“They Won’t Let Us Starve But They Won’t Let Us Live”

The Politics of Hunger and Aid Dependence in Malawi

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The importance of aid to economic, social and political development has been widely debated. Arguments have tended to focus either on the question of aid effectiveness or the political effects of aid. This thesis seeks primarily to contribute to the question of the political impact of aid on relationships of representation and interactions between citizens and the state; but it also demonstrates the importance of the politics of aid to its effectiveness. I take the literature on aid and politics as my starting point, which focuses on the interactions between donors and governments and the manner in which these undermine political sovereignty (Whitfield 2009; Abrahamsen 2000; Williams and Young 2012). This literature conceptualises aid interactions as taking place around a negotiating table or in the state's bureaucracy, within a 'sovereign frontier' (Harrison 2007).

Using Malawi's agricultural sector – a politically important sector in a heavily aid-dependent country – as my case study, I build on this literature in two ways. Firstly, I contend that developments in aid modalities and donors' efforts to restructure the Malawian state have resulted in more substantive infringements of sovereignty than previously argued. Donors have become constitutive of domestic politics. Aid negotiations and resistance to conditionalities now occur at all levels of the state and within domestic political systems. Thus, resistance to aid conditionalities, formal and informal, has shifted from the bureaucratic into the political realm, where it has frequently become the prerogative of the executive. Secondly, in order to fully appreciate the effects of aid dependence, primarily how it alters everyday interactions between citizens and the state, studying down the state is imperative. Here, aid dependence has profound effects on state-society relationships and political representation in Malawi, thereby preventing a move towards more responsive policy-making and away from patronage.

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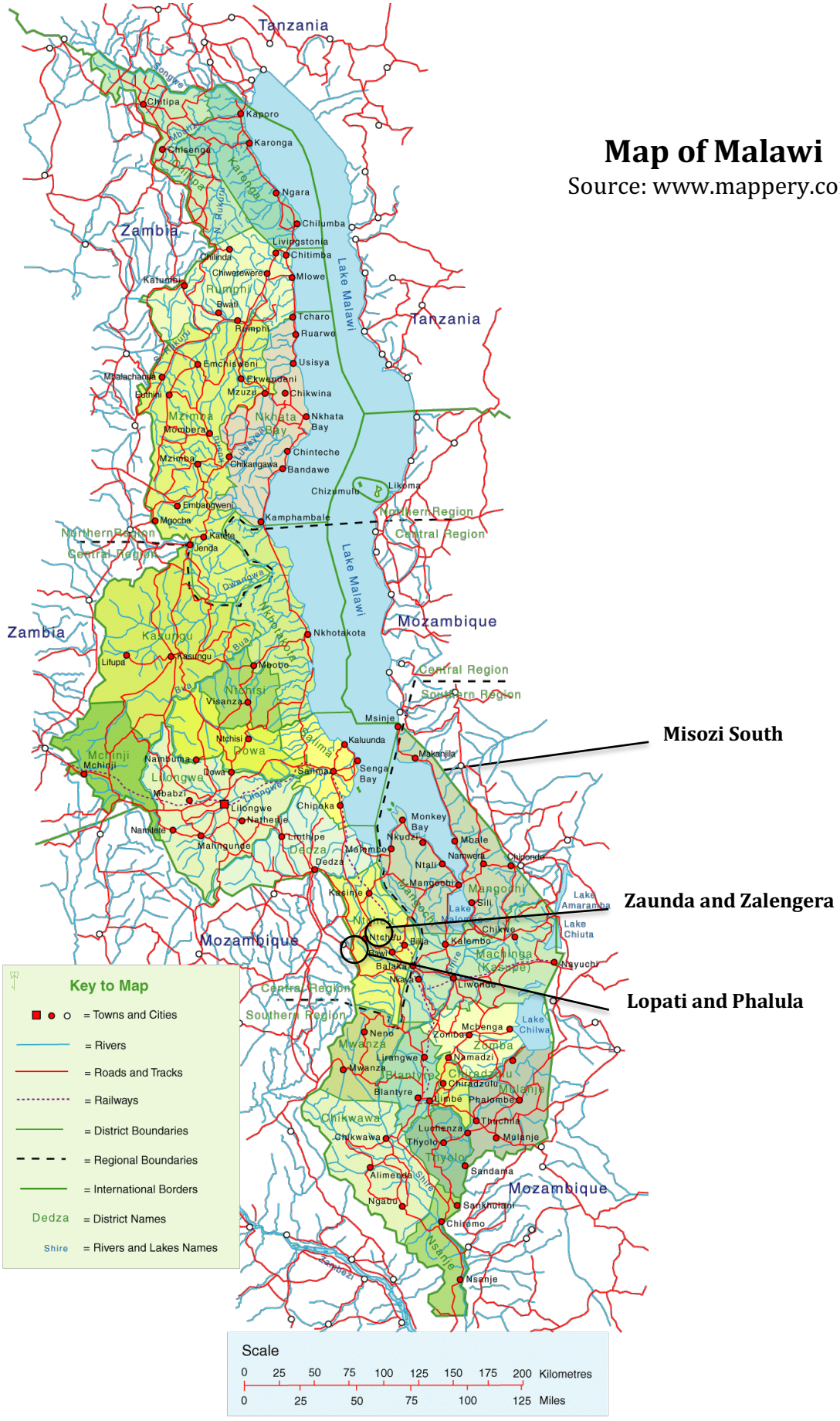
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Map of Malawi

Source: www.mappery.com

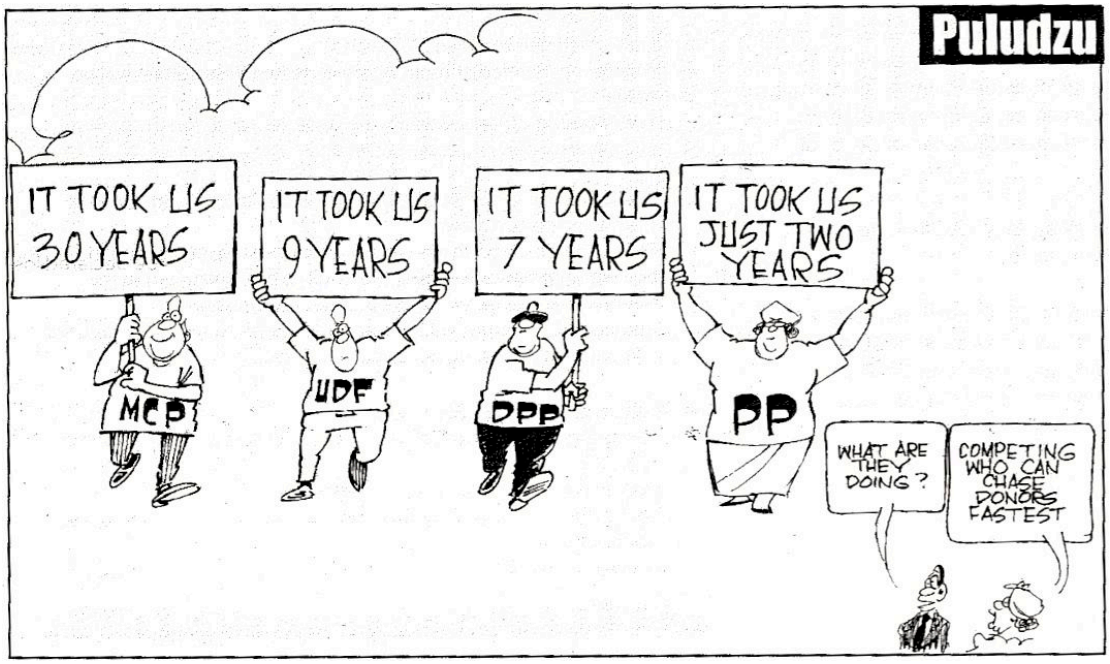


List of Acronyms

ACE	Agricultural Commodity Exchange
ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
AforD	Alliance for Democracy
AfDB	African Development Bank
ALNRC	Agriculture, Land and Natural Resources Committee
ASWAp	Agriculture Sector-Wide Approach
BWI	Bretton Woods Institution
CABS	Common Approach to Budget Support
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CfSC	Centre for Social Concern
CISA-Net	Civil Society and Agriculture Network
CONGOMA	Council of NGOs in Malawi
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DADO	District Agricultural Development Officer
DCAFS	Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security
DfID	UK's Department for International Development
DoDMA	Department of Disaster Management Affairs
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FAO	United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation
FEWS-Net	Famine Early Warning System Network
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FISP	Farm Input Subsidy Programme
FMB	Farmers' Marketing Board
FUM	Farmers' Union of Malawi
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GoM	Government of Malawi
GTPA	Grain Traders and Processors Association
HIPC	Highly-Indebted Poor Country
HRCC	Human Rights Consultative Committee
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development

IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPI	Institute for Policy Interaction
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JPAF	Joint Performance Assessment Framework
JTFSN	Joint Taskforce on Food and Nutrition Security
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
MEJN	Malawi Economic Justice Network
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MISC	Management and Information Systems Committee
MoAFS	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
MP	Member of Parliament
MT	Metric Tons
MVAC	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee
NASFAM	National Association of Smallholder Farmers of Malawi
NFRA	National Food Reserve Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education
NSO	National Statistical Office
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PS	Permanent Secretary
RAO	Regional Agricultural Officer
RoM	Republic of Malawi
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SGR	Strategic Grain Reserve
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
TA	Traditional Authority
TIP	Targeted Input Programme
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USP	Universal Starter Pack
VH	Village Head
VP	Vice President
WB	World Bank

Introduction



The election edition of *The Malawi News* in May 2014 featured the above sketch by Puludzu, Malawi's best-known political cartoonist (Puludzu 2014). The cartoon depicts the four main presidential contenders whose parties have all held power since independence in 1964. Each of the candidates is holding a placard stating how long their party had been able to retain donor support, or in the words of the commentator in the cartoon, how long it had taken them to chase Malawi's donors away. In the absence of this explanation, the casual observer would be forgiven for thinking that each candidate was advertising the length of his or her party's control of the presidency, for none of them survived the withdrawal of donor support for any significant length of time. Thus, Puludzu raised one of the most important questions of the 2014 election campaign and the one that is central to this thesis: what is the role of aid in domestic politics in Malawi?

Puludzu's cartoon also reflected the fraught relationship between Malawi's donors and Joyce Banda's government, which prevailed at the time of the presidential, parliamentary and local elections held in May 2014. The majority of donors had chosen to suspend their aid in October 2013, following the exposure

of gross corruption and misappropriation of funds by civil servants. In doing so, the donor community had once again demonstrated its willingness to back up its threats with concrete action, even at the expense of economic devastation. Accordingly, the threat of fuel and foreign exchange shortages set the tone for the election. Aid to Malawi was suspended for the fourth time in 2013 forming part of an increasingly rapid cycle of aid suspension and eventually, resumption. Aid was first suspended in the early 1990s in an effort to hasten political liberalisation. Subsequent suspensions in the early 2000s and in 2011 were justified based on macroeconomic mismanagement and corruption. As a result, questions of aid dependence and sovereignty were hotly debated on the campaign train. All of the major presidential candidates in 2014 lamented Malawi's continuing reliance on aid and promised to reduce this. Much was made of the fact that even though Malawi was rapidly approaching its 50th anniversary of political independence, its sovereignty was still being undermined by its dependence on aid. This dependence was felt particularly acutely in May 2014, as with each interruption in aid disbursements, Malawi's donors used the opportunity to cement their position in Malawian politics and extend their presence and influence over policy-making. Whenever Malawians had felt the pinch of reduced foreign exchange availability in the past, dwindling public services, and currency devaluation its leaders sacrificed political sovereignty for the resumption of aid.

Malawi is exceptionally aid-dependent, even by the standards of small, resource-poor African countries. As a result of its limited natural resources, its single annual rainy reason, an underperforming agricultural sector and a small tourism industry, its main source of foreign exchange is aid; after tobacco, tea, coffee and tourism. According to the World Bank, official development assistance made up 28.6% of GNI, a level of aid dependence that is only exceeded by Liberia, four small South Pacific island states and Afghanistan (World Bank 2014). Despite having received high levels of assistance, Malawi remains the world's poorest country with a GDP per capita of only US$226 (ibid.). Directly or indirectly, aid finances essential services, including health care, schooling, and the agricultural subsidies that make the difference between food self-sufficiency and food insecurity. The devastating effects of aid suspension were plainly demonstrated between 2010

and 2012, when it led to the fuel shortages that saw the economy virtually grind to a halt. As the aid architecture has been reorganised – initially with the introduction of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in the early 1980s and then as a result of the 'partnership' era beginning in the 1990s – aid has become more and more influential in domestic politics, as macroeconomic policy impositions were complemented by sectoral policy 'advice'. The labour of policy advice was divided up among donors: the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) negotiated macroeconomic policy and bilateral donors brokered their own sectoral policy agreements with line ministries. Consequently, these actors have come to permeate all aspects of domestic politics, the state and the civil service.

The infringement of sovereignty that accompanies the contemporary aid system and the battles that are fought between recipient governments and their donors have been described elsewhere. The first systematic study of aid relations and the new processes of negotiation that accompanied the introduction of SAPs and conditionalties, *Aid and Power*, applied a principal-agent framework to analyse the interactions between government officials and donor representatives (Mosley et al. 1991). More recently, Whitfield and her co-authors have taken a more comprehensive political economy approach to the study of aid relations, attempting to look beyond the narrow process of negotiation to include the daily interactions between donors and recipients, arguing that donors have become 'embedded' within the civil service of recipient countries (Whitfield 2009). The question here, however, is the understudied aspect of the aid system, namely the effects of these relationships on domestic political arrangements and relationships between citizens in aid dependent countries and their governments. It is in these relationships, after all, that the effects of undermined sovereignty will manifest themselves and where their import may be ascertained. My aim is to look beyond these infringements of sovereignty at the level of bureaucrats and aid representatives to ask what the importance of this particular form of circumscribed independence is in Malawi. In order to do so, the interactions between donors and government have to be investigated within the domestic political context, particularly where constrained self-determination impacts on citizens' daily interactions with domestic politics, the state and its institutions. As

a result of Malawi's precarious food security situation, nowhere is this infringement of sovereignty felt more acutely than in the agricultural sector, especially in the realm of subsistence maize production and food security policies.

The importance of the agricultural sector to both domestic politics and Malawi's donors is unsurprising given that every year a significant proportion of households rely on food aid and at least 40% of rural households are unable to meet their minimum caloric requirements (Verduzco-Gallo et al. 2014). The more significant food shortages that are experienced every few years serve as a reminder that even these minimal living standards are precarious. Malawi experienced a devastating famine as recently as 2001/02, when not only the harvest, but also, government safety nets failed. The most reliable estimates of excess mortality range from 1,000 to 3,000 people (Devereux 2002c). Malawi is uniquely constrained in its quest to achieve food security. Malawians consume more maize than any other nation in the world, with an average annual consumption of 137 kg per capita, the equivalent of more than two thirds of daily calorie intake (Morris 1998). This maize is produced almost exclusively by domestic, subsistence farmers who express a strong preference for maize over other staple crops. More than 80% of arable land is put towards its production. High population growth rates mean that the land available to maize producers is extremely limited, with average per capita landholdings below 0.2 ha nationally, and as low as 0.1 ha in southern Malawi (Tchale 2009).

Since the liberalisation of agricultural markets in the 1980s, more and more households have come to depend on informal labour opportunities to earn a meagre income, frequently paid in kind, to cover food requirements during the 'hungry season', which has gradually grown longer. Rural markets are so poorly integrated that they are subject to extreme price fluctuations, based on the availability of maize within the immediate vicinity (Fahy-Bryceson and Fonseca 2005). Productivity per hectare is very low and attempts to improve it are undermined by poorly functioning markets, the high cost of inputs, and erratic agricultural development policies. These factors are all exacerbated by Malawi's geographical disadvantage; as a landlocked country, with a single annual rainy

season, poor infrastructure and with neighbours who are food insecure, it struggles to import sufficient quantities of maize at times of crisis. Furthermore, Malawi remains a largely rural country with 80% of the electorate living in rural areas, and the majority of those in urban areas engaging in some form of agriculture, in order to protect themselves from the vagaries of food price fluctuations (Alwang and Siegel 1999). Thus, the question of food security is a crucial political issue in Malawi.

The solutions to these challenges are not self-evident, leading to frequent disagreement between donors and government on how to tackle the extreme poverty prevalent in rural Malawi. Broadly speaking, donors promote market-driven solutions to food insecurity, where prices for inputs and outputs are allowed to play out. This provides the private sector with arbitrage opportunities, which donors argue would ensure food imports, domestic trade and the stabilisation of maize prices. At both the national and household levels, donors are sceptical of the pursuit of maize self-sufficiency, which the Government of Malawi has made its priority. Instead, they argue for the production of higher value goods and crops in order to generate income to import maize. The donor community's approach is a technocratic one, influenced by Sen's theory of famine (e.g. Sen 1981), which attributes an important role to markets in ensuring food security, and which evinces a distrust of the state's ability to stimulate agricultural development. Malawi's smallholders have a different view; they have been negatively affected by ongoing liberalisation efforts, which have eroded their already narrow livelihoods base (Devereux 2002b). As a result, they express a strong preference for state involvement in rural markets to stabilise prices and ensure affordable access to maize during the 'hungry season' and for yield-increasing inputs (as will be discussed in Chapter 7).

Food production and security policies are thus not only the most important domestic political issue, they are also a major concern to Malawi's donors, given the importance of the agricultural sector to economic growth. As both donors and Malawi's electorate are concerned with and have conflicting ideas about agricultural policy, it allows for the study of the impact of aid beyond its

propensity to constrain the policy-making freedom of recipient governments. The interactions between donors and government and how these undermine the independence of Malawi's government are my starting point, but I also look beyond these to study down the state and to locate resistance to these policies beyond the 'negotiating table'. I argue that the 'negotiating table' is no longer the primary locus of policy dialogue. Instead, negotiations and resistance now take place within the civil service as donors have inserted themselves into the state's bureaucracy, the political realm where elites attempt to remain responsive to domestic political demands, and to the grassroots where smallholder farmers interact with the institutions of the state that implement policies. By considering the negotiations with, and resistance to, aid's impositions that occur in these sites, so far removed from the boardrooms in which aid agreements are signed, the full effects of aid on domestic politics may be discerned.

Considering these aspects of aid dependence in Malawi reveals a picture in which aid can no longer be considered an actor external to domestic political concerns. Instead the lines between the Government of Malawi and its donors have become blurred, to the extent that donors have become a constitutive element of domestic politics. The manner in which donors, first and foremost the BWIs, impose and police policies has constrained the civil service to an extraordinary degree. Virtually all food security policies are conceived and discharged under the supervision of donors and with their technical assistance. The only spaces that remain for independent policy-making are ad hoc presidential initiatives and directives or, on occasion, unofficial policy that uses state resources to provide support to smallholder producers outside of formal structures.

One such presidential initiative, which has formed the basis of much of the support provided to smallholder farmers by the Malawian state from 2005 onwards, is the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP). Despite the best efforts of President Mutharika to insulate the FISP from the donor community's influence, it succumbed to pressure from the World Bank, the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), Irish Aid and Norway, in particular, to limit the subsidy's size and to structure it in a particular manner. These impositions led to

a subsidy that did not take the difficulties of maize production, as experienced by smallholder farmers, into account and so affects political relationships at the grassroots. Ultimately aid dependence in Malawi has had profound effects on relationships between the electorate and its representatives, notably MPs. As a result, it has undermined the emergence of stable political parties and increased distrust towards the state and its ability to implement the policies promised by political leaders. This has profound implications for the presidential candidates depicted by Puludzu and the manner in which political power is won, lost and exercised in Malawi.

Chapter Outline

Following the introduction of the theoretical debates to which this thesis contributes, the rest of the chapters are divided into two parts. The first looks at how aid has undermined the independent decision-making of the Government of Malawi since the introduction of SAPs and makes the argument that this has restricted the government's responsiveness to smallholder demands. It focuses on the elite-level interactions between donors in Malawi and the government, demonstrating how the bureaucracy is constrained and resistance to donor impositions takes the form of presidential initiatives. The second section – beginning with Chapter 5 – looks at aid dependence as it played out during Bingu wa Mutharika's presidency, using the FISP as a case study. Not only was the FISP the single most important food security policy during his presidency, but it was also an important locus of interaction between donors and government, as well as the site of everyday interactions between smallholders and the state.

Much of the research on aid has focused on establishing the extent to which conditionalities and attendant aid modalities have undermined the sovereignty of recipient states. These debates, particularly as they pertain to theories of the African state, and aid-dependent democratic regimes are introduced in Chapter 1, as are the theories of negotiation that have been employed to explain how donors and governments arrive at conditionalities and 'partnership' agreements. I make the argument that critiques of aid which focus on the fact that aid undermines

sovereignty, while important, fail to fully probe the effects of this weakened independence and therefore do not expose the full extent to which donor agencies have become constitutive of the political systems which they claim to assist. Further, aid dependence has not simply had the effect of rendering recipient democracies "choiceless" as is often argued. The consequences of aid dependence have been neither so complete nor limited to the process of policy making. As the process of negotiation and resistance happens along the whole spectrum of the state, from the political elite at its helm to the smallholder producers who interact with it, aid dependence can only be understood within a framework that explores how public authority works "from below". Thus I argue for the need to look for the effects of aid dependence in the tangible interactions between individuals and the state, for example through agricultural policies such as the FISP.

A brief discussion of my methodology and research methods follows. Given the nature of the research question, which looks to ascertain the different views held by political actors, smallholder farmers and donors in Malawi's agricultural sector, I argue for a constructivist approach. I also describe the three stages of my research, namely archival research in Zomba, elite interviews mainly in Lilongwe and Blantyre and interviews with smallholder farmers in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu. I explain how each of the three research stages was designed to elucidate the different perspectives of actors involved in the sector.

Part I

In a situation in which a government repeatedly failed to ensure the minimum living standards of its people, particularly access to adequate, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, it is unsurprising that food security became an extremely sensitive political issue. Chapter 2 examines the extent to which Malawi's political administrations have sought to guarantee food security and to ensure that maize production risks are absorbed by the state, as well as detailing how governments have failed in this endeavour, particularly since the liberalisation of the agricultural sector in the 1980s. While similar arguments have been made regarding political systems and food security, such as Amartya Sen's argument that famines are incompatible with democratic political systems, I detail

the political effects of famine and consistent low-level food insecurity in an imperfect democracy.

Chapter 2 serves the dual purpose of introducing the reader to Malawi's subsistence agriculture sector and its maize dependence as well as detailing how food security is such a politically controversial issue. Thus, I explore three distinct periods in terms of food security and maize production: the era of colonial agricultural policy, particularly its inconsistent approach to the staple crop maize; the post-independence focus on domestic maize production as a means of ensuring food security; and finally the havoc wrecked in rural Malawi by the liberalisation project, beginning in the early 1980s.

In Chapter 3, I begin to demonstrate just how pervasive the influence of donors in Malawi has become. Not only has the donor community become 'embedded' in the state as argued by Whitfield and her co-authors (Whitfield 2009) but aid agencies, both multi- and bilateral, have set about an intentional project of restructuring the bureaucracy in order to increase donor influence over policy making. This necessitates a discussion of the developments in the aid industry that have seen the emergence of new patterns of engagement between donors and recipient governments. I also examine the innocuous sounding concept of partnership, before turning my attention to the specific interactions within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS).

The extent to which donors police the work of the MoAFS means the ministry's focus has become elaborating the details of the orthodox policies outlined in aid partnership documents, documents such as Malawi's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy. Heterodox policies, which Malawi has consistently insisted on implementing, no longer originate within the MoAFS. Furthermore, new structures within the Ministry not only limit policy agendas and developments but have also been created to limit the ability of politicians to deviate from orthodox policies. The chapter takes an in-depth look at the structures that were created following the 2001/02 famine, at the behest of the donor community, to ensure that the management of the Strategic Grain

Reserve (SGR) corresponded to their preferences, and which have subsequently expanded to include much of the Ministry's work. Further, it considers the structures that have been created more recently for aid coordination within the sector, such as the Sector Wide Approach and the Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security, both of which play a significant role in ensuring that the MoAFS adheres to 'best practice'.

