

A Draft National Seed Policy Abandons Smallholder Farmers



Volume 12
Issue 1: January-June 2016

Nature's **Voice**



Centre for Environmental
Policy and Advocacy



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A Word From the Executive Director

WILLIAM CHADZA

I welcome you to the first edition of Nature's Voice in 2016. In the first half of the year, CEPA rolled out implementation of its new strategic plan. The plan focuses on natural resources, climate change and biodiversity.

CEPA celebrates the long awaited adoption of the National Climate Change Management Policy, having worked with various partners in providing input into the policy. We are proud that many of our aspirations are reflected in the policy. We look forward to contributing towards its implementation.

While we commend government for positively responding to policy inputs from non-state actors, we noted on the other hand resistance to proposals towards formulation of an integrated National Seed Policy that considers both formal and farmer seed systems.

Within the first half of 2016, CEPA embarked on developing an environmental information and knowledge management platform. This is an online library of environmental information from CEPA and other agencies. The platform contains a vast range of resources relevant to policy makers, civil society organizations, research institutions, academia and development partners. We believe that the

platform will be key in contributing towards our policy work.

As we continue implementing our policy work, we cherish the good partnership that we have with you.

CEPA celebrates the long awaited adoption of the National Climate Change Management Policy



From the Editor's Desk

AGATHA CHIMSEWA

As the agrobiodiversity keeps on getting depleted in Malawi, our cover story takes a look at the Seed Policy and how it has left out small holder farmers who are a majority in Malawi and contribute over 80% of food in Malawi. The cover story is followed by an article on engagement of government in relocation process of Karonga flood victims.

We also take a look at the involvement of duty bearers in leading communities in addressing land degradation in Nsanje district which has yielded good results. An article on the hot debate on what to do with the confiscated ivory follows. This comes at a time when Malawi's economy is not doing well and at the same time Malawi is trying to promote sustainable environmental management.

In addition we take our readers through different environmental policy advocacy work that CEPA was engaged in, in the first six months of the year 2016 in the 'CEPA in a Snap' section. Furthermore, we present to you CEPA's work in photos. This will be followed by 'a word from our friends' where some of our friends from Africa Centre for Biosafety share with us a summary report on the impacts of AGRA's pigeon pea and agro-dealer projects in Malawi.

Lastly, I would like to thank Stephen Chikuse, Dorothy Tembo-Nhlema, Stanley Mvula and Tiwonge Chirwa for doing a great job with this issue.

Enjoy reading this issue.



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A National Seed Policy For the Few

By Agatha Chimsewa, CEPA

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Reading the final draft of the National Seed Policy, one wonders if it is really for all Malawians. The policy will promote a 'small' formal seed system at the expense of 'a large' farmer seed system. It is sad the policy focuses more on promoting the formal seed system leaving behind the informal seed system which, ironically, provides over 70 percent of seeds used by the majority of smallholder farmers who make up about 80 percent of the agricultural sector in Malawi and contribute about 70 percent to the national food basket. It is a policy that recognises the importance of biodiversity and its contribution to food security yet falls short to promote such a rich heritage which, in part, enhances promotion and conservation of local varieties.

One would have expected agricultural reforms and policies to promote both the formal and informal seed systems and not work to strategically eliminate the latter from the national agricultural system. If anything, the National Seed Policy should have helped to organise the informal seed system making it more vibrant more effective. Malawi needs the formal and informal seed systems to create a robust and integrated seed system that can efficiently promote food security and nutrition at both household and national levels.

The National Seed Policy should promote an integrated seed system where both formal and informal seed systems are addressed to enhance food security and biodiversity conservation.



photograph: Isatah Phiri

Farmers selecting groundnut seed in readiness for the next growing season

The draft policy predominantly promotes the use of modern seeds which is a good development since such seeds respond well to different climatic conditions



and are resistant to most pests and diseases. We should, however, not overlook the fact that modern seeds come from local varieties which the policy wants to strategically eliminate from the system.

If the draft Policy is not revised, Malawi will surely find herself in a situation where she will have to import seeds as germ plasm from other countries after our rich and diverse local varieties are all gone. Are we really thinking in terms of sustainable development? Do we really want to deprive our posterity of the vast germ plasm Malawi has now?

