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BUILDING RESILIENCE AND ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION IN MALAWI

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DISCUSSION PAPER

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Acronyms

ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
AIP	Affordable Input Programme
BRACC	Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change
CEPA	Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy
CISANET	Civil Society Network for Agriculture
CISONECC	Civil Society Network on Climate Change
CPCs	Civil Protection Committees
DECs	District Executive Committees
DoDMA	Department of Disaster and Management Affairs
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
ENRCs	Environment and Natural Resources Committees
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority
FISP	Farm Input Subsidy Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LGA	Local Government Act
LPG	Liquid Petroleum Gas
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MK	Malawi Kwacha
MNSSP	Malawi National Social Support Programme
MVAC	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee
NAPA	National Adaptation Programme of Action
NASFAM	National Association of Smallholder Farmers of Malawi
NCCP	National Climate Change Programme
NDRM	National Disaster Risk Management
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPC	National Planning Commission
NRB	National Registration Bureau
NRS	National Resilience Strategy
NSSP	National Social Support Policy
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
RGB	Rwanda Governance Board
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SCTP	Social Cash Transfer Programme
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USD	United States Dollar
VNRMCs	Village Natural Resources Management Committees

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About the Paper

This paper presents a political economy analysis of resilience and adaptation to climate change in Malawi to inform the work of BRACC. It situates the political economy analysis of resilience and adaptation to climate change within the context of the country's broader political economy. This has been influenced greatly and shaped by the politics of transition to democracy, and the reorientation of the elites from agriculture to commerce as a principal means of accumulation. These drivers of the general political economy context have created a policy milieu characterised by affinity towards the provision of private rather than public goods, the dominance of the culture of rent seeking, and weak policy implementation and commitment to reforms. The specific implementation challenges that have influenced and shaped the political economy of the resilience and adaptation to climate change include: political and bureaucratic leadership, financial resources constraints, coordination challenges, and stalled decentralisation policy reforms. Beyond BRACC's programmatic and knowledge-building efforts across various thematic areas, the paper aims to inform a wide audience of policymakers, development practitioners, civil society organisations, think tanks and researchers.


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1 INTRODUCTION: WHY IS POLITICAL ECONOMY IMPORTANT?

This paper undertakes a political economy analysis (PEA) of resilience and adaptation to climate change in Malawi to inform the work of the Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change (BRACC) programme in Malawi (2018–2023). The long-term objective of the programme is to contribute to a reduction in extreme poverty and to end the recurrent cycle of hunger and humanitarian assistance in Malawi. The programme aims to do this by taking market-based approaches to improve people's livelihoods and by developing scalable social safety net systems that respond predictably to weather and climate-change-related shocks.[1]

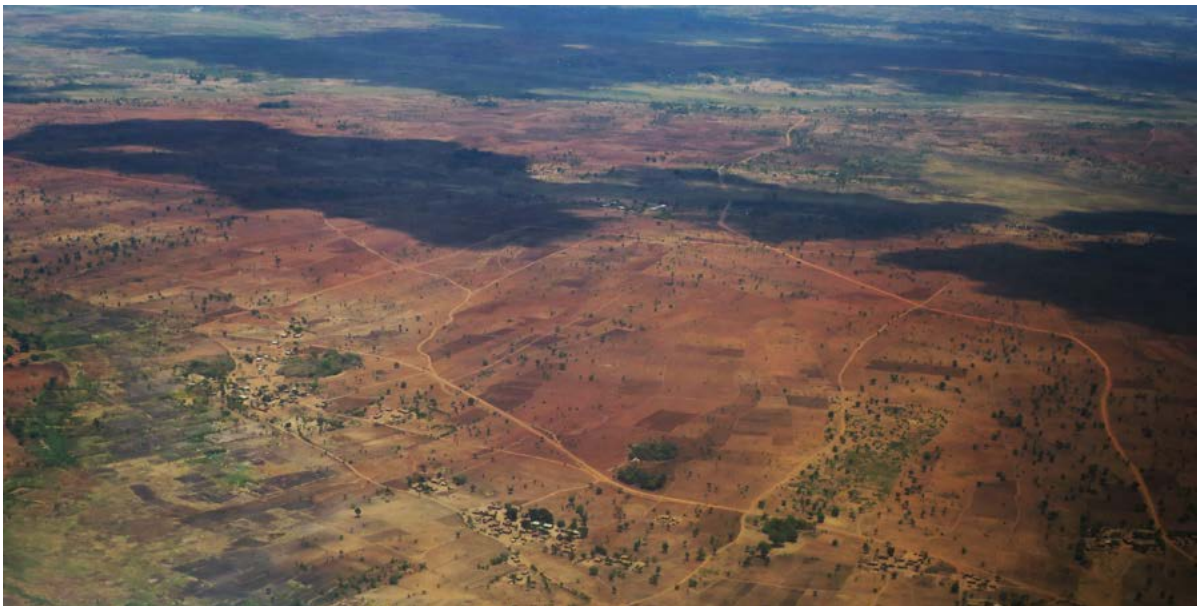
The BRACC programme is inspired by, and aims to support the implementation of, the Malawi government's National Resilience Strategy (NRS) 2018–2030. The overarching goal of the NRS is to break the cycle of food insecurity in Malawi by bridging development and humanitarian interventions and prioritising a continuum of more predictable livelihood support packages that target vulnerable households.[2]

Addressing adaptation and resilience is not apolitical. Instead, there are a variety of different parties and interests who use their power and resources to advance their own interests in adaptation and resilience, resulting in different policies and programming. PEA can illuminate the ways in which this plays out.[3] PEA entails systematically mapping out all key actors in an issue area; identifying their interests and recognising their forms of power (political, economic and ideological); understanding their relationships with each other; and appreciating the issues, narratives and ideas that shape how and why they interact with each other.[4,5] Consequently, PEA involves looking at the dynamic interaction between structures, institutions and actors to understand decision-making.[6] This gives a greater understanding of the context, as well as how power and decision-making is exercised, and barriers to change and how they may be overcome.[6,7]

PEA tools assist in the design and implementation of programmes that have achievable objectives and which are more likely to achieve results. Integrating PEA into project design, management and implementation makes it possible for programme staff and key stakeholders to track changing actors, interests and power relations through implementation, manage risks, and seize opportunities as they arise. This supports more politically feasible, and therefore more effective, development strategies by setting realistic expectations of what can be achieved, over what time scale, and the risks involved.[8] This paper aims to contextualise Malawi's political economy and what it means for adaptation and resilience agendas.

This paper is divided into five main sections:

- This introduction forms the first section.
- The second section focuses on the country's general political economy context.
- The third section assesses the political economy context as it relates to climate change adaptation and resilience.
- The fourth section examines the potential change in the underlying dynamics of the country's political settlement, especially following the change in the country's electoral system for electing presidents.
- The fifth section is the conclusion, with recommendations for what will be needed to deal effectively with resilience and adaptation issues in the country.



