to implement plans, as well as infrastructure to allow them execute their responsibilities diligently. The limited availability of incentives such as career progression mechanisms, training opportunities, and the availability of physical incentives were also found to be ineffective as motivating factors. The informants felt that lack of motivation and low morale is having a negative effect on their performance of duties, to the extent that at times they felt less accountable for any failures.

Specific to extension workers at EPA levels visited by the review team, it was observed that these have received good training in the area of communication, but need retraining to be in tune with changing times, requirements and approaches. Almost all informants ranked career progression as either poor or average, morale and motivation poor or average, incentives/security poor or average, but team work/networking as excellent. With regard to work redeployment and job sharing, there was generally a negative feeling regarding the heavy staff turnover, sometimes without clear or convincing justification from the central levels still governing this key organisational issue. This was found to have a negative impact on both staff commitment and the coordination and implementation of planned activities.

## 5. CONCLUDING ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### 5.1. THE DECENTRALISATION PROCESS IN GENERAL

The decentralisation policy recognizes that devolution of political powers and functional responsibilities is closely linked to fighting poverty in Malawi. The implementation process that commenced with the National Decentralisation Programme in 2001 to date has recorded some progress. At this point there is, in fact, no way back! In general terms, however, progress so far has been slow at both national and sector levels. The major cause for the limited progress appears to be the absence of clear implementation strategies combined with operational commitment. The internal planning process seems to have been cumbersome, and did not involve sufficient consultation and cooperation with stakeholders.

Ministries have been given extensive powers to influence the exercise of devolving (their own) powers, functions and responsibilities to the District level. But there appears to be fragile capacity within the government system in managing a complex reform process like this. At higher levels, there is apparently no strong driving force or leadership to the extent that things appear to be done in an ad hoc manner – giving room for various expression of reluctance to devolve power and decentralise resources. Policy implementation through circulars, which has been reported at central level, results in lack of ownership. The Decentralisation Secretariat may have been the Government institution with most ownership to the process, but its functions are at present being phased out and passed over to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, whose functions, strategies, and capacity do not create a synergy which makes it into a champion of decentralisation. In general, the process sounds more elaborate on paper than on the ground.

General achievements include the following:

- The national policy on decentralisation and the decentralisation process is, in spite of considerable reluctance to devolve power, clearly appreciated at all levels;
- A number of guidelines on roles, functions and responsibilities of DAs and sub-DA structures are actually available;
- There are initiatives to coordinate government-, donor- and NGO-funded initiatives for district development;
- Several initiatives are made to facilitate responses to the training needs required by the decentralisation process at national, institutional, and DA levels;
- Decentralisation implies the development of constitutional roles, responsibilities and feedback systems for communities, and this aspect of democratisation is appreciated by many people at village level who have understood its implications;

So far, however, decentralisation has been more oriented towards *administrative decentralisation/deconcentration* than towards *devolution of power and resources*. In this regard the following points should be taken into account:

- ❑ The form and degree of devolution varies between sectors, districts, and lower-level institutions;
- ❑ The decentralisation policy and process has created a new set of rules for competition over scarce resources, and for the quests and negotiations over power and autonomy at all levels;
- ❑ Decentralisation has opened up for claims to (more) power and resources in the lower levels of the hierarchical structures that constitute the public sector;
- ❑ At sub-district levels, the roles and functions of Traditional Authorities/Chiefs versus elected committees are mostly still not well separated, and negotiated through the traditional power structure in the cases where external interventions in terms of training and human resources do not change this;
- ❑ Lack of capacity is generally used as a multi-purpose argument in competition for power, and in the quest to maintain power at higher levels.

## **5.2. DECENTRALISATION IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR**

Decentralisation in the agricultural sector, though ranked positively when comparing sectors, has had both achievements and shortcomings. Key shortcomings are similar to the ones highlighted for the entire process as outlined above. Others that are pertinent to the sector include the following:

- ❑ Though funds for various operational expenses within the agricultural sector are transferred from the central Treasury to the DA's bank account, there is a discrepancy between budget and funding, and a general lack of certainty with regard to transfers from the central level;
- ❑ The higher level institutions have tended to maintain their structures and staffing to the extent that DA positions are managed by lower-level, often poorly trained staff;
- ❑ There is general resistance for staff at higher levels to move to DAs;
- ❑ The ADDs have ended up as "co-opted" regional branches of the central Ministry, with their functions limited to planning, monitoring and backstopping the DAs;
- ❑ The lower level structures, regardless of their own capacity constraints, still think they can operate more effectively without the ADDs;
- ❑ With an unclear rationale, the ADDs have upgraded their staff positions;
- ❑ Infrastructure in the districts is not conducive to the successful implementation of the decentralisation process, mainly due to lack of facilities and the availability of outdated equipment;
- ❑ Staff at DA level are at times put in a position of "wearing two hats", for example in cases where central offices use DA-level staff to carry out functions, for which "headquarters" have maintained responsibilities;
- ❑ Both within the agricultural sectors and in other sectors, resources have not been decentralised in a well-organised manner, to the extent that responsibilities for maintenance have been given over without ownership of assets.

### **5.3. CONCLUSION**

This study has sought to provide a general status report of the decentralisation process in the agricultural sector in Malawi, by focusing on issues related to policies, processes and community linkages. From this review of sector devolution we see that district structures have realigned the old RDPs (formerly reporting to the ADDs) and reorganized them into District Agricultural Development Offices (DADOs) at DA level. Financial resources for District-level agricultural programmes' operational expenses are currently flowing directly from the Treasury (or MoA) to the DAs. And responsibilities for agricultural extension service delivery is located at the District level.

The process of decentralisation is, in general, being pursued with persistent influence from Central Government and Donors, involving quests for power and competition over resources that also include Traditional Authorities, local politicians and community groups. The process, however, lacks clear leadership with the necessary commitment and strategy to make the process succeed within the given time frames of the Decentralisation Programme. On the other hand, there is not only considerable reluctance to devolve power and resources to lower levels, but also to question public officials, institutions – and Traditional Authorities – regarding their roles in the devolution process. These challenges in terms of creating downward-accountability mechanisms are, in turn, related to the challenges of both democratisation and capacity building – at all levels. Despite the fact that the decentralisation process appears to be acceptable to most stakeholders, both clearer leadership, clearer commitment, clearer strategy, and reliable support, especially funding for local development programmes, are all necessary to make sure that devolution succeeds, and that devolved functions and responsibilities are strategically implemented in an effective and efficient manner.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

After reviewing and analysing the decentralisation process in the Agricultural Sector in Malawi, the review team will present the following general recommendations:

- The devolution process requires leadership with a clear sense of ownership, a clearly defined strategy, and clearly defined responsibilities. Several models have been tried at central level, but also the present phasing-out of the Decentralisation Secretariat, with responsibilities handed over to the Ministry of Local Government should be critically revised with a view to how these crucial functions can be more optimally performed.
- Pro-active leadership and ownership to the process would also strengthen the decentralisation process within the *agricultural sector*, in order to move beyond what so far has been achieved in terms of decentralising the responsibility for extension services to the District level.
- The devolution process within the agricultural sector should be completed, the MoA (Ministry of Agriculture) having the responsibility to provide necessary technical supervision, monitoring and evaluation services, and the DA level reporting in technical matters directly to MoA.
- More direct institutional links should also be developed between the District level/ EPAs and the research and experiment stations under DARS.
- Eventually, the ADDs may be phased out to promote more efficient and effective use of resources
- The decentralisation process in the agricultural sector – and related areas, such as natural resource management, forestry and lands – should undergo an urgent revision to develop more effective implementation and management strategies.
- A multi-stakeholder-driven sectoral core function review should be carried out at the present stage of the decentralisation process, to identify crucial functions to be performed at Central Government level and make a strategy for deployment of specialized staff to the DA level. The sector is here including both government and non-government institutions.
- Staff employed at DA level and below should be offered training, re-training and urgently needed capacity building.
- Though financial resources since 2005 are transferred directly to the DAs from the Treasury and MoA, funding levels should be increased and all disbursements made in a (more) timely manner.
- Infrastructure at DA level and below need to be improved
- In the implementation of the new Agricultural Extension Policy, local-government extension officers should be given a special mandate to make sure that the “Those who benefit pay”-principle is not translated into service-provision based on “Those who pay benefit”.

