

POLICY BRIEF

Vol 11 Issue 4

Irrigation Policy



**Centre for Environmental
Policy and Advocacy**



UTVIKLINGSFONDET

This Policy Brief has been produced with the financial assistance of the Development Fund of Norway, through the Sustainable Agriculture and the Lead Farmer Programme. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) and can under no circumstance be regarded as reflecting the position of the Development Fund of Norway.

1. Introduction

The National Irrigation Policy and Development Strategy was adopted in 2000 to guide irrigation development in the country. It outlines governments plan for the irrigation sector and the strategies for attaining irrigation development objectives. The policy highlights strategies in irrigation development, coordination within the sector and with other disciplines. The Irrigation Department is mandated to facilitate irrigation development for food security, poverty alleviation and national economic development.

2. Policy Objectives

Broadly, the policy highlights seven objectives for the irrigation sector which aim to:

- Contribute to poverty alleviation by targeting smallholder farmers in irrigation development
- Increase agricultural production and enhance food security
- Extend cropping opportunities and provide wider variety of crops
- Create an enabling environment for irrigation agriculture by encouraging the private sector to invest in irrigation development projects; and facilitating rural communities to manage irrigation development projects.
- Optimize government investment in Irrigation development
- Enhance human capacity for irrigated agriculture in various sectors for research in irrigation and technology and marketing for irrigation produce.
- Create and promote entrepreneurship in small scale irrigated agriculture sector

3. Broad Development Strategies

The policy highlights the following strategies for irrigation development:

- a. Identification of areas with irrigation potential. Government will identify areas with potential for irrigation and areas with greater potential (with a consideration on social and economic factors) will be prioritised. In addition, studies on irrigation and related fields will be undertaken during this process.
- b. Capacity Building- The policy recognizes the need to develop existing expertise and training institutions to offer programmes on irrigation development. These include on-job training and short courses. Having carried out a capacity/training needs assessment, government will improve and support irrigation training at various levels and also provide training programmes smallholder farmers. A continued assessment of training needs will be undertaken and similarly irrigation training programmes will be evaluated.

4. Procedures for irrigation Development

Farmer participation and ownership:

Using a participatory approach in irrigation development, farmers will participate in management of existing and development of new schemes. Irrigation schemes will be owned by beneficiaries through farmer organization to ensure that full

participation and sustainability of the schemes. Support will be provided to the farmer organizations to manage the irrigation schemes, marketing of inputs and supply of inputs. The organisations will also be supported to effectively operate an association, access credit services and liaise with government on land issues. Land and assets of the schemes will be transferred to local farmer organizations.

Environmental protection:

All irrigation development will be integrated with other natural resource management activities in order to protect the environment. An assessment will be done to ensure that negative environmental impacts are avoided. Similarly health impacts of irrigation will be monitored.

Scheme financing: Costs for the rehabilitation of government schemes prior to turnover will be borne by the government itself, but operation and maintenance costs after turnover will be borne by participating farmer organizations themselves. Government will explore ways of securing credit for irrigated agriculture sector through farmer-oriented intermediaries, encourage participation of existing associations and encourage investments in irrigated agriculture from savings.

Women's participation in irrigation: Rural communities will be sensitized on participatory methods and encouraged to incorporate female members in management committees. Government will promote the participation of women farmers in small scale irrigation and encourage women to own land. Gender will also be mainstreamed in irrigation programmes. The policy also recommends a fund for women exchange visits.

New technologies and Research in Irrigated Agriculture: The government will provide guidance in introducing irrigation technologies appropriate for small holder irrigation to the farmer groups managing the schemes. Research and development will be established for development of technologies (processing and labour saving technologies) and will be controlled by the machinery unit in the Department of Research.

Marketing and crop diversification: Government will explore alternatives to handling and marketing produce from the schemes. The department of Irrigation will support promotion of crop diversification.

Private sector and NGO participation in Irrigation Development: The government will create an environment that will encourage investment in irrigation agriculture by the private sector. Extension services will also be provided on irrigated agriculture.

5. Smallholder Irrigation Development and management

Scheme development: The policy intends to develop an awareness program to inform farmers of the potential irrigation agriculture sites identified and participatory approaches will be used to assist farmers to develop these schemes. Schemes will be developed in a manner that they are manageable and sustainable and minimize negative impacts on the environment. Catchment wide development plans will also be developed.

Transfer of management of existing government schemes: Government is determined to transfer the ownership, management, operation and maintenance of its existing irrigation schemes to farmers who are currently operating in these schemes. The schemes will be rehabilitated prior to hand over and government will support beneficiary farmers to form groups and associations.

Rehabilitation of old earth dams: Existing earth dams in areas with the potential for irrigation will be surveyed to establish the technical and social needs of the area. The evaluation will focus on the willingness of the farmers within those areas to form organizations and take full responsibility in operating and maintaining the dams. Construction work beyond the capacity of the beneficiaries will be contracted to private sector.

Assistance to informal irrigation sector: Survey will be done to assess areas under informal irrigation, its problems and constraints. Government facilitate access to information on simple irrigation technologies, support research and development, and review legislation related to use of wetlands.