The concluding chapter of the first part of this thesis, Chapter 4, turns its attention to the question of resistance to conditionalities as well as more subtle, but no less powerful, donor impositions, given the extent to which the Ministry of Agriculture has been captured by the donor community. As a result of new aid modalities, resistance to donor policy preferences has had to move out of the Ministry and has taken the form of ad hoc policies and presidential initiatives. Here, I consider the most important food security policies, namely the dismantling of the marketing parastatal, the role of the SGR and fertilizer subsidies. As a result of limited donor capacity, the government focused its resistance on each of these issues in turn while donors concentrated on other policy questions. I argue that the Government of Malawi has been remarkably consistent in its efforts to protect smallholders against the vagaries of liberalisation, even though this has, paradoxically, resulted in policy inconsistency. Further, I demonstrate the extent to which this resistance has been the prerogative of presidents, while parliamentarians and the bureaucracy have been sidelined. This also means that resistance to its policies is seen as increasingly 'politicised' by donors, which only heightens efforts to strengthen controls within the state to prevent opposition to conditionalities. The conclusion to the first half of the thesis is therefore that Malawi's aid dependence has had profound effects on its political development, in which the civil service and parliament have been largely denied their role in policy making, while the presidency was strengthened.

Part II

The first part of the thesis focuses on donor-government relationships at the elite level, namely between government ministries, politicians and representatives of the donor community. Part II seeks to make the link between these agricultural

policies and political developments at the grassroots. It studies down the state, from the elite to the grassroots level, with Malawi's most important food security policy as a case study. The FISP is important not only because it consumes more than half of the Ministry of Agriculture's annual budget and 6.6% of GDP in 2008/09 (Dorward and Chirwa 2011b), but also because its success determines the nation's food security. Nevertheless, the policy remains controversial and its survival is not guaranteed as donors – particularly the BWIs – remain critical of subsidies as a development tool and all donors feel that it should not become a permanent policy.

The distinct political and economic context against which the Farm Input Subsidy Programme was introduced is considered in Chapter 5. Mutharika was elected president under uniquely challenging circumstances: the economy was in disarray as a result of macroeconomic instability, a prolonged period of rural decline and the suspension of aid towards the end of his predecessor's presidency. To further complicate matters, Mutharika commanded only a weak mandate, having won merely 35% of the popular vote and was seen as little more than a puppet president, installed by his predecessor, Bakili Muluzi. In other words, he faced the twofold challenge of creating an internal constituency that would allow him to escape from Muluzi's shadow while also placating donors so that they would resume aid disbursements.

I argue that the introduction of the FISP allowed Mutharika to placate both his internal constituency of smallholder farmers, who make up the majority of Malawian voters, the political and economic elite, and eventually the donor community, despite their initial misgivings. The fragile balance Mutharika was able to achieve during his first term was disrupted when he refused to follow the IMF's advice and devalue the Kwacha, which derailed the IMF's Extended Credit Facility. Once this delicate arrangement between donors and government was disrupted, the limits of his presidential powers were laid bare and the dependence of any Malawian president and government on their external donors was highlighted. The loss of external funding had significant domestic political

repercussions, which ultimately led to Mutharika resorting to progressively more autocratic legislation to cling to political power.

After discussing the importance of FISP to rural Malawi and to Mutharika personally, I turn my attention to the policy's role in donor-government relationships in Malawi. A fertilizer subsidy was not only Mutharika's best option, but the only one available to him given the nature of the crisis in rural Malawi and the state of donor-government relations. These relationships had profound impacts on the subsidy from the very beginning as funding for the subsidy was limited and their impact expanded throughout Mutharika's presidency during which various donors extended their engagement with, and therefore, influence over the FISP. The interactions between donors and government *vis-à-vis* the FISP can be broken down into three distinct phases: beginning with disapproval or indifference, moving onto widespread acclaim and support, before coming full circle to disillusionment and impatience with the programme and its political beneficiaries, particularly Mutharika.

For Malawi's donors – particularly the World Bank, DfID, Irish Aid and Norway – the essence of the battle over the FISP has always been ensuring that the programme did not gradually develop into a permanent, universal subsidy. The extent to which certain donors, notably DfID, were willing to curtail national sovereignty and wrestle control away from the government to this end is surprising. The result has been a programme that is altered, in scope and aim, and ultimately one that is no longer responsive to the demands of smallholder farmers. I argue that interactions around the FISP not only demonstrate tensions between the domestic and international realm for Malawi's politicians, but also, the willingness of donors to insert themselves between political leaders and the demands made of them by the electorate. Thus, I contend that donors and their technical concerns over subsidy design, size and structure undermined any efforts on behalf of Malawian politicians to break out of patrimonial and patronage-based relationships and to move towards more responsive forms of political representation.

It is not unusual for policies, especially those as sizeable as the FISP, to differ in their implementation from policy-makers' intentions. However, the extent to which smallholder farmers subvert the intentions of the FISP represents more than an ad hoc deviation. I argue, in Chapter 7, that the widespread practice of smallholders sharing subsidised inputs should be seen as an eloquent rejection of the targeted nature of the FISP and a call for more broad-based assistance to smallholders. I contend that the realities of maize production and livelihood strategies in rural Malawi do not allow for the narrow targeting prescribed by the FISP. Firstly, regardless of comparative wealth, all rural households faced substantial risks in their efforts to farm for their subsistence needs. These risks render any investments, particularly in inputs, extremely costly and frequently economically unviable. Secondly, food deficit households relied on the marginally wealthier members of their community for labour opportunities during the 'hungry season', for which they are usually paid in maize. These labour arrangements were embedded in relationships of reciprocity, which meant that they needed to be reciprocated with gifts of fertilizer where possible. Furthermore, it was in the interest of all households to ensure that the comparatively wealthy were able to produce surplus maize so as to provide labour opportunities for other households. Finally, for those for whom the FISP was the only means of accessing fertilizer, sharing represented a means of smoothing access to fertilizer across seasons. Unfortunately, the problems experienced with regards to the FISP did not end with the targeted nature of the subsidy; smallholders also encountered considerable difficulties in accessing fertilizer at parastatal marketing outlets, which were overcrowded and plagued by corruption. Overall, this increased distrust towards the state and the image of the FISP as an unreliable programme, heightening anxiety around the programme's future.

The final chapter seeks to draw out the political implications of Malawi's aid dependence, through the lens of the FISP. Thus, it focuses on the effects that the lack of universal fertilizer subsidy has on the relationships of political import in rural Malawi, including relationships with chiefs, Members of Parliament, and political parties. Chapter 8 demonstrates that the FISP strengthened the

institution of chiefs as they ultimately determined who accessed fertilizer and in turn, who was able to eat, which was reflected in both the rumours and the gossip related about them. The impotence of Members of Parliament, their political parties and parliament itself were highlighted by the ultimately futile efforts of smallholders to make their voices and views about the FISP heard. Nevertheless, smallholder farmers still attempted to hold their MPs accountable as was evidenced by the very high turnover rates of parliamentarians, even though this often proved an ineffectual protest, due to the absence of a stable party system. The lack of local councillors, due to Mutharika's refusal to hold local elections, further strengthened chiefs, as there was no local, democratic counterweight. Finally, subsistence farmers were clearly disillusioned with the state, which appeared to be doing such a bad job of the FISP's implementation, leaving them struggling to access subsidised fertilizer.

In summary, the FISP and its targeted structure served to undermine progress towards representative relationships and undermined smallholders' faith in the state. In amongst all of this, President Mutharika managed to monopolise the credit for the FISP. So while the FISP undermined other democratic structures, it increased Mutharika's political power, strengthening the winner-takes-all nature of Malawi's democracy.

In the conclusion, I draw out the most important consequences of my research and return to the question of the overall effect of Malawi's engagement with its donors. I argue that the infringement of Malawi's sovereignty has resulted in donors not only becoming embedded within the state but in a gradual altering of the state's institutions, especially its bureaucracy. These institutional changes are an explicit attempt by donors to limit the policy options available to Malawi, with the effect of weakening the ability of political representatives to oversee the work and direction of these institutions. As donors became progressively further entrenched within the state's bureaucracy this changed the nature of the state's relationships, both with the political elite and smallholder farmers. It also had a profound impact on the process of negotiation of, and resistance to, aid's policy impositions. Rather than taking place around a formal negotiating table,

deliberations occurred at all levels of the state and on an almost daily basis, with the overall result of rendering donors constitutive of domestic political systems. Resistance and negotiation also became more prolific, as was demonstrated both by the president's interaction with the state as well as the manner in which citizens engaged with the state's institutions and policies. Unsurprisingly, this constrained relationships of representation between smallholder farmers and MPs and weakened political parties, which were unable to differentiate themselves from one another based on policies or ideology. Finally, I suggest that the reluctance of donors to conceive of themselves as constitutive of, rather than external to, domestic politics allowed them to evade responsibility for the results of their policy impositions and so increased their willingness to suspend aid and to extend their influence further still over agricultural policymaking.

Chapter 1

The Politics of Aid and Aid Dependence

Introduction

In the last decade or so, the idea and enterprise of international aid has come under increased academic scrutiny, with the more critical scholars arguing that aid has undermined the sovereignty and democratic processes of its recipients. Critics of aid have focused on the conditionalities that have accompanied aid since the introduction of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s. In the case of more recent critiques, this has included policies that have come about as a result of interactions between donors and recipients, whether these are the result of conditionalities or voluntary compliance in order to trigger the disbursal of aid monies (e.g. Whitfield 2009 or Williams and Young 2012). These analyses of aid focus on demonstrating the extent to which aid has undermined national sovereignty and jeopardised the freedom of political elites in former colonies to select their own policies. They have made important contributions to elucidating how certain approaches to the African state and its political elites have justified and allowed for the imposition of policies on sovereign nations by limiting their policy choices. However, contemporary debates stop short of examining the full impact of aid, beyond the process of negotiation between recipients and their donors. I argue for an approach to the study of aid that looks beyond elite-level negotiations and central bureaucracies to consider the impact of aid-compromised sovereignty by locating negotiation and resistance throughout the political system. This allows for a more nuanced approach to the state, state-society interactions, and the effects of aid on democratic processes. "Studying down" the state and political institutions reveals the extent to which aid has become constitutive of these institutions. Importantly, it also highlights how aid shapes the everyday lives of the citizens of aid dependent countries and their ability to make political demands on the state.

The first section of this chapter provides a critique of aid that is informed by studying down the state. It begins with an overview of the debates around aid and

sovereignty, arguing with Harrison for a broader understanding of sovereignty and for the need to interrogate the effects of aid dependence on domestic politics. The second section interrogates the concept of the state used by advocates of conditionality and argues for a different view of the African state in order to trace the full impact of aid dependence on states and citizens. In particular, I contend that appreciating the impact of aid dependence on states and state-society relationships demands that we examine the everyday interactions between citizens and the state. Subsequently, I review the literature on aid and democracy, concluding that the importance of aid in democratic systems is not limited to the question of whether or not aid furthers or hinders democratic transitions, but concerns the manner in which aid affects political relationships, including democratic ones. Finally, I discuss academic approaches to the process of aid negotiations and argue that both negotiation and resistance are not limited to the central state. I then discuss the methodology and research methods I have used in order to understand aid dependence and its impacts in Malawi.

Aid and the Importance of Sovereignty

Research on aid falls into two main camps. The first concerns itself with the effectiveness of aid while the second is preoccupied with the political implications of aid and the policy impositions that accompany it. While this thesis falls into the second camp, both are important to the discussion of aid and sovereignty. At their most fundamental, the two schools take a very different approach to the question of the sovereignty of aid recipients, disagreeing over whether the provision of aid to developing countries entitles its providers to a seat at the domestic policy-making table or whether this constitutes too serious an infringement of sovereignty. Those scholars who seek to defend the sovereignty of recipients frequently point to the extremely sensitive nature of these issues in former colonies, which make up the majority of aid recipients, where the right to self-determination was won relatively recently (e.g. Williams and Young 2012; Whitfield 2009). Unsurprisingly, those authors who value sovereignty less highly are also those who remain convinced of the ability of aid to positively transform developing countries. They argue that if only the modalities of aid delivery were corrected, if recipients followed or were made to follow “best practice”, or if they

implemented a certain set of policies to create the necessary institutional environment for growth, then aid would have its desired, transformative effects (e.g. Collier 2007, Sachs 2005). The aid effectiveness debate, which concerns itself with these questions of best practice, consists of two central arguments. The first revolves around the optimal delivery mechanisms for aid and the second around ensuring that aid, once disbursed, is used "correctly". The former is concerned with better aid coordination and delivery, for example weighing up the relative benefits of budget support over project financing or vice versa (DAC 2005), while the latter is concerned with the specific policies or institutions required to further development (Acemoglu et al. 2012, Sachs 2005). The justification for curtailing national sovereignty by tying aid to policy prescriptions is complicated by the lack of agreement about which policies would best bring about 'development' and even what the goals of the development project should be.

The other body of research, which concerns itself with the politics of aid, and in particular aid dependence, focuses on the question of who should make these decisions about the development project and its goals. It is sceptical of the ability of aid to engender meaningful "development" on the African continent and so creates a space in which the role of aid can be critically analysed and the responsibility of donors debated. In this literature the infringement of sovereignty is problematized, and in some cases the very reason for Africa's continued underdevelopment is found in the undemocratic nature of aid and in the very policies it forces on its recipients (e.g. Riddel 2007, Moyo 2008). The increasing involvement of multi- and bilateral donors in the domestic policy-making sphere of recipient countries since the introduction of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s has brought the question of sovereignty to the fore. As this thesis seeks primarily to interrogate the political impacts of aid dependence – rather than concerning itself with the question of its effectiveness – the starting point for this chapter, is the question of sovereignty that is raised directly and indirectly by the proponents and critics of aid. The rest of this section looks at these critiques of aid and argues that our analytical lens must look beyond donor-government interactions, and focus instead on the knock-on effects of compromised

sovereignty and its consequences for political processes from elite to grassroots levels.

Graham Harrison begins his efforts to understand the relationship between aid and sovereignty by arguing, with Cooper (1997), that the sovereignty of African states came under threat when donors began to conflate the "development project", as defined by donor agencies, with legitimate government. This "development project" is defined in narrow, economistic and usually growth-focused terms by the international financial institutions (IFIs). Despite this there is little consensus between multi- and bilateral donors on the exact nature of this project, a situation aggravated by the fads that frequently drive the policy agendas of aid agencies. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the definition of the "development project" expanded to include political requirements, such as a narrowly defined concept of democracy. In this context, African states and their governments have rarely been given the liberty to define the nature and goals of their own national development project against which their progress may be judged. As African governments appeared to "fail" at generating economic growth, their right to sovereignty was further questioned and compromised, through the imposition of SAPs. The idea that sovereignty was conditional on states achieving adequate economic growth was sufficiently widespread that SAPs did not initially engender much debate about whether these changes in aid modalities were compatible with self-determination (Harrison 2007).

However, the interactions between donors and recipient governments are more complex than donors simply overstepping a sovereign boundary. Aid agencies require sovereign states as a vehicle for their assistance and, therefore, as their entry into another dominion. States are not simply bypassed by donors, but interactions between donors and representatives of the state are integral to aid relations (Clapham 1998). Sovereignty is not a condition but a process and therefore is not best thought of "in linear form: geographical metaphors of boundaries or lines encourage us to think about a political condition or entity that is transgressed" (Harrison 2007: 196). Thus, he challenges scholars of the institutions of aid to scrutinise the nature of the impositions that African

governments are burdened with, and suggests that the space where donors and governments interact should be conceived of as a 'sovereign frontier'. In this way, the myriad of interactions between donors and governments and the manner in which they sit between the domestic and international realm becomes the focus of research (ibid.).

In practice, this means that the interactions between donors and the government take place within a 'sovereign frontier'. The external boundaries of this frontier are regularly penetrated by various aid agencies and assisted by the external orientation of the majority of African governments. However, while this boundary is permeable in the one direction – by donors imposing conditionalities on recipient governments – they do not allow for African governments to permeate this border in the other direction. As such aid relationships have become normalised, for example through the permanence of structural adjustment programmes, donor influence over recipient policy-making has expanded significantly. It is this inherent power imbalance between donors and recipient states that has resulted in an expansion of external power within this frontier, even where discourse suggests a reduction in donor impositions, as in the concept of 'partnership' (Harrison 2007).

Rita Abrahamsen (2000) argues that this intrusion into the 'sovereign frontier' is disguised by donor discourse, which has represented the development project as disinterested and technocratic and humanitarian rather than a political and ideological endeavour. In keeping with this argument and the rejection of the notion of technocratic 'best' policies and practices, which the proponents of aid, such as Collier (2007), Calderisi (2006) and Sachs (2005) advocate, Whitfield and her co-authors seek to uncover the interactions and negotiations between donors and recipient governments that occur in this 'sovereign frontier' (Whitfield 2009). Whitfield makes an impassioned argument for the right to sovereignty of aid recipients, based on its necessity in order to ensure a

> political realm in which citizens would exercise their own agency and a political community would decide its own fate [and in which] non-interference in domestic affairs … [is]

> the means by which external powers respected the rights of these communities (Whitfield 2009: 6-7).

She vehemently disagrees with the notion that by virtue of contributing financially to this project external agencies have any right to determine how those funds are to be spent, preferring to see aid as analogous to an international welfare system. Further, she rejects the argument that African underdevelopment is primarily the result of social or political forces in African states, which forms the intellectual and ideological basis for the imposition of many governance conditionalities (as discussed further below). Whitfield and her co-authors' concern is primarily the manner in which policies are imposed – directly through negotiations between donors and recipients – and indirectly through the gradual 'embedding' of donors in the civil services of African states (Fraser and Whitfield 2010). These scholars, therefore, provide a useful analytical framework within which the relationships between donors and recipient governments may be analysed. The aim of this thesis is to look at the effects of these impositions, in particular their political consequences, in order to ascertain the effects of compromised rights to self-determination

While they also afford primacy to the notion of sovereignty, David Williams and Tom Young focus on the nature and effect of the policy impositions that accompany aid as demonstrative of a larger 'liberal project' (e.g. Williams and Young 2012; Williams 1993; Young 2010). For Williams and Young the 'liberal project' is the attempt to create African societies and states in the image of the West, as conceived by the aid industry's policy makers. Thus, they see aid within a neo-colonial context, where it serves a neoliberal agenda and the imposition of concomitant policy preferences. They write that the

> crucial difference is of course that colonial rulers, however constrained by the limits of 'hegemony on a shoestring', did have means of enforcement whereas the modern armies of progress and development are perforce constrained to promote social change 'at a distance' (Williams and Young 2012: 19).

They argue that aid is motivated by the attempt to instil certain political and economic systems on recipient countries and economies. In this process, market-based economies are presented as 'natural', even where the aid system must work hard to create them, and impositions of the development project are justified through the language of universal rights (Young 2010). As a result, the aid system has created stronger linkages between the aid given and the outcomes expected, serving to produce the neoliberal transformation advocated by the bi- and multilateral aid agencies (Young 2010; Abrahamsen 2000). While the connection between aid and policy impositions has certainly been strengthened, Williams and Young do not consider the success or failure of donors to bring about the changes they desire in recipient countries, the extent to these policies provoke resistance or the political fallout of such dynamics.

Mark Duffield has taken a similar position to Williams and Young, arguing that aid has now been afforded the role of ensuring global security and well-being, meaning that relations between states have become less immediately important – for this new security paradigm – than the process of regulating and adjusting the behaviour of political actors within them (Duffield 2001). Thus, the aid project has been drawn into the post-Cold War paradigm and its emerging system of regulation and governance, both within countries and at the global level. In this new paradigm, "[s]overeignty is now widely argued by donor governments and multilateral agencies alike to be a conditional status" (Duffield, 2001: 311) that can be revoked where countries do not conform to the expected norms. He argues that new management approaches have increased the influence of aid, directly and indirectly, over both public and private actors within recipient territories, but does not discuss how this changes the manner in which citizens engage with the state or private organisations.

Thus, we have two distinct camps with regards to the role of aid in the 'development project' divided in part by the value placed on sovereignty. For those who do not see the imposition of policies as incompatible with sovereignty or consider the loss of sovereignty a price worth paying in the pursuit of economic growth, the big question in aid is its effectiveness in inducing economic growth

and democracy, and concomitantly how it can be reformed to better meet the needs of the development project. For the other camp – whether the focus is the security or liberal aspect of the 'project' – not only has the 'development project' as advocated by the IFIs and underpinned by bilateral donors largely failed, but it has also contributed to undermining the substantive sovereignty of aid recipients, which is valued in itself.

However, these authors' concern for sovereignty and the aid system's disregard for this institution results in a focus on negotiations and interactions within Harrison's 'sovereign frontier' and their effects vis-à-vis recipient states. Harrison, in his case studies on public sector reform in Tanzania and Uganda demonstrates very effectively the extent to which sovereignty has been undermined and how public sector reforms have been concerned as much with constructing as reforming the state, both with the primary aim of rolling out neoliberal reform (Harrison 2005). In Mozambique, he demonstrates the manner in which corruption became a focus of the IFI's civil service reform, not so much in order to eradicate corruption for its own sake but as it was understood to prevent comprehensive neoliberal reform (Harrison 1999). He concludes that as a result of donor interventions these states are no longer sovereign but 'governance states'. Others have argued that a similar process has taken place within the civil society of many recipient countries, particularly where civil society relies heavily on donor funds (Gabay 2014; Williams and Young 2012).

Harrison makes the argument that "[i]n an age when no *terra nullis* exists for the West, transnational spaces of the sovereign frontier have become the central site of expansion by the West" (Harrison 2007: 198) and that within that space African states are only able to reactively shape this process of imposition. Whitfield (2009) and Abrahamsen (2000) similarly describe the process and discourse through which the international aid community and recipient countries engage in this 'sovereign frontier'. Whitfield and Fraser argue that donors have become increasingly 'embedded' within the civil service of recipient countries. The question of concern to this thesis is how this embeddedness has affected the domestic political dynamics of democratisation in Malawi. As we will see, donors

in Malawi have not only embedded themselves within the civil service but have actively remodelled the domestic political system and bureaucracy in order to facilitate the implementation of their policy preferences. The question that therefore remains to be explored is how these impositions affect domestic political dynamics.

Thus, as donors have become more entangled in the policy-making and, thus, politics of recipient states they must be considered "constitutive elements of the political system that they support" and their actions and influence needs to be seen as integral to the power struggles and political dynamics within the entirety of the domestic polity (Leininger 2010: 64). Not only does this extend our understanding of the extent to which sovereignty is substantively undermined but it also highlights the manner in which the aid system creates frictions, incongruity and inconsistencies in recipient polities (Grimm and Leininger 2012: 395). I argue that only by studying the impact of the aid system – at all levels of the state rather than within central ministries or aid negotiations – can its direct and indirect effects be fully understood. This includes resistance to policy impositions and the knock-on effects of this resistance for social and political relations, not simply between donors and governments within the 'sovereign frontier' but at all levels of the domestic polity.

Harrison (2007) predicts that as donors fail to achieve their objective of creating states that adhere to neoliberal reforms and policies, the

> the frontier of intervention will … begin to engage with social spaces outside the sovereign frontier, and into the engineering of post-colonial societies themselves. In this sense, the sovereign frontier – rather like the marches and outposts of other historic empires – might be understood as a stepping stone for a possibly even grander frontier of Western expansion (Harrison 2007: 205).

The interactions within the 'sovereign frontier', as Harrison also argues, already have profound effects that reach into domestic societies and polities. However, these impacts and effects remain understudied and this thesis looks to trace their impacts within the Malawian polity and its democratic institutions. Resistance to

donor-imposed policies also takes place outside of the negotiation process and goes far beyond the extent to which negotiated policies are implemented or not. In addition, elite level analyses of the impact of aid on sovereignty do not adequately consider the importance of the historical and political context within which they take place, as we will see below.

The contribution of this thesis to these theories of aid is twofold: firstly, I look at the interactions within Malawi's sovereign frontier, between bi-and multilateral donors and the government of Malawi. I argue that the division of labour within the donor community has important effects in the ways in which interactions are structured in the sovereign frontier. Since the IMF and World Bank have embraced the *rhetoric* of partnership and distanced themselves from the more explicit conditionalities, the work of policing the implementation of policies has fallen to bilateral donors. It is the combination of overarching policy impositions through the PRSP framework and the IFI's control of the purse strings combined with the bilateral donors' efforts to restructure the state that have led to a constriction of policy space in Malawi. Christopher Bickerton's argument regarding partnership in EU negotiation processes is relevant here: the term partnership does not only allow for the window dressing of the donor community's impositions, but it also allows for the creation of a very broad community of donors, with slightly different ideological and policy preferences (Bickerton 2005) and so it increases the influence of the donor community as a whole.