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2 THE POLITICAL ECONOMY CONTEXT

KEY FRAMING EVENTS

Two key events are helpful in understanding Malawi's contemporary general political economy context: the transition from a one-party authoritarian state to a multiparty political dispensation in May 1994, and the reorientation of the configuration of political elites away from agriculture to commerce.[9,10] These two events have combined to produce a political economic context that favours the provision of private goods over collective public goods as the basis for either getting or maintaining political power. They have also contributed to shaping the underlying dynamics of Malawi's contemporary political settlement, defined as acquiring, organising, distributing and exercising power.

As a result of these two events, Malawi has shifted from being an authoritarian, developmental, patrimonialist regime to a competitive, clientelist (political support in exchange for goods/services) regime, with several important consequences for politics, policy and development.[11,12] As an authoritarian, developmental, patrimonialist state, Malawi was characterised by a system of centralised and systematic rent management in which policy was driving patronage, while in the new, competitive, clientelist regime patronage drives policy underpinned by widespread fraud, corruption, nepotism and opportunism.[13,12] Although agriculture remains the backbone of the country's economy, the transition to democracy in May 1994 was associated with a dramatic change in the configuration of the political elites. While the one-party political elites were predominantly agriculture-oriented, the political elites that took over in May 1994 were mainly interested in commerce as their primary source of accumulation.[9,14]

IMPLICATIONS OF THE GENERAL POLITICAL ECONOMY CONTEXT

This political economy context has implications for various facets of society: policymaking and the provision of public goods; the dominance of a culture of rent seeking; and policy implementation and commitment to reforms.

Policymaking and Provision of Public Goods

A range of reviews show that the transition to democracy in Malawi was characterised by the collapse of the practices that created some semblance of development in the one-party era. Prowse and Grassin[3] argue that Malawi had a functioning political and bureaucratic apparatus that created a supportive environment for delivery of collective public goods, especially between independence in 1964 and the late 1980s.

Some of the key features of the political and bureaucratic apparatus included:

- distribution of rents and assets to actors who used them productively
- an insulated cadre of civil service technocrats
- clear planning and effective implementation.

Since the transition in May 1994, the state has become the main source of patronage through procurement contracts and development aid, especially in sectors such as health, education and agriculture. Often policies are implemented not to make a difference but because they will facilitate extraction of rents and direct benefits for the political elite.[13,10] (Note that in this paper, rents are defined as an amount of money earned that exceeds that which is economically or socially necessary and often arise from market inefficiencies or information asymmetries.)[15] In the first two post-independence decades, Dr Banda's centralised patrimonial system was built around control of productive resources but allowed for investment in a capable bureaucracy where policy followed patronage. In contrast, the current fragmented politics, where the public sector is the key source of rents, leads to the logic of patronage following policy.[16]

The political culture underpinning the developmental patrimonialist and competitive, clientelist, political settlements has essentially remained the same, although post-May 1994 it has somewhat effectively adapted to the electoral demands of the multiparty democracy. Some scholars have described Malawi as having undergone transition without transformation.[11,12] This has led to the situation whereby there is an absence of institutions in key areas, contradictory frameworks in some areas or sectors, concerted efforts to reverse potentially transformative legislation, non-implementation of laws and regulations, and creation of self-serving institutions. All these have combined to create a system of government characterised by long-term policy incoherence, which does not present a supportive legislative and institutional milieu for collective action that underpins the successful provision of public goods.

The sustainable provision of public goods is impeded by widespread corruption, nepotism, fraud and rent-seeking tendencies. O'Neil et al.[17] and Booth[18] observe that competitive clientelism undermines the elite's adherence to developmental policies, reduces political space in which the state bureaucracy works, and leads to short-term rent seeking being prioritised over long-term national development. This is observable in almost every other sphere: short-term political considerations largely drive public policies. These considerations usually dictate a clientelist mode of political legitimation, not one based on delivery of public goods required for economic and social transformation. This perpetrates a political logic that tolerates corruption as a means of rewarding loyalists and capturing rents to promote political aims, rather than to reinvest in poverty reduction and inclusive growth.[12]

Malawi's high and increasing donor dependence exacerbates the situation. According to the World Bank,[16] Malawi gets official development assistance (ODA) averaging USD 1 billion per annum, equating to about USD 60 per capita each year, compared to USD 50 in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. The annual amount of aid to Malawi is estimated at between 20–25% of the country's Gross Domestic Product. Despite claims that various development initiatives are subordinated to the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) planning framework, Malawi continues experiencing a proliferation of donor-driven interventions. These interventions are often fragmented, non-aligned and in conflict with each other, as well as in conflict with the overall development agenda espoused in the MGDS. This is worsened partly by the dominance of the project or programme modality as a vehicle for aid disbursement to the country, as opposed to budget support that gives the recipient country flexibility to use the aid as it deems appropriate.

A notable feature of the Malawi situation is the multiplication of policy documents and an absence of real, implementable policies beyond the very short term. This is often the case because donors have responded to the government's weak incentives to policymaking by increasingly stepping into the government's shoes, substituting for the government in the policy function.[19] The government has essentially limited capacity to drive its own development agenda. This is expected to change with the recent adoption of the Malawi Vision 2063, designed to ensure coherence and alignment of different interventions, within and across sectors.[20]

Dominance of the Culture of Rent Seeking

While the rent-seeking culture is dominant across all sectors, its impact has been quite consequential in the agricultural sector, which is a significant contributor to the economy and the source of livelihood for most of the population. The history of rent seeking through the agricultural sector is a long one. The Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) has been a target for rent seeking since the early days of independence in the 1960s.[19] Since that time, ADMARC has been manipulated for populist political purposes while providing significant opportunities for patronage via non-transparent targeting, pricing and procurement. During the one-party state, ADMARC 'taxed' smallholder farmers through its pricing policies. That income was used to promote patronage limited to the upper echelons of politicians, the civil service and the military, and did not require blatant corruption to implement.[13] In the contemporary context, ADMARC has been captured for patronage largely through its distortions in the agricultural markets, benefiting the elites disproportionately.