Besides, not all Malawian farmers can access modern seeds due to cost implications. Others just prefer local varieties and open pollinated variety (OPVs) due to their unique taste and cultural reasons. So, why not offer them options?

It is therefore, it is wise to recognise seeds in the informal seed system that have traits that respond well to different climate, pests and diseases challenges, apart from being preferred by the majority of Malawians. Such agro-biodiversity need to be conserved and promoted to be used as germ plasm for future seeds.

From the drought and the floods that were experienced this year, it does not take a rocket scientist to know that the future of our food security hangs in balance. It is sad that most farmers cultivated maize which was adversely affected by El Nino-induced drought. This happened despite massive campaign encouraging them to cultivate different crops.

Local varieties and OPVs dominate Malawi's agro-biodiversity. If policies do

not promote such varieties, it will be difficult to conserve the rich agro-biodiversity and in the near future it will just be the few commercialised varieties that are promoted in the policy as the local ones extinct. This runs in sharp contrast to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) which Malawi ratified.

Therefore, it is imperative that Malawi should promote conservation of her biodiversity to enhance food diversity at both household and national levels. One way to achieve this is to develop and implement policies that promote conservation biodiversity.

The National Seed Policy should promote an integrated seed system where both formal and informal seed systems are addressed to enhance food security and biodiversity conservation. The National Seed Policy should be for all Malawians and not for only a few.



A display of local varieties of maize, groundnuts, pumpkins, soya, millet and okra at risk of extinction if the National Seed Policy is passed in its current form

photograph: Mahara Nyirenda



Self Help Africa Engages Karonga District Council and Chiefs on Relocation Process for Karonga Flood Victims

By Stephen Chikuse, CEPA

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Towards the end of 2015/2016 rainy season, heavy rains increased the vulnerability of communities in Karonga, particularly those from the flood-prone areas of Traditional Authorities (T/As) Kilupula and Mwakaboko.

Over the past years, these communities have been persistent victims of floods owing to the geographical locations of their areas. Both areas are located in the North Rukuru River catchment that drains much of the western and northern side of the district into Lake Malawi. During floods, these communities lose property, crops and some times lives.

Having realised the vulnerability the floods pose to the communities, Discovering Innovative Solutions for Communities to Overcome Vulnerability through Enhanced Resilience (DISCOVER)— a sister consortium to the Enhancing Community Resilience Programme (ECRP)— in collaboration with Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) are currently supporting a relocation process for the communities in these flood-prone areas. The process started by conducting advocacy meetings with Area Development Committees (ADCs) in the affected areas.

Officials from Meteorological Department, Karonga District Council, ADCs and media houses attended the meeting.

In the end, flood hotspots in the affected areas were identified and relocation plans were developed.

Besides, several issues pertaining to disaster risk reduction such as water, sanitation and hygiene were also mainstreamed in their respective Village Action Plans (VAPs).



Some ADC members from T/A Mwakaboko at the relocation plan meeting

To alert communities in the district on DISCOVER disaster risk management efforts, a live radio panel discussion was also conducted on Radio Dinosaur and Tuntufye FM whose panellists included officials from Karonga District Council, Meteorology Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health and traditional leaders.

Apart from the relocation of communities from flood-prone areas, the other issues discussed during the panel discussion included the effects of El Nino experienced during the 2015/2016 rainy season which increased floods in the district.

They also shared the lessons from the El Nino experience and solutions that can be put forth to arrest the situation in future.

It is expected that the relocation initiative by Self Help Africa will help reduce vulnerability to disasters of communities in the district by reducing their vulnerability to disasters.

photograph: Stephen Chikuse



Malawi Holds National Disaster Risk Management Platform Conference

By Dorothy Tembo - Nhlema, CEPA.

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Government in collaboration with development partners and civil society partners organised a National Disaster Risk Management Platform Conference from 30th to 31st May 2016.

The conference, the first of its kind, whose theme was 'Building resilience through recovery and risk reduction' and attracted over 230 participants from government, local authorities, development partners, national assembly, academia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the media.

The meeting was held to share best practices, progress, success stories, challenges and lessons learnt in the implementation of recovery and resilience interventions in the country.

The aim of the conference was also to foster dialogue and engagement on the integration of urban risk and resilience in development planning and implementation of risk management interventions. The gathering also discussed Disaster Risk Management (DRM) frameworks that have been recently developed.

