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 Malawi, Factor 17: Good Governance

## **Governance and Nationwide Food Security in Malawi**

By 2050 there will be a projected nine billion people; to feed all of these new people we will need to double crop production worldwide. To reach this goal it is imperative that corporations, NGOs, communities and governments work together. Particularly, it is the government's job to improve their country by striving to reach certain benchmarks such as the Millennium Development Goals that range from improving maternal health to ensuring environmental sustainability.

Malawi is a beautiful country with a diverse range of breathtaking landscapes that range from mountain ranges to plains to lakes, all inhabited by a wide range of flora and fauna. Malawi also has a high number of nature preserves. Hopefully Malawi will be able to maintain these beautiful nature preserves while also increasing food production ("Attractions").

There is an impressive range of animals in Malawi with over six hundred and fifty varieties of birds and an estimated 700 species of fish in the renowned Lake Malawi. With the successful re-introduction of the black rhino and the planned re-introduction of lions gives Malawi good prospects in the future regarding animal diversity ("Wildlife").

There are many issues in Malawi such as under irrigated land and a lack of sustainable agricultural practices. Both heavily impact Malawi's food security and the reliability of their smallholder farms. Also Malawi has very high rates of malnutrition in young children. Malawi's education system needs attention due to a large amount of their population being of school going age but an education system unequipped to handle so many students. The government of Malawi has struggled with the allocation of funds.

Malawi is one of the most densely populated countries in sub-Saharan Africa with a population density of over 200 people per square kilometer; because of this high density, the average household only has one hectare of land holdings (ACDIVOCA). The average household has four to five residents half of which are ages fifteen or under (The DHS Program 7). Even though such a high number of people are of school age very few will ever see school through to completion. Only 58% of students will ever finish primary school (Ripple Africa). Due to many factors, such as being held back in primary school, fees and illness only 13% of secondary school aged people (13-17) actually attend a secondary school (Ripple Africa). Collectively only 22% of people will ever finish secondary school and only 5% will go beyond (The DHS Program 2).

Of this large number of children, 81% will receive all recommended vaccines while only 2% will receive none (The DHS Program 9). Seventy-seven percent of households have access to an improved water source (a water source that has protection from outside contamination) (WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Supply and Sanitation). But about 60% of children between 6 and 59 months have some form of anemia and 47% of children are stunted from malnutrition (The DHS Program 10). While the government does have a public healthcare system, only fifty dollars per capita is spent on it (Ripple Africa). Another major issue for healthcare in Malawi is that there is only one doctor for every 88,300 people so most hospitals and clinics are run by clinical officers (four years of study) and medical assistants (three year of study) (Ripple Africa).

A major factor in malnutrition is a lack of crop diversification in Malawi. Maize makes up 54% of caloric intake (Minot 1). A majority of farms (97%) grow some form of maize. Other common crops are Cassava (7% caloric intake) and potatoes and sweet potatoes (8% caloric intake) (Minot 3). Even though Maize is

such an important crop, Malawi has some the most volatile maize prices in the world, sometimes reaching four times that of international prices (Minot 6). This is because of unreliable yields caused by land degradation and declining soil fertility because of a lack of crop rotation (IFAD). Also most farms rely on weather which doesn't affect drought resistant crops like cassava but heavily affects crops of maize (Rural Poverty Portal)(Minot 1). Most of the government run irrigation systems have fallen into disrepair (Rural Poverty Portal). Other barriers to food security are high input costs with the fertilizer cost per hectare equaling thirty-nine dollars (Land O'Lakes Inc)(Ripple Africa).

Malawi is currently able to produce a surplus of food, but this does not affect greater issues such as malnutrition and lack of irrigation in Malawi because of poor government practices (Food Security Portal). Malawi's Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) is instrumental in creating Malawi's food surplus in recent years because of the subsidy it puts on fertilizer but the FISP does little to help the other major areas of food insecurity in Malawi (Mazunda 2). The FISP is a subsidy program that provides fertilizer and seeds to qualifying farms; about half of farms in Malawi qualify (Malawi: Bountiful Maize Harvest Tempered by Input Cost)(Mazunda 1). The program subsidizes enough fertilizer to produce the 2.2 million tons of maize required to feed the country and still have over a million tons as surplus though the validity of these reports has been questioned ("Malawi: Bountiful Maize Harvest Tempered by Input Cost")(Mazunda 2). Sadly the FISP is incredibly expensive; in the 2008/2009 season, it cost seventy-four percent of the total agriculture budget and sixteen percent of the total national budget (Mazunda 1). The FISP also monopolizes the human resources of the Ministry of agriculture and food security for up to four months every year for the preparation and implementation of the FISP (Mazunda 2). The monopoly the FISP has on budget and human resources is detrimental to the overall issue of food insecurity in Malawi because it pulls away money from other programs like the green belt initiative a large scale irrigation program (Mazunda 1). The green belt initiative would be incredibly beneficial in Malawi because only 2% of land is irrigated and rains are becoming less reliable (Harvest Help 2). The lack of good governance in Malawi contributes to food insecurity by failing to fund irrigation programs that would lessen the population's reliance on rain and doing little to promote crop diversification which contributes to high malnutrition rates (UNICEF).