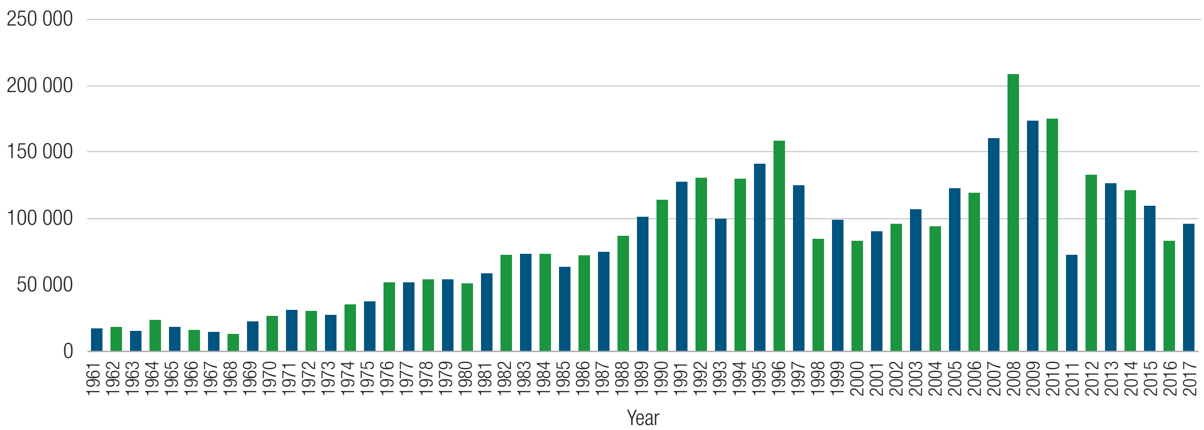
ADMARC is unable to buy maize from farmers at profitable prices because it comes onto the market late. However, in the event of serious food shortages, ADMARC is tasked to buy maize to fight food insecurity. It often does that at very high prices, and the suppliers to this market are predominantly those with political connections. It is against this backdrop that the World Bank[21] argues that ADMARC's market interventions should follow transparent rules and set price intervention bands, which would encourage the participation of private traders and strengthen the position of Malawian farmers.

The heart of rent seeking now comes from subsidies, which were designed to improve the country's food security and lie at the heart of the country's political economy.[21] The dominance of subsidies has been accompanied with reforms to the agricultural sector, which have weakened rather than strengthened it.[3] This is due to the reconfiguration of elites at the helm of government post-May 1994, who have implemented reforms in the sector to create opportunities for rent extraction for personal gain and not for the greater common good.

A widely-cited example of rent seeking is the reforms undertaken in the tobacco sector that was at the heart of rent generation during the one party state. However, these reforms were not properly planned and implemented to continue generating resources that facilitated the country's development efforts. Neither the political nor the bureaucratic elites were interested in maintaining the productivity of the tobacco industry, but rather in allowing as many of their supporters as possible to participate in the sector. Most of these people did not have the skills and expertise to handle tobacco, which negatively affected the industry.

The liberalisation of tobacco cultivation and marketing created opportunities for intermediaries (consisting largely of civil servants and small-scale traders) buying tobacco from smallholder farmers for sale at the auction floors. These intermediaries had limited technical experience and skills in the cultivation and processing of tobacco. They also did not have technical skills and experience in handling tobacco to maintain the quality standards that were the norm during the pre-liberalisation period. Therefore, although during this period the production of tobacco went up (Figure 1), the benefits to farmers plummeted due to the combination of poor quality tobacco, the downward spiral of prices and increases in the transaction costs of getting tobacco to the market.

Figure 1: Tobacco Production Figures in Malawi (2001–2017)



Source: FAOSTAT

The way that subsidies have been implemented since the late 1980s has demonstrated, and continues to demonstrate, the salience of food security, particularly maize, in the country's political economy.[3] Successive governments have been preoccupied with guaranteeing food security, especially ensuring adequate maize supply to farmers through subsidised production, handouts or keeping market prices for maize low.[19] The subsidies are popular, both because they ensure that the government of the day gets the political support of the voters and because they provide an opportunity for rent extraction for those with close connections to the influential politicians. Analyses over the years have shown that party loyalists, or those with close connections to influential politicians, dominate these contracts.

Some companies with credible track records in relevant areas are sidelined for not being politically correct. Most of the companies that have found themselves in this situation have either gone under or have scaled down their operations substantially. These tendencies have encouraged the development of a shadow private sector dominated by companies put together simply to exploit opportunities. However, these companies lack the necessary track record to create the growth and development of a private sector that can power the country's transformation and sustainable development.

Therefore, there is a limited social contract based on food security driven by maize. It is for this reason that Malawi remains largely dependent on maize as its main staple, despite efforts to diversify its agricultural portfolio over the past five decades.[23] This makes Malawi highly susceptible to the adverse effects of climate change as many areas, particularly in southern Malawi, have agro-ecological conditions with low, and deteriorating, suitability for the cultivation of maize. Diversification of the crop portfolio would greatly improve Malawi's capacity to withstand the adverse effects of climate change.

The implementation of subsidy support programmes since the late 1990s to facilitate diversification of the country's crop portfolio have not been very successful. An example is the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP), implemented between 2005 and 2020. FISP was designed to cater for crop diversification and efforts were made continually to ensure that this was done. However, its implementation continually focused on maize. The FISP package irregularly included legumes that support diversification, offer cash income opportunities and soil fertility benefits. Farmers in areas where maize does not do well did not receive supplies of alternative crops, such as sweet potatoes or cassava. The inclusion of legumes in FISP always relied on donor support. This is not surprising, because policies concerning maize as the country's main staple lie at the heart of Malawi's political economy. The emotive issue of maize security underlies policies that are reactive rather than proactive and riddled with opportunities for rent seeking.[21] This is why maize is subjected to ad hoc export bans driven by the political imperative of food insecurity, even though this disincentivises investments in commercial farming and agricultural growth.[22]

The Affordable Input Programme (AIP) succeeded FISP from the 2020/21 growing season.[29] This is one of the flagship programmes of the new Tonse Government, ushered into power in June 2020 following the fresh presidential elections. The AIP targeted 4.2 million smallholder farming households.
It is designed to provide each farmer with:

- two bags of fertiliser weighing 50 kg each at MK 4 495 per bag
- a choice between 5 kg certified maize seed or 7 kg of certified rice seed or 7 kg of certified sorghum seed at MK 2 000 per pack.

The budget of AIP is MK 160 billion of the MK 245 billion allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture, representing a 78% increase from the MK 36 billion allocation to the final edition of FISP. Unlike FISP, AIP includes no legume inputs. In addition, despite its designed intention to offer seed for other cereals, such as rice and sorghum, to farmers to cater for varied ecological realities, the implementation of AIP has focused exclusively on the distribution of maize seed due to the government's limited resources. This is likely to undermine the potential of AIP to effectively mitigate adverse effects of climate change and build sustainable resilience across the country. The programme is administered using electronic vouchers, based on a farmer registry linked to the National Registration Bureau (NRB)'s national identification system. Stakeholders (including donors) are supportive of this development as it provides transparent targeting mechanisms, while ensuring good governance.

A series of challenges plagues AIP, such as:

- availability of inputs in adequate amounts
- regular stock-outs of inputs
- regular network outages
- corruption whereby vendors are accessing the inputs more than farmers
- suppliers selling underweight bags of fertilisers
- some suppliers selling fertiliser at more than the set price of MK 4 495.