The Vice-President of the Republic of Malawi, Right Honourable Dr Saulos Klaus Chilima—who is also Minister responsible for Disaster Management Affairs, was the guest of honour.

The Vice-President said time to worry about past failures is gone and emphasised the need for all stakeholders to join hands to breaking the cycle of disasters.

He said investing in preparedness saves US\$7 million of response. The delegates to the indaba made specific recommendations to be acted upon by different stakeholders.



photograph: Dorothy Tembo Nhlema

Vice-President Dr Saulos Klaus Chilima leaving the conference room

investing in preparedness saves US\$7 million of response



When Duty Bearers Lead the Communities in Fighting Environmental Degradation

By Charles Kabambe, CEPA.

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Issues of water scarcity, food insecurity due to droughts and dry spells, flooding and soil erosion are some of the common occurrences in Malawi.

Massive environmental degradation in almost all the districts of the country has played a major role in creating panic and uncertainty among communities and duty bearers as to what surprises nature has in store for them.

Moved by such uncertainties, some communities such as Group Village Headmen Nsamba and Bande in Nsanje - one of the districts highly prone to negative effects of climate change and environmental degradation - have developed action plans to facilitate adaptation and mitigation efforts against this phenomenon.

Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) and Churches Aid in Relief and Development (CARD) are working with 40 water committees from traditional

Massive environmental degradation in almost all the districts of the country has played a major role in creating panic and uncertainty among communities and duty bearers as to what surprises nature has in store for them



photograph: Charles Kabambe

Above and below: A water committee from GVH Bande developing an action plan



photograph: Charles Kabambe



authorities (T/As) Chimombo and Mbenje in Nsanje.

The name of this intervention was improved community resilience through increased water supply and food security project in Nsanje (which has now phased out) and was financed by the Scottish Government through Christian Aid.

The water committees are tasked to spearhead water resource management efforts to ensure availability of safe hygienic water for consumption and for irrigation.

They are expected to demand communities' rights to safe water and food while ensuring that their efforts are in line with government policy guidelines on food security and natural resources management.

Under the project, communities from Group Village Heads (GVHs) Nsamba and Melo in T/As Chimombo and Mbenje, respectively, developed action plans in March 2016 to facilitate the implementation of activities focusing on water and forestry management (afforestation and regeneration), food security and community awareness.

The aim of the action plans is to address issues of water scarcity and hygiene, rampant environmental degradation, food shortages and information exchange.

Despite CEPA linking communities and duty bearers to facilitate collaboration and implementation of the project, there was nothing concrete on the ground to portray progress.

This is why CEPA organised dialogue sessions between duty bearers and communities in both T/As to identify, probe and rectify the critical challenges slowing down work and to allow successful implementation.

Lack of capacity in decentralisation consultation, coordination and collaboration resulted in the stagnation of activity implementation in both GVHs Nsamba and Melo.

An immediate result from one dialogue meeting in Nsanje was a community stakeholders meeting called by GVH Nsamba to bring sanity in the implementation of the project in his area.

As a result of the leaders' intervention, over 2,000 trees were planted by the communities along flood-prone Nyachipere River. There is hope that the destructive river will be tamed in the long run if leaders play a leading role in ensuring that communities are implementing the action plans.



photograph: Mitsunge Mgoli

Nyachipere River in Nsanje.



photograph: Mitsunge Mgoli

Nsamba communities planting and watering trees along Nyachipere River.

CEPA Activities in



Community advocacy engagement in Chikwawa



CEPA and government inspection team measuring contamination of water in river close to Nkachira Coal mine in Karonga



Participants at a knowledge exchange workshop on a stakeholders oversight in Salima on 26th May, 2016



Officers from the department of Mines and CEPA conducting joint monitoring of mine at Nkachira Coal Mine in Karonga



Community member engaging department of mines officials on the proximity of a mine to a school in Karonga



A farmers' own seed bank in Hewe, Rumphi



Different foods displayed in Rumphi at a documentation event



A farmer explaining how to make Nthimpwa an energy giving food



A policy advocacy training workshop for the youths.