Thus, as the civil service reforms describe by Harrison (1999, 2001) have failed to provide donors with the neoliberal policies they have resorted to creating additional structures within the bureaucracy to constrain political decision-making independence, thus going beyond creating 'governance states' to engage with other social spaces. This thesis focuses on the relationships of representation in a young democracy and interactions between citizens and the state. The impact of donor funding and co-option of civil society are another way in which donors have influenced the democratic processes of aid-dependent democracies.[1]

[1] The manner in which donors have coopted civil society in 'partnership' and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper drafting processes are discussed by Mercer (2002, 2003) and Fraser (2005). Joel Lazarus has subsequently argued that co-optation has not been as extensive as previously argued

Secondly, as a result of these interactions, the effects of and resistance to aid cannot be understood simply by studying the negotiations that take place within the sovereign frontier. Both the resistance to and the impact of policies introduced by the donor community take place primarily outside of these spaces. As a result of the pervasive nature of interactions between donors and the government, and despite donor efforts to contain this, resistance has moved into the political realm and frequently takes the form of presidential initiatives. Part II of this thesis demonstrates the importance of donor impositions in terms of their impact on relationships between citizens and the state and between voters and their political representatives. I argue that resistance to donor-imposed policies also occurs outside of state institutions, in the communities that find themselves on the receiving end of donor-imposed policies. Thus, relationships between donors and recipient governments shape all aspects of the political system. I therefore make the link between interactions in the 'sovereign frontier' and the political grassroots.

Conceptual Approaches to the African State and Aid Relations

Broadly speaking, there are two major approaches to the study of African states and to their relationships with donors. The first takes a neopatrimonial approach to the state, where African states are seen as afflicted with similar pathologies, including political structures based on patronage networks fuelled by corruption. Proponents of the second approach argue for a more differentiated view of African states based on their historical, social and economic experience. Unsurprisingly, these two approaches hold very different views on the relationship between aid agencies and the state and the extent to which conditionalities, implicit or explicit, represent a legitimate means to influence the policies and development trajectory of the African continent.

(Lazarus 2008) and Niamh Gaynor has described resistance in civil society to donor impositons (Gaynor 2010, 2011).

Scholars who understand African politics through the lens of neo-patrimonialism, tend to argue that aid should be used to impose or encourage 'correct' or 'best practice' policies, or concern themselves with how to make conditionalities "bite" (e.g. van de Walle 2001, 2005). They argue that African polities are 'hybrid' regimes, which merge the façade of a rational-legal state apparatus with a political logic of patrimonialism, where the exigencies of patronage, prebendalism and misappropriation of public resources predominate. They argue that these demands dominate the political system at all levels, taking precedence over other political institutions, including democratic ones (e.g. Clapham 1990). Theories of neo-patrimonialism locate the "failure" of the development project within African domestic political systems. This makes it possible to conceive of aid as playing a benign role and attributing the failures of the aid system to recipient governments and states. Thus, in the best-case scenario, aid can be used to push for the reforms that make up the neoliberal consensus, while in the worst case, aid monies are used to bolster pre-existing neo-patrimonial networks.

Frederick Cooper (2002), on the other hand, argues that African states have become 'gatekeeper states', where political competition has degenerated to such an extent that states are little more than a vehicle for accessing the resources provided by the international community. He writes that African states, as a result of the institutions inherited upon independence, are weak and sit

> astride the interface between a territory and the rest of the world, collecting and distributing resources that derived from the gate itself: customs revenue and foreign aid; permits to do business in the territory; entry and exit visas; and permission to move currency in and out (Cooper, 2002: 157).

For Cooper, therefore, aid serves to maintain and reinforce a certain type of state that is only minimally accountable to domestic pressures and struggles to enforce its reach over its territory and to gain the cooperation of its citizens. Importantly, however, he conceives of aid as external to governance systems, rather than an actor within the polity.

While Cooper sees the African state as compromised by its colonial origins, and the patronage opportunities provided by keeping the gate as serving to establish vertical links between elites and citizens, others see these patronage mechanisms as evidence of the exceptional nature of African states. Nicolas van de Walle, for example, argues that neo-patrimonial states are generally characterised by a substantial degree of state autonomy, as clientelist networks exert more political influence than "legitimate" political demands made of the state (e.g. van de Walle 2001). Further, he argues that neo-patrimonial states exhibit low capacity and so insulate political elites from having to grapple with the reforms advocated by proponents of structural adjustment programmes (ibid.). The logic that underpins policy conditionality in such a conceptual framework is not difficult to ascertain: as African political elites are not likely to respond to domestic pressures for 'development', aid must be used to enforce policy change.

A number of academics have pointed to the problems inherent in neo-patrimonial analyses. First and foremost the manner in which this narrative of the African state pathologises the institution by comparing extreme empirical examples with the Weberian ideal-type and finding the former deficient to the point almost of being unable to manage its own affairs (Alexander and McGregor 2013; Meagher 2006; Mkandawire 2001; Wai 2012). Wai, for example, writes that "[n]eo-patrimonialism depicts African states as aberrant political formations, pathological constructs, dysfunctional entities and, recently, criminal enterprises" (Wai 2012: 31). Such accounts also tar governments and political elites with the same brush: they are depicted as deviating from the ideal of a leadership interested in the public good and the 'development project' and characterised as 'big men' or stooges. The African 'development project', it is argued, can only fail given the absence of a Weberian state and "a type of political domination which is characterised by *insecurity* about the behaviour and role of the state institutions (and agents)" (Erdmann and Engel 2007: 105).

Because the neo-patrimonial approach conflates the most dysfunctional states with the quotidian functioning of all African states it fails to discern the historical and contemporary realities of African states, governments and societies. It

reinforces "the image of the continent as a place of the absurd, aberrant or inadequate, occurring in the shadow of earlier European experiences" (Wai 2012: 33). Not only does this efface the possibility of an African developmental state, but it also obscures the relationships of power within which African states operate (Mkandawire 2001; Wai 2012). By failing to recognise the importance of these political relations, advocates of this approach create a vision of development as powered by external actors, primarily of Western origins, including Western political systems, aid and policy ideas.

Christian Lund and his co-authors suggest an approach to the study of African states and political dynamics that is more fruitful for analysing the impact of aid, where the exigencies of democratic institutions and patronage networks coexist. Lund et al argue that public authority in African states must be understood "from below", i.e. in the interaction between state institutions, political actors and citizens. This allows for an appreciation of local politics that begins "from the variety of concrete encounters between forms of public authority and the more or less mundane practices of ordinary people" (Lund 2007: 2). It is only by studying these local political dynamics that the extent of the loss of sovereignty and, therefore, the implications of aid dependence may be elucidated. As Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan argue (1997, 1998 and 2003), the state, as well as the ideas and perceptions held about it by citizens, need to be the focus of research. This is where the central policy-making capacity of the state, over which aid negotiations hold such sway, meets the political realities within which the beneficiaries of these policies subsist. In Lund's words:

> it is difficult to ascribe exercised authority to the 'state' as a coherent institution; rather, public authority becomes the amalgamated result of the exercise of power by a variety of local institutions and the imposition of external institutions, conjugated with the *idea* of a state (Lund 2007: 14).

In a similar vein, Thomas Bierschenk argues for an understanding of the African state and its policies that sees their creation as a process of 'sedimentation'. He argues that African states have been constituted by a gradual process of deposit as

> each institutional reform and each round of development policy intervention leaves behind an institutional legacy which slots into the group of existing institutional arrangements. More than 50 years of development policy have not led to the homogenisation of these institutional arrangements; instead they become more and more complex (Bierschenk 2010: 7).

It is in this political and institutional context that the imposition of aid policies and, indeed, the resultant and frequent changes and U-turns in policy, need to be analysed. Such an approach allows for the possibility of states and governments that are responsive while also being corrupt or driven by neo-patrimonial demands, which provides a more fruitful conceptual framework from which the role of aid can be considered.

My intention is explore the ways in which the Malawian state, despite being comparatively weak, does much more than straddle the interface between the domestic and international domain with regards to aid. I argue that the implications of aid relations are more complex than previous theoretical starting points have permitted. While the state may be weak and domestic politics may, at times or even frequently, be subject to the exigencies of patronage, the state is nonetheless rooted within social relations, and as such the policy impositions and financial resources of the donor community have consequences that extend far beyond neo-patrimonial networks. Patronage politics intersect with democratic and other pressures and the balance between the two is affected not only by the resources made available by donors, but also by the imposition of certain policies over others.

Aid and Democracy: Help or Hindrance?

Of further consequence to this thesis is the manner in which democracy and the democratisation process has been conceptualised in debates over the political consequences of aid. A particular focus of debates has been the question of whether or not aid has played a positive role in encouraging more pluralistic political systems in recipient countries. I argue that democratic systems vary in their form to such a degree that the effects of aid dependence are equally

unpredictable between democracies and heavily dependent on the democratic system in question, something which is all too frequently lost in discussions on aid and democracy.

Those who view politics in primarily neo-patrimonial terms argue that in most African polities political parties are weak and fragmented, and voting is undertaken with the expectation that the winner will reward his or her voters with state resources. In addition, clientelistic networks are seen as essential to incorporating and rewarding the political elite (van de Walle 2007). Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) expand upon this patronage model, according a greater degree of importance to the delivery of public goods. They attempt to explain how elements of patronage co-exist with democratic institutions in all competitive political systems where

> clientelistic accountability represents a transaction, the direct exchange of a citizen's vote in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods and services (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007: 2).

They argue that an element of patronage exists in all democratic systems as politicians target the benefits of policies at certain groups in exchange for their votes and only in institutionalised democracies, with strong and ideologically coherent parties, will politicians risk creating winners and losers with their policies without relying on direct political support from these same factions. Where democracy is less well-established politicians increase their support base by providing "club goods" to those groups most likely to vote for them (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). In this manner, patrons can maintain their clientelistic networks through the democratic system, in parallel to other patronage or prebendal networks.

What these scholars fail to adequately account for is that the effects of aid will differ depending on the extent to which policy-making has moved beyond the provision of "club goods" and will vary with the nature of the democracy in question. As with the nature of states, the precise makeup of a democracy is largely determined by the historical, social and economic processes by which it is constituted. Given the relative youth of African democracies, the nature of

democratic transitions and the extent to which democratic political systems have been institutionalised is important. There has been much debate around the precise definitions of democracy and the question of what distinguishes a democracy from other political systems.[2] What is more important to determining the effects of aid on relationships of representation, however, is the exact nature of the institutions of representation with which donors interact and, as a result, the impact that they have on these. The literature on aid and democracy has attempted to theorise the impact of aid interventions, particularly SAPs, without adequate concern for the process of institutionalisation or the differences between democracies.

In a now classic contribution, Bates argued that SAPs made governments more responsive to new and larger constituencies than the urban supporters they had previously relied upon. These urban supporters could no longer be placated with policies that ensured minimal urban living standards as a result of the conditionalities attached to SAPs. He contends that politics is always a question of "ruler versus citizen", where citizens own the factors of production but are unable to make and enforce public policy, while rulers have the power to make policy but, as they do not own the factors of production, must bargain with their citizens to obtain policy compliance. For Bates, governments will have little choice but to bargain in market-based economies, where tax avoidance and general policy defiance becomes much easier for the average citizen. Thus, in his eyes, as SAPs are designed to reduce state intervention in markets and to develop market economies, they are likely to compel governments to seek greater dialogue with their citizens (Bates 1981, 1995).

Those who argue that a certain minimum level of socio-economic development is a prerequisite for democratisation also accord aid a positive role in the democratisation process. Muller (1995), for example, demonstrates that the largest gains in democracy are experienced by countries at "intermediate" levels of development and finds that this is due to the inverse relationship between

[2] For definitions of democracy see, for example, Dahl (1971) and Schmitter and Karl (1991) and for questions of democratic consolidation, see Stepan and Linz (1997) and Schedler (2002).

income inequality and economic growth.[3] Muller is but one contributor to a long and inconclusive argument about the link between national income and democratization, but as Ake points out, such debates are something of a red herring as they ignore the question of sovereignty: The question that should be asked is not "whether it is more important to eat well than to vote, the question is who is entitled to answer that question" (Ake 1991).

Concurring with Ake, academics such as Ottaway argue that democratic transitions are not possible in situations of donor influence, where pressures for democratization will generally take a back seat compared to economic reform and foreign policy objectives (Ottaway 2003). Furthermore, donors are unable to provide useful support to democratisation as their own models have grown too complex and costly, including demands to strengthen democratic institutions, civil society, the media, the rule of law, etc. The demands made of weak governments by donors are continuously growing, seemingly without acknowledgement that these tasks may need to be prioritised or sequenced and, if they are not, democratization may well be undermined (ibid.).

Furthermore, the continued conviction of donors – particularly the Bretton Woods Institutions – that development solutions are universally applicable and that, therefore, a 'correct' set of policies can be determined and implemented (as described, for example, by Easterly (2008)) frequently results in contradictions between the expectations of internal and external constituencies. Of particular interest to this thesis are the divergent demands made of recipient states and governments by the voters who confer political legitimacy and the donors who choose whether to provide the financial resources for the policy preferences of the electorate. While Bates has argued that these tensions have helped bolster political liberalisation, others have focussed on the extent to which this constrains democratic space.

[3] Muller defines "intermediate" levels of development by GDP and includes those countries with a GDP per capita of US$1000- 4400 in 1970.

Very little has changed *vis-à-vis* the crux of the dispute between donors and government – namely the role of the state in the development process – since the international community first began explicitly imposing economic and political conditionalities on aid recipients: the donor community subscribes to a view of the state as the enabler of the private sector, which will drive growth, rather than the state acting as the driver of economic growth (Leftwich 1993). However, where a large percentage of the population depends on state services to sustain their livelihoods, the electorate is likely to exert pressure on governments to deliver these services. This is frequently, if implicitly, acknowledged by donors when they invoke the concept of 'political will' or lack thereof and refer to the need to insulate political leaders from democratic pressures. This stands in contradiction to their stated intentions of strengthening national democratic institutions and many of their own projects, which are designed to improve democratic governance. Mkandawire (1999), stressing the restrictions that donors place on democratically elected leaders, argues that the resultant democracies are so constrained in the choices that they are able to make that they become 'choiceless democracies'. Aid, therefore, undermines the ability to respond to citizens, compromising the legitimacy of the incumbent government, and possibly even the democratisation project.

These debates take polarised positions on the role of aid in the democratisation project – that it either undermines or supports 'democratisation' – without considering that it may do both of these things at the same time or that the exact nature of the outcomes of aid may, in fact, depend on a whole host of other factors, including but not limited to the political and economic history of the recipient, historical donor-government relationships, the nature and capacity of the state and the myriad of relationships that connect states and citizens or political actors and their constituents. That is to say the complex and multi-faceted nature of democracy is lost in these analyses. Each donor-imposed policy or project will have a different effect depending on how it interacts with each of these factors and how all actors in the chain of implementation of these policies choose to use their individual or collective agency.

Aid and Policy Impositions: Locating Negotiations and Resistance

The impact of aid is determined, in large part, by the policy negotiations between donors and government where donors seek to impose policies they deem necessary and that would not be implemented in the absence of aid, while governments resist or comply with these impositions. Generally, the locus of these interactions has been assumed to be Harrison's 'sovereign frontier', around a negotiating table, at which donors and government meet. More recently, others have argued for an expanded notion of these negotiations, contending that these occur in a broader range of circumstances as donors have become 'embedded' within the civil service. However, I argue that as donors have become constitutive of the political systems with which they engage, it is necessary to study down the state in order to locate processes of negotiation of and resistance to aid. Only by doing this can the effect of aid on sovereignty, the state and political systems be fully understood.

Negotiating Aid

The conditionalities attached to the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) introduced in the early 1980s marked a new chapter in donor-government relationships in several ways: firstly, they were designed to improve repayment rates in a situation in which collateral was not available, by altering the macroeconomic policy environment in ways that the IFIs believed would speed up recovery and growth (Mosley, Harrigan and Toye 1991). The logic behind this was that higher growth rates would increase tax revenues and so would generate the additional income necessary for loans to be repaid to the IFIs. In addition, conditionalities served to decrease the fungibility of aid monies as programme funding increasingly replaced aid (Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1998). This new aid modality, coupled with the severity of the financial crises experienced by many developing countries in the late 1970s and early 1980s, allowed donors to exert unprecedented influence over domestic policy-making in recipient countries. Further, as the 1980s and early 1990s progressed structural adjustment programmes ceased to be short-term interventions and became an integral element, the basis even, of the international community's aid architecture and therefore its interaction with recipient countries (Harrison 2007). The continued engagement between donors and recipients has come under scrutiny, initially

within the framework of game and principal-agent theories (e.g. Mosley et al 1991; Killick et al. 1998).

As discussed above, much of the work concerned with the effectiveness of aid accepts the necessity of the underlying economic principles and policies recommended by the IFIs (e.g. Killick et al. 1998) and, therefore, struggles to explain the reluctance of recipients to conform to conditionalities. In order to explain the behaviour of reluctant politicians and bureaucrats this literature takes on the underlying assumptions of the neo-patrimonial and rational choice literature, namely that the primary aim of recipient governments is to preserve their power base and access to state resources, by avoiding painful reforms that might threaten this. As Whitfield and Fraser write

> The idea that recipient government actions might reflect the democratic wishes of their citizens, be economically (as opposed to politically) rational, publicly interested or based in legitimate prioritization of policy goals other than the maximisation of growth, is hardly considered. (Whitfield and Fraser 2009: 30)

Consequently, the possibility that donor-imposed policies may inflict more harm than good or that they are not transferable between the different contexts prevalent across the African continent is frequently not considered.

Mosley, Harrigan and Toye's contribution to the debates around conditionality argued that aid and its conditionalities were best understood as a bargaining game in which both parties take note of the other's behaviour in order to strengthen their own negotiating position (Mosley et al 1991). The donor will aim for as much policy change as possible per dollar, whereas the recipient will want to minimise the number of unwanted policy impositions. Where governments expect policy stipulations to have severe negative political consequences, the main aim of government negotiators will be to limit their impact and avoid unpopular reform. Recipient governments know that donors need to continue disbursing funds and depend on continued collaboration with recipient governments. They make use of this knowledge when they refuse certain policy impositions or when determining which of the imposed policy conditions to implement and how, once official

negotiations are completed (Mosley et al, 1991). In a similar vein, Tony Killick et al. use a principal-agent model in order to investigate why it is that conditionalities do not work (Killick et al 1998). They concentrate on the contract between donors and recipients, which is negotiated by officials – where donors attempt to maximise the uptake of conditionalities and recipients make calculations based on the costs of implementing them – and conclude that conditionalities simply do not work as the costs of implementation are frequently too high for recipients (ibid.). Killick, however, stops short of asking why the costs of implementation might be too high or considering whether this might be problematic in terms of sovereignty and hence domestic political accountability.

In contrast, Whitfield (2009) argues for a more comprehensive political economy approach. She acknowledges that global forces shape the behaviour of actors around the negotiating table, such as economic, political and ideological circumstances, and asserts the importance of recognising that recipient governments object to policy impositions for a variety of reasons, both legitimate and illegitimate. Whitfield and Fraser argue for

> an approach that identifies the particularities of the contemporary aid process, as well as considering the institutional legacies of the system over which innovations are layered (Whitfield and Fraser 2009: 37).

The theoretical approaches to negotiations between donors and governments, Whitfield and her collaborators argue, no longer apply to the partnership era in which only a small number of aid conditionalities are negotiated explicitly between donor officials and their counterparts in Ministries of Finance. Donors have created a "plethora of arenas" in which policies are discussed as they have become "embedded" within governments and civil service structures (Whitfield 2005; 2006). This means that donors need only impose macroeconomic conditionalities explicitly, while relying on the self-policing by governments in other major sectors through processes such as the drafting of national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Once these have been compiled, bilateral donors need then only provide technical assistance, project financing and sectoral budget

support in line with the recipient's *very own* policies in order to ensure that their preferred policies are implemented. New modalities and financial mechanisms to assist with the disbursement of aid have further reduced the space available for governments to develop their own policies and to circumvent direct and indirect impositions (Svensson 2002). Simultaneously, the discourse of the donor community has shifted to 'partnership' and 'aid coordination', and purports to improve aid coordination and to reduce the almost limitless coordination work associated with being an aid recipient, as outlined in the Paris Declaration (DAC 2005). Perhaps the best example of this is the move towards 'Sector-Wide Approaches', which supposedly serve to reduce coordination problems, but in fact drastically increase the workload in line ministries. Moreover, attempts to create these new institutional structures in the absence of any clear vision of what such an institution should look like are not only time consuming but also reduce the oversight and coordination ability of the Ministry of Finance and allows for the concentration of otherwise fragmented donor influence by ensuring pooled sector funding.

The corollary of the partnership era and its distinct modus operandi is that resistance to donor interventions has become more fragmented, diverse, convoluted, politicised and, frequently, difficult to trace. Whitfield and her co-authors locate the resistance of weak aid recipients in the process of drafting overarching policy papers – for example by failing to prioritise policies in the drafting phase so that many can be dropped at a later stage – or by resisting only in the case of the most important policies. Whitfield concludes that some

> governments … have opted to accept their subordinate position and the inevitability of intimate donor involvement in policymaking, and then pursued strategies to maximise their policy control within that context. These have not been successful strategies for securing control over their country's political agenda (Whitfield 2009: 356).

Beyond the Negotiating Table: Why Does Aid Dependence Matter?

Studies of the process of negotiating aid focus on the negotiating table where officials from donor agencies and recipient bureaucracies meet to thrash out the

conditionalities attached to any given tranche of aid. While Whitfield (2009) demonstrates how donors have become increasingly 'embedded' in the bureaucracies of recipient states, to the extent that they now sit on both sides of the negotiating table, her focus remains on this expanded notion of the negotiating table. However, in a situation where donors have infiltrated recipient states to the degree described by Whitfield, it is questionable whether this locus remains key to resisting donor impositions. Direct resistance as well as attempts to mitigate the impact of conditionalities need to be sought elsewhere. While it has always been true that opposition occurred outside of official negotiations, these loci of resistance are likely to increase in importance as donors expand their supervision of recipients' bureaucracies. As negotiations are increasingly dominated by donors despite – or arguably because of – the emphasis on 'partnership', resistance at the negotiating table is oftentimes futile. The first real chance for negotiation or resistance available to governments is the failure to follow through on agreed-upon conditionalities. As aid relations have become more decentralised and 'embedded' so have strategies for resisting donor control over domestic policies. Acts of resistance need to be sought in complementary policies that undermine the intention, if not the letter, of conditionalities, as well as in the realm of policies that are initiated and implemented relatively independently of the civil service, for example at the behest of the head of state. As donor capacity and attention is limited, recipient governments are able to resist strategically by using policies in those areas that are, at any given moment, of lesser interest to donors to counteract those policies imposed in other areas. These practices have to be balanced with the demands made by political constituencies, making for increasingly politicised policy and decision-making. The displacement of resistance has also brought with it an expansion of efforts by the donor community to control recipient governments, not simply their bureaucracies, for example through an increased focus on governance programmes.

This evolution in donor-government relationships has had a number of repercussions. The first is that in order to understand the impact of aid dependence the focus of research needs to shift from an emphasis on the conditionalities negotiated by the IFIs or even Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

to the lower-tier, bilateral donors who police the drafting and implementation of policies in the civil service in seemingly more collaborative ways. Concurrently, attention needs to be directed at how individual policies are shaped by politicians, civil servants, bi- and multilateral donors as well as their supposed beneficiaries. In other words, it is important to consider the overall policy picture that emerges rather than simply studying direct negotiations and policy impositions. Simply considering which donor-imposed policies are actually implemented – or not – is inadequate: a plethora of contradictory policies might attempt to counteract the liberalisation drive of the IFIs. Similarly, arguing that aid creates inconsistent or incoherent policy environments, as for example Harrigan does, is also insufficient without considering the political consequences of these policies (Harrigan 2003). Only if the political context within which these policies are made, and indeed the policies that appear to emerge only as a result of political rather than technocratic considerations, are considered an integral part of "aid negotiations" can the full implications of aid dependence, and consequently imposed policies, be understood. Such an approach also sheds light on the question of how aid fits into patrimonial or patronage politics alongside democratic institutions and policy pressures.