Other challenges include the following:

- The persistent electricity network outages, as well as generally weak supportive Information and Communications Technology (ICT) at national level, have had several negative consequences.
- In some cases, the sheer incompetence of some retailers (and some deliberate ploys to create room for corruption) have worsened these consequences. Beneficiaries are reportedly spending three to seven consecutive days at selling points before they can be served. This forces them to abandon their livelihoods, resulting in significant opportunity costs for these hard-working men and women.

As with FISP, there is concern that AIP will not help marginalised households who do not have labour capacity to farm themselves. As the programme is still in its first season, lessons about what worked, what did not and why, will emerge over the coming months with reviews of the programme performance. However, the design and implementation of AIP raise fundamental questions about the future of the agricultural sector in the country, its ability to deal with issues of resilience and adaptation, and the role of AIP in addressing these challenges.

The issue of subsidies to the agricultural sector has been a subject of contentious debate, especially regarding its long-term sustainability. Many stakeholders with concerns about the long-term sustainability of subsidies felt that the change of government in June 2020 presented a very rare opportunity to either discontinue subsidies altogether or to design a robust subsidy programme that addressed the key shortfalls of FISP.

Discontinuing subsidies was not possible for the following reasons:

- The incoming government had campaigned for universal subsidies to the agricultural sector.
- Subsidies have existed since the late 1990s and the question of food security – maize – has always been central to the country's political economy.

The prospects of the country's agricultural sector running without subsidy support to smallholder farmers are unimaginable, not to mention the political consequences for the ruling party. The main issue, therefore, is not discontinuing subsidies. The focus should rather be on ways of improving the design and implementation of subsidy programmes so that they can contribute to the progressive and dynamic transformation of the country's agricultural sector, at least in the interim.

However, the increase in resource allocation to AIP is likely to worsen the existing neglect of other equally important interventions addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability to food and nutrition security in the context of climate change. By focusing on the distribution of maize seed and fertiliser, the programme assumes that the rainfall pattern will always be ideal for the cultivation of maize. This is not the reality now, and rainfall pattern will become less suitable over a broader area with climate change. The design of AIP does not encourage crop and asset diversification to cushion against unfavourable weather conditions over the short and long term. There is no complementary investment in increased access to climate information and early warning, catchment and land use management, or access to reliable markets. In its current design, the programme alone will not break the cycle of hunger and vulnerability due to the impact of climate change. Moreover, AIP does not show how its design, management and implementation insulate it from the deeply entrenched rent-seeking tendencies that have plagued the subsidy programmes since the late 1990s.

The design and implementation of AIP further reinforces the centrality of food security, especially maize, at the heart of the country's social contract. In responding to a query about AIP's exclusive focus on maize, a Ministry of Agriculture official observed that 'the programme is leaning heavily on maize because it is Malawi's staple grain'.[25] This deeply entrenched orientation influences the pattern of the government's investment in other key areas relating to resilience, flooding, disaster risk reduction, social protection and climate change. Government's investments generally are geared more towards coping with, and responding to, risk than mitigating them through diversification and risk reduction.

According to Da Corta et al.,[26] the average expenditure on safety net programmes from 2011 to 2016 in Malawi was equivalent to 0.6% of GDP. This is strikingly low compared to the 1.2% average for sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). During the same period, the country spent the equivalent of close to 2.6% of GDP on the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) lean-season food response and 2.2% of GDP on FISP, which focused almost exclusively on maize. This should have been seized as an opportunity to expand the range of staple grains which can be produced viably in current and future climates. However, voices pushing for improvements in the implementation of FISP and food security policy have been ignored. Stakeholders in the agricultural sector, led by the Civil Society Network for Agriculture (CISANET) and the National Association of Smallholder Farmers of Malawi (NASFAM), are advocating for the reallocation of resources from low-impact programmes within the agriculture sector, such as the AIP, to other underfunded high-impact programmes, such as livestock, research and extension services.

The focus on subsidies and disaster response shows that there is a preference for expenditure on visible, rather than invisible, policy domains, most likely shows political mileage or gains. Overall, the expenditure on humanitarian aid between 2011 and 2016 peaked at 6% of GDP, ten times more than the expenditure on safety nets. This lack of commitment to safety nets is underlined further by the low share of expenditure financed by government. The government currently finances only 6% of all Malawi's safety net spending, while development partners finance 94%. This is clearly unsustainable. The evaluation of the Enhancing Community Resilience Programme (2011–2017) is illustrative in this regard. During the six years of programme operation, only 18% of beneficiaries received social cash transfers, while 63% of beneficiaries received humanitarian support and 50% had received input vouchers under FISP.[27]

There is promising evidence about the efficacy of social safety nets, such as social cash transfers, on consumption smoothing and health-seeking outcome routines, which could be leveraged if interventions were appropriately prioritised, scaled, and financed.[16] Resources meant to support long-term resilience are diverted to support current disasters. For example, according to Botha et al.,[28] in the 2016/17 season, the government released MK 1.2 billion to support disaster response efforts, but it is often unable to invest resources of a similar magnitude in disaster prevention and preparedness efforts.

Policy Implementation and Commitment to Reforms

Malawi grapples with the serious problem of policy implementation failure or, indeed, policy implementation gaps on an enormous scale. A lack of, or limited, commitment to reforms designed to improve the overall operative environment to support successful implementation of reforms worsens this problem. The problem of policy implementation gaps is not unique to Malawi, but this challenge is pronounced and significantly affects progress in various facets of development in the country. According to Hudson, et al.,[29] factors leading to policy implementation gaps or failure include:

- overly optimistic expectations
- implementation in dispersed governance
- inadequate collaborative policymaking
- vagaries of the political cycle.

There is a tendency to embrace programmes and policies, but rarely implement them to their logical conclusion. This results in a multiplicity of initiatives on the same issue, which are generally uncoordinated.[3] This has prompted some donors, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to scale down their support to policy development as the existence of policies hardly guides the implementation processes needed to bring about the intended benefits for Malawians.

Policy failures, implementation gaps and the lack of commitment to reforms are key characteristics of a competitive clientelist political settlement. Political settlements of this nature tend to encourage policymaking in distinctive administrative silos, even though most interventions will almost certainly have wider implications on external parties. Limited collaborative policymaking, and the failure to establish a common ground for public policy through constructive management of difference, are some of the key reasons for subsequent implementation difficulties.[27] In addition, successful policy design requires continuous collaboration with a range of stakeholders at multiple political, policymaking, managerial and administrative levels, as well as the engagement of downstream implementation actors, such as end users, frontline staff and a range of local service agencies.