n Photos



Media engagement on irrigation intervention in Dedza



Seedling Nursery Salima Discover



Media beneficiary interaction in Salima



Information sharing media engagement in Dedza



Youths discussing issues affecting them



Field visit by British High Commissioner in Dedza



Irrigation farmers in Balaka



Community based bee keeping in Balaka

Why Malawi Cannot Sell its Ivory Stockpiles



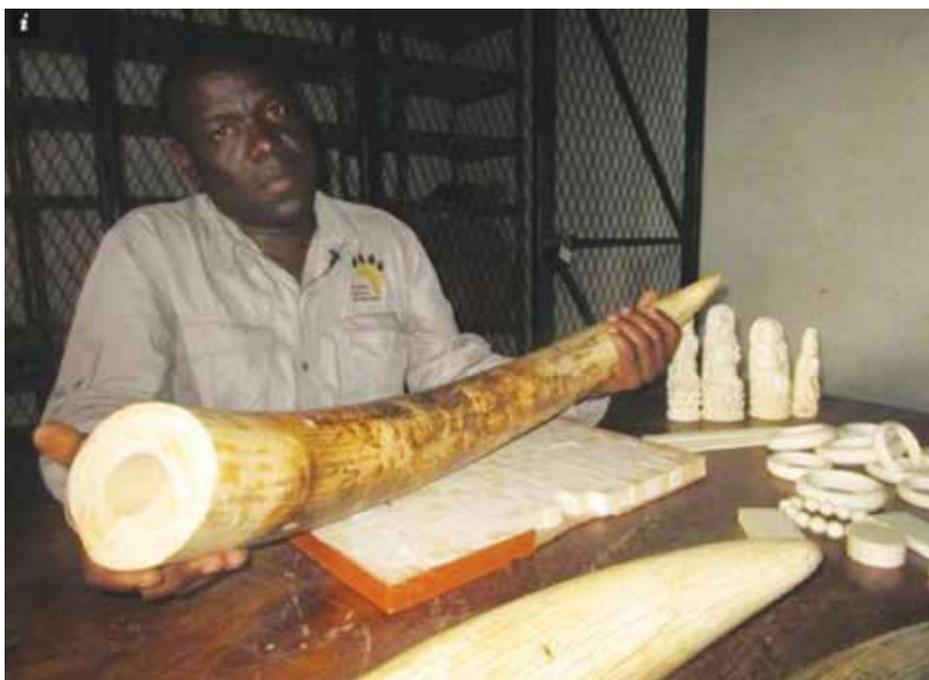
By Kat Stansfield

Lilongwe Wildlife Trust

Nevertheless, we must understand the facts before jumping into conclusion that selling the ivory would boost the fragile economic status of the country

CEPA has joined a consortium with five other NGOs to educate the Malawi public about the facts when it comes to the destruction of ivory. Misleading press coverage and the complexities of the associated legislation have led to much local debate as to whether Malawi's ivory stockpiles should be sold or destroyed. So, the NGOs produced a publication which aims at thwarting the public opinion that since Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, government should sell the stockpiles to generate the much needed funds. Why? Well, there are several reasons, but the main one being that it is simply not possible!

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), of which Malawi is a signatory, banned the international trade in ivory in 1989. This effectively prevents any international trade in ivory. Simply put, Malawi could not legally sell the ivory stockpiles. And holding out for the ban to be lifted is futile as even if there was a clause for international sale, Malawi could not be a part of it considering most of the stockpiles have been seized from poached animals rather than obtained from natural deaths/problem animals, etc. CITES would never allow the legal sale of contraband ivory.



photograph: Kat Stansfield

An officer shows confiscated ivory and ivory products

Legal international trades in the past have not helped the elephants. Two one-off sales were allowed in 1999 and 2008, but instead of flooding the market with ivory to bring the price down, it has been attributed to increasing demand and, therefore, poaching. It is worth noting that trade in legal ivory provides a cover for illegal ivory because it is almost impossible to distinguish between the two. As a result, it is extremely unlikely that CITES will ever agree to any sales again.



In the past five years, poaching has skyrocketed with elephants now more under threat than ever. If current rates continue, Africa's flagship and most iconic animal could be facing extinction in less than 10 years. Elephants are a keystone species and their loss will impact biodiversity which will in turn impact factors like agriculture and even human health. If we can't protect our elephants given the benefits of this keystone species, what hope do we have for the rest of our wildlife?