The literature on aid and politics is also too narrow in another respect, as it focuses only on relationships between donors and government, assuming that politicians and civil servants resist conditionalities where they are politically painful, either for self-serving purposes or to prevent legitimate political settlements from being undermined. The possibility that resistance to policies can happen outside of the confines of elite decision and policy-making is given inadequate consideration. Policies are either implemented or not, with certain political outcomes. This view stems from a failure to consider the everyday interactions between states and citizens that, as Lund argues, form the basis of public authority and local politics. In interactions with "twilight institutions", "beneficiaries" of policies imposed by donors are able to mount their own resistance to aid dependence and its policy consequences. These acts of resistance (or negotiation) happen outside the 'sovereign frontier', in the everyday interactions between citizens and the state, and represent the consequences of

compromised sovereignty. Aid has more profound impacts for sovereignty, the state and domestic politics than can be captured simply through the study of relationships between governments and their donors. Not only do donors become "constitutive elements" of domestic politics in recipient countries as argued by Leininger (Leininger 2010: 63), the consequences of this are much more pervasive than is generally considered. Donors are not simply external actors who influence policy through imposition or through their 'embeddedness' within states, rather they penetrate and profoundly alter domestic political relationships far beyond their physical reach and presence.

Research Methodology and Sources

Methodology

The research question at hand, namely exploring the impact of aid dependence on relationships of representation and, thus, democratic processes, requires contrasting the different understandings of Malawi's agricultural sector held by the various stakeholders. These stakeholders include actors involved in the policy-making process, such as donors, government officials and politicians, as well as the political constituencies affected by these decisions, primarily smallholder famers. In other words, the policy preferences of donors, government, political representatives and smallholder farmers need to be understood, as well as the discourses underpinning these, including ideological differences. These divergent views are "actively constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed continuously" by the actors involved and explored in dialogue with the researcher (Palys 2003: 14). The primary aim of this thesis is not to establish which sets of policy preferences are likely to engender the greatest level of agricultural transformation, although their implications for agricultural production and food security are of concern too, of course. Instead, I seek to understand how and why these policy packages differ and what the political fallout is of one set of preferences being implemented over another. The aim is also to discern the underlying ideologies espoused by policy-makers, donors and smallholders that give rise to divergent policy preferences and, thus, to determine the political impact of donor-government negotiations.

A methodological approach is, therefore, required that moves beyond a positivist view of the world as this methodology values only data that can be replicated and that is representative of an "external world" that is discrete from the researcher. As Charles Taylor argues, such

> notions about the sciences of man are sterile, [and] that we cannot come to understand important dimensions of human life within the bounds set by this epistemological orientation (Taylor 2000: 185).

Instead a methodology that allows for the different interpretations and policy preferences of respondents and one that is able to see the dialogue and conflicts between these views as a valid area for research is required. Michael Burawoy suggests an extended case method approach for such research questions and a 'reflexive science' methodology that "thrives on context" and dialogue (Burawoy 1998). He dismisses the notion that it is possible to conduct positive social science as any form of participant observation or interview will have an effect on the social world it seeks to understand. This compromises the replicability of data and renders representativeness impossible in the positivist sense. With Gouldner (1970), he dismisses the "methodological dualism" that is the result of attempting to conduct positivist social science, where the researcher herself is absolved or freed from the very hypotheses she is expounding.

As an alternative, Burawoy proposes the methodology he terms 'reflexive science' as a meaningful alternative to positivist science and argues that the methodological difficulties inherent in social science should not preclude a scientific approach. With 'reflexive science' the unique circumstances and conditions of any chosen fieldsite and the dialogue between individuals within it and the wider world, as well as the dialogue between researcher and respondent, become a central component of the research itself. Burawoy writes that

> where positive science proposes to insulate subject from object reflexive science elevates *dialogue* as its defining principle and *intersubjectivity* between participant and observer as its premise (Burawoy 1998: 14).

Thus, the interview or participant-observer interactions are seen as active interventions that provide opportunities for the researcher as "social order reveals itself in the way it responds to pressure" (Burawoy 1998: 17). When such social interactions and research experiences are first unpicked and then understood in their broader social, political and economic contexts, they can shed light on and refine existing theories. All the while, the external world that acts upon and is acted upon by the research environment ('structuration' in Burawoy's terms) is acknowledged as central to the research process. Thus, through the extended case method, existing theories can be amended, elaborated or improved upon and science becomes not something that offers "final truths, … [or] certainties, but exists in a state of continual revision" (Burawoy 1998: 16).

This process of constant revision is also known as the 'hermeneutic circle', where sense is made of data and its interpretations – or text – with reference, in turn, to other interpretations (e.g. Katz 1983, McNabb 2004). As there is no definitive means of testing the conclusions drawn from data only interpretations are possible and

> to appreciate a good explanation one has to agree on what makes good sense; what makes good sense is a function of one's readings; and these in turn are based on the kind of sense one understands (Taylor 2000: 187).

With reference to my research, the goal of tracing the frequently antagonistic debates and negotiations between the Government of Malawi and its donors and of delineating the impact of these processes, thus becomes one of dialogue – between researcher and respondent, between actors within the fieldsite, and between the fieldsite and the external environment. Throughout the process of conducting my research and in writing my thesis, I was engaged in a constant process of unpacking the social context of my interviews, the 'epistemic communities' of my interviewees, and their interactions with each other and in aggregating my findings into an understanding of aid relations and its political impact. No single interviewee or source could be expected to offer an adequate answer to the research question as a whole, but could only provide one possible interpretation of a small aspect of it. The socially constructed nature of different actors' views within the policy-making process in Malawi was the forefront of my

analysis. For the donor community, for example, views of food security were based on technical knowledge that valued nutrition and agricultural science as well as neoclassical economic theory, over other types of knowledge. Over and above its importance to securing their daily caloric intake, smallholder producers' views on food security policies were determined by experiences of famine as well as questions of identity and social obligations. My understanding of donor–government relationships and their impact changed, therefore, as each interview added layers of nuance or, frequently, contradictory material.

Burawoy dismisses the views of theorists who have responded to the critiques of positivist science by moving as he perceives it too far from science towards a methodology based on 'interpretation' as its central tenet. Instead, he argues for the need to hold on to the scientific nature of social research:

> If context effects demonstrate the impossibility of science, power effects show how dangerous and self-defeating it is. But abandoning science altogether leaves power unaffected and the hegemony of positive science untouched (Burawoy 1998: 24).

However, Geertz nevertheless makes a compelling argument for interpretative analyses and "thick descriptions" that are relevant to the analysis of donor-government relationships in Malawi. He writes that

> Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz 2000: 5).

On this basis, he argues that researchers need to do more than simply describe the situations encountered, but that they also need to provide interpretations for their readers, or "thick descriptions", in order to give meaning to their ethnographic material. While this thesis does not rely so much on ethnographic data or participant observation, there is clearly a need not only to describe the actions and policy-preferences of donors, government officials and smallholder farmers, but to interpret their origins in order to ascertain their relevance to aid relations in Malawi.

In summary, Burawoy's 'reflexive science' and the extended case method allows for and permits an interpretation of the divergent constructs around the food security problem by different actors in Malawi and assists in answering the thesis' central research question. As a result, I was able to conceptualise of my data gathering exercise as a dialogue and I was able to discuss the statements made about smallholder preferences for maize voiced by their representative organisations or farmers themselves, for example, with members of the donor community to better understand their appreciation of Malawi's food security situation, and vice versa. What to smallholder farmers was a rational response to the complex food security challenges they faced and their preference for a certain staple was often characterised by donors as a "single-minded pursuit of maize self-sufficiency" and attributed to nebulous cultural factors (Rubey 2003: 3). Such discussions provided useful insights into the conflicts, and their origins, between different actors attempting to influence the policy-making process.

Finally, the implications of Buraway, Taylor and others' work is also important with regards to the types of research questions and the answers that are possible in the social sciences or the "science of man" (Taylor 2000). They both argue that the predictive capacity of these sciences suffer as a result of such an approach. Taylor writes:

> And thus, it is much easier to understand after the fact than it is to predict. Human science is largely ex post understanding. … There is a clear asymmetry here, which there is not (or not supposed to be) in natural science, where events are said to be predicted from the theory with exactly the same ease with which one explains past events and by exactly the same process. In human science this will never be the case (Taylor 2000: 208-209).

When the study of intersubjectivity is elevated to a legitimate research concern and dialogue becomes a defining principle of research, then research questions seek primarily to understand what has occurred rather than to make predictions about outcomes. This is relevant to this thesis and its discussions of the emergence (or lack thereof) of 'responsive policy-making relationships' and other emergent

democratic institutions in that I seek only to describe the ways in which donor-government relationships have prevented their emergence. I cannot, nor do I attempt, to argue that these would definitely have emerged in the absence of aid-imposed policy restrictions. Similarly, there has been much discussion concerning the aptitude of democracy and democratic institutions for generating economic growth and even whether democracy is viable below a certain socio-economic threshold. My interest here is not to decide whether democratic institutions should emerge in Malawi, but to explore how aid relations have impacted on their development, after the Malawian electorate voted for multiparty democracy in a referendum in 1993.

Research Process and Methods

To answer my research question, I needed to explore two relationships, namely negotiations and resistance – formal and informal – between donors and recipient officials and between the government of Malawi and those Malawians who, in turn, interact with these policies and the institutions that implement them. The first involves exploring donor-government relationships through elite interviews and the grey and secondary literature available on the topic. The relationship between rural Malawians and the government is affected by the discrepancy between smallholder farmers' policy expectations and the policies implemented by government as well as the impact of policies on smallholder farmers' livelihoods. The first aspect could be traced through archival research and life history interviewees with smallholders and the second through extensive interviews with smallholders on contemporary policy, as well as some secondary and grey literature, particularly evaluations of large-scale agricultural programmes, such as the FISP.

The fieldwork that forms the basis of this thesis consisted of three phases. The first phase was research in the national archives in Zomba from July to November 2011. This was followed by elite interviews, the bulk of which were conducted in Lilongwe and Blantyre between November 2011 and March 2012, and were complemented by a second stint of fieldwork in August and September 2013. The analysis of elite-level relationships between donors and government also draws on interviews conducted and documents collected in the course of the fieldwork

for my MPhil dissertation from July to September 2007. Finally, the material on the impact of agricultural policies on smallholder maize producers' and their policy expectations was generated between March and June 2012 in interviews with smallholder farmers, traders, agricultural extension officers and ADMARC employees.

Archival and Documentary Research

The main aim of the archival component of my fieldwork was to elucidate the background against which the national political and policy-making context could be understood, specifically with regards to how agricultural policies since independence have shaped the expectations of smallholder farmers and thus the negotiating positions of the Malawian government. The focus of the research was the immediate pre- and post-independence era, during which Banda used agricultural policy to shape the nation-building process, strengthen his grip on power and to control the rural population in ways that profoundly affected political life for decades. The most important task was to clarify the emergence of maize as both the principle crop and the central issue in national politics. This research also elucidated the emergence of the system of parastatals, policies and subsidies that governed the agricultural sector and absorbed much of the risk inherent in food production, prior to the introduction of structural adjustment programmes in the early 1980s.

Within the national archives in Zomba, I concentrated my research on government documents from the Ministries most relevant to my research, namely the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Agriculture (though these went by different names at different times). I focused on the period from the mid-1940s up to the present day, although effectively this meant until approximately 2005, as any documents generated after 2005 were still being kept in the Ministries themselves in Lilongwe and were generally not accessible.

Within the documents of the Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs my focus was on those that recorded interactions between the government of Malawi and its donors, with the aim of tracing these evolving relationships. The form that these documents took changed over the period under study; initially most sources

were telegrams, letters and relatively short project reports. With time, letters and telegrams were replaced with mission reports and the minutes of donor-government meetings and more extensive reporting to donors on various aspect of government, including macroeconomic data as well as project reports. In the first two decades after independence the government of Malawi held frequent meetings discussing donor policy and Banda personally noted his views on meeting outcomes and decisions. After the introduction of structural adjustment programmes, unsurprisingly, meetings increasingly involved donor counterparts. Within the Ministry of Agriculture's files, policy documents, meeting minutes and discussions over ADMARC's price policies proved particularly useful. I complemented these sources with Kamuzu Banda's personal archives, to provide some insight into his personal involvement with agricultural policy-making.

It is worth noting that the quality and quantity of archival materials available declined from the early 2000s onwards, as a result of an increase in the use of computers and in the absence of an archiving policy for electronic documents and communication.

The Malawi National Archives in Zomba have been used by a number of historians; most notably and recently John McCracken drew on archival sources from Malawi's National Archives in his book *A History of Malawi, 1859 – 1966*. Colin Baker made use of documents now in the personal Banda archives in the writing of *Revolt of the Ministers: The Malawi Cabinet Crisis, 1964-1965*, while John Lwanda used them to write *Kamuzu Banda of Malawi: A Study in Promise, Power and Legacy.* Joey Power also drew on these archives in *Political Culture and Nationalism in Malawi: Building Kwacha.*

There are a number of challenges inherent in any type of archival research, particularly in discerning that which is unwritten but which was of importance nonetheless. This refers not to the information that is missing from the archives, but to that which remained unspoken because it formed part of the "epistemic habits" of those responsible for the archive's creation (Stoler 2009). Ann Laura

Stoler argues of colonial archives that this does not mean uncovering "hidden messages" in the archives but

> [r]ather it seeks to identify the pliable coordinates of what constituted colonial common sense in a changing imperial order in which social reform, questions of rights and representation and liberal impulses and more explicit racism played an increasing role (Stoler 2009: 3)

She calls this the 'grain' of the archives and argues that this must be understood before one can read against the grain of the archive and discern resistance to the colonial logic and imperial project. This approach proved useful to my study of Malawi's colonial and post-independence archives in two ways. Firstly, it allowed for a reading of the colonial logic of agricultural development in Nyasaland and thus, subsequently, a deconstruction of the prejudices and pre-conceived notions that led to the choice of certain policies over others. This then allowed for a better understanding of the policy logic that determined post-independence agricultural policy under Hastings Kamuzu Banda from 1964 onwards. Secondly, this approach to the archives proved an adept tool for understanding the manner in which donor-government interactions unfolded from about 1980 onwards, as the first Structural Adjustment Programme was negotiated. Having studied the grain of the archive and the "epistemic habits" that determined the policies implemented by Banda's government, I had an improved understanding of the ways in which donor-imposed policies contravened these and gradually undermined their viability.

Throughout my fieldwork, I also collected and interpreted the grey literature generated by government and donor institutions, which included Country Assistance Strategy Papers, policy papers and national statistics. The meaning of these texts required deciphering through a process of 'discourse analysis' in which the authors' points of view and intent, their cultural, political and institutional backgrounds were scrutinised (McNabb 2004). Of particular importance to this was the evolution of relationships, partnerships and institution-building processes between organisations and political actors. It proved particularly difficult to ascertain the motivations of the donor community in persisting to

pressurise government to impose policies that would remove the minimal protection that smallholders enjoyed from the vagaries of food insecurity. As Thomas Hüsken argues, the donor community's policy ideas and ideals are influenced by what he terms 'epistemic communities' and result in the dominance of certain ideas, which fall in and out of fashion (Hüsken 2006). While this explains the ascendancy of certain ideas regarding food security, it rendered the process of attempting to ascertain donor motivations difficult.

This type of document analysis also involves careful consideration of the language used. A careful reading of the documents that govern the interaction between donors and recipient governments was particularly useful as the language used revealed different approaches to food security. Additionally, an analysis of the policy questions avoided in official documents provided important insights. For example, the World Bank Country Assistance Strategy for 2007-2011 emphasised that the Bank worked on five-year plans so as to harmonise its work with domestic planning documents and processes. However, it did not engage with the issue of Malawi's fertiliser subsidy, a controversial policy that many donors did not support but that at times amounted to 6% of GDP.

Finally, my archival and documentary research suffered from a more prosaic version of the problem of deciphering the "unwritten": the absence of information and the proliferation of demonstrably incorrect data. The first is perhaps most starkly illustrated by the fact that whole boxes of archived resources are missing from the Zomba archives. Included amongst these missing boxes are those that cover correspondence with the IMF and the Ministry of Finance in the late 1990s and early 2000s, i.e. the period in which the former pressed for the sale of the Strategic Grain Reserve prior to the devastating famine of 2001/02. According to the archivists, a former employee of the archives sold these missing boxes as scrap paper to traders at Zomba's vibrant fish market. It was not possible to ascertain whether this was in fact the truth, or whether certain documents had disappeared from the archives for reasons of political expediency. A second incident served to demonstrate the unreliability of data on agriculture in Malawi. During my research, it became clear that there was a large discrepancy between the number

of farm households in Malawi according to the statistics generated by the National Statistical Office and the Ministry of Agriculture. While this appeared baffling at first, it eventually led to some fruitful discussions with policy-makers who were able to shed light on the political reasons for this (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this).

It is worth noting here, that the agricultural, food security and GDP statistics for Malawi are frequently unreliable. Not only are they subject to the usual difficulties in measuring production and consumption in a largely agricultural economy, but the production of statistics has become heavily politicised, in part as a result of strained relationships between donors and the government and in part due to government's desire to demonstrate the efficacy of its food security policies.[4] There is, for example, some evidence that the annual maize production figures have been inflated to prove the effectiveness of the FISP. Chirwa and Dorward (2013c) question these figures as the increase in maize prices, in the absence of large exports, are not compatible with the sizable production surpluses that were reported from 2008/09 onwards. Fortunately, Chirwa and Dorward have attempted to establish realistic production estimates, thus allowing for the analysis of the political dimensions behind production and household numbers that I discuss in Chapter 6 (e.g. Chirwa and Dorward 2013c).

Elite Interviewing

Following the archival and document research in Zomba, I conducted elite interviews with policy and decision-makers in Lilongwe chosen from one of three categories: employees of donor organisations (frequently but by no means always expatriate employees); representatives, employees and former employees of the Government of Malawi; political parties and civil society organisations. While the main aim of these interviews was to explore the policy preferences of donors and government, their discrepancies and negotiation processes, I also interviewed representatives of non-governmental organisations involved in these negotiations on behalf of smallholder farmers. This not only allowed for the exploration of the constraints faced by Malawi's smallholders and the nature of their policy ideals in

[4] For a discussion of the difficulties of the general problems with GDP data see Jerven (2013b).

advance of my rural fieldwork, but also how their views may or may not have fed into the policy-making process. In-depth interviews were carried out with organisations such as the National Association of Smallholder Farmers of Malawi (NASFAM), the Farmers' Union of Malawi (FUM) and the Civil Society and Agriculture Network (CISA-Net), all of whom feed into governmental decision-making processes, formally or informally, on issues of agricultural development, including staple food production. Other local and international NGOs have also become increasingly involved in these consultation processes. They sit on a surprisingly large number of governmental committees, feeding into discussions held at the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee or the Joint Task Force on Nutrition and Food Security (both located within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security).

From within these three loose categories of interviewees, I chose respondents according to their affiliation and position within their agencies. Identifying the organisations active in the field was possible through the Council of NGOs in Malawi (CONGOMA), workshop attendance lists, lists of participants in Sector Working Groups and the Sector-Wide Approach in agriculture, political parties and by making contact with the relevant ministries. Snowballing also allowed me to identify important contacts and to learn of the existence of other projects and organisations, which proved especially useful for 'moving up the hierarchy' especially in political parties or government ministries. In this manner, for example, I was able to interview Vice President Joyce Banda by making contact with the People's Party's spokesperson for agriculture, who subsequently facilitated an introduction.

My interviews were semi-structured, i.e. I had a clear list of questions to be answered, but was flexible enough to allow broader exchanges of views. This was particularly important as each organisation had different approaches and roles to play in the donor-government relationship or as a service provider in the case of NGOs, no single set of interview questions would have been suitable or made sense to all interviewees. Certain interviewees were so focused on particular aspects of the research question that I found it useful to explore only one topic in

depth with them, whereas with others, who had more of an overview, the discussion remained much broader. Furthermore, my interviewees differed greatly in their willingness to candidly discuss conflict between donors and the government. Many of them, particularly those who either worked for donor organisations or as their counterparts within government, were at pains to stress the benefits of the "partnership era", for reducing tensions between donors and government. It thus became clear that asking questions aimed directly at eliciting information on conflict between the two parties would not always yield results and that a certain degree of flexibility was necessary in the interview process. In-depth discussions about the negotiations of technical components of projects and policies, on the other hand, frequently exposed deep-seated ideological rifts between government representatives and donors and the compromises that were elaborated to address these.

Quite a number of my elite interviewees preferred to remain in control of the interview process, and led the discussion once I had introduced the general purpose of my research. In these situations I did little other than "get[ting] people onto a topic of interest and get[ting] out of the way" (Bernard 2002: 209). This strategy frequently revealed important, and unexpected, insights. Many of my respondents were senior civil servants, politicians or employees used to running meetings and interviews and allowing them to take control put them at ease and elicited sensitive or controversial information that they may have been reluctant to disclose had I asked directly in my role as interviewer. In this context, both my female gender and age was frequently an advantage, as I was deemed relatively unthreatening by the oftentimes older and well-established male technocrat.

"Filter questions" allowed me to establish the relevance of my questions to the respondent, to determine which topics might yield the most fruitful discussion, but also to gauge how many prompts my interviewee would prefer. In this regard, the political and economic situation in Malawi in 2011 and 2012 proved a blessing in disguise despite the fact that it also rendered the logistical aspect of my fieldwork (especially in rural Malawi) extremely difficult at times. The foreign exchange shortages and empty fuel pumps coupled with political demonstrations

and the president's increasingly authoritarian style made for a universal conversation opener and served as a "filter question" as these topics were also intimately connected to the main themes of my research, namely agriculture and donor-government relationships.

Rural Research

For the final stage of my research I spent three months in two rural areas in Malawi. The first month in Misozi South, approximately 30 kms from Lilongwe, and then two months in Ntcheu Rural, in Malawi's Central Highlands. Due to the agro-ecological and political differences between Malawi's three main regions, the North, South and Central Highlands, I had initially intended to spend time in one rural community in each region in order to ascertain the different political outcomes of the fertilizer subsidy programme. However, this proved too logistically difficult at a time when the public transport system was grinding to a halt as a result of fuel shortages and I had to limit my research to central Malawi. It has been argued by a number of authors, most notably Chirwa and Dorward (2013c), that the implementation of this programme, particularly the element of coupon sharing, took different forms and was more or less important in the three regions. It is, therefore, possible that my findings reflect only the experience of the Central region. However, as my intention was not to ascertain whether the involvement of aid in the agricultural sector had a given outcome, but rather to determine whether it shaped domestic politics in Malawi and undermined the ability of political representatives to fulfil their roles as intended, I believe my conclusions are still relevant for understanding Malawian politics.

I chose the two fieldsites, in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu, for a combination of reasons, largely to do with questions of access and in an effort to find fieldsites that would prove representative of Malawi's three agro-economic and political regions. Thus, I began my research in Misozi South outside of Lilongwe as the area was a Malawi Congress Party (MCP) stronghold. I was able to negotiate access through the District Commissioner and Traditional Authority as I had met the MP for the area, who had served as Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture for several years. As it gradually became clear that I would not be able

to cover each of Malawi's three regions, I decided to confine myself to further research in the central area, but outside of the immediate vicinity of Lilongwe, where market access was not facilitated by the proximity of the capital. Ntcheu district proved a good choice in this context as, unlike other areas in the central region, it did not have a strong MCP affiliation. Instead, Ntcheu had seen a great deal of change in terms of its choice of political party as well as its individual representatives. Furthermore, my research assistant had the necessary connections to the District Commissioner to facilitate access.

Despite having conducted research in two districts, the majority of the material presented in this thesis is from Ntcheu, rather than Lilongwe Rural. This is as my findings in Lilongwe Rural informed and altered my understanding of the FISP. When I initially began my research in Lilongwe Rural I was not expecting to find the level of coupon sharing, or for it to be as institutionalised as it turned out to be. It was only as I heard stories from smallholder farmers of their interaction with the FISP that the focus of my research shifted. As a result of what I had learned in Lilongwe Rural, I was able to focus more on the manner in which communities subverted the subsidy, in other words, how sharing was organised and for what reasons, which forms the basis of much of my analysis on the subsidy programme. While many of my findings were identical in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu, I was able to get at the rationale for coupon sharing and the conflicts it both created and resolved in a more focused fashion during my time in Ntcheu.