Several studies show that policymakers in Malawi are committed to reforms on paper and not to making the reforms work as intended in practice.[30] According to the World Bank,[22] donor behaviour has greatly contributed to these dysfunctional dynamics by demanding reforms that can be met by superficial changes, reinforcing tendencies of isomorphic mimicry. Often, aid is conditioned on the promise of reform, which often proves to be temporary and superficial. The political and bureaucratic elites are committed to implementing reforms if their positions are under threat or when popular opinion is against them. They implement these reforms to regain support by doing the right things, such as to avert imminent economic collapse or to entice donors to reinstate aid. In these circumstances, the government has demonstrated the ability to establish discipline and implement sound policy, albeit temporarily. However, the benefits from these actions rarely extend beyond elite capture, because the commitment to make the changes permanent is non-existent.

Limited leadership capacity is an important contributor to policy implementation failure or gaps. In a recent evaluation, the Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA)[31] demonstrates how sector heads will often complain that limited funding restricts their capacity to implement policies. However, they neither engage in lobbying for, nor mobilising, resources, nor do they invest efforts in generating resources from within their sectors. Even with provision of resources, such as through dedicated treasury funds, these resources usually end up in the hands of a few people at headquarters and not necessarily in direct interventions at local level. According to one estimate, about 24.5% of the government's annual expenditure is on administrative overheads, comprising wages, salaries and allowances.[21]

The limited progress made in establishing a functioning devolved system of local governance worsens policy implementation failures, or gaps at the local level, which negatively affects successful translation of policy decisions made at the national level to the local level.[28] In 1998, the government adopted a decentralisation policy and the Local Government Act (LGA). These were supposed to facilitate the establishment of functioning local governments, but progress has been quite dismal. The implementation of the decentralisation policy reforms has been 'stop-and-go', worsened by the 2010 amendments to the LGA. This Act essentially reversed the underlying goals and objectives of the decentralisation policy reforms, as stipulated in the Constitution.[29]

Informal systems, epitomised to a large extent by chieftaincy, are also a challenge for local governance. Decentralisation policy reforms push for the establishment of democratic institutions at the local level. However, chieftaincy, which is highly steeped in tradition and characterised by fusion of legislative, executive and judicial functions, remains dominant and influential. Afrobarometer surveys[32] since 1999 have consistently indicated that traditional leaders are the most trusted institutions at the local level. Yet nearly all their practices run counter to the democratic logic propagated in the decentralisation policy reforms.

Due to these challenges, the decentralised local governance system is in a state of flux. This creates difficulties for the successful implementation of policies developed at the national level for the benefit of people in local government areas. In most sectors at the local level, there are no guidelines, institutions, regulations, personnel or funding to get things done. The Malawi National Decentralisation Policy commits the government to make available at least 5% of national revenues to local governments for the development of districts. However, since 1998, the government has not transferred more than 1%. This means that local governments generally grapple with unfunded mandates.

In summary, the policy arena in the country is shaped by Malawi's unique combination of structural conditions, historical legacies and the evolution of its political settlement, which is characterised by elite capture, fragmentation along identity lines and high donor dependence, and a limited social contract based on food security and maize in particular.[27] These characteristics have contributed to a stable but low-level equilibrium, trapping the country in a cycle of crises. These crises have been followed by highly visible reactive responses, rather than deeper commitment to reforms needed to break out of the cycle. Given that climate change will worsen the existing causes of such crises, the need to break the cycle is even more imperative.

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3 CONTEXTUALISING ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE POLITICAL ECONOMY EXPERIENCES

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE EVOLUTION IN ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE

There has been significant progress in the development of the enabling policy, institutional and legislative framework for climate change adaptation and resilience in Malawi over the past few decades. These efforts can be traced back to the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) developed in 2006, following Malawi's signing of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on 10 June 1992 and its subsequent ratification on 21 April 1994.[33] The NAPA identified urgent priorities for reducing the vulnerability of rural communities to the adverse effects of climate change. Updated in 2015, the NAPA covers a wide range of priorities with the potential for strengthening the capacity of communities to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change.

Pardoe et al.[5] observe that many policy developments in the realm of climate change adaptation can be attributed to the groundwork laid by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA-funded) Africa Adaptation Programme (2008–2012). This programme undertook various studies to assess the capacity and policy needs for climate change, and the appropriate institutional framework for reform. The JICA Africa Adaptation Programme culminated in the National Climate Change Programme (NCCP), housed in the Department of Economic Planning and Development in the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation.

The NCCP paved the way for the formulation of the National Climate Change and Environment Communication Strategy 2012–2016. The National Climate Investment Plan (2013–2018) followed in 2013. According to Pardoe et al.,[5] the investment plan proposes a 'Climate Change and Natural Resources Management Sector Wide Approach' to direct donor funds for streamlined strategy implementation, with the aim of establishing a Climate Change Fund to channel public and private climate finance. The National Climate Change Management Policy, drafted in 2013, was only endorsed in 2016. The 2015 flood disaster catalysed the adoption of the Disaster Risk Management Policy in the same year, after several years of preparation. It expired before the formal adoption of the Disaster Risk Management Bill. The legislative process will resume once its successor, the Disaster Risk Management Policy has been finalised.

Efforts to support resilient livelihoods were consolidated further with the adoption of the National Social Support Policy (NSSP) in 2012, culminating in the Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP I), which evolved into the MNSSP II. This, in turn, formed the basis for the NRS, which brings together disaster risk management (DRM), climate change adaptation and social protection. The underlying philosophy of the MNSSP II was to create a dynamic safety net system that can better respond to persistent poverty, recurrent shocks, and support the demographic dividend.[16]

The MNSSP II prioritises five areas of support:

- consumption support
- support for resilient livelihoods
- shock-sensitive social protection
- links between safety nets and other programmes
- strengthening all safety net systems.

These safety net systems are critical to resilience by protecting the poor against recurrent shocks and promoting strategies for growth and development.

Botha et al.[28] argue that the 2015 flood disaster, unprecedented in recent history, necessitated the development of the NRS and its implementation plan.

The NRS has four pillars:

- resilient agricultural growth
- risk reduction, flood control and early warning and response systems
- human capacities, livelihoods and social protection
- catchment protection and management.

The NRS was designed to break the recurrent cycle of food insecurity by bridging development and humanitarian interventions and prioritising a continuum of more predictable livelihood support packages that target vulnerable households.[2] This became imperative because safety nets and humanitarian aid operated completely separately from each other, despite having many overlapping mandates and functions. The overall objective of the NRS is to harness resilience-building strategies under a common framework and coordinate a multisectoral approach to reduce vulnerability to seasonal-predictable as well as severe and sudden-onset emergencies.

A large range of stakeholders are active in each of the spheres of the NRS. These include:

- government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs)
- non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- development partners, especially at the local levels
- communities/citizens.

Despite good policy progress in the different sectors, they have all remained separate, a problem that donor actions have sometimes worsened, as elaborated further below. The NRS intended to bring together different parties but was only adopted formally in 2020, many years after it was first mooted, and institutional arrangements have yet to be finalised.