Malawi's own elephant population has taken a hit over the years. Exact data for the declines are scarce, but IUCN 'definite' population data suggests that 71 percent of the country's elephants declined between 2002 and 2006. Kasungu National Park is a good example; once home to over 2000 elephants in the 1980s now holds less than 50.

Aside from the legalities, Malawi has also come a long way in the last two years in standing up for its wildlife. His Excellency Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika along with 15 Ambassadors and High Commissioners in Malawi have all pledged their support in the fight against wildlife crime, laws are being changed to ensure such crimes are appropriately penalised, and customs and border officers are being trained to identify illegal wildlife products such as ivory and rhino horn. With all this in place, the torching of ivory could be the added impactful statement needed to show the world that Malawi will not tolerate the illegal ivory trade.

So, in the meantime, Malawi's four tonnes of ivory is doing nothing but adding to the financial strain of the country. There is need to tighten security to prevent ivory from getting into the hands of criminals. It's unable to be sold and not yet planned to be destroyed. The only way this ivory can make it into the market is illegally, therefore, the only people set to gain from an illegal sale are criminals, fuelling the trade and increasing demand.

Nevertheless, we must understand the facts before jumping into conclusion that selling the ivory would boost the fragile economic status of the country. This is not an option for government – the choice is either to keep or destroy it. Which option do you think would make the most impact on Malawi's values and action towards its wildlife?

Visit this link https://issuu.com/malawiwildlife/docs/rationale_ivory_destruction_malawi_ to read the publication.



A heap of ivory burning as a police officer looks on

photograph: Kat Stansfield

CEPA in a SNAP

January - June Activities

CEPA was at the fore front of many national and community events related to natural resource management, climate change and biodiversity over the first half of 2016

ECRP Participates in WED Commemoration, EBAFOSA Launch and Climate Change Week

June was another exciting month. CEPA, through Enhancing Community Resilience Programme (ECRP), participated in the commemoration of the World Environment Day (WED), EBAFOSA launch and the Climate Change Week at Bingu International Conference Centre in Lilongwe from 6th to 10th June 2016. His Excellency the State President Professor Peter Mutharika on 6th June graced WED whose theme was Join the race to make the world a better place. WED offered a rare opportunity to ECRP partners to showcase what they are doing to mitigate the impact of climate change and



photography: Dorothy Tembo Nhlema

ECRP pavilion showcasing the difference between the three stone cooking approach and the improved cook stoves



photography: Dorothy Tembo Nhlema

Some of the products at the ECRP pavilion

conserve natural resources. On display were Chitetezo Mbaula and natural resources based products such as honey, rice, chidede, moringa powder and oil. As part of information sharing, CEPA and partners distributed different publications such as policy briefs, newsletters, hazard maps and brochures. Most, if not all, people who visited ECRP stand were impressed with various interventions being promoted, contacts were exchanged and some products on display were sold.

CEPA, CARD Commemorate World Environment Day in Nsanje

Considering the effects of environment degradation and climate change, Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) in partnership with the government, Churches Action in Relief and Development (CARD) and other stakeholders on 9th June 2016 conducted an awareness campaign in the area of Group Village

Head Melo in Nsanje district to commemorate the World Environment Day. Activities to mark the day, whose theme was Join the race to make the world a better place, were held under the Improved Community Resilience through Increased Water Supply and Food Security Project funded by the Scottish Government.



photography: Dorothy Tembo Nhlema

CEPA Programmes Director Herbert Mwalukomo speaking at the event.



photography: Dorothy Tembo Nhlema

Participants viewing the stands displayed during the event

Compliance of Mining Regulatory Framework Strengthened

CEPA and the Department of Mines with support from Tilitonse Fund through the Strengthening Mining Governance in Malawi project undertook a joint inspection to enforce compliance of mining regulatory framework in selected mines in the northern region of Malawi. The activity took place in March and May this year. Gaps were identified in compliance with the regulations and recommendations were made towards strengthening compliance and adherence with the mining regulations as a way of ensuring sustainable management of mineral resources.

The joint inspection provided a platform for government, mining investor's and CEPA to engage and address many pressing issues regarding environment, occupational health and safety, safe storage, handling and use of explosives. Issues relating to water quality and submission of mineral production figures and payment of

royalties were also monitored.