This component of my research also proved the most complex in terms of positionality, access, and ethics. While conducting my research in Lilongwe amongst the political, bureaucratic and technocratic elite, I was able to determine my position *vis-à-vis* my interviewees to a much larger degree, choosing to emphasise our commonality of background or education or choosing to cast myself as an outsider, depending on the research context. So, for example, I was quite keen to emphasise my position as an outsider when interviewing civil servants or politicians to avoid being seen as a member of the aid community and therefore encumbered with the politics and conflicts of donor-government relationships but could also frequently draw on a joint educational background,

or similar experiences, in order to establish rapport. In rural Malawi this was, of course, not an option as my position as an outsider was undeniable. As a white woman, who alternately arrived in a minibus, on a motorbike or a bicycle taxi, had never practiced subsistence agriculture, did not speak fluent Chewa, had neither children nor husband, there were few points of commonality, if many opportunities to laugh at the researcher. This brought both challenges and opportunities with it with regards to the reliability and insight of my research and my ability to establish rapport and trust with my interviewees. My position was further shaped by the fact that in order to have access to my chosen fieldsites, I needed to first establish contact with the District Commissioner, then the Traditional Authority and finally the Village Head. While in some villages the Village Head chose not to involve himself in my research, in others he insisted on accompanying me around the village and introducing me to every household. Unsurprisingly, in these villages it was much harder to gain the trust of my interviewees and they did not talk as openly about the role of their Village Head in the process of distributing the benefits of the FISP.

Beyond this process of initial introductions, my position as outsider had both advantages and disadvantages. As far as the former is concerned, agricultural policies in general and the FISP in particular, were important subject matters to the majority of those I interviewed, as their livelihoods depended on these very directly. Many of my interviewees expressed not only willingness but also relief at being able to share their views on the subject with an outsider with whom they felt they could air their grievances, without the fear of fanning conflict. At times the fact that I asked questions that were patently beside the point and perhaps even stupid helped to break the ice. On the other hand, this also led to ethically difficult situations where my interviewees assumed that simply by virtue of the fact that I was a foreign researcher asking questions about their livelihoods that I was there in order to bring resources of one form or another. Naturally, this also had the potential to distort people's answers as they sought to make themselves appear poorer in order to access these resources. Of particular concern here is the question of the FISP and the sharing of coupons where it is conceivable that respondents concealed the extent of differentiation between households and

household wealth in order to justify their decision to share coupons. It is also highly likely that there was more coupon theft, misappropriation, and selling than was reported by my interviewees as these activities are not officially sanctioned. However, the number of coupons available in any given village did appear to match official records, so it is reasonable to assume that theft and corruption at this level of the fertilizer distribution process will not have been substantial.

Finally, the process of negotiating consent proved complex in both Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu, where my respondents were not conversant with academic research and its possible implications. The majority were not able to read or write, so consent could only be oral. While I ensured that all of my interviewees were aware of how I would use the material gathered, I also guaranteed anyone I spoke to anonymity. Of course, this cannot be guaranteed in the case of Village Heads or other traditional authorities, as I have also disclosed the names of the villages where I conducted my research. These, however, all agreed to being identified by their position. In order to ensure the anonymity of my interviewees I have numbered them in order of interviews conducted, rather than giving them pseudonyms, as this eliminates the possibility of other individuals being mistakenly identified as one of my interviewees.

Once I had negotiated access and completed the process of initial introductions I attempted to select households to interview at random in order to get as representative a sample of households as possible. I was careful to ensure that I spoke to official FISP beneficiary households as well as those who were not selected. For each village, I selected twenty households at random from the village register kept by the village head, using a random number generator. I also selected an additional ten household names, again at random with the use of a random number generator, from the list of FISP beneficiaries supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture. It was in interviewing households that had not officially benefitted from the FISP that the extent of coupon sharing first became evident to me. As the question of coupon sharing became more and more central to my work, I began to seek out households that had not benefitted from the subsidy at all, officially or unofficially in order to get their views. In Phalula – a very small village – I spoke

to more than 90% of households and all of them claimed to have benefited from the FISP in the previous agricultural season. In total, I interviewed 149 smallholder farmers in rural Ntcheu, 69 of whom were from official FISP beneficiary households. In each village, I also interviewed the village head, as many members of the Village Development Committee as I could locate, the village's Agricultural Extension Agent and in the nearest trading centre I interviewed maize traders.

Naturally, I did not always manage to interview a representative from each of the selected households, in which case I went back to the list of remaining households and chose another one at random. More frequently, however, I interviewed households that I had not originally selected, usually as individuals sought me out to give me their views, having heard about my research from other respondents. On numerous occasions, my interviewees would bring their neighbours who they thought might have useful contributions to make into the interview setting. More than once, what had begun as an individual interview quickly became a focus group discussion. I attempted to limit this and to conduct interviews with selected households individually as much as possible as I believed – and this was borne out on a number of occasions – that interviewees would be more likely to disclose sensitive aspects of their interaction with the FISP, such as coupon sales or purchases, in the absence of other community members.

A downside of selecting respondents by household rather than as individuals was that women turned out to be over-represented amongst my interviewees as my research was conducted not long after the maize harvest when the men were more frequently away from the home or their fields in order to sell their produce. The question of how a household should be defined – by marriage, cohabitation, by collective farming activities, land ownership or some other criteria – was also a constant question that proved impossible to answer. However, as this is a question also faced in the selection of FISP beneficiaries and the registering of households with the Ministry of Agriculture this proved useful for understanding the realities of FISP's administration.

My interviews with smallholder farmers were more structured than my elite interviews, but there was nevertheless a great deal of variation in the topics discussed. Sometimes I initiated these deviations from the standard set of questions as my understanding of the FISP became more nuanced, while at other times this was driven by my interviewees' desire to speak to certain aspects of the FISP or agricultural policy. Nevertheless, my interviews always began with a standard set of questions about how much land the household owned and/or farmed, the size of the last harvest, consumption patterns, how much maize the household had bought and sold, when it had run out of maize and how it had covered that shortfall. This allowed me to ascertain the relative wealth level of the household and provided a starting point from which to discuss how FISP beneficiaries were selected, how they should be selected as well as the programme's impact on livelihoods.

Conclusion

The effects of aid and aid dependence extend far beyond a simple infringement of sovereignty that renders recipient governments "choiceless democracies". Much of the work on aid has looked at its effects at elite level, either focusing on sovereignty and demonstrating the extent to which this has been undermined or assuming that the loss of sovereignty at the elite level has negative effects on representative political systems. However, in order to appreciate the effects of aid, one needs to look beyond infringements of sovereignty and interactions between donors and government alone and trace the impact of its policies down the state, as well as looking to the response of political actors to impositions. Further, the sites of negotiation and resistance are not only found where donors and government interact directly – either around the negotiating table or within the state's bureaucracy – but wherever citizens interact with the state and the policies imposed by donors. In this way the implications of undermined sovereignty, the relevance of aid to democratic institutions, and the effects of the state of 'embedded' donors can be better understood.

In order to understand the influence of donors in recipient polities, it is also necessary to go beyond neopatrimonial theories of the African state and politics.

These do not allow for the historical, social or economic insights necessary to comprehend either the demands citizens make of their state and political representatives or the means by which leaders respond to these, beyond resorting to patrimonial networks and misappropriation. A different approach to politics is required in order to conceptualise a political system that might be patrimonial and corrupt *as well as* responsive to electoral demands. In such a system, the effects of aid would be quite different to one in which feeding neopatrimonial networks was the main political exigency. In addition, the question of whether or not policy impositions by donors are a legitimate technocratic tool for achieving economic growth takes on new dimensions. The democratic systems with which donors engage vary to such a degree, one from the other, that a simple binary understanding of aid as an institution that either promotes or undermines democracy does not hold. It is possible that aid does both simultaneously.

Finally, I have argued that the sites of negotiation for aid and its attendant policies need to be reconsidered. Whether donors negotiate policies only with elites or have become more constitutive of the political systems within which they work, their influence is felt at all levels of state and society. Thus, a full picture of aid dependence and its political impact must take account of responses to imposed policies at all levels, from the elite to the grassroots. While citizens may not be able to make their views on donor-imposed policies and aid dependence heard effectively, either by their political representatives or the international community, they certainly express their views and seek to renegotiate such policies in their daily interactions with the state.

Given the nature of my research question, I made the argument for a post-positivist research methodology, as it is best suited to drawing out the divergent views of donors, recipient governments and citizens. This provides the best starting point for exploring the political impact of aid dependence and elucidating the impact of these divergent views on political and policy-making processes. Based on this, I conducted my fieldwork in three stages in Malawi, each of which was designed to shed light on a different aspect of, and actor involved in, aid relations. My archival research delved into understanding colonial and post-

colonial agricultural policies as well as shifting aid relations from the 1980s onwards. The second phase, elite interviews in Lilongwe, elucidated contemporary aid relations, modalities and conflicts. While the third, in rural Malawi, sought to trace the impacts of aid relationships where they matter the most to economic and political dynamics, namely in the lives of smallholder farmers.

Part I

Chapter 2

The Political Importance of Maize in Malawi

Introduction

While Malawi is certainly not the only food insecure country in Southern Africa, it faces unique challenges in its efforts to achieve the elusive goal of food security, which in turn has a profound effect on national political dynamics. Most strikingly, Malawians consume more maize per capita than any other nation in the world. Average per capita maize consumption fell from 220 to 163 kg per capita between 1979 and 1989 but still represented more than two thirds of Malawians' daily calorie intake (Harrigan 2008; Morris 1998). However, Malawi's maize production pattern is equally unique: this maize is produced domestically, almost entirely by smallholder farmers for their own consumption. Only a small number of countries depend to such a significant degree on a single food crop. Furthermore, the availability of maize in Malawi is determined each year by the quality of its single annual rainy season in a geographical context in which natural barriers to trade render the import of bulky staple foods expensive and unreliable. In a good year, Malawi is food self-sufficient as smallholders cover not only their consumption needs but also produce modest surpluses to feed urban consumers and deficit producers. High population growth rates mean that by 1992-93, 69% of smallholder households had less than one hectare of land and only the rural elite was still able to produce enough maize to cover household consumption (Potts 2006). This situation continued to deteriorate throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, rendering the majority of households deficit producers in all but the exceptionally good years (Tchale 2009). These households rely on poorly developed rural markets or, if they are fortunate, the unreliable remnants of the state marketing system, to purchase additional food, usually maize (Fahy-Bryceson and Fonsecca 2005).

This situation, as we will see, is the result of 20th century developments and, in particular, certain agricultural policies as maize only replaced sorghum and millet as the most important crops in Malawi in the late 19th and early 20th century. Yet by the mid-1990s, 90% of cultivated land was given over to maize, the vast majority of it on smallholder land (Smale and Heisey 1997). As almost 80% of the country's population are smallholder farmers who produce maize and strive to be food self-sufficient, it is hardly surprising that they are an important electoral constituency and political force (Alwang and Siegel 1999). This chapter serves two purposes. The first is to introduce the reader to the unique agro-economical environment of Malawi, and the second is to make the argument that the policies pursued during colonialism and up to the introduction of multi-party democracy, have given maize and food security a uniquely important place in Malawian politics. This chapter examines why maize has come to be central to agricultural and food security policy in Malawi and why it is that Malawi has not diversified away from maize production to any significant degree. It seeks to explain why *nsima* alone, the stiff porridge made from maize is considered 'food', while all other food sources are deemed simply a 'snack'.

The first section of this chapter is a brief discussion of agricultural policy during the colonial era and demonstrates how maize production and the failure to ensure the stability of its supply and production, alongside draconian agricultural laws, provided one of the rallying points for the fight for independence. The second section outlines how the first generation of political and technocratic leaders, first and foremost Hastings Kamuzu Banda, made a policy of maize self-sufficiency central to Malawi's food security policy by creating a comprehensive system of state-managed risk for smallholder producers. This brought maize into the forefront of political life and created expectations for the role of future administrations in terms of food security. The risks faced by smallholder farmers since the 1980s when this system was gradually dismantled by the international financial institutions is the focus of the subsequent section. Finally, I discuss the 2001/02 famine, which proved the most devastating in Malawi's history, and has had lasting impacts on donor-government relationships as well as domestic politics.

Colonial Agricultural Policy

Maize was probably first introduced to eastern and southern Africa in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries by Portuguese traders who serviced the East African Coast. By the late 19th century it was widely eaten and cultivated throughout the region, even though millet, sorghum and cassava remained the dominant crops (Miracle 1966, von Oppen 1999). John McCracken writes that maize was introduced to the area that later became Malawi "perhaps in the eighteenth century, and by the 1880s had become the 'chief article of cultivation' in the area [the Southern Highlands]" (McCracken 2012: 13). At this point in time, the crop was most common in southern Nyasaland, in the proximity of the southern lakeshores, and in the North around Mzimba. Although the Central Highlands were later to become Malawi's main maize producing area, the crop did not establish itself in the region until the late 19th century (ibid.). In the vicinity of Blantyre and in the Lower Shire Valley, on the other hand, the introduction of hut taxes had led to the commercial production and trading of maize in order to meet these cash requirements by 1892. While the collection of hut taxes was a priority for the colonial administration, ensuring adequate production levels of staple crops for domestic consumption needs was accorded much less importance by administrators in the late 19th and early 20th century (McCracken 2012). In the early 20th century, however, colonial officials became concerned with peasant tobacco production, when it began competing with large, white-owned estates and thus threatened the livelihoods of European settlers. In 1926, the Native Tobacco Board was set up, ostensibly to assist African farmers with the production of quality tobacco, but also to restrict its production and to control the prices obtained by producers (ibid.).

Maize grew in importance to the livelihoods of smallholder producers throughout the beginning of the 20th century. African producers were increasingly side-lined from the production of cash and export crops, which were produced instead by European-owned estates. A dual economy thus emerged, which saw the production of tea, tobacco and some coffee on a small number of estate farms, and maize production by African households, which produced only modest surpluses

(Smale 1995). These surpluses were, however, adequate to allow for a significant proportion of peasants to trade their maize at the markets that emerged in and around Blantyre (McCracken 2012). A favourable world market for maize in the 1930s further encouraged its cultivation, both by smallholders and large-scale estates throughout eastern and southern Africa (Miracle 1966). By the 1940s maize was grown throughout Malawi and had become particularly popular in the central region, where both soils and climate were conducive to its production (Byerlee and Eicher 1997). The increase in global maize prices after the second World War further helped to establish maize as the preferred staple crop of smallholder farmers, particularly as from 1948 onwards, Malawi began exporting maize, thus guaranteeing a market for the crop. Unsurprisingly, smallholders were not well connected to global markets and so frequently relied on selling their maize to estates which were better integrated into maize value chains and markets. The product became a significant export crop in 1951 when the value of maize exports was exceeded only by tea and tobacco. Maize exports peaked in 1953 but remained significant for most of the 1950s (McCracken 2012: 247).

While the agricultural policy of the colonial administration emphasised estate-based production, particularly the production of cash crops for export, the growth in maize production in the 1950s was also the result of increased attention to food production following the famine of 1948/49. The famine resulted in at least 2000 excess deaths and considerable resentment towards the colonial state for its failure to better alleviate the suffering caused by a poor harvest. Colonial officials drew lessons from the event and sought to intervene in agricultural production to prevent a repetition of the disaster. Unsurprisingly, the direct cause of the famine was understood to be the devastating failure of rains beginning in December 1947. Beyond this, the famine was recognised as part and parcel of a larger agricultural crisis and declining per capita production, which policy-makers believed was caused by rapid population growth in an already densely populated region of the continent. The result had been shrinking landholdings on which tobacco cultivation was competing with food production, due to the higher prices being paid to smallholders by the Native Tobacco Board (McCracken 2012). Consequently, from 1949 onwards, the colonial administration drastically

increased the price of maize and groundnuts and increased the number of markets at which farmers could sell their produce, leading to a much larger volume of crops being sold through these channels. As John McCracken writes:

> In Lilongwe district, maize sales at government markets rose from 900 tons in 1945 to a peak of 25,032 tons in 1954. Official sales then declined as a result of the government decision to cut the price offered for maize in its markets. African traders, however, purchased much of the surplus at the old price and groundnut sales also rose to a peak of 9,803 tons in 1962 (McCracken 2012: 251).

In the latter stages of colonialism in Nyasaland, conservation and soil erosion also became a focus of agricultural policy making. Wapulumuka Mulwafu demonstrates the extent to which this new focus on conservation was attributable to broader developments in scientific knowledge and attitudes towards conservation, not just in Malawi but also in Europe, North America, and South Africa (Mulwafu 2011). In Malawi, the expansion of soil fertility and conservation efforts took off with the arrival of the new Governor, Sir Geoffrey Colby in 1948. Colby believed in a state-led development process and promoted the autocratic Richard Kettlewel to the position of Director of Agriculture. Kettlewell's belief that the severity of the ecological crisis in Malawi justified punitive measures was strengthened by a book entitled *The Rape of the Earth*, which sought to impress the devastating impacts of irresponsible agriculture practices on its readers, and strongly advocated extensive interventions to protect soil fertility (McCracken 2012). While the previous Director of Agriculture, P.B. Garnett, had championed the need to persuade farmers of the value of soil conservation,

> Kettlewell justified increasingly draconian state intervention on Malthusian grounds by depicting peasant farmers as wreaking terrible havoc on the environment through their inability to adjust their farming methods to the rapid growth of the population (McCracken 2012: 319-20).

It is worth noting, that this view of the situation was not informed so much by knowledge of local soil conditions and farming practices, as by the literature on other countries and contexts, which Kettlewell assumed must also apply to

Nyasaland.[5] Kettlewell's policy of enforced ridging on farmlands was so unpopular that he was not only personally disliked but these policies – as in other colonies – became an integral component of the nationalist struggle as well as an important determinant of post-colonial policies. Kettlewell himself is still remembered today, among those who had contact with him during his tenure as Director of Agriculture, as an autocratic individual who had more respect and affection for his dogs than his employees (Interview, Anonymous, 29 November 2011). Besides imposing unpopular ridging policies, Kettlewell also saw maize as integral to Nyasaland's alleged Malthusian crisis, and so encouraged sorghum and millet production by reducing the maize prices offered by the Maize Marketing Board and even uprooting green maize in smallholder fields where it was deemed to be detrimental to erosion control efforts (Vail and White 1989).[6]

In the Crop Production Policy of 1957/58 the technocrats of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources note their reservations regarding maize. While accepting that it had now become the de facto staple crop and that there was little that could be done about this in the short-term, maize was considered "more conducive to soil erosion and exhaustion than any other of the main crops grown, making excessive cultivation undesirable".[7] The following year, it was decided that the production of maize should be limited to meeting domestic requirements only, and that its production should be strongly discouraged in those areas where it would cause the greatest damage.[8]

As in other colonies, these agricultural policies prompted increased resistance towards the colonial state and strengthened the demands of smallholder farmers for the right to grow whichever crops they chose and to trade these freely. Thus

[5] See also Beinart et al. (2009), Stott and Sullivan (2000) and McCracken (1987) for further discussion of the influence of international scientific discourse and knowledge on soil conservation in southern Africa during this time.
[6] The draconian measures employed by Kettlewell were by no means out of the ordinary in colonial Southern Africa. See for example Beinart (2008) for a discussion of conservation and its impact in Southern Africa and McGregor (1995) for conservation policies and resistance in rural Zimbabwe.
[7] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (undated), *Crop Production Policy for 1957/58*, Malawi National Archives, Zomba. All subsequent archival documents referenced in this chapter are to be found in the Malawi National Archives, in Zomba.
[8] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (undated), *Crop Production Programme 1958/59 – Addendum: Maize*.

maize production and food self-sufficiency – as a result of the 1948/49 famine and colonial agricultural policy – became not only a rallying point for the nationalist movement but also influenced the way in which smallholder farmers were to relate to the post-colonial state and the demands this constituency was to make of its future political representatives (e.g. Vail and White 1989).

As agricultural issues had become one of the rallying points for the nationalist movement, the introduction of a gentler form of extension advice to smallholder farmers was Dr Banda's priority upon taking up his first position in Nyasaland's government as minister of natural resources and local government in September 1961.[9] In his initial statement of policy to all Ministry staff, he wrote:

> … I have always, and still do, deprecate the paternalistic approach of the past and penal sanctions which have caused the present antagonism to "malimidwe"[10] and opposition to modern methods of land use. Instead I am convinced that the long term answer lies in education and persuasion as opposed to coercion, and this is my policy which I shall require all members of this Ministry to implement.[11]

In the same letter Banda recognised that these changes to the modus operandi of the Ministry "may at first appear frustrating to officers who … are … most anxious to see the early cessation of bad practices".[12] It is noteworthy that Banda was not opposed to the content of conservation policies but, perhaps even more surprisingly given his later governance style, was concerned with the autocratic nature with which they were implemented.[13] As anticipated by Banda, the Ministry's cultural shift was not initially met with a great deal of support by European officers who felt that Banda's directive was indicative of the fact that he had failed to appreciate

[9] For a more detailed discussion of the nationalist movement and the events running up to independence in 1964, see McCracken (2012), MacDonald (1975) and Kalinga (2001).
[10] "Malimidwe" was the name given to the agricultural laws that required farmers to implement unpopular conservation techniques such as ridging.
[11] Banda, H.K. (1961), *Letter to All Members of the Ministry*, Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 15 December 1961.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Again, this is not unique to the Malawian context. Jocelyn Alexander describes a similar case in Zimbabwe where "[p]opular participation in planning was thus reduced to an exercise in convincing people that the experts new best." (Alexander 1994: 332). She also demonstrates the Zimbabwean government's continuity in endorsing the content of the policies of the colonial era.

> the critical position that we have now reached both from the point of view of conservation of natural resources and the observation of elementary, sound measures of crop hygiene.[14]

A few months later, the *Malawi News* accused European staff at the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources of sabotaging Banda's efforts so that they could say "We told you so. The Doctor's methods of teaching agriculture were wrong ours were right". Instead the article argued

> People are obeying Kamuzu's orders to do their gardens properly without being forced to do so by any stupid agricultural officers or stupid chiefs. We know the people will defeat these conspirators.[15]

In summary, then, colonial agricultural policy was characterised by its inconsistency towards maize production, at times encouraging it in the name of food security, at others discouraging it, sometimes with draconian measures, for fear that Nyasaland was in the grip of a Malthusian crisis. This erratic approach to maize did not, however, halt the growing importance of the crop but instead provided a rallying point for the liberation movement. While neither the harsh policies of erosion control and resistance to them, nor the continued emphasis on erosion control after independence, are unique to Malawi, they laid the foundations for maize-focused post-colonial policies. These policies, however, were distinct from those in other parts of post-colonial Southern Africa, as we will see below.

Post-Colonial Agricultural Policy or How Maize Became Food

Unfortunately, Kamuzu Banda's deprecation of paternalistic and autocratic approaches did not extend beyond his dislike of "malimidwe" policies. His presidency, which stretched from 1964 to 1994, was characterised by autocracy and the suppression of any form of dissent. Following independence, Banda's cabinet ministers attempted to limit his power, due to concerns over his autocratic

[14] Webb, H. (1961), *Letter from Acting Director of Agriculture to the Secretary for Natural Resources & Local Government, Zomba*, 18 November 1961.
[15] Malawi News (1961), *Freedom of Expression – Our Birthright*, 21 December 1961.

tendencies, which both stood in the way of certain ministers' personal political aspirations and threatened to suffocate any political opposition in Malawi (Baker 2001). Their attempt not only failed but also strengthened Banda who took the opportunity to rid himself of all but his most loyal henchmen and henceforth used the 'Cabinet Crisis' as justification to arrest, murder or send into exile any political opposition. Colin Baker writes that

> It has been estimated that during the three decades of his reign he detained over a quarter of a million people, and even this calculation is seen by some as a 'gross underestimate' (Baker 2001: 320).