IMPLEMENTATION, PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Proposing the NRS in 2016 meant Malawi was amongst the first countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to put in place a coherent framework for resilience. However, the same reasons that make a coherent approach necessary have also impeded its negotiation and led to many challenges in its implementation.

There are apparent contestations among stakeholders in the different areas, precipitated by competing narratives about the key problems in the realm of climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and the framing and conceptualising of social protection. For example, Chinsinga et al.[33] noted the framing of climate change adaptation in three different ways, with quite different implications for priority actions by different sets of stakeholders:

- as an agricultural problem
- as an environmental problem
- as a development problem.

Each of these perspectives has different implications in terms of which government agency should provide leadership in climate change efforts, as well as the set of interventions to be prioritised. These contestations may have contributed to the conceptualisation of the NRS as an overarching framework to coordinate and guide the implementation of various interventions related to adaptation, resilience and social protection.

The implementation framework of the NRS is designed to strengthen the development and humanitarian nexus by improving linkages between government and all development partners in order to deliver a combination of predictable and complementary resilience-building interventions targeted to the vulnerability characteristics of food insecure households across the country.[2] There has been some impressive progress in institutionalising the implementation framework. However, there are still some serious political economy challenges affecting effective implementation of adaptation and resilience interventions.

Because of these challenges, some donors are pushing for the NRS to be coordinated by the National Planning Commission (NPC), as it is perceived to have the technical and political clout to be the institutional home of the NRS and drive its implementation. It is important to note that the NRS does not propose a separate social protection system but suggests that resilience is already supported through the MNSSP II. It also suggests that additional livelihoods/social protection/human capacity interventions, such as agricultural livelihoods support, should both complement the MNSSP II and be aligned with the MNSSPII in their targeting.

The foregoing vision stands a better chance of achievement because the country has made progress with relevant legislation and policies that can harness sustainable progress in the resilience and adaptation sectors. Some of these policies include:

- the draft Disaster Risk Management Bill, which strengthens existing DRM legislation and introduces risk reduction measures to minimise the impact of hazards, reduce vulnerabilities and current conditions that create vulnerabilities, and increase the resilience of human ecosystems
- the Environment Management Act 2017, which mandates the establishment of an Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) that has the power to enforce the right to a clean and healthy environment and to monitor and enforce compliance by lead agencies with environmental and natural resource-related policies and legislation
- the National Charcoal Strategy, which promotes switching to clear fuels like Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) and develops legal and sustainable charcoal value chains
- the ten new land and related laws, which allow smallholder farmers to get legal titles to their land and provide for decentralisation of land management.

The National Climate Change Management Policy was adopted finally in 2016 – although it took several years to get to this stage from first being proposed.

Challenges to the implementation of this policy remain:

- political and bureaucratic leadership challenges
- financial resource constraints
- stalled decentralisation policy reforms.

Political and Bureaucratic Leadership

The role of political and bureaucratic leadership in either fostering or hindering progress in adaptation and resilience has been well documented. According to Pardoe et al.,[5] political leadership has been key in determining the degree of progress achieved in these areas. Changes in political leadership often affect the priorities in these areas, as well as the pace of action. Institutional restructuring and realignment often accompany the change in leadership, such as the shuffling around of bureaucratic staff. This especially affects principal secretaries and directors – some of them appointed on the basis of political affiliations and not merit. This becomes an issue when performance of an institution is tied to particular individuals.[5] A critical challenge for the country is to build systems that work irrespective of personalities running them – systems and procedures, rather than individual personalities, should drive performance.

While issues of adaptation have been on the agenda since the early 2000s, considerable progress happened during the presidency of Joyce Banda. The establishment of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change between 2012 and 2014 underlined this progress. This period saw the adoption of a National Climate Change and Environment Strategy (2012–2016) and the National Climate Change Investment Plan (2013–2016). An advanced draft of the National Climate Change Management Policy was developed by the end of 2013. Furthermore, climate change was recognised in national planning documents, such as the MGDS II (2011–2016).

Progress somewhat stalled during Peter Mutharika's presidency – climate change became a less pressing priority. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change was abolished and the Environment Affairs Department and Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services became part of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mining. This led to climate change being less prioritised compared to the other focal areas of this ministry. The National Climate Change and Management Policy, developed in 2013, was endorsed only in 2016. Both the National Disaster Risk Management (NDRM) Policy (2015) and the NRS (2016) were adopted only in the wake of the devastating floods that had inflicted heavy damage to the economy. The NDRM Policy had been in draft since 2010.

There is some evidence to suggest that the NRS was accelerated by Vice President Saulos Chilima, who was very keen to reverse the trend of economic growth being disrupted by disasters and had, until his removal from this portfolio, been a champion for disaster risk reduction.[28,5] However, Vice President Chilima is no longer directly involved in climate change and resilience issues in the Chakwera government, because of the shift of this portfolio to the Office of the President and Cabinet.

There have been some changes following the change of government in June 2020. The Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services and Environmental Affairs Department now fall under the Ministry of Forestry and Natural Resources. However, the Department of Disaster and Management Affairs (DoDMA) has moved from the Office of the Vice President to the Office of the President, signalling the highest possible level of commitment to dealing with issues of climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and resilience. In a special address on 19 October 2020, President Dr Lazarus Chakwera described climate change and natural disasters as existential threats and expressed his government's commitment to treating these issues with urgency. The following sentiments by the President are quite illustrative:

> 'Historically, we have tended to spend resources in responding to disasters when what we need is to build resilience so that we reduce the occurrence and effects of such disasters. This is why the focus of my administration is to design and implement comprehensive measures for preventing and responding to material disasters. Specifically, we are implementing the NRS in fulfilment of our manifesto to invest in actions like river bank protection, afforestation, catchment area conservation and disaster management.'[34]

While this is promising, the sector has not always been prioritised in terms of resource allocation. In the speech, the President hinted that his government may consider a carbon tax with proceeds ring-fenced for environment protection initiatives. In 2019, a similar tax was imposed. However, instead of being used to operationalise the National Climate Management Fund, the carbon tax proceeds were allocated to other competing activities. The inherent challenge in the management of the carbon tax proceeds partly arose because of the failure to finalise the institutional home for the NRS. Had this decision been settled, the agency housing the NRS could have been empowered to follow up on these matters.

Financial Resource Constraints

Existing reviews show that climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, social protection and resilience are amongst the least funded priorities in the National Budget. The situation is the same for the environment, forestry, wildlife and natural resource management sectors. According to the Civil Society Network on Climate Change (CISONECC),[35] an analysis done by Irish Aid in 2018 showed that during the implementation period of the MGDS II, climate change, natural resources and environment management received the least financial attention, with less than 1% of the national budget allocations between years 2012/13 and 2015/16.