## **6.2. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NORWEGIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN MALAWI**

Considering that both *decentralisation* and *agricultural development* are key areas in Norwegian development cooperation, with the aim of contributing towards poverty reduction in Malawi, the following recommendations are made:

- Support to capacity and competence building in agriculture and natural resource management should include explicit priorities aimed at responding to the challenges and needs formulated in local government forums at village, area (EPA/sub-district) and District Assembly (DA) levels.
- Programme and project funding from the Norwegian side should be based on a careful scrutiny of to what extent the funded activities may actually undermine fledgling local government structures and development-oriented activities.
- By providing funds that are channelled to properly managed District Development Funds – and possibly earmarked for the agricultural sector – participatory-democracy processes of decision-making and agricultural-development initiatives at village level can be strengthened, together with the formally established but not necessarily operative structures of stakeholder panels within the District agricultural sector, and village-level agricultural development initiatives supported.
- Research projects and technology development funded through Norwegian programmes, aiming to carry out demand-driven research and improved extension services, should seek to establish direct links with the Districts. The channelling of significant resources to the ADD level, thus contributing to maintain administrative structures at this level may not be justified at present.
- Research programmes and projects could effectively be used to forge stronger links between higher education and research institutions, such as Bunda College, as well as research institutions outside Malawi with research and experiments carried out at stations operating under DARS. These links should be extended further to the decentralised District Agricultural Development Offices and Extension Planning Areas at the local levels; in order to reach the ultimate beneficiary of decentralisation in the agricultural sector: the Malawian farmer, her family, and the local community.

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## ANNEXES

### ANNEX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### **Decentralisation in the agricultural sector in Malawi: Policies, processes and community linkages**

*Decentralisation* can be seen as a process that involves a shift in the locus of power from the centre towards the periphery. Still the centre will normally set the broad policy guidelines, and often define more specific objectives for the decentralised units. Decentralisation will, in fact, usually imply a series of negotiations between central and local offices and different stakeholders. Such negotiations involve rules and resources, as well as issues of upwards and downwards accountability. That is, questions concerning who the decentralised offices primarily are responsible to, the central power-holders or the local communities.

In 1994, after the introduction of a multi-party system in Malawi, the new government decided to devolve powers from the central level to lower levels, in order to promote grassroots participation in decision-making. In 1998, the Cabinet approved a National Decentralisation Policy, and in 1999 the Local Government Act was enacted. The new laws and policies involve the establishment of District Assemblies with one elected members from each Ward in the District, as well as the deconcentration of operational power from central ministries to the District level.

The functions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Food Security are, at present, also undergoing a process of decentralisation to the District level. This process includes the responsibility for service delivery in the form of *extension services*, which has been the responsibility of DAES – the Department of Agricultural Extension Services in the Ministry. A new national extension policy was finalized in 2000, and launched under the name: *Agricultural Extension in the New Millennium: Towards Pluralistic and Demand-driven Services in Malawi*. These policy guidelines indicate a shift from supply-driven to demand-driven extension service provision; the principle of “those of benefit pay”; the promotion of plural actors in the field of extension – including farmers’ organisations such as NASFAM; and finally the decentralisation to the 27 Districts of the responsibility to organise and coordinate extension services.

The present study aims to provide a “status report” on decentralisation in the agricultural sector in Malawi, focussing on the decentralisation of extension services to the Districts. The study will focus on two districts (possibly one in the North and one in the South), addressing the follow-up of the central-level policy guidelines indicated above, how local (bottom-up) concerns are dealt with, and to what extent policy development is also taking place at the local level. The issue of how District authorities deal with the challenges related to land and natural resource management will be addressed, the relationships and interactions between District authorities and with Traditional Authorities, and the role of local and/or international NGOs will also be brought into the analysis.

In the selection of districts for this study, a range of criteria will be taken into account, such as the presence of area development projects funded by e.g. the World Bank, NGOs working in the field of natural resource management and agriculture, the presence of NASFAM in the district, and local MASAF project experiences, in addition to the North/South dimension.

The study will be planned and carried out consulting and/or collaborating with the new officer in charge of the thematic area at the Norwegian Embassy in Lilongwe.

Dated: 23.09.2005

## **ANNEX 2: WORK PROGRAMME AND CONTACT DETAILS FOR INFORMANTS**

*Elaborated by Ramji Nyirenda*

### **1. Preparation**

Before the core programme commenced on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2005, my main occupation was in the preparation for the exercise, which included the following major activities:

- Gather relevant documentation such as the Decentralisation Policy, the Agricultural Extension in the New Millennium Policy Document, and the Malawi Local Government Act 1998
- Review of relevant information and correspondence such the Contract Agreement, the Concept Note, the Terms of Reference (TORs), and the above documents
- Arranging for the hiring of a vehicle for use during consultations in Lilongwe and outside. This involved getting quotations from Car Hire organizations and recommending to NORAGRIC through Dr. Kaarhus the most reliable organization with the most reasonable rates
- Arranging for meetings with relevant Lilongwe based stakeholders such as: - Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) Controller of Agricultural Extension Services Dr. Jeff Luhanga (Tel. 08 823353) the Acting Principal Secretary Mr. Matola (Tel. 01 789033), the Director of Agricultural Planning Services Mr. George Zimalirana, the Director of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES) Mr Kanyenda, National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM) Ms. Betty Chinyamunyamu (01 772866), the Department of Forestry John Ngalande and Wellings Simwela (Tel. 01 771000), the Decentralisation Secretariat Dr. Aubrey Mvula (Tel. 01 755700, 01 755703), the Norwegian Embassy Dr. Chikuni (08 202915) and Øystein Botillen (01 774211), Bunda College of Agriculture (Vice Principle) Dr Emanuel Kaunda and Dr. James Banda (Tel. 01277226), Natural Resources College Mr. Kaupa (the Principal) (Tel. 08 950082, or 01 766644), Lilongwe Agricultural Development Division (LADD) (01 753171, 01 754577, Harvest Help-Find Your Feet Mr. Haris Mfune (Tel. 08871385), Mr. Willi Ehret previously of GTZ (Tel. 08369870), GTZ Mr. Bodo Immink the Programme Coordinator, Civil Society Agricultural Network (CISANET) Mr. Victor Mhone and Farmers Union Of Malawi (FUM) Miss Mariam Mapila
- On 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2005, I had discussions with Dr. Randi Kaarhus to brief her on preparatory arrangements, available documentations, vehicle hiring tentative arrangements, prepare a tentative Work Plan, sort out logistical issues, agree on the approach to be adopted for the Consultancy i.e. Definition of expected achievements, Identification of sources of information and stakeholders to be consulted, development of a questionnaire, agree on information analysis and draft Report format,

- Stakeholder identification from Central Government, Parastatal institutions, Agriculture and other research stations, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), relevant associations, Local Government agencies such as District Assemblies (DAs), Area Development Committees, Village Development Committees, District Executive Committee, Agriculture Extension Planning Areas, Area and Village Executive Committees, District Agriculture Extension Coordinating Committee (DAECC) and other stakeholder panels and committees, and
- Preparation and delivery of a letters of introduction to Lilongwe based stakeholders. Similar copies were used during the fieldwork

## 2. Field Work

The field programme was divided into three core parts as follows: Consultations with Lilongwe Based Stakeholders between 23-30 November 2005, Consultations with relevant stakeholders at Mzuzu ADD which included stakeholders in Mzuzu City, Rumphi District Assembly, Bolero EPA, and Jalira-Betere Village Development Committee, and finally, consultations at Lilongwe ADD which included stakeholders within Dedza District Assembly, Lobi EPA, and Gwengwere F.P. School in Kaphuka EPA.

### 2.1 Consultations with Lilongwe based stakeholders (23-30 November 2005)

A number of consultative meetings were conducted by Dr. Kaarhus and myself within the City of Lilongwe. A number of government agencies, academic institutions, trusts, and NGO were met. Within seven days, a total 19 consultative meetings were conducted in Lilongwe. The schedule of events, institutions visited and the people met is outlined in table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS IN LILONGWE CITY**

DATE	TIME	INSTITUTION	PEOPLE MET
23 Nov. 05	11.0 am	Norwegian Embassy	-Dr. Chikuni and Øystein Botillen
24 Nov. 05	9.30 am	Ministry of Agriculture	-Mr. Matola Principal Secretary representative
	2.00 pm	Department of Forestry	-John Ngalande Deputy Director of Forestry
	3.30 pm	NASFAM	-Call at Betty Chinyamunyamu NASCENT Director
	4.30 pm	Ministry of Agriculture	-Dr. Jeff Luhanga Controller of Agricultural Extension Services
25 Nov. 05	7.30 am	Ministry of Agriculture	- George Zimalirana Director of Agricultural Planning Services
	9.00 am	Natural Resources College	The Principal Mr. Kaupa
	2.30 pm	NASFAM	Ms Chinyamunyamu and Timothy Shawa