In the absence of meaningful political opposition, and given Banda's autocratic and paranoid personal style, the majority of agricultural policies designed and implemented in the course of his dictatorship carried his fingerprints. He was frequently involved in initiating and designing new policies and, at the very least, signed off on all policies of any note.[16]

State-Managed Risk of Maize Production

Despite the rather erratic and frequently hostile stance of the colonial administration to maize production and consumption in Nyasaland, Malawi was already exceptionally maize dependent upon independence, both in terms of its production and consumption patterns. A 1959 a report entitled *Trends in African Food Consumption: Nyasaland* noted that maize constituted 75 per cent of the food consumed in the protectorate, usually accompanied by beans, groundnuts, vegetables and pumpkin leaves.[17] Shortly after independence, in 1968, the National Sample Survey of Agriculture estimated that as much as 78% of smallholder land was under maize cultivation with possibly detrimental outcomes for soil fertility.[18] In other words, Malawi was not only predominantly an agricultural economy, it was one that was unusually dependent on a single crop that is not particularly drought tolerant and therefore subject to large fluctuations in production levels.

[16] For further analyses of H.K. Banda's life and presidency see for example Short (1974), Virmani (1992), Lwanda (2009) and Mpasu (1995).
[17] Department of Agriculture (1959), *Memo from the Department of Agriculture to Provincial Agriculture Officers*, 25 September 1959.
[18] Cited in Department of Agriculture (undated), *Chapter III – Agricultural Policy*.

Independence did not immediately bring substantive changes to the agricultural policy. The Ministry of Agriculture's submission to the Development Plan that was to guide government activities for the first four years following independence, appears to have been heavily influenced by the thinking that dominated colonial agricultural policies and did not pay particular heed to the unique challenges of maize dependence. Its focus was on the production of cash crops and livestock husbandry as the central tenets for national agricultural development. A fertilizer subsidy was instigated, which was primarily if not exclusively intended for the production of cash crops, to stimulate overall agricultural production. The one nod to maize production was the promotion of improved maize seeds to smallholder farmers.[19] The fertilizer subsidy for cash crops was to provide for "more than 30,000 tons of fertilizer for use on annual crops at subsidized prices", beginning with an initial subsidy level of 55% of the market price, followed by a gradual fading out of the subsidy by 1970 or 1971. It would be funded by proceeds from the Farmers' Marketing Board (FMB) and West German assistance.

Not long after independence, however, the question of how to increase maize production and how to deal with vulnerability, particularly to food insecurity but also to soil erosion, quickly moved to the top of the agenda. This appears to have begun in earnest when the Commissioner of Agriculture requested input on the question from his Regional Agricultural Officers in 1966.[20] While there was unanimous agreement among Regional Agricultural Officers that price policy would be key in ensuring Malawi's maize production levels, there was less agreement on how price policy should be used and to what purpose. While it seems to have been taken for granted that Malawi should aim to achieve self-sufficiency, given the high natural barriers to trade that resulted from being landlocked and having poor infrastructure, there was no consensus regarding how

[19] Ministry of Natural Resource, Surveys and Social Development (undated), *Development Plan 1964: Details of Project "Increased Crop Production*".
[20] Regional Agricultural Officer (RAO), Mzuzu (1966), *Letter to the Commissioner for Agriculture, Zomba*, 28 September 1966; RAO Lilongwe (1966), *Letter to the Commissioner for Agriculture "Maize"*, Lilongwe, 16 September 1966; RAO Blantyre (1966), *Letter to the Commissioner for Agriculture "Maize"*, 14 September 1966.

the objectives of food self-sufficiency and increased maize production could be met without compromising long-term development goals.

While all agricultural officers were in agreement that increases in maize price would stimulate a production response by smallholder farmers, the Regional Agricultural Officer for northern Malawi was concerned that farmers would sell too large a percentage of their production if prices were increased. The Officer for the Central Region, on the other hand, thought that increases in production would only be brought about if prices earlier in the season could compete with those that farmers achieved during the 'hungry period', should they have any maize left to sell.[21] These disparities in opinion most likely reflected the differences in livelihoods strategies and wealth across the regions. Nonetheless, there was one aspect of maize price policy that all could agree upon. It was perhaps best expressed in the letter sent by the Mzuzu Regional Agricultural Officer:

> To sum up I feel that unless we can be certain that an increase in price will increase the yield rather than the area of crop grown we should be unwise to stimulate the development of maize as a cash crop more than is resulting from current economic pressures.[22]

The other suggestion made at this stage, but that only gradually took hold in the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s, was for the FMB to purchase maize directly from smallholder farmers, thereby reducing the margin that was being paid to traders, which in 1966 was approximately half the FMB's purchase price. The Regional Agricultural Officer from Blantyre, in particular, made the case for "increased marketing efficiency" as a means for ensuring higher producer prices.[23]

The outcome of these consultations with agricultural officers was a "Maize Production Policy" that came into effect in 1966. This policy document makes a strong case for maize self-sufficiency, achieved mainly through maize price policy. It argued for the necessity of maize self-sufficiency despite the evident costs. In

[21] Regional Agricultural Officer (RAO), Mzuzu (1966), *Letter to the Commissioner for Agriculture,* 28 September 1966.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Acting RAO Blantyre (1966), *Letter to the Commissioner for Agriculture,* 14 September 1966.

light of the discussions surrounding the eventual dismantling of these same policies it is worth quoting at some length:

> A policy of self-sufficiency in maize is a policy of insurance, for which a premium has to be paid. This premium is the production of maize surpluses which cannot be exported without financial loss to the FMB. This loss is in effect a transfer of income from producers of other crops to maize producers. …
>
> Any policy other than that suggested is a policy of deficit involving either periodic scarcity and hardship, or the expenditure of foreign earnings on supplementary food imports, or the investment of capital in holding stocks to tide over periods of scarcity. …
>
> This solution [of producing cash crops for export and importing food] is rejected, however, mainly because of the risk involved for a country, whose exports must consist almost exclusively of agricultural produce sold at world prices…. It is, therefore, accepted that the basic task of agricultural development is to increase maize production to keep pace with the growing population.
>
> The circumstances gives [sic] a certain moral justification for attempting to pass part of the burden on to other sections of the economy.[24]

It is worth noting here that the policy of self-sufficiency, which would at times entail surplus production and would thus result in an implicit taxation on other crops for the benefit of maize production, was chosen *intentionally* and because of the political and moral imperative to prevent food shortages and, possibly, famine. The policy recognises that this strategy involves trade-offs and costs, especially that there were "cogent reasons why maize should not be regarded as a desirable export crop" but that this might on occasion be the means by which surpluses would have to be disposed of and used to generate foreign exchange earnings. Importantly, these costs were deemed justifiable, given the moral and political imperatives of achieving food security and maize self-sufficiency.

[24] Government of Malawi (1966) *Maize Production Policy: Summary and Recommendation*, July 1966.

Having justified the necessity of maize self-sufficiency, the Maize Production Policy turns its attention to the manner in which this increase was to be achieved. One of the main concerns of the policy was how to stimulate an increase in the production of maize without increasing the acreage of land given over to its production, as this would result in the displacement of export and cash crops. Thus, it recommended an increase in the usage of fertilizer, improved seeds and an increase in producer "effort" and skill. While the latter was to be achieved through a concerted attempt to persuade (rather than coerce) farmers to use improved farming methods, the other two goals were to be met through fertilizer and seed subsidies.[25]

The imperatives of maize production and the decision to support a policy of maize self-sufficiency had a number of consequences for the organisation of the agricultural sector, particularly with regards to the marketing and storage of maize. Initially, the FMB did not purchase smallholder produce directly from the growers themselves, but in bulk from traders, thus reducing both the number of the board's transactions as well as the need for marketing structures in Malawi's more remote rural areas. The downside of this arrangement, however, was that a large percentage of government's intended support for smallholder farmers effectively went to maize traders. In the southern region, for example, the average price paid to maize producers in 1966, according to the Acting Regional Agricultural Officer, was 18/9-d per 200lb bag while traders were paid as much as 28/-d for the same quantity.[26] A concerted effort was subsequently made to reach smallholder farmers directly, by expanding the organisation's rural marketing infrastructure, so as to stimulate maize production without having to increase the price of maize that the marketing parastatal was offering.

In line with this decision, the mandate of the FMB was expanded substantially and it was reincarnated as the Agricultural Development and Marketing Board (ADMARC). ADMARC was formed in 1971, with the mandate to assist smallholder farmers' development and ensure a steady supply of maize both at the household

[25] Department of Agriculture (1968), *Draft Policy Statement*, 3 February 1968.
[26] Acting RAO Blantyre (1966), *Letter to the Commissioner for Agriculture,* 14 September 1966.

and national level, by providing marketing structures that producers could access directly, and by guaranteeing pan-territorial and pan-seasonal prices. It was also mandated to invest in broader economic activities that would contribute towards the development of the agricultural sector and the economy as a whole (Oxfam 2002). In order to provide these services, the organisation created an extensive network of markets across the country that allowed all smallholders easy access to ADMARC's infrastructure (WB 2003). Consequently, though, it proved extremely costly for government to provide this service in competition with private traders, and eventually the sale of maize on the private market was made illegal in order to protect ADMARC's profitability and viability. This was justified by ADMARC's Director who argued that

> farmers on customary or public land must not be allowed to play the "commercial" market when it suits them and then fall back on ADMARC as a dumping ground when there is a surplus of maize in the country.[27]

Furthermore, as ADMARC's rural infrastructure grew, it made sense to channel subsidies through these same structures, thus further increasing the corporation's dominance and presence in rural Malawi. Throughout the 1970s then, ADMARC

> was able to provide assured and reliable markets for smallholder produce. Further it paid farmers cash on delivery, subsidized the cost of inputs, and subsidized the consumption of maize and rice. … between 1971 and 1979, ADMARC made about MK181.9 million from its marketing activities in the smallholder sector. This money was used to cross-subsidise the cost of inputs to smallholder farmers, consumption of maize and rice by food deficit households, and making investments in other sectors of the economy (Oxfam 2002: 1).

As ADMARC grew in importance, so did the temptation to use it for short-term political gains. The policy of encouraging increased maize production through price policy, first by the FMB and subsequently ADMARC, was thoroughly debated and discussed, but individual pricing decisions were not always so well-considered. While it was standard procedure for President Banda to be involved

[27] ADMARC Director (1971), *Letter to Settlement Officer Mzuzu*, 2 September 1971.

in price setting and indeed in making the final decision on maize prices, he also occasionally made these decisions unilaterally, announcing these at political rallies in order to garner political support from smallholder farmers, and leaving ADMARC staff to deal with the fallout.[28]

During the 1970s ADMARC remained an autonomous Malawian organisation, responsible for its own administration and management without technical assistance from donors. This changed drastically when the donor community began to penetrate the Malawian state with the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the early 1980s. The first indication of a donor-driven agenda for ADMARC reform was a United Nations Development Programme/Food and Agriculture Organisation funded project, the proposal for which was drafted in May 1980.[29] This project was initiated at the behest of the United Nations, rather than the Government of Malawi, although ADMARC officials expressed their reservations from the beginning. Specifically, there was concern that the foreign technical assistants who would oversee the project, would not understand the political and economic importance of the organisation and seek to enforce their own ideological agendas:

> ADMARC, however, expressed the need to ensure that the project would provide not academic idealists but pragmatists, who would not only identify problem areas but would have the strength of their convictions to stay on and implement their own proposed remedial action programme.[30]

The final component of the Government of Malawi's food security strategy was the establishment of reserves for those years in which production could not meet domestic demand. The rationale for storing maize, rather than relying on imports in deficit years, was that it would save on precious foreign exchange reserves. This would also prove less costly in the long-run, given the natural barriers to trade that Malawi experiences as a result of being landlocked. It was decided that state

[28] ADMARC (1978), *Board Paper No. 1/73: Producers* Prices, 6 March 1978.
[29] ADMARC (1980), *Proposal for a UNDP/FAO Funded "Produce Marketing Project" for ADMARC*, May 1980.
[30] Ibid.

of the art storage facilities should be built in Lilongwe with a capacity to store 180,000 metric tons (MT) of maize. Initially, discussions within the Government had led to the consensus that a reserve of 60,000 MT would be adequate but this was increased to 180,000 MT to ensure food self-sufficiency, even in years of poor harvests.[31] Previous experience had demonstrated that it was very unusual for production levels to drop more than 30%, even in a very bad year. In the late 1970s, 180,000 MT of maize would have made up 60% of such a shortfall, meaning it would have been adequate to cover the majority of shortfalls and certainly until import cover could be arranged.[32] It is worth noting that the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation had considerable input into the process of designing the storage facilities, including questions of storage capacity. It recommended that cereal producing countries should keep reserves of at least 10% of their annual production, which they state would have been 120,000 MT.[33] It appears that, as was the norm with any major decisions taken by the Ministry of Agriculture, the final decision was deferred to Banda, who decided to err on the side of caution and quite possibly prestige, arguing that a larger reserve would also be a means for Malawi to contribute to international food security.[34]

It is important to emphasise the overall success of these structures and policies on their own terms. The comprehensive absorption of maize production risks by the state through its marketing structures, including extensive storage facilities, and the provision of input subsidies, ensured a stable supply of food and, importantly, access to it for the population at large. While Malawi did suffer harvest failures between 1964 and the beginnings of agricultural liberalisation in the 1980s, these did not translate into serious food shortages. On the downside, the system did not entirely avoid the concern expressed in the *Maize Production Policy* of 1966: 90% of smallholder land was given over to maize production in the late 1990s, and

[31] ADMARC (1979), 'Proposed Silo Complex for Strategic Storage of Maize', May 1979.
[32] Ibid.
[33] N.B. The FAO appears to have assumed an annual harvest of 1.2 million MT while the Government of Malawi was clearly working with a figure of 1.0 million MT in their respective calculations regarding the optimal size of the reserves. (ADMARC (undated), '1978/1979 Development Estimates: Project Submission').
[34] ADMARC (1979), 'Proposed Silo Complex for Strategic Storage of Maize', May 1979.

yields had barely kept up with population growth, while the production of other crops had not expanded to the extent intended.

Maize Production and Vulnerability

The Rationale for Reform

By the late 1970s, Kamuzu Banda's government had created a comprehensive agricultural marketing and risk-management system that protected farmers against the risks of market volatility and poor rains. Regardless of the size of the national or local harvest, smallholders were thus able to purchase maize at pan-seasonal and pan-territorial prices, which eliminated both the problem of price fluctuations caused by traders and storage losses. Subsidised inputs, coupled with stable maize prices, on the other hand allowed for the profitable farming of maize. In exceptionally bad years that would otherwise result in extremely high maize prices and the erosion of livelihood bases, ADMARC and its reliable maize prices provided a safety net. The support provided by pan-seasonal and pan-territorial prices was particularly crucial in production shortfall years, as demonstrated by ADMARC's sales figures: between April 2001 and May 2002, the agricultural season that saw the largest number of hunger-related deaths in Malawi's history, ADMARC sold 73,960 MT of imported maize, compared to 31,110 MT sold by private traders and 7,330 MT distributed by the European Union and the World Food Programme (Chirwa et al. 2005).[35] Despite its importance, ADMARC, fertilizer subsidies and the Strategic Grain Reserve all eventually became the target of Structural Adjustment Programmes and various donor-led reforms in the 1980s and 1990s (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

Until the late 1970s Malawi achieved impressive economic growth rates and was considered exemplary by the international community for its market-oriented economic management (Christiansen and Stackhouse 1989). However, Malawi's structural macroeconomic imbalances of the late 1970s, such as the balance of payment crisis, growing public sector deficits and external debts, as well as declining growth rates, intensified interactions between the Government of

[35] N.B. While ADMARC undoubtedly played an important role during the 2001/02 famine, it is worth noting that the private sector's poor performance was in part due to government interventions in maize markets during this period, as the private sector feared that its profit margins would be undermined by government interventions. See below for further discussion.

Malawi and the IFIs, particularly the World Bank. This occurred at a time when the World Bank was looking to improve the returns to its investments and therefore the 'effectiveness' of its aid, and introducing more explicit conditions to its aid in the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes. Despite the fact that the Bank did not open its permanent country offices in Malawi until 1986 (Kydd and Hewitt 1986), it conducted an initial assessment of Malawi's economy and its structural problems, which determined the requirements for its Structural Adjustment Loan (Christiansen and Stackhouse 1989). It is worth noting that Malawi was one of the first countries in sub-Saharan Africa to sign a Structural Adjustment Loan agreement with the Bank, rendering the process especially imperfect and experimental.

Based on its assessment of Malawi's macroeconomic difficulties, the Bank identified the source of these in the dual nature of Malawi's agricultural sector, where growth had been largely driven by estate-based agricultural production, mainly for export, while smallholder production appeared to stagnate (Christiansen and Stackhouse 1989). Smallholder production, as we have seen, was regulated by the state, with all smallholder produce marketed through the state marketing board, ADMARC. The estate sector, on the other hand, produced cash crops with relatively little state support or interference. While this system created a fairly stable and food secure environment for smallholder farmers, agricultural growth throughout the 1970s had been based largely on exports of cash crops such as tobacco, tea and coffee from large estates and improvements in rural living standards had been slow to materialise (ibid.). The conclusion that the IFIs drew from this picture was that these price incentives were the cause of stagnating smallholder production (e.g. Sharaunga and Wale 2013). This assessment was shaped by the prevailing ideology in the IFIs that "getting the prices right" was central to creating an environment in which agricultural production would flourish (Howell 1990).

The Process of Reform

From the standpoint of the IFIs, the most obvious and simplest starting point was therefore to reform ADMARC. The parastatal was fingered not only for being the

institution that implemented government pricing policy, but also for the high costs associated with operating large numbers of rural and remote markets, its costly maize transport network and its investment portfolio. In the course of the first two Structural Adjustment Loans, implemented between 1981 and 1985, agricultural pricing policy was amended to ensure better prices for smallholder export crops so that maize prices began to reflect regional and seasonal price variations. The private sector was once again permitted to engage in trading smallholder produce and ADMARC outlets that traded less than 60MT of maize per annum were identified for closure. Importantly, the complete removal of subsidies on the maize account was intended to take place by 1988 (Christiansen and Stackhouse 1989). However, in all of this "there is little evidence to suggest that either the donors or the government conducted any serious analysis of how the plan could be expected to operate" (Christiansen and Stackhouse 1989: 735).

In the donor imagination the reforms envisioned for Malawi's agricultural sector would redefine the state's role, away from a controlling function in smallholder markets to a focus on holding strategic food reserves and intervening only in exceptional circumstances, for example where food security was acutely threatened. In order to maintain the markets to intervene more actively where necessary, the plan was to have ADMARC continue to trade in smallholder produce on a commercial basis alongside the private sector. However, as we will see in Chapter 4, these reforms ultimately failed for two reasons. The first is that "… no country has yet achieved a sustainable system that combines a limited public sector with market efficiency and price stability at an acceptable fiscal cost", meaning that any initial pro-market reforms would invariably lead to further rounds of liberalisation in order to prevent spiralling costs (Beynon et al. 1992: 402). Secondly, Kamuzu Banda's government vehemently resisted the liberalisation of agricultural markets.

The first Structural Adjustment Programme signed in 1980 saw the reduction of ADMARC's marketing role, through the closure of rural ADMARC outlets and a reduction in subsidies on maize prices, as prescribed in the conditionalities attached to this loan (Beynon et al. 1992). These changes paved the way for the

legal reforms in 1984 that allowed private traders to participate in smallholder produce commerce. Even though this participation was – at least officially – still heavily circumscribed and only permitted within the grounds of ADMARC outlets and within the government-prescribed price band until the late 1990s, it nonetheless marked a shift in ADMARC's control over national produce markets (Christiansen and Stackhouse 1989). As ADMARC had shut down slightly more than 15% of its rural outlets and markets by 1988 (Beynon et al. 1992), thereby reducing smallholder farmers' access to ADMARC services, an unknown share of this newly-liberalised trade would have happened outside the purview of ADMARC and with little regard for government price bands. Furthermore, the majority of markets closed as a result of donor stipulations during this period were those that bought less than 60MT of maize per season and were thus also the remotest and those that provided services to those farmers least able to access private commercial opportunities (Christiansen and Stackhouse 1989). In 1995, agricultural prices, with the exception of maize, were fully liberalised and even the maize price band was formally abandoned in 1999.

As attempts to liberalise maize prices continued, the focus of reform shifted to input subsidies, particularly fertilizer, which the World Bank argued were expensive, displaced commercial fertilizer purchases and provided opportunities for corruption (Dorward et al. 2008). As a result of the World Banks' intervention, fertilizer subsidies were phased out and removed completely in 1994/95. As a result of the detrimental food security impacts of this decision, fertilizer subsidies were once again introduced, but in safety-net form as this was more palatable to donors, in the late 1990s (Harrigan 2003). From 1996 onwards, fertiliser subsidies took the form of a Universal Starter Pack (USP) programme, which supplied all rural households with a small amount of fertilizer and seed. This was subsequently amended to become a Targeted Input Programme due to IMF and European Commission pressure and funding withdrawals (IMF 2006b; Booth et al. 2006). The result of these interventions was possibly worse than a simple withdrawal from input subsidies, as neither private sector suppliers nor smallholder farmers knew which interventions to expect in fertilizer markets from one year to the next.

A Liberalised Agricultural Sector

The Low Productivity Maize Trap

The liberalisation of the agricultural sector saw smallholder farmers exposed to market forces and the risks of maize production that had previously been absorbed by the state. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the marketing services of ADMARC were reduced until they were negligible or non-existent, while in the 1990s fertilizer subsidies were equally phased out, as described above, leaving smallholder farmers without any protection. This gave rise to what has been termed the "low productivity maize trap" that I describe below. The extent to which Malawi's smallholders were subjected to market forces has varied in the liberalisation era, due to the policy inconsistency born of the government's efforts to resist donor-imposed policies. Nevertheless, from the mid-1980s onwards, state assistance to maize farmers has been insufficient to allow an escape from this trap and its dynamics were, and continue to be, the primary determinant of food security and maize production levels.

Landlocked countries that hover around the food self-sufficiency threshold experience high staple crop price volatility as a result of the large difference between import and export parity prices, which in turn are determined by transport costs. In Malawi this is aggravated by the strong covariance of harvests and production shocks (positive as well as negative) across the Southern African region, its limited infrastructure, and inability to import adequate quantities of maize rapidly (Byerlee et al. 2006). Malawi's strong reliance on one, comparatively drought intolerant, staple exacerbated maize price volatility. When markets were liberalised, large intra-seasonal fluctuations became the norm, as maize scarcity made itself felt during the 'hungry season' and prices approached import parity. For example, following the 2011 harvest, the average nominal maize price in Southern Malawi was approximately MWK 25 per kilogram, while the same quantity had increased to MWK 90 by January 2012 (FEWS-Net 2011; FEWS-Net 2012b).[36] High intra and inter-seasonal price fluctuations coupled with

[36] Maize prices for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 were exceptionally high throughout the season due to the devaluation of the Malawian Kwacha by almost 100% in May 2012 and a further 50% devaluation between May 2012 and May 2014. Thus, following the poor 2011/12 agricultural

the possibility of production failure meant smallholder producers operated in an extremely high-risk environment and increases in food prices were among the most common circumstances that deepened or pushed households back into poverty (DfID 2007). A knock-on effect of price volatility was that smallholders were deterred from cash crop production and diversification, as such production decisions could leave households unable to purchase sufficient quantities of food in exchange for the income earned on cash crops such as tobacco, cotton or sugar.

Liberalised maize markets resulted in such high price volatility, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s that smallholder farmers struggled to farm profitably and their already low living standards were eroded even further. An interviewee from Care International referred to it as a "crisis of the unknown" in 2007:

> Everything was known [before liberalisation]. When market liberalisation came we threw farmers into a crisis of the unknown whereby they couldn't be aware in advance who buys what they have produced and at what price (Interview, Care International, 28 August 2007).

Smallholder producers were deterred from cash crop production, as one bad national or regional maize harvest would result in such price spikes as to leave households unable to purchase sufficient quantities of food in exchange for the income earned on cash crops (Interview, World Vision, 31 July 2007). Equally, investing in inputs became increasingly risky from the 1980s onwards as prices were consistently low at the beginning of the season, when the majority of producers needed to sell their crop, and in some years throughout the season, meaning that the cost of fertilizer frequently could not be recouped. In many cases, the cost of fertilizer was completely beyond the means of households who did not have the storage capacity that would enable them to make use of intra-seasonal price increases. The heavy reliance on maize by individual households resulted in

season and the devaluation of the Kwacha, this price disparity became even larger, with maize prices starting at MWK 45 at the beginning of the season in Lilongwe in June 2012 and peaking at just under MWK 160 in March 2013 (FEWS-Net 2013). While there are no truly representative years, given the high fluctuation of production levels and therefore prices between agricultural seasons, the prices experienced during the 2011/12 season are, therefore, more representative.

a concomitant increase in aggregate vulnerability to production shocks over the 1980s and 1990s.