Botha et al.[28] observe that inadequate financial resources hamper support to resilience building activities and coordinated preparedness and response activities. They note that no budget exists specifically for DRM that various government institutions can use, which, in turn, affects implementation. As noted earlier, preparedness and risk reduction receive very low funding. Consequently, resources meant to support long-term resilience end up diverted to support responses to current disasters.

The financial challenges experienced in these sectors are largely tied to the dominance of donors. As noted above, the disproportionate share of resources for the formulation of policies, legislation and implementation of activities comes from donors.[5] Pardoe et al.[36] demonstrate that limited government budget allocations reduce the ability of MDAs to be self-determined and set their own agendas. Consequently, they become dependent on donor-determined projects which may be selective in the aspects of climate change adaptation plans and policies that they support and divert focus away from government priorities. Donor funding is often unpredictable, which makes planning for the MDAs challenging.

Donors tend to prioritise their own interests which, in turn, undermine a sense of staff autonomy and agency to act according to their goals. Donor systems induce inter-agency competition for donor resources, which creates barriers to coordination and impedes the coherent cross-sectoral approaches that are necessary to effectively implement policies, legislation and programmatic activities. Overall, therefore, implementation of policy is affected adversely by high levels of uncertainty that stem from reliance on donor funding, rather than predictably on budget resource allocation.

An increasing number of NGOs are active in disaster risk reduction, flooding management and control as well as social protection. While this is a positive development, it has fostered moral hazard on the part of the government. Bussel and Fayaz[37] argue that if the government anticipates that actors will spend on disaster response, it will be less willing to allocate its own resources on preparedness and response. Levels of disaster preparedness are usually higher when more disaster-oriented NGOs are present, as NGOs generally focus their attention on disaster preparedness, including capacity building of civil protection structures, flood early warning systems, and other initiatives to promote community preparedness. However, some NGOs have the tendency to appear only during disasters and to disappear soon after a period of highly visible emergency response. The challenge, then, is to maintain high levels of preparedness beyond individual projects, and to sustain capacity and infrastructure investments over time.[28] This, therefore, makes it imperative to have dedicated on-budget provisions to ensure that districts have the requisite capacity to prepare for, and respond to, disasters as they happen, including building back with resilience.

Coordination Challenges

While the NRS brought attention to the cross-sectoral nature of resilience, there is still limited coordination at the implementation level among various institutions.[28] Despite increased interest for policies to recognise DRM and resilience, actual implementation is fragmented with insufficient coverage of interventions. There is not sufficient mainstreaming of DRM, resilience and climate change across sectors. Between 2011 and 2016, it is estimated that there were 38 different agencies implementing, or supporting the implementation of, resilience-related programmes, but they often remained poorly coordinated.[16] Most of Malawi's social protection programmes have independent implementing structures that often involve the same district stakeholders, which stretches district coordination capacities. The main challenge is that the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and Public Sector Reforms does not have sufficient capacity to hold all stakeholders accountable or to ensure cross-ministerial coordination. Although there is a joint National Technical Committee on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management that performs a coordination function, budgetary constraints mean that it is rarely able to meet quarterly as it is supposed to.

Frequent restructuring of the institutional frameworks for implementation, especially every time there is a change of leadership, compounds the coordination challenges. The resulting changes are often complex and contested, as responsibilities are split over different departments. This usually results in confusion around mandates and ultimately hampers the effectiveness of planning and implementation.[5]

Different financing structures and implementation modalities make it difficult to coordinate interventions such as the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP). This exacts unnecessary burdens on already stretched human resources for meeting varying requirements of different donors who fund different projects.[16,5] The fight for resources among government departments affects coordination and coherence of adaptation-building efforts.

When one agency is a recipient of funds for resilience or adaptation, others tend to step back. This is typically what has happened with the NRS, perceived to be an agenda of DoDMA, where it has been housed on an interim basis – yet a wider range of MDAs have a role to play if it is to be successfully implemented. In some cases, agencies promote conflicting policies. For example, the Ministry of Forestry and Natural Resources prohibits cultivation within 6m of river banks, while the Department of Irrigation promotes cultivation along river banks to take advantage of the rich alluvial soil deposits as a means of guaranteeing bumper harvests to ensure food security.[37]

Emerging evidence is demonstrating that sector policies remain more coherent in addressing immediate-term disaster management issues of floods and droughts rather than long-term strategies for climate change adaptation. Dougill et al.[38] observe that, for more effective mainstreaming of climate change adaptation, governments need to actively embrace cross-sectoral planning through cross-ministerial structures. In this case, designating the NPC as the institutional home for the NRS becomes an attractive option.

Stalled Decentralised Policy Reforms

As already observed, the stalled decentralisation policy reforms make it difficult for government agencies to operate effectively at the district level. Local governments across the country are in a state of flux. They are not functioning, let alone constituted in the manner initially construed in the statutes.[16] Functioning decentralised governance systems, accompanied by clear mandates and budgets, would promote ownership and improved governance at all levels.

The slow pace of decentralisation has had several negative consequences for the implementation of disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, social protection and resilience interventions. Local governments are not empowered appropriately to introduce and support interventions that could help build resilience. They are almost entirely dependent on the central government for operational resources, although there have been some changes in the realm of DRM. Where devolution of resources has occurred, commensurate resources to support services meaningfully in most sectors has not accompanied this devolution. In the 2020/21 budget cycle, for example, the gender and community development sectors were each allocated a total of MK 250 million, translating to an average of MK 9 million per district. With rising population growth, such budgets are realistically too low to capacitate districts for responding to the rising service delivery needs in areas such as gender equality, women's empowerment and child protection measures.[39]

Incomplete decentralisation also means that rarely are positions filled with sufficiently qualified personnel. For example, Disaster Management Officers are junior staff members with little power and limited resources to effectively perform their roles. Initially, less than one third of districts had an officer, although by 2020 that had improved to all districts. As highlighted in a World Bank report, the Environmental Management Act 2017 observes that for progress to be made, there is need to support the decentralisation process by increasing the transfer of funds and human resources to districts and appoint Environment Officers to be members of the District Executive Committee (DEC).[16] Without adequate staffing, local governments are not able to provide the coordination that is needed to implement policies, programmes and projects.

The failure of coordination at the national level manifests itself at the local level, as the local level mirrors the national-level structures. For example, the forestry sector has Village Natural Resources Management Committees (VNRMCs), DoDMA has Civil Protection Committees (CPCs), and the Environmental Management Act 2017 provides for the creation of Environment and Natural Resources Committees (ENRCs). Due to their overlapping mandates, the same people tend to belong to most sector-based committees. The institutional landscape becomes even more complex when NGOs create committees specifically for their interventions. This multiplicity results in a large time burden for members of these various structures, unnecessary duplication of efforts, and conflicting approaches which affect resilience building.