Photograph: Cynthia Simkonda

Officers from the departments of Mines and Water Resources assessing contamination of stagnant acidic rainwater from Nkachira Coal Mine

CEPA In GMO Awareness Campaign



Photograph: Agatha Chimsewa

A panellist responding to a question during the live GMO discussions on MBC Radio 2

By Agatha Chimsewa

There is generally little or no knowledge about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Malawi. To close the knowledge gap, CEPA facilitated a live panel discussion on MBC Radio 2 with experts from the Environmental

Affairs Department, University of Malawi, Cotton Council of Malawi, Biodiversity Conservation Initiative, farmers organisations and research institutions responding to questions and comments from students, farmers organisations, civil society

organisations (CSOs) and research institutions. The listeners wanted to know what GMOs are, their status in Malawi and the country's regulatory framework. The panel discussion was organised with support from the Development Fund of Norway.

CEPA Participates in BCI Field Day



Photograph: Agatha Chimsewa

A member of Mkombezi Seed Bank in Rumphi explains how groundnuts performed this year as the guest of honour Chief Mwanhunikira takes note

Field days are a golden opportunity for researchers, extension workers, agro-dealers and farmers to share skills and knowledge on different agriculture technologies and interventions. CEPA participated in one such field day at Mkombezi Seed Bank in Rumphi to appreciate resilience of different varieties of crops in the face of drought that hit the district this year. The field day, organised by the Biodiversity Conservation Initiative (BCI), brought together farmers, researchers, environmentalists, agricultural officials and traditional leaders.

CEPA in a SNAP

January - June Activities

CEPA was at the fore front of many national and community events related to natural resource management, climate change and biodiversity over the first half of 2016

CSOs reviews the Draft National Energy Policy

Through the Sustainable Energy for All Civil Society Movement, a review of the draft National Energy Policy was conducted. The stakeholders felt that the Department of Energy took a good move to develop the policy. They expressed optimism that the policy will help to coordinate various efforts in the energy sector.

The stakeholders also felt that with high levels of forest degradation to charcoal as a source of energy, the policy will provide direction on alternative and efficient sources of energy such as briquettes, Liquefied Petroleum Gas and improved cook stoves, among others.

The reviewers said the draft policy requires some inputs on gender as one of the priority areas which is being integrated in various projects. Boys, girls, men, women and other groups of people are affected differently with energy challenges.

They also cited renewable energy and electricity as other priority areas to be addressed to ensure that the policy is comprehensive. Other priority areas will have to be merged and policy statements need to be reviewed.



SE4 All Malawi members reviewing the National Energy Policy

Photograph: Dorothy Tembo - Nhlema

My Life my Choice Youth, Partners Trained in Policy Advocacy

By Cynthia Simkonda

Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) organised a two-day trainer of trainers (ToTs) workshop for My Life My Choice (MLMC). The workshop, held from 27th to 28th April 2016, equipped both the youth and MLMC partners with vital skills and knowledge that will enable them to effectively advocate and lobby for different issues affecting their lives. So far, 142 youths have been trained. It is expected that the youths and partners will play a crucial role in influencing policy and decision-making processes. The Operation Days Work, through the Development Fund of Norway, supported the workshop.



My Life My Choice youth and partners during the policy advocacy training workshop

Photograph: Cynthia Simkonda

A WORD FROM OUR FRIENDS



Impacts of AGRA Pigeon Pea, Agro-dealers Projects in Malawi

By Dr Stephen Greenberg,
ACB.

Recently the African Centre for Biosafety (ACB) conducted research on the impacts of two projects sponsored by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) in Malawi <<http://acbio.org.za/green-revolution-dead-end-in-malawi-two-case-studies-agras-pigeon-pea-project-and-malawis-agro-dealer-strengthening-programme-masp/>>. One project was on pigeon pea integration into maize farming systems in central Malawi. The second one was the Malawi Agro-dealer Strengthening Programme (MASP), a national programme to establish a private enterprise agricultural input distribution network, mainly of Green Revolution inputs, specifically certified and hybrid seed, synthetic fertilisers, and industrial agrochemicals.