The negative impact of price volatility could have been eliminated by private sector or household maize storage, as liberalisation advocates argued it would. However, this proved problematic as smallholders lacked the necessary access to capital to store maize without suffering large post-harvest losses, while the private sector was deterred by the high costs and risks that result from variations in output across agricultural seasons. Small-scale businesses were ruined by two consecutive bumper harvests, as in 2006 and 2007, which depressed prices even further and reduced the economic profitability of storage. For those same seasons, the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM) reported that even its subsidised storage facilities were struggling to survive and sell their stocks as the Malawian market was flooded with maize, while exports still remain unfeasible given the high natural barriers to trade. A representative from NASFAM explained:

> They have tried to sell it [maize from NASFAM granaries] elsewhere, [but] they haven't found any markets. Their farmers have plenty of maize, so that the association was forced to sell at a very low price just to recover what they invested (Interview, NASFAM, 16 August 2007).

Furthermore, the combination of high domestic and international transport costs and the low value of maize often made trade across anything other than relatively short distances an unrealistic prospect (Fafchamps and Gabre-Madhin 2001).

Malawi's poorly developed agricultural markets caused particular problems in rural areas, where high transport costs rendered input and output markets unprofitable for private traders. Where the private sector did supply inputs, they were expensive and rural traders also purchased farmers' outputs at very low prices (Interview, MEJN, 27 July 2007). Despite Malawi's small size, large parts of the country were too remote for traders to service profitably even during the 'hungry season' (Interview, Concern Worldwide, 29 August 2007). Due to their small numbers, maize traders exerted undue influence in rural areas and over the

prices they chose to pay customers and were able to take advantage of farmers forced into distress sales directly after harvests. In areas of localised food shortages and during the 'hungry season' prices were inflated in rural areas as a result of their inaccessibility to traders. More generally this prompted a strong sense of distrust towards private traders, and offered compelling evidence in the eyes of smallholders for guaranteed prices and market access through ADMARC:

> The vendors don't give the price you get at ADMARC. … ADMARC offers better prices while the vendors are just stealing from us farmers (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/39, Lopati, 25 April 2012).

Most of Malawi's smallholder maize producers have very limited amounts of land at their disposal, often of poor and declining fertility, and increasing productivity per hectare was therefore paramount for breaking out of the cycle of food insecurity. Given these constraints and the small percentage of land that is under irrigation in Malawi, smallholders were positively disposed towards yield-increasing technologies. Nevertheless, fertilizer use decreased markedly after the liberalisation programmes of the 1980s, following a pronounced reduction in fertiliser subsidies, the devaluation of the Malawian Kwacha, and increasing difficulty in sourcing inputs in more remote areas as a result of the withdrawal of ADMARC and input subsidies. The real price of fertilizer almost doubled between 1995 and 2005, and unsubsidised prices remained well above world market and regional prices (RoM and WB 2006). Fertilizer use was very low in Malawi, approximately 34 kg per hectare in the absence of any subsidies as fertilizer outlays cannot always be recuperated through sales (ibid.). Organic fertilizer has not proven a viable option due to the low livestock base, which has been eroded by episodes of food insecurity, during which livestock were sold or consumed (Interview, Africare, 3 August 2007; World Vision, 31 July 2007). It is against this backdrop that the Government of Malawi introduced a large-scale subsidy in 2005, the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, in an effort to allow smallholder producers to escape the trap created by liberalisation.

Liberalisation and Rural Poverty

Liberalisation had a devastating impact on rural Malawi, eradicating both some of the differentiation between rural households and a great deal of the progress that

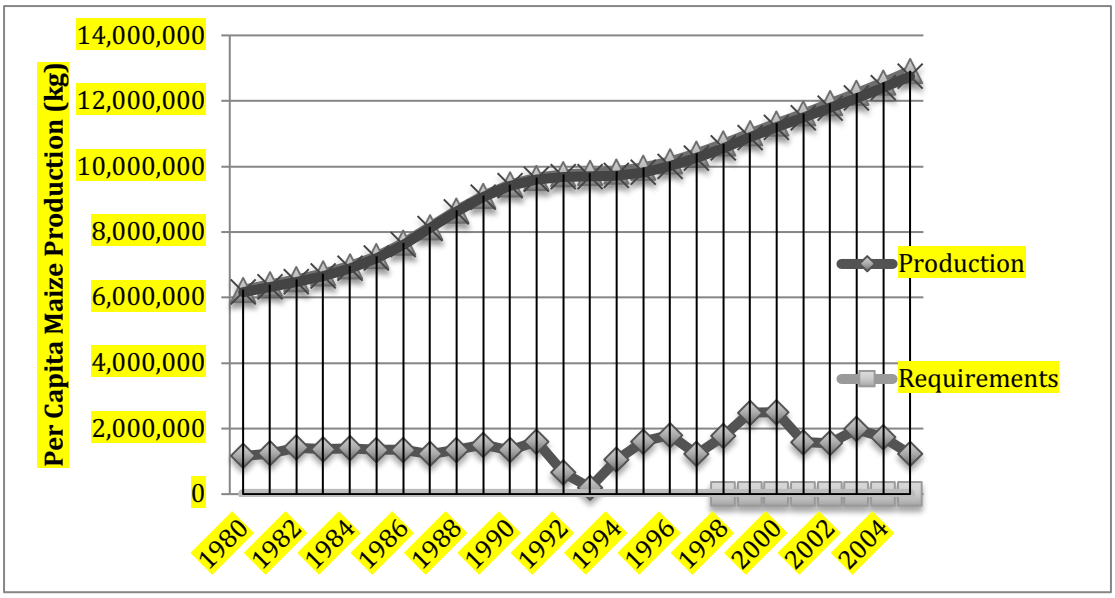
had been made since independence, both in terms of raising living standards and ensuring food security (Fahy-Bryceson and Fonseca 2005). By the late 1990s, despite the high value placed on maize self-sufficiency, the majority of rural households were no longer able to achieve this goal. Gladwin et al. (2001) put the figure for deficit producers at 70 to 80% of rural households, while the Integrated Household Survey carried out in 1997/98 found the number to be slightly lower at 65% of households (Benson et al. 2004; Republic of Malawi 2012). The discrepancy between these figures is probably the result of the fluctuations in production levels between years, which depends to a large degree on access to subsidised fertilizer, which was extremely variable in the late 1990s, and the quality of the annual rainy season. In any case, many of these deficit producers were also forced into distress sales at the beginning of the agricultural season when maize prices were at their lowest in order to cover essential expenditures (c.f. Gladwin et al. 2001). From 1990 onwards, Malawi regularly experienced years in which national maize production levels fell significantly below consumption levels, and acute food insecurity became a regular occurrence (Denning et al. 2009). In the absence of significant imports, frequently in the form of emergency food aid from donors, Malawi was not able to maintain its per capita maize consumption levels (Mazunda and Droppelmann 2012). In part as a result of the dismantling of ADMARC and subsidised maize sales, production shortfalls became acute famines in 2001/02 and 2004/05.

My interviewees in rural Ntcheu traced a decline in their personal living standards, linked strongly to their ability to produce sufficient maize for household consumption, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s and deteriorating substantially until they became beneficiaries of the Farm Input Subsidy in 2005/06 (e.g. Interview, Smallholder No. 3/43, Zaunda, 11 May 2012). The traditional system of *ganyu* – a wage-labour arrangement built around reciprocal relationships of support between wealthier, labour scarce and poorer, food-scarce households – provided a safety net for deficit producer households (this institution is discussed further in Chapter 7). However, as the detrimental effects of liberalisation came to be felt in the 1990s, *ganyu* came under the continued stress of prolonged hunger periods and dwindling incomes, as more and more

households relied on wage labour, resulting in a substantial decline in wage rates (Chirwa and Dorward 2013c). The reliance on *ganyu* also meant that smallholders had to work for wages during planting and harvesting periods when demand for labour and wages were at their highest in a largely agrarian economy. As a last resort for accessing food, *ganyu* was often undertaken at the expense of agricultural activities on smallholders' own landholdings, i.e. *ganyu* became a short-term coping strategy that sacrificed long-term viability (ibid.). Another strategy was to increase the hectarage given over to maize to cushion against poor yields in bad years. Not only did this increase the vulnerability to food shortage in drought years, as drought resistant crops such as sorghum and millet were replaced with maize, but household nutrition levels declined when the percentage of maize in the diet increased (Chilowa 1998). Above average maize yields, at the national level, also represented a mixed blessing, as maize prices fall and other crops and household necessities become comparatively more expensive.

In a largely agrarian economy, where 80% of the population were smallholder farmers who relied on maize production and the agriculture sector generated approximately 30% of GDP as well as 75% of export earnings (Alwang and Siegel 1999; GOM 2012), liberalisation proved detrimental to the economy as a whole. As demonstrated in Figure 2.1 the per capita production of maize fluctuated significantly throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, with an overall trend of a 2.1% decline per annum. The reduction in living standards that this entailed is evidenced by significant increase in child malnutrition: while only 21% of children under the age of five were underweight in 1980, 27% were underweight in 1995.

Figure 2.1: Per Capita Maize Production



Source: World Bank 2014

Thus, Malawi has not been able to achieve the agriculture-driven growth necessary for improved living standards and food security. In 2014, Malawi was judged to be the poorest country in the world by the World Bank with a GDP per capita of only $226[37] (World Bank 2014). In terms of food and nutrition security, 40% of the rural population were unable to meet their caloric requirements in 2004/05. Since the implementation of a large-scale fertilizer subsidy beginning with the 2005/06 agricultural season, this declined to 37% of the rural population by 2010/11, but still remains significant (Verduzco-Gallo et al. 2014).

The Politics of Food Insecurity

As a result of the difficulties inherent in maize production in rural Malawi since liberalisation, a strong preference among Malawi's farmers and some non-governmental organisations for input, especially fertiliser, subsidies has emerged with many arguing that a well-executed fertilizer subsidy alone could almost ensure Malawi's food self-sufficiency. As an interviewee from Care International put it: "if you were to address the fertilizer issue, you have almost addressed the food security concerns of communities" (Interview, Care International, 28 August 2007). This point was emphasised repeatedly by smallholders in the course of my

[37] Compared to Burundi's GDP of $267 per capita and the Central African Republic's of US$333 per capita, the next poorest countries.

fieldwork in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu districts and my interviewees stressed their inability to eat in the absence of a fertilizer subsidy:

> Bakili [President Muluzi] didn't come up with good policies … The Starter Pack wasn't enough and people were dying of hunger. Maize was not doing well and at this point in time [during the hungry season] we would have already started looking for maize husks to eat. (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/39, Lopati, 25 April 2012).

Fertilizer subsidies were therefore seen as the single most important policy by Malawi's smallholder farmers.

The withdrawal of state institutions from the agricultural sector, highlighted the importance of the state and its representatives in ensuring food security, both at the level of the household and the nation as a whole. Although the state-managed marketing and input provision system did not succeed in moving Malawi beyond an agricultural economy or, perhaps more importantly, one that predominantly produced a single low-value crop, it had succeeded in preserving certain minimal living standards. The availability of maize, sold at reasonable prices, was highly prized by my interviewees, as expressed by this smallholder farmer:

> In the past, starting when I was young, up until [Bakili's Presidency] when I was older, that time ADMARC was having maize all the time, but now if you go to ADMARC you will find no maize. (Interview, Smallholder No. 2/03, Phalula, 27 April 2012).

Significantly, and for reasons that will become clear in the second half of this thesis, rural voters held presidents, rather than their Members of Parliament, political parties or other political representatives, responsible for agricultural policies. Subsequent presidents and their agricultural policies were evaluated against the standards set by Kamuzu Banda's agricultural production and marketing system. While Banda's regime was frequently criticised for its lack of political freedom, particularly that all Malawians, even in utero, were required to be card-carrying members of the Malawi Congress Party, its resolution to ensure food security and minimum living standards was valued very highly (e.g. Interview, Smallholder No. 1/33, Lopati, 24 April 2012). It set the benchmark

against which rural voters evaluated subsequent agricultural policies, and thus the presidents who introduced them.

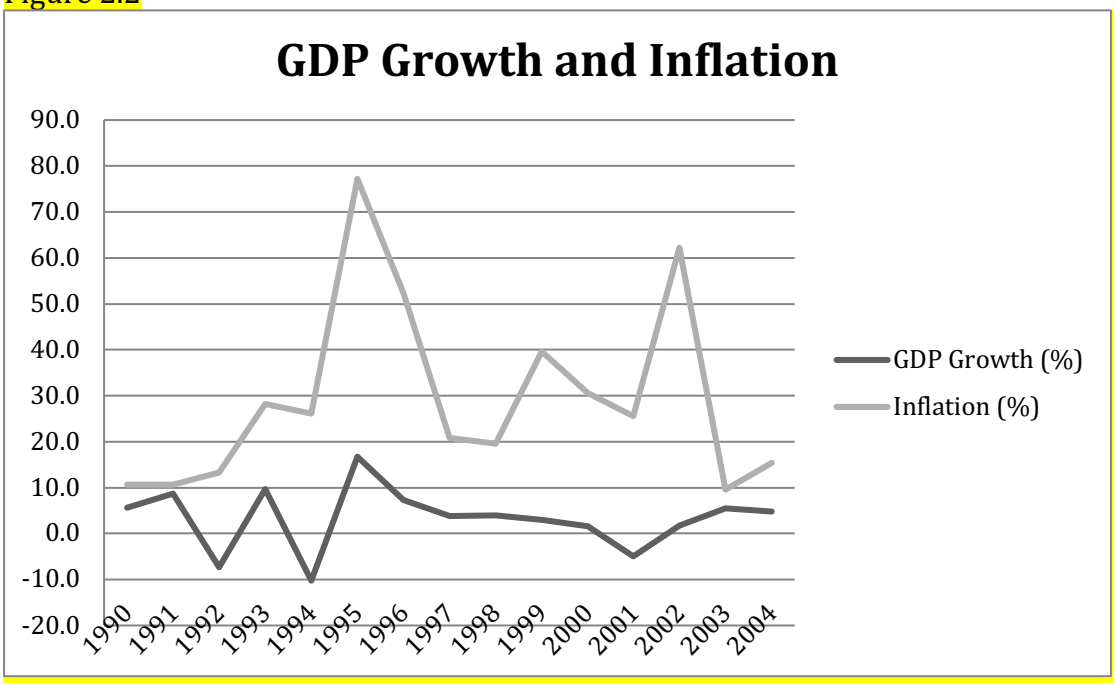
Bakili Muluzi's Presidency

Banda's regime had remained remarkably stable for almost 40 years, with very minimal resistance to his dictatorship after the Cabinet Crisis of 1964-65. The economic decline of the 1980s, notably the decline in rural living standards, food security and maize availability, reduced domestic tolerance for his autocratic leadership and resistance slowly emerged (Baker 2001). The end of the Cold War lessened international support for his administration whilst the Catholic Church and civil society pressed for Malawi's democratisation (Brown 2004). Over 60% of the population voted for multi-party democracy in the 1993 plebiscite. A hastily written constitution was put in place and the first elections were held in 1994. The opposition party, the United Democratic Front (UDF), were given a popular mandate to create a new democratic government with Bakili Muluzi as president (Englund 2002, Ng'ong'ola 2002).

Unfortunately, Malawi's political transition did not ease its economic woes. The economy continued to stagnate and corruption increased while the vast majority of Malawians were excluded from opportunities to influence policy. As Stephen Brown (2004) shows, the international community, which had been so influential in the democratic transition, turned its attention once again almost exclusively to the economy. Given the decline in living standards throughout the 1980s, Muluzi was unable to resist the liberalisation agenda of the IFIs. At no time were Malawi's smallholder producers as vulnerable as during Muluzi's presidency. ADMARC had ceased to exist in all but name, maize prices were liberalised, and fertilizer subsidies had been abolished (Interview, Anonymous NGO Representative, 31 July 2007). In the absence of any other means for intervening in the agricultural sector, Muluzi and his political allies resorted to the use and abuse of the Strategic Grain Reserve in order to mitigate the fallout. From the late 1990s, fertilizer subsidies were re-introduced but they took the form of smaller subsidy packages, initially as a Universal Starter Pack (USP) to all rural households and later a Targeted Inputs Programme for only the poorest (Levy 2005, Harrigan 2003). In the course of Muluzi's second term, the poor economic growth rates, high levels of corruption

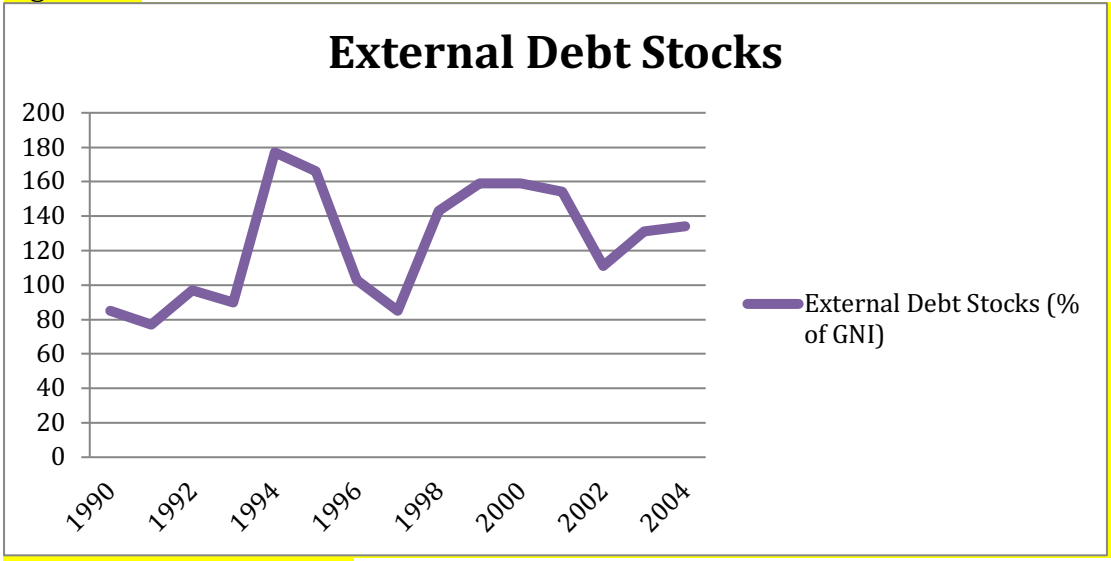
and turmoil within the civil service reached its pinnacle and relationships between donors and Muluzi's government deteriorated to such a degree that budget aid was eventually suspended in 2001 and was not resumed until after the election of a successor to Muluzi (Booth et al. 2006). As a result of the above, GDP growth rates remained low throughout Muluzi's presidency and only exceeded population growth rates by any significant margin in 1995 and 1996 and 2003. The average GDP growth rate between 1998 and 2004 was only 1.6%, at a time when population growth remained at around 3% (Booth et al. 2006). Inflation, on the other hand, remained persistently above 20% and reaching as much as 77% in 1995 (see Figure 2.2). Stagnating GDP growth rates and high inflation rates were partly driven by the declining production levels in the agricultural sector (as discussed above) but were also aggravated by poor fiscal discipline, which had resulted in an increase of the debt stock from approximately 85% to 160% of GNI between 1990 and 2000 (see Figure 2.3). Given the dwindling productivity of both the agricultural and manufacturing sectors and the suspension of aid in 2001, Muluzi's government was increasingly forced into external borrowing to cover budget shortfalls. The fiscal situation was aggravated by a looting of public coffers by politicians and civil servants, leading to the "collapse of state service provision" (Booth et al. 2006).

Figure 2.2



Source: World Bank 2014

Figure 2.3



Source: World Bank 2014

Not only did this cause macroeconomic instability and limit President Mutharika's policy options when he was elected in 2004 (as discussed in detail in Chapter 5), but the detrimental effects of economic liberalisation, as well as the poor governance associated with Muluzi's regime, meant that a large percentage of Malawians purported to be disillusioned with multi-party democracy less than a decade after the first elections in 1994 (Tsoka 2002).

The Famine of 2001/2002

The famine of 2001/02, the magnitude of which remains disputed with estimates of excess deaths ranging from 300 to 3,000,[38] further demonstrated the crucial role of state-backed institutions in mitigating the risks faced by smallholder farmers, as well as the importance of donor-government relationships in deciding the fate of rural Malawians. For the purpose of the arguments made in this thesis, it also established the extent to which the IFIs agricultural policies – in this case particularly the IMF's – were driven by ideological concerns rather than an in-depth understanding of the realities of maize production in Malawi. Beyond the

[38] Estimates of the number of deaths remain controversial. Civil society organisations' research and their collation of lists imply that excess mortality may have been in the range of 1,000-3,000 (Devereux 2002c).

failure of donors to react to the impending crisis, however, the famine of 2001/02 also demonstrated the extent to which Muluzi and his cronies were willing to abuse their positions of power for their own pecuniary and political ends. In other words, it was an example of a 'new variant famine', namely one which is not caused simply by a natural disaster but one that takes place within the context of convoluted negative synergies between natural triggers, economic vulnerability and political responsibility, all within a global system that has an unprecedented capacity to cause as well as eradicate food shortages. Devereux et al. argue that these new forms of famine have three triggers, namely natural disasters, the malevolent or incompetent exercise of state power, and conflict (Devereux et al. 2002).

In the case of this particular 'new variant famine', the cause of the catastrophe was a combination of production failure, trade failure, corruption, poverty and limited employment opportunities as well as problems in the delivery of food aid, aggravated by hostility between the government and its donors. Food production in the 2000/01 agricultural season had been inadequate due to a comparatively minor alteration in the annual rains. The shortfall initially went unrecognised by Malawi's Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS-Net), mainly as tuber production was overestimated, possibly by as much as 1000% (Potts 2006). Other early warning systems, such as the press, also failed to recognise the preliminary signs of distress, with NGOs working in rural areas being the first to raise the alarm. Both government and donors were slow to respond to these alerts, insisting that available data indicated that Malawi's domestic food production had been adequate (Devereux 2002c).

Given the comparatively small production shortfall, markets might have been expected to respond to the rising food prices in affected areas, resulting in the adequate provision of food stuffs to deficit households through trade. Private traders did not respond, however, for two reasons: in the first instance, large-scale traders, particularly those who would have imported maize, were deterred by the erroneous crop production estimates of FEWS-Net, which continued to insist that national supplies of maize and cassava were adequate until January 2002. It

therefore appeared economically unprofitable for traders to import food, given the high import costs, and without any indication at the time that prices would rise even further (Devereux 2002c). Secondly, once the scale of the food shortages became evident, the Government of Malawi announced its intention to import maize, reducing the potential profitability and increasing the risk of maize imports for private actors. When these imports were subsequently delayed the private sector scrambled to import maize, but failed to meet demand (Booth et al. 2006). Opponents of Malawi's agricultural liberalisation policies argue that the restructuring of ADMARC and the removal of maize price bands in 1999 were contributing factors to the famine, as these resulted in declining incomes and reduced assets and buffers to the extent that even in good years many households were unable to cover their basic nutritional needs. The high prevalence of HIV/AIDS will have further undermined the coping strategies of labour-constrained households (Fahy-Bryceson and Fonseca 2005).