Local planning, financing and investment that build on civil society partnerships can enable the scaling of community initiatives. Limited involvement of local communities in Malawi's resilience sector has led to projects not being implemented successfully.[40] This leads to lack of ownership, which undermines potential impact. Proposed solutions must be designed with the involvement of those most affected, because they are the custodians of rich local knowledge and can provide valuable insights.

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4 PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE?

The combined impact of the implementation gaps or challenges discussed in the previous section is that nearly all districts in the country lack capacity for disaster risk governance and resilience building. As a result of the stalled decentralised policy reforms, local governments in Malawi have been largely characterised by weak governance where public sector actors are unable, or unwilling, to assume their assigned roles and responsibilities in protecting rights, providing basic services, public services and ensuring that public sector management is efficient and effective.

Weak governance contributes to vulnerability to disaster, linked to poverty and inequality, poorly planned urban development, and sluggish economic development. Creating functioning local governments holds huge promise to facilitate the turnaround in the implementation of climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and social protection programmes and policies.

There are some promising prospects of change following the transition of the electoral system from simple plurality to a majoritarian electoral system for those aspiring to become presidents of Malawi. The reinterpretation of Section 80 of the Constitution by both the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Appeal that winning presidential candidates must get 50% +1 votes at the polls has huge potential to alter fundamentally the underlying logic of political mobilisation, as those aspiring to become presidents will have to put together nationally-oriented coalitions of support.[41]

The change in the electoral system makes the provision of public, rather than private, goods the principal means of gaining or maintaining political power. This change could increase political incentives to address the obstacles that impede progress in the realms of disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and social protection. These potential changes are likely to be reinforced further if the public sector reforms championed by the Office of the Vice President, such as restructuring local governments to reflect their capacity and comparative advantage, are implemented.

Several countries have managed to change and improve the functioning of their public sectors significantly to facilitate better service delivery:

- In **Ethiopia**, a strong and sound administrative system has emerged with greater capacity for service delivery, through a retooled public service underpinned by merit-based recruitment, training and increased funding.[42]
- **Rwanda** has established a reputation for quick implementation of policies and for quickly changing course where and when necessary.[42] The government's preoccupation with performance monitoring and measuring results, functions for which numerous organs or institutions have been established or devised, supports the drive for implementation. For example, the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) assesses, at regular intervals, the satisfaction of the citizens with respect to various programmes.[43] A culture of systematic learning through leadership retreats and zero tolerance of corruption further enhances effective performance.
- **Tanzania** has recently ratcheted up its level of government effectiveness by cracking down on corruption, patronage and fraud, while demanding high levels of accountability from public sector employees. This has resulted in a new culture of responsibility, resulting in widely positive changes in the role and performance of its bureaucracy.[44]

These three countries' experiences demonstrate that breaking out of recurrent cycles of crisis requires strong commitment from the highest levels to implement rule-based systems and facilitate overall cultural change. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen commitment capacity to rule-based systems over time and to shift incentives from immediate political expediency to more steady functional performance on an ongoing basis.[32]

Some of the key steps towards changing systems of service delivery include:

- working within the existing context while touting ideal standards through processes of negotiation and conflict, experimentation and iteration
- developing initiatives that work with, or around, prevailing political incentives to transform the fundamental drivers of poor governance and service delivery in the long term
- working within the structures that the current policy paradigm creates to make mindset changes that might mitigate negative effects of policy on service delivery
- identifying and working with potential champions of change, or indeed positive deviants, to create potential pockets of effectiveness with the potential to diffuse change more widely.[23]

In late 2020, a public lecture by Vice President Saulos Chilima was critically acclaimed for the way he highlighted the need for mindset change among all actors to change Malawi's development trajectory. This bodes well for the possibility of Malawi following the example set by Ethiopia, Rwanda and Tanzania in this regard.[45]


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5 CONCLUSION

This paper has examined both the underlying dynamics of the general political economy context and those dynamics that specifically underpin climate change adaptation and resilience.

The key features of the general political economy context, to a very great extent, have been shaped and influenced by two framing events: the transition to democracy in May 1994 and the reconfiguration of the political elite's orientation away from agriculture to commerce as a major source of accumulation. These have culminated in a competitive clientelist settlement that perpetuates most of the practices, traditions and attitudes that were at the centre of the one-party dictatorship. The key elements of the practices, traditions and attitudes include patronage, clientelism, opportunism and corruption, a domineering executive, a weak citizenry and limited political space.

A combination of these factors has created an environment in which there is low propensity for the provision of collective public goods, entrenched rent-seeking tendencies underpinned by patronage driving policy, limited policy implementation characterised by widespread policy implementation failures or gaps, and superficial commitment to reforms designed to bring about efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness. The key observations in the general political economy context manifest themselves in the underlying dynamics around climate change adaptation and resilience as follows:

- Vagaries of the political cycle hinder implementation, especially in terms of priority setting, pace of implementation and challenges arising from institutional restructuring that often accompanies change of leadership.
- Dominance of donors affects agenda and priority setting, especially through funding. Government funding to resilience building is negligible and as such donor interests are prioritised over national interests.
- Weak institutional structures often undermine coordination and result in fragmented implementation. The NRS offers tremendous potential for coordination, but it is yet to find an institutional home. The situation is worsened by most stakeholders that prefer to work in silos, as well as a context of varying funding and reporting modalities requirements by donors whose projects are short-term and narrowly focused.
- Policies, plans, strategies, laws and regulations tend towards being implemented slowly, or not at all. This undermines efforts to nurture a robust and coherent implementation and monitoring framework to achieve the desired results.
- Stalled or incomplete decentralisation policy reforms result in rampant implementation failure at the local level. There is a huge disconnect between national level policy aspirations and what happens on the ground.

However, these challenges are not insurmountable. The jumping-off point to deal successfully with these challenges is to grasp fully the political economy context of resilience and adaptation at the national and local levels. This would allow for constant appraisal of the policy, project and programme implementation dynamics to ensure that activities are on course, proceeding at the desired pace and momentum, taking timely corrective action where necessary, and seizing opportunities as they arise to harness the achievement of the country's resilience and adaptation goals, objectives and aspirations, as outlined in various relevant policy documents.

O'Neil et al.[17] provide a multi-pronged starting point that entail the following:

- working within the existing context while touting ideal standards through processes of negotiation and conflict, experimentation and iteration
- developing initiatives that work with, or around, prevailing political incentives to transform the fundamental drivers of poor governance and service delivery in the long term
- working within the structures that the current policy paradigm creates to make mindset changes that might mitigate negative effects of policy on service delivery
- identifying and working with potential champions of change, or indeed positive deviants, to create potential pockets of effectiveness with the potential to diffuse change more widely.

It is also important for government to increase domestic funding for climate change adaptation and resilience interventions to minimise donor dominance in this sector as much as possible. This would allow the government to regain its autonomy over policy formulation and implementation processes.

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