The report, researched by Dr Blessings Chinsinga from the University of Malawi with contributions from ACB, found the projects to facilitate the expansion of corporate Green Revolution technologies into African agriculture. There is a resulting displacement and disruption of pre-existing systems, of dispossession and extraction of material and other resources, with distorted benefits for a relative elite within Africa. The argument is not so much that there should be no accumulation whatsoever in Africa, but rather that this should not be inequitable and that Green Revolution programmes monopolise public sector and donor resources.

There is a resulting displacement and disruption of pre-existing systems, of dispossession and extraction of material and other resources, with distorted benefits for a relative elite within Africa



A pigeon pea field in Chamama, Kasungu

Photograph: Stephen Greenberg

A WORD FROM OUR FRIENDS

Diversity spreads risk. Therefore, there should be diversity in techniques and methods to ensure that if some fail, others can keep going. The current State-capital consensus monopolises financial resources and decides how to channel these resources in their own interests, which are financial interests. A diversity of programmes and activities are needed to build resilience in the face of risk. This means decentralisation, a wider distribution of resources, focusing on local economies first and working with local priorities to see what type of support can be provided.

The pigeon pea project is part of AGRA's work on integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) which is more or less identical to conservation agriculture (CA). Both of these have some good agro-ecological practices at their core: minimum disturbance of soil structure, permanent ground cover and crop rotation/intercropping. But ISFM and CA work with 'hybrid' agronomic models, including the 'judicious' use of synthetic fertiliser and herbicides and use of hybrid seed. This portends the advance of genetic modification, glyphosate and synthetic fertilisers, even as this technology begins to falter elsewhere.

The pigeon pea project with National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM), International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS) and others aimed to introduce pigeon peas into sites in central Malawi for intercropping with maize. In theory, it was based on soil fertility benefits of legume rotations with maize, but

The pigeon pea project is part of AGRA's work on integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) which is more or less identical to conservation agriculture (CA).



Agro-dealer at Wimbe, Chamama

Photograph: Stephen Greenberg

A WORD FROM OUR FRIENDS



in reality the focus was on yields and markets. Certified seed came from ICRISAT. NASFAM organised farmer participation and extension support, provided a market and other services for participating members. Farmers participated in the project, but production dropped off sharply after the end of the three-year project.

A flaw in the project design was that pigeon pea was introduced into areas with no history of local use. This meant there was no pre-existing local demand. The project, therefore, relied on an external buyer (NASFAM), but this was not commercially sustainable without the project subsidies. The introduced seeds were improved varieties from elsewhere in the country. There is no indication of any prior assessment of local legume use or whether farmers had any priorities for developing their own legume seed.

An external introduction may displace locally used, adapted legume varieties through subsidised sponsorship. Some of these varieties may be lost. This narrows agricultural biodiversity and increases risk. It reduces local nutritional diversity. Introducing new genetics into a local pool could have value, but if it displaces other varieties and then fails after withdrawal of external resources, then it can have lasting damage, especially in variety loss.

MASP, the agro-dealer programme, offers an example of the privatisation of extension services. These private services are trained to be conduits for corporate-industrial agricultural inputs, dispensing product-related technical advice. This for-profit extension network is considered more investment-worthy than public sector extension, which is forced to secure contracts to fund practical work. The public sector extension service is then captured by corporate interests.

In reality, the small-scale agro-dealers in MASP struggled to compete in a market dominated by multinational corporate interests with a huge cut in the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP). They also have their own channels in farming areas. Seasonality of business means there are times when the agro-dealer must do something else for survival and they may not have resources to sustain the business.

Demo plots are a very useful instrument, but the conditions must accord with those in the farmers' plots otherwise success stories cannot be replicated. Many improved seed varieties work well in the demo plot but cannot be transferred into the much harsher conditions outside the demo plot. The demo plots are currently used for improved varieties with irrigation, fertiliser and agrochemicals. As with the pigeon pea, activity dropped off markedly at the end of the project, meaning it was not sustainable for agro-dealers to keep the plots going. Without corporate sponsorship, the demo plots stop functioning. The challenge is to think about what can be done in a relatively short time that continues functioning even without external resources, and that can then be built on. The answer to that must come from farmers and their households.

In reality, the small-scale agro-dealers in MASP struggled to compete in a market dominated by multinational corporate interests with a huge cut in the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP).



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