6. Expected Outputs

The policy and strategy is expected to address key constraints in the irrigation sector and offer results that enhance poverty alleviation and increase food security of the rural masses. The policy's expected outputs are: Increase land put under irrigation based on the existing irrigation potential; increase production of crops from irrigated agriculture and improve on irrigated crop diversification; provide a well-coordinated market system established with considerable local processing, better storage and transportation of farm produce; improved participation of private sector and NGOs in irrigation projects: establishment of local organizations for full ownership of schemes; improved participation of women in irrigated agriculture; presence of Irrigation department at various levels; improvement in technical and administrative capacity in the irrigation department and improved capacity of private sector and training institutions.

7. Institutional Framework

Irrigation development will be under the mandate of the irrigation department and consultations will be done with the National Economic Council (NEC). Other related structures such as development partners, task forces, farmer communities, sector ministries and departments and private sector will also be involved.

7.1 Legislation

The government is to put in place an Irrigation Act; that would guide irrigation development and create avenues of operation among the different stakeholders through its regulations. The act will also exist in harmony with other existing sectoral legislation and all irrigation development will be coordinated with other disciplines by the National Irrigation board.

7.2 Role of Government

Department of Irrigation. The department's functions among others include the formulation of irrigation designs and specifications which will be the basis for

monitoring and evaluating irrigation works; and the promotion of an integrated irrigation approach in the planning and design of irrigation projects and irrigation infrastructure. The department will devolve its construction role to district level platforms and private sector and play a supervising role. The department will also have greater presence at different planning levels in the districts.

Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation: The ministry is responsible for coordinating with other ministries and government departments, parastatals and NGOs. Areas of possible coordination include promotion on irrigation, identification of farmer's interest, staff training, extension and research, catchment management, gender issues and management of farmer organizations and associations. The ministry will promote irrigated agriculture in accordance with Extension programmes will be promoted to support interested farmers and communities. Staff development programmes will also be done within the department.

Other ministries that play a major role in irrigation development are the Ministry of Water development, Ministry of Lands and Valuation and the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Wildlife. Ministry of Forestry Fisheries and Environmental Affairs is responsible for ensuring that irrigation agriculture is developed within sound environmental procedures and that it is consistent with principles of sustainable development.

7.3 Women in Irrigated Agriculture

The participation of women in smallholder agricultural activities is greater than that of men, hence the need for irrigated agriculture to cater for the interest of women farmers based on socio-cultural traditions within the country's rural setting. Women in irrigated agriculture need special consideration to acquire inputs as they are most vulnerable in terms of a limited resource base and inadequate credibility to qualify for credit. The following areas will therefore be considered; new technologies should be evaluated on the basis on equal participation, design of irrigation systems should take into account the needs of women and children, and local communities should encourage women to participate in irrigation.

7.4 Other institutions

Private Sector -The private sector will become involved in planning, designing and implementation of irrigation programmes. Technical assistance to consultancies will be offered by the National Irrigation Board.

Farming communities - Smallholder farmers will form organisations that will participate in planning and design on schemes, and their implementation. They will also meet costs of the operationalization and management of their schemes.

Private estate and commercial farmers- These will be encouraged to share their experience in irrigation development to benefit smallholder farmers and will be encouraged to diversify from traditional estate crops. They will also ensure capacity development of their staff and support surrounding communities by providing storage and processing facilities, a point to access farm inputs and a marketing outlet
Credit and banking institutions- Credit institutions will provide affordable credit facilities to irrigation beneficiaries, while banking institutions will recognize local

community organisations and provide credit for their capital development.

Non Governmental Organizations

NGOs will promote NGO-donor collaboration and are encouraged to provide services, equipment and materials for development of irrigated agriculture.

Donors

Donor support for irrigation development will be directed or guided by the policies and strategies highlighted in the National Irrigation Policy and Development Strategy (2000). The government of Malawi will indicate to donors' its priority areas at the same time donors will be able to outline their areas of interest in order to harmonize national needs and a donors' preferred areas of support.

National Economic Council: The council will ensure that donor support is in line with the objectives of irrigation development. The council is responsible for approving all development projects and assess whether they comply with relevant sector and national strategies and strategies.

National Irrigation board: The board will coordinate irrigation development and management in accordance with provisions from the strategy and Irrigation Act, approve standards and guidelines in irrigation development, coordinate donor activities and monitor progress in irrigation development.

District irrigation task forces: Each district will have a District irrigation task force to coordinate irrigation development at district level. It will advise the District development committee on District irrigation development plan.

National committee on irrigation and drainage: The committee provides a forum for exchange of ideas in irrigation development in the country. It will also ensure that training programmes match national demands and priorities.

Water resources board: the board ensures that holders of water rights adhere to the law and monitor water use and quality of water. It will also oversee pricing of water resources.

Training institutions: These institutions will be encouraged to formulate programmes that can build and maintain capacity in irrigation development. All formal courses will be supplemented by on-job training and a curricula will be developed by a selected task force.

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