The FISP also does little to affect one of the other issues plaguing Malawi: malnutrition from lack of crop of diversification (UNICEF). Maize still continues to be the primary source of calories in Malawi. In 2010 3,419,410 MT of maize were grown in 2010 compared to the second most yielding crop rice only had 110,106 MT produced (Food Security Portal). This lack of diet diversity leads to high rates of malnutrition; about sixty percent of children under five have vitamin A deficiency (UNICEF). Also years of just growing maize on the same land has depleted the soil and raised the amount of fertilizer needed for a successful crop ("New Farming Practices Grow Healthier Children"). This increased need for fertilizer is one of the reasons why the FISP is so important ("New Farming Practices Grow Healthier Children"). The lack of good governance in Malawi causes degradation of the environment through overuse of fertilizer as well as water scarcity from lack of irrigation. The lack of good governance also causes malnutrition because it does not promote crop diversification.

In the Mzimba district of Malawi, the Soils, Food and Healthy Communities (SFHC) project started a scheme that teaches farmers how to grow and cook different types of legumes such as soybeans, peanuts and pigeon peas ("New Farming Practices Grow Healthier Children"). The process involves planting a variety of legumes one year making the soil more fertile so that the following year less fertilizer is needed for a successful crop of maize ("New Farming Practices Grow Healthier Children"). The SFHC project also teaches farmers' families recipes to cook with these new types of food this helps increase the use of the new crops lowering malnutrition rates in the area ("New Farming Practices Grow Healthier Children"). The SFHC project had about seven thousand participants in 2011 and has projected that they will only be able to add about five hundred participants a year ("New Farming Practices Grow Healthier

Children”). Food production mostly of maize is trending upward but this does little to help the other issues like malnutrition and lack of irrigation in the country (Food Security Portal).

If the governance of Malawi improved by moving some of their budget away from the FISP and to other projects like the green belt initiative and a government program similar to the SFHC project many things would improve. A funded green belt initiative would greatly reduce the impact of drought and other weather related issues. While a project similar to the SFHC project would create much more sustainable farms. As well as help to lower the rates of malnutrition in Malawi. This would greatly help smallholder farmers by giving them more reliable yields with lower input costs.

Getting rid of reliance on chemical fertilizer and relying more on crop rotation would be beneficial to the environment because the soil is being fertilized more naturally. Lowering malnutrition rates would greatly improve health especially for pregnant women and children under 5 (UNICEF). More reliable food production would hopefully allow more farms to grow cash crops that improve the economy and lowering poverty.

Another factor that will affect governance within Malawi is education and population growth. Half of Malawi’s population is of school going age (The DHS Program 2). With so many children in Malawi it is very important that they get a quality education. Another issue that is linked to education is population growth. Malawi is already one of the most densely populated countries in Africa, and studies have shown that the higher the education level of a household the fewer children the household had (The DHS Program 5). Therefore increasing nationwide education would likely reduce the rate of population growth and lower the risk of severe overpopulation.

To improve food security, it is recommended that the Malawian government moves funds away from the FISP and to other programs that will have greater long term benefits. Malawi should put more funds toward the Green Belt Initiative to increase the amount of irrigated land and reduce reliance on rain for watering crops. It is also recommended that the Malawian government create a program that mirrors the SFHC project. This project would greatly help to lower rates of malnutrition if the results are similar (IRIN News). The government could promote consumption of the new foods grown by having a modified version of the recipe days that are part of the SFHC project in which volunteers teach farmers recipes that use their new crops but in a system that is better suited for providing education nationwide.

The idea addresses Millennium Development Goal number one which is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by increasing the nutritional value of the average diet and increasing food production. As well as Millennium Development Goal number 7 which is to ensure environmental sustainability. It will do this by reducing reliance on fertilizer by introducing crop rotation to the average farmer and making more sustainable water sources by increasing the amount of irrigated land (UN).

The Malawian government could effectively work with the SFHC to create a government program that provides the same assistance as the SFHC project only nationwide. Local communities would play a very important role in the project and use of the foods they have grown to improve the situation. Another important role of local communities is creating word of mouth advertisement for the programs. Creating a greater demand for the knowledge the program provides as well as spread the recipes and other things that were taught at recipe days

With the recommendations of moving money away from the FISP and moving funds to the Green Belt Initiative and a project the mirrors the SFHC project, Malawi hopefully will be able to continue to create a surplus of food every year while heavily cutting back on malnutrition related illness. The increase in irrigation should also make crops much more reliable and less dependent on the weather lessening the impact of climate change in Malawi. If the recommendations do improve countrywide food production

and health some farmers can rise above subsistence farming and start to grow cash crops which will improve the economy.

If all recommendations and predictions do become reality, other countries in sub-Saharan Africa will be able to look at Malawi as proof that it is possible to grow enough food to be food secure. Those countries will also see the impact food security has on economies and health and will work even harder to help reach the goal of feeding nine billion people by 2050. Malawi's new and improved economy will hopefully help to improve the economies of surrounding countries helping to make food security more possible for those surrounding countries.

To achieve these goals will require the cooperation of NGOs, the Malawian government and other factions. This type of cooperation will be required worldwide to be able to be able to feed 9 billion people by 2050. It is possible but only if we as a world work together to reach this goal. After all Norman Borlaug said, "Food is the moral right of all who are born into this world" (Brainy Quote). if world governments and other organization work like they truly believe this, we will be able to feed nine billion by 2050.

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