	5.00 pm	Harvest Help: Find your Feet	Haris Mfuno
<b>26 Nov. 05</b>			Literature review
<b>28 Nov. 05</b>	9.00 am	Bunda College of Agriculture	The Principal and Deputy Principal Dr. Emanuel Kaunda
	11.30 am	Willi Ehret	Agriculture Extension, Organizational Changes and Development Consultant (08369870) Formally of GTZ Agro-based Project
	3.00 pm	Department of Agriculture Extension Services	Mr.C.M. Kanyenda Director AES, J. Nkhoma ACAEO (09375579), M.N.S. Msowoya, Principal Planning Officer
<b>29 Nov. 05</b>	8.00am	GTZ Project	Bodo Immink Programme CCoordinator
	9.00 am	Decentralisation Secretariat	Aubrey Mvula, Alufeyo Banda
	11.00 am	Lilongwe ADD	J.C. Banda Deputy Programme Manager, E.L. Katunga Extension Methodology Officer, D.L. Yona Chief Agricultural Extension Officer
	3.00 pm	Farmers Union of Malawi (FUM)	Ms Mariam Mapila (09330100)
<b>30 Nov. 05</b>		Civil Society Agricultural Network (CISANET)	Victor Mhone (08872926)
<b>08 Dec. 05</b>	10.30	Lilongwe Wendel Guest House. (Round up meeting to discuss preliminary findings and recommendations as well as the structure of the draft report	Randi Kaarhus
<b>08 Dec. 05</b>	2.00 pm	Norwegian Embassy (Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations to the Norwegian Ambassador to Malawi	The Norwegian Ambassador to Malawi, Øystein Botillen and Randi Kaarhus
<b>09 Dec. 05</b>	10.30am	Escort Dr. Randi Kaarhus to Lilongwe Airport	N/A
	12.00am	Director of Agricultural Extension Services	Mr. Kanyenda (Collect and review additional documentation)

*Note: Table 2.1 includes meetings conducted on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2005 and activities for 9<sup>th</sup> December 2005*

## 2.2 Consultations with Mzuzu ADD based stakeholders (30 Nov. – 3 Dec. 2005)

From Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2005, stakeholder consultations were conducted in the Northern Region of Malawi in Mzuzu Agricultural Development Division (MZADD). The programme was broken into three phases as follows (specific details are outlined in Table 2.2):

- Consultations with stakeholders within the City of Mzuzu on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2005
- Consultations with stakeholders at Rumphi District Assembly on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2005 and
- Consultations with stakeholders at Bolero Ecological Planning Area (EPA) on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2005.

**Table 2.2 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS IN MZUZU ADD**

DATE	TIME	INSTITUTION	PEOPLE MET
01 Dec. 05	9.00am	Mzuzu ADD	-Marco Mvula Seed Officer, -B. G. Chingwalu Chief Agricultural Extension Officer, -Owen Kumwenda, Principal Eextension Methodologies Officer (Tel. 01 334066 or 01 332582)
	2.00pm	Mzuzu Smallholder Coffee Trust	-Bernard B. Kaunda
	4.00pm	Lunyangwa Agricultural Research Station	-C.S.M. Chanika
	7.00pm	Harvest Help-Find Your Feet	Wezi Moyo
02 Dec. 05	9.00am	Assistant District Agriculture Development Officer (ADADO)	Palichi Munyenembe
	10.00am	Rumphi District Assembly	-R.K. Simwaka, District Commissioner -W.F. Gausi, Director of Planning and Development
	11.00am	Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR)	Lawrence Kanjira District Coordinator

	4.00pm	Rumphi District Executive Committee	-Goldie Siabu, CPAR, -Sweeney Msosa, Min. of Trade -H.M. Mulenga, Min. of Community Development -O.A. Sichali, Min. of Social Welfare -Ms. B. Chimaliro, CADECOM -W.C. Banda, Assist. District Forestry Officer -V.S.C. Luhanga, Min. of Community Development -J. Mkandawire, Min. of Irrigation and Water -Wezi Gausi, Min. of Community Development -Andrew Chima,
<b>03 Dec. 05</b>	9.00 am	Rumphi District Agriculture Development Officer (DADO)	-K.C. Nkhonde, DADO, Rumphi -A.S. Tembo, Chief Irrigation Officer
	10.00 am	Bolero Ecological Planning Area (EPA)	-Z.C. Nkhonde, Assistant Extension Development Officer (AEDO) -H.K. Kawonga, Assistant Extension Development Officer (AEDO)
	12.00 am	Jalira/Bekere Village Development Committee (VDC)	-Longson Chipeta, Chairperson -Principal Group Village Headman Jalira -Village Headman Chinkhuntha -Village Headman Muwere -Village Headman Chiwumbila -Village Headman Dafu -Ag. Group Village Headman Chimunkwawu -Ag. Village Headman Mzota -Ag. Group Village Headman Lusuntha -AG. Village Headman Muwele -Alex Mtika, Chibeme Kumwenda, Maria Chirambo, Jenifer Botha, Glory Mkandawire, Mary Gongwe, Regina Nyirenda, Ellness Harawa, Matson Beta, Yoramu Chirambo, Amon Msimuko, Rhoda Zgambo, Dickson Nkhonjera, Joyce Gondwe, Fane Jere, Paul Botha, John Chirambo, Lyness Kumwenda, Deodato Botha, Rose Nyasulu, Emmis Nyirongo, C.T. Botha, Sarah Hlango, Aron Nkhonjera, Wilson Mwanza, Donnex Nkhonjera, Phillip Mhango, Standwell Botha, Owen Zimba, Madothi Phiri, Washington Chirambo, Lisse Gondwe, Lucy Tembo, Suzan Nkhonjera, Rose Chawinga, Moreen Chipofya, Tiwinechi Mphande, Victoria Machere, Lombani Chavula, Sipanji Botha, E.T. Kalumbi, Emelina Luhanga, Mercy Banda, Ellen Machere, Lilly Chirambo, Elidah Munthali, Bosco Zgambo

### 2.3 Consultations with Lilongwe ADD based stakeholders (30 Nov. – 3 Dec. 2005)

On 4<sup>th</sup> December 2005, we drove to Dedza District Assembly (located within Lilongwe Agricultural Development Division). We had meetings with various stakeholders as follows (specific details are outlined in Table 2.3):

- 5<sup>th</sup> December 2005: Consultations with stakeholders within Dedza District Assembly
- 6<sup>th</sup> December 2005: Consultations with stakeholders at Lobi and Kaphuka EPAs
- 7<sup>th</sup> December 2005: Consultations with stakeholders within the forestry sector i.e. Dedza District Forestry Office and Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife.

**Table 2.3 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS WITHIN DEDZA DISTRICT ASSEMBLY (LILONGWE ADD)**

DATE	TIME	INSTITUTION	PEOPLE MET
05 Dec. 05	9.00am	Dedza District Assembly	-M. Jere, District Commissioner -M. Kamlomo, DADO -F. Mzamu, Director of Planning -H. Mandere, Concern Universal
	2.00pm	Dedza District Agriculture Development Office	-M. Kamlomo, DADO J.E.R. Shaba, Crop Production Officer
	3.00pm	Concern Universal	-D. Mtoseni, Programme Manager -H. Mandere, Deputy Programme Manager -L. Chizimba, Programme Manager
	4.30pm	-Catholic Development Commission of Malawi (CADECOM)	-F. Nyongani -P. Chidammodzi
06 Dec. 05	9.00am	Lobi Horticulture Association	-W. Chintapasa, Committee Member -K. Miliward, Secretary -U. Gama, Chairperson -S. Kalongwenje, Committee Member -Grace Kaduya, Secretary -A. Trindade, Member -Esimta, Member -C. Malombela, Member -B. Chelerani, Member -E. Daudi, Secretary -E. Dzindiwo, Committee Member -Chihiro Tsuchiya, Japanese Volunteer -Makiko Tsukamoto, Japanese Volunteer
	12.00am	Chimowa Village Development Committee	-M. Kantadza, Chairlady -N. Molosi, Vice Chairperson -M. Chilamba, Committee Member K. Hamiton, Committee Member Village Headman Chimowa, Advisor

	3.00pm	Lobi EPA	-K.M. Mvula, AEDO -f.b. Mpembeka, AEDO -P.S. Chirwa, AEDO -T. Chimlomo, ACDC
	5.00pm	Gwengwere F.P. School	-T. Fungatila, Headmaster -C.I. Chirwa, Extension Officer, Kaphuka EPA
<b>07 Dec. 05</b>	8.30 am	Dedza District Forestry Office	-H.A. Magagula, District Forestry Officer (DFO) -P.A. Nthenda, Assistant DFO (Extension) -H.A.T. Chalira, Assistant DFO (Indigenous Forest Management) -A.K. Chimutu, Forestry Assistant (Plantations and Bembeke EPA)
	10.30 am	Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife	-H.M. Banda, Lecturer -L. Kamangadazi, Lecturer