Responses by government and donors were not only inadequate but aggravated the crisis. At the insistence of the IMF and the World Bank, the Government of Malawi had attempted to run the SGR on a cost-recovery basis (Harrigan 2001). This meant the government had taken a commercial loan to finance grain purchases at an interest rate of 56% per annum, which, unsurprisingly, led to severe financial pressures on the National Food Reserve Agency now in charge of the reserves. The IMF's answer to these pressures was to recommend a reduction in the size of the SGR from an already meagre 60,000 to 30,000 metric tonnes (as discussed above, the reserve was intended to hold up to 180,000MT). Retrospectively, the IMF maintained that this advice was correct, given the information in hand at the time regarding the levels of food production in the 2000/01 season and the state of ADMARC's finances (Zerbe 2004; Interview, IMF, 11 September 2007). In a move reflective of the extent to which corruption had permeated the political elite and senior civil service by the middle of Muluzi's second term, the government used this as an opportunity to pay its political creditors by selling and, it appears, in some cases giving away the entire contents of the reserve to its cronies, rather than exporting the grain and setting up a financial reserve, as intended by the IMF. The recipients of this maize stockpiled

it until prices peaked, aggravating food shortages. Unsurprisingly, donor-government relationships deteriorated and donors were reluctant to fund maize imports while suspicions remained that members of the political elite were hoarding maize in order to profit from the food shortages (Booth et al. 2006; for further details see Chapter 4). Trust between donors and their government counterparts were already at an all-time low due to the corruption and mismanagement prevalent in Muluzi's administration (Devereux 2002c). In addition to these factors, the government had a vested interest in playing down the extent of the famine as the 2004 presidential race loomed and it only acknowledged the crisis very late in the day. Once a state of emergency was finally declared, food aid and imports were slow to arrive as Malawi was competing for maize with Zimbabwe and Zambia, which were also experiencing food deficits (ibid.). Throughout, the government publicly blamed poor donor advice for the food shortages, refusing to shoulder any of the responsibility, which naturally served only to further the mistrust between donors and the government that prevailed during Muluzi's second term.

The famine once again cemented the centrality of maize to Malawian politics by highlighting both the precarious nature of maize production and the government's role in ensuring food security and coordinating the emergency relief effort and by drawing agricultural, particularly maize, production into the heart of negotiations between Malawi and its donors. The Muluzi government clearly failed to deliver on its responsibility to ensure food security and provide relief to smallholder farmers. With only the 1948/49 crisis being of a similar magnitude, this served to further link the legitimate right to govern with the provision of food security in the minds of the electorate. This period also saw a deterioration of donor-government relationships and a subsequent shift towards closer monitoring of governance and agricultural policy in Malawi. For smallholder producers, the famine further justified the ideal of maize self-sufficiency, as imports and food aid had proved so unreliable. As a consequence, the importance attached to ADMARC by smallholders increased. The large number of famine deaths and acute food shortages undermined Malawi's sense of national autonomy as the country became increasingly dependent on international assistance. Finally, the disarray

in which Muluzi's government left the country, largely as a result of the events of 2001/02, drew his successor, President Mutharika, into increasing Malawi's maize dependence in order to meet the demands of his rural constituencies, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

Food and particularly maize policies were central to livelihoods in Malawi, both before and after independence in 1964. They have become inextricably interwoven with Malawian politics. Colonial agricultural policy was unchanging only in its inconsistency: it was precisely its erratic nature that led to maize policy becoming an integral part of the growing discontent with the colonial administration and, thus, one of the rallying points of the nationalist movement. The dissatisfaction and vulnerability that colonial agricultural policy had created, structured the response to maize dependence and food insecurity upon independence. Kamuzu Banda's government saw achieving food security as its moral, political and economic obligation and set about creating the structures necessary to ensure this. Faced with an economy that was already highly maize-dependent, both in terms of the land given over to its production and the amount consumed per capita, Banda's administration decided upon an agricultural development path that focused on achieving maize self-sufficiency through a state-managed marketing and input subsidies. As ADMARC gained in importance, the decision was made to further protect the maize production and consumption system through the maintenance of national reserves of 180,000 MT in Lilongwe. During this period, the state assumed much of the risk of maize production and pursued policies that increased maize output. Unfortunately, this was successful only in its most immediate aim of achieving food security. Its secondary goal of ensuring that the increases in maize production happened on a decreasing proportion of the country's agricultural land was not achieved. The wider project of agricultural development was, arguably, hindered by the political primacy of food security.

This state of affairs left Malawi open to the criticism that its development project was too dependent on the state, resulting in pressure from the IFIs to liberalise

agricultural production. The result of this liberalisation project was devastating for maize producers and, thus, for the majority of Malawians. Rather than providing a stable production basis for household livelihoods, maize production became not only a risky undertaking, but one that was nigh on impossible to break away from. As maize was not only the primary food crop, but also the main agricultural output, its prices fluctuated to such an extent between and within years that investing in maize production frequently proved uneconomical, at least in the absence of significant subsidies. Storing quantities above and beyond household consumption was also risky, as was the production of non-food cash crops, as they often fetched such low prices that earnings were inadequate to allow their producers to purchase enough maize for household consumption. In this way, the vicious circle of underinvestment and low productivity once again became a pressing political question as the issue of how to protect smallholder farmers from the vagaries of a poorly developed market arose afresh. This question was never more urgent than during the 2001/02 famine and in its aftermath as it so aptly highlighted both the increased vulnerability of Malawi's rural poor, the decline in rural living standards and the deterioration of longstanding coping strategies as well as the importance of political leadership for preventing the worst fallouts of production shortages. These developments both prior to and after independence have, consequently, rendered maize central to Malawi's political life, and therefore so central to disagreements between the Government of Malawi and the international community.

Chapter 3

A Ministry Under Siege: Malawi's Shifting Aid Architecture and Growing Donor Influence

Introduction

Not all aid dependent countries are created equal. The extent to which domestic politics will be affected by relationships with donors is determined, primarily, by the extent to which donor influence over policy-making can be kept in check. Lindsay Whitfield argues that "those countries that have been most successful in negotiating aid have kept donors at arms' length while formulating their own policy positions and have largely kept them out of their domestic administrative systems" (Whitfield 2009: 20). In this chapter, I describe why it has been so difficult for Malawi to keep donors at a safe distance and outside of the parameters of the civil service. This chapter argues that current discourses of aid and their accompanying disbursement structures, as well as various efforts to ensure that specific normative notions of 'good governance' are adhered to, have resulted in a very tight regime of donor control over any activities carried out under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS).[39] It seeks to develop the argument that policy in aid-dependent countries is at best negotiated and at worst imposed (c.f. Whitfield 2009; Abrahamsen 2000), by contending that aid negotiations and interactions between donors and government are no longer the loci of policymaking disputes, as these spaces are overwhelmingly under the leadership of the technocrats of bi- and multilateral aid agencies. However, in arguing that the Government of Malawi is constrained in its ability to elaborate or implement policies that fall outside of the aid industry's policy consensus does not mean that it lacks the ability to resist these impositions. Rather, as is discussed in subsequent chapters, these acts of resistance take less technocratic, more overtly political and, frequently, more untidy forms. The donors' desire to prevent such

[39] It is worth noting that similar structures exist within the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, other line ministries as well as certain parastatal organisations and QUANGOs that both influence and have knock-on effects on decision-making in the agricultural sector. The focus here is the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security.

acts of resistance has in turn driven their own efforts to insulate policy-making from "political interference" and to attempt to install meticulous technocratic procedures for budgeting and planning within the MoAFS. In essence, a vicious circle has been created where efforts to maintain sovereign decision-making result in further endeavours to ensure that only donor-sanctioned policy options are implemented.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of changing aid modalities and their accompanying ideologies since the introduction of structural adjustment programmes in the early 1980s, before describing the resultant aid architecture that prevails not only in Malawi but throughout sub-Saharan Africa. This is followed by an examination of the changing nature of the aid received by Malawi and how aid disbursement mechanisms have increasingly led to an "institutional entanglement" of donor representatives and the bureaucracy of the Malawian state (Whitfield and Fraser 2009: 21). The final section describes the extent of these entanglements in the MoAFS in 2012.

Structural Adjustment: Paving the Way for More Intrusive Aid Modalities

The debt crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s and the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) designed to ameliorate it resulted in the profound shift in aid relationships described in Chapter 1. It is only with the introduction of SAPs that the international financial institutions (IFIs) began to purchase macroeconomic policies with their loans and concessional grants as poor policies had become the dominant explanation for Africa's failure to develop. Prior to the early 1980s, Malawi and other aid recipients benefitted from the Cold War as well as the prevailing economic and ideological conditions that allowed for comparatively high levels of policy independence and assertiveness even among those countries dependent on foreign aid. The manner in which structural adjustment policies were imposed and resisted has been discussed at length elsewhere (notably Mosley et al 1991), but it is worth noting here that those countries which were saddled with the largest number of policy conditions were those whose debt crises were the most severe, those which were of the least economic and political significance and so lacked financing alternatives, and those who were negotiating

comparatively small loans with the IFIs (ibid.). Others have noted that those countries that were least able to win the argument for aid as a form of recompense rather than 'charity' voluntarily and altruistically given and, relatedly, those most lacking in domestic political legitimacy found it hardest to assert their policy preferences in these negotiations (e.g. Fraser 2009). A combination of these factors allowed donors to choose which countries to support, while arguing for the need to prevent the misallocation and misappropriation of their aid in the name of their domestic taxpayers. Simultaneously, incentives for World Bank staff aligned to encourage them to broker as many conditions to their loans as possible (ibid.). The result was a significant decrease in the ability of many developing country governments to push for loans that were suited to what they saw as their own political and economic needs.

As the economic gains promised by the IFIs as a reward for economically painful and politically difficult adjustment periods failed to materialise, the Bank, in particular, sought to explain this both to its internal and external stakeholders. In this process, the Bank settled upon a new development narrative that moved 'good governance' to the forefront, arguing for better technocratic administration of and adherence to conditionalities, coupled with procedural democracy, in the name of achieving economic growth (Abrahamsen 2000).[40] The outcome of this ideological shift was to seek ways in which the Bank could exert more effective pressure on developing countries to accept and implement conditionalities, as well as creating local state machinery that would be more capable and effective, or – in other words – that would offer less resistance to its policy ideas.

By the late 1990s, a complex new aid architecture that was able to both closely monitor recipient countries' progress and comprehensively control the policy agenda had been put in place. The 1990s also ushered in an era of increasing donor assertiveness, with loans being disbursed in tranches, frequently only after reforms had been implemented, as well as being linked to monitoring and

[40] This minimalist or procedural incarnation of "democracy" was not expected to produce significant pressures for policies that were contradictory to those stipulated in loan disbursement agreements.

evaluations systems that aided the imposition of conditionalities. Donors also increasingly felt that suspending aid could be morally justified and so increasingly made use of this option, particularly in countries such as Malawi where this would have minimal or no repercussions for donors. Simultaneously, donors shifted towards conceptualising aid relationships as 'partnerships', in order to increase country 'ownership' of the policymaking process. This shift was accompanied by a move towards encouraging recipients to draft Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), with the intention of allowing countries to draft their own medium-term strategies, which donors would then fund. It was also frequently argued that this process would reduce the administrative burden of receiving aid from many different agencies (e.g. Mallarangeng and van Tuijl 2004).

The discursive shift towards 'partnership' and 'ownership', and away from 'conditionality', which came about in the late 1990s, did not represent a genuine move away from the impositions of loan conditions. Nevertheless, this shift had two important outcomes that are relevant to this discussion, namely the idea that the focus of aid should be 'poverty eradication' and the decision to increasingly disburse loans and grants through general or sector budget support. The focus on 'poverty reduction' tied donors into more intimate policymaking relationships with recipient countries, not simply at the level of the Ministry of Finance where macroeconomic policies had been thrashed out jointly with donors for a long time, but also at the level of line ministries with the justification that donors needed to ensure that sectoral policies were also contributing to the project of poverty eradication (Whitfield 2009; Interview Hon. Jumbe, 6 February 2012). Secondly, the drafting of PRSPs, contrary to arguments that this would lead to increased country ownership, in fact represented a significant expansion in the extent of donor involvement in policymaking, as donors were both involved in the drafting process, as well as ultimately passing judgement over the documents before deciding whether they would put their monies towards the goals outlined in these strategies (Dijkstra 2011; Crawford 2003; Interview, Malawi Economic Justice Network, 27 July 2007). Furthermore, it is worth noting that these processes did not replace conditionalities but ran in parallel to more coercive forms of policing recipients' policies. The most conspicuous failure of PRSPs to allow for local

political processes was "exposed in cases where the 'multi-year' planning cycles of the PRSP cut across electoral processes" (Fraser and Whitfield 2009: 86).

Aid Architecture in the Partnership Era

The aid structures that evolved during the 1990s and 2000s also belied the argument that changes in aid had increased 'partnership' and 'ownership'. Rather, the coercive elements of the aid architecture that accompanied the 'partnership era' were divided up between the different agencies, particularly between the IFIs and the bilateral donors. Each level of the aid architecture engaged with recipient governments and their bureaucracies in slightly different ways, each with unique effects on policymaking independence. The IMF sat atop this structure and, in line with its mandate, engaged developing countries on their macroeconomic framework, in so far as it affected the country's balance of payment situation, and ensured that the negotiated framework was adhered to. Within this structure the Fund's focus in agricultural economies was to increase agricultural production through market reforms: "[t]he IMF sees its financial role in these cases not as subsidizing further deficits but as easing a country's painful transition to living within its means" (IMF 1996). In this process the Fund imposed certain conditions upon recipient countries, which if fulfilled allowed that country to access funds to assist with this transition in the form of an Extended Credit Facility, its "main tool for medium-term financial support to low-income countries" (ibid.). Within this framework, the World Bank then required countries to draft a medium-term development framework, such as Malawi's *Growth and Development Strategy* (GoM 2006; GoM 2012), in order to improve the efficiency of resource use for economic development and poverty alleviation. In essence, therefore, the IMF determined the means within which Malawian governments must live, while the World Bank placed further restrictions on how these means could be spent. For the purposes of this chapter, there are two important consequences of this aspect of aid architecture: firstly, it places limits on the levels of government expenditure; secondly, it constrains policy options, as any reversal of the liberalisation policies imposed in the 1980s and 1990s can lead to a suspension of aid (World Bank 2007). Failing to live within the macroeconomic framework negotiated with the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) can have serious consequences, as it may

engender the withdrawal of their aid, as well as that of their bilateral donors, who generally require adherence to these frameworks to release their budget, if not their project, support. What is noteworthy about this new aid architecture was the extent of collaboration between donors, particularly the degree to which the bilateral donors were willing to let the IMF dictate their aid decisions.

The remainder of the donor community, whether bilateral or part of the UN system, relied on the BWIs to oversee the management of macroeconomic policies and focused their attention on guiding sectoral policies, such as education sector reforms, providing sanitation infrastructure or agricultural policies. They aimed to influence the form that specific policies took, thereby shaping their political impact and constraining a government's ability to respond to the demands of its electorate in a slightly different fashion. As we have seen in previous chapters, the nature of development interventions by this tier of organisations has changed to reflect the shift from universalist welfare policies in the West in the 1960s and '70s towards narrower, targeted policies in the 1980s as neoliberalism took hold ideologically throughout the developed world (c.f. Mkandawire 2005). In this context, aid shifted from a preoccupation with assisting less-developed countries in their efforts to achieve economic growth and development to a focus on assisting the poor. As "aid fatigue" rendered aid more and more difficult to explain to taxpayers in the developed world, policymakers and politicians in donor countries turned their focus towards assisting the "deserving poor", rather than attempting to sell the more abstract concept of economic, political and social development to their electorate (Hon. Friday Jumbe, Former Minister of Finance, 6 February 2012: Hon. Andrew Mitchell, Public Lecture at Queen's College Oxford, 7 February 2013).

From Projects to 'Partnership' in Malawi

Chapter 4 discusses the details of the policies negotiated during the Structural Adjustment and 'partnership' eras while this section focuses on the aid modalities that were used to exert pressure on the Government of Malawi for the implementation of these policies. I begin by looking at the manner in which donors and government collaborated under Kamuzu Banda's administration prior to the

establishment of SAPs, the accompanying changes in donor-government relationships and finally the move towards 'partnership' that dominated aid relationships in the last decade. I then outline the culmination of these new structures within the agricultural sector.

Policy-Making Prior to Structural Adjustment

For reasons that are probably equally divided between the geo-political ramifications of the Cold War and Kamuzu Banda's autocratic nature, the Government of Malawi was able to be assertive in its dealings with the donor community at independence. President Banda micromanaged all aspects of his government's policy, including interactions with donors wanting to work in Malawi or in collaboration with its civil service. The appointment of foreign nationals as technical assistance to donor-funded projects, for example, had to be signed off by the president himself and when he deemed it necessary, he did not hesitate to place – at times stringent – restrictions on their work and movement. In March 1974, for instance, when a team of researchers from the University of Berlin were tasked with carrying out an agro-economic survey to assist the work of a German-funded project, President Banda approved their work in Malawi "on one strict condition that the team will limit its survey to the Central Region Lake Shore Development Scheme, financed by the German Government" in a handwritten memo to the Acting Secretary for Agriculture and Natural Resources.[41] Not only is this example representative of the general attitude taken by President Banda, it is also evidence of the fact that far fewer donor missions visited Malawi in the 1970s than is now the norm. While it appeared to be established protocol that Banda signed off on the individuals visiting Malawi on these missions, as well as all aspects of agricultural policy, he was not generally briefed on the outcome of these missions, as they mainly served the purpose of monitoring by donors rather than influencing Malawi's agricultural policies.[42]

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[41] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (1974), *Memo to H.E: Agro-Economic Survey Team from the University of West Berlin,* 13 March 1974, Malawi National Archives, Zomba. All subsequent archival documents referenced in this chapter are to be found in the Malawi National Archives, in Zomba.

[42] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (1974) *Memo to H.E.: Visit by Mr. Lomax of the World Bank to Shire Valley Agricultural Development Project*, 13 May 1974.

Beyond maintaining high levels of control over the quotidian interactions between the government or civil service and its donors, Banda also maintained a greater degree of autonomy over policy-making processes. The Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, as it was called at the time, drafted its own National Rural Development Plan, which it envisioned would entail "multi-sector development of specific geographical areas which it is hoped to spread over the whole country during the next 20 years under the NRDP".[43] Not only did this development plan provide a clear and coherent vision for rural Malawi, it also saw the Ministry, under Banda, taking charge of this plan with assistance from donors on its own terms:

> A large part of the success in implementing this approach to date can be attributed to the policy of the Government in presenting such projects in a form suitable for external financing …
>
> Emphasis [is] given to the preparations of the projects for financing, while at the same time Government maintains the provision of basic support facilities to smallholders … There is a close liaison with statutory organisations concerned with the development of agriculture, particularly ADMARC, who have the main responsibility for the marketing and movement of agricultural produce and for the provision of essential farm inputs to smallholders (ibid: 4).

There is also plenty of evidence during the first 15 years after independence that policies were developed within the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, in the absence of donors and that donor influence was only felt indirectly and much later on in the policy-making process.[44] Of course, this is not to say that various donors, particularly the World Bank as the main donor to the sector, could not and did not influence policy by selecting projects according to its priorities. However, it was not their stated intention at this stage to influence larger sectoral policies and no efforts were made to limit the fungibility of project assistance, therefore giving comparatively high levels of freedom to Malawi. The lack of coordination among donors also meant that even if one donor was unwilling to

[43] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (undated), *Agricultural Policy*, Chapter 3, p. 40.
[44] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (1975), *Minutes of Meeting to Discuss the Proposed National Rural Development Plan*, 11 January 1975.

fund certain types of projects, it was likely that another agency would step into the breach.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Malawian government's – or perhaps simply Banda's – confidence in its own policymaking was sufficiently solid to reject aid where it was not deemed to be necessary or in line with agricultural policy and to defend its convictions *vis-à-vis* even very large donors, such as the World Bank.[45] For example, in 1969 a memorandum was submitted to President Banda outlining the World Bank's reservations regarding Malawi's economic position, particularly its budget deficit, to which he simply responded in the margins:

> Read. But tell Mbekeani [Malawi's Ambassador to the United Nations in New York] that I say that the Bank or I.D.A. is talking nonsense. We will not listen to them. We know what were [sic] are doing and where we are going. H.K.B.[46]

The New Aid Modalities of Structural Adjustment

While Banda's autocratic nature was certainly important in shaping aid relations in the first 15 years after independence, his government was not be able to maintain such high levels of control in the aftermath of Malawi's balance of payment problems in the late 1970s, when it was forced to turn to the IFIs for assistance. Not only was Malawi in need of external assistance, but its position was further weakened by Banda's age, declining health and decreased interest in the day-to-day aspects of governing Malawi and defending it from donor impositions (Interview, Former Chief Economist, 7 April 2012). The first archival evidence of the extent to which SAPs would change Malawi's aid relations is an internal document from the Secretary for Agriculture and Natural Resources to the Secretary of the Treasury and the Chief Economist written in response to the World Bank's analysis of the Malawian economy. In this document, the Secretary for Agriculture makes the case for Malawi's desire to achieve food self-sufficiency, rather than to rely on a strategy of economic and agricultural diversification and it makes an impassioned case for ADMARC and the importance of its pan-

[45] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (1974) *Memo: Draft Letter to the German Ambassador on the Future of German Technical Assistance in Salima*, 9 October 1974.
[46] Ministry of External Affairs (1969), *Memo to H.E.: Malawi's Public Finances*, 14 February 1969.

territorial and pan-seasonal pricing system for smallholder farmers.[47] Not only was the need to defend domestic agricultural policies against donors in this way unprecedented, it ultimately failed, as discussed in Chapter 4.

A few months later, the shift in the nature of aid relations became yet more evident, when the Secretary to the Treasury wrote to all Principal Secretaries, encouraging their compliance with World Bank conditionalities:

> A World Bank mission has recently completed its preparatory work for final appraisal of a loan, which Government intends to negotiate for balance of payments support. … However, in view of the nature of the disequilibrium, the economy will require to undertake structural adjustments in terms of the sectoral utilisation of available resources. The success in negotiating this loan will, to a large extent, depend on whether we are able to demonstrate our efforts in this direction.[48]

From this point onwards, the World Bank frequently used the negotiated conditionalities of its loans to force policy change in Malawi. A series of telegrams sent from the World Bank's headquarters in Washington in late 1982, for example, repeatedly reminded the Government of Malawi of its obligation to liberalise its markets before further funds could be released.[49]

However, the level of intrusion by the Bank remained relatively contained, as the Bank did not have in-country offices at this time. This allowed the Ministry of Agriculture to devote considerable attention to constructing a coherent internal position, to conduct its own policy analysis and to a measure of autonomy and negotiating capital.[50] Nonetheless, this period did see a significant increase in the number of external consultants hired to generate knowledge concerning Malawi's economy and the agricultural sector in particular, with the mandate to make policy recommendations for future lending programmes (ibid.). Frequently, these

[47] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (1979), *Memo: Response to World Bank Study "Problems and Issues in the Agriculture Sector"*, 12 May 1979.
[48] Treasury (1980), *Memo: Proposed World Bank Loan for Structural Adjustment*, 9 June 1980.
[49] World Bank, *Telegram to Ministry of Finance*, 28 December 1982.
[50] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (1984), *Memo: Preparation for World Bank Preparatory Mission for Third Structural Adjustment Lending Programme*, 28 November 1984.

assessments and the resultant policy recommendations differed substantially from the government's position. Despite these trends, the Government of Malawi was able to retain a degree of autonomy in the process of knowledge generation and, therefore, was able to defend certain policies, such as the fertilizer subsidy, with considerable success until its negotiating capital was eroded further in the move towards aid 'partnerships'.[51]

Although the 1980s ushered in a seismic shift in Malawi's agricultural policies, as we will see in the next chapter, a similarly important, yet less noticeable shift occurred in aid relationships and modalities in the 1990s. For Malawi, the shift was twofold: first, the international community lost its previously timid approach in dealing with Kamuzu Banda's autocratic rule, and secondly the donor community made a concerted effort to coordinate and harmonise its aid. Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, bilateral donors pushed Kamuzu Banda's government towards greater political openness. The US Ambassador to Malawi, for example, stated in an interview with the Financial Post, that

> There is no indication that the new administration in Washington will change our policy – worldwide – of using economic assistance to encourage good government. … It is Malawian voices which must – will be – heard. I'm happy to see that this dialogue is taking place among Malawians in public office and private life.[52]

This shift marked the beginning of a now well-established pattern of the donor community tiring of the autocratic behaviour of Malawi's presidents [53], withdrawing its aid and then stepping in again when reforms had been implemented. It is worth noting that these decisions were not unanimous among donors, instead each donor took the decision to suspend aid individually and to varying degrees. Nevertheless, a critical mass of aid was suspended in the early 1990s in an attempt to further democratisation, in the early 2000s in order to

[51] Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (1984), *Minutes of Structural Adjustment Loan (III) Meeting Held in the Ministry of Agriculture*, 11 December 1984.
[52] Ministry of Foreign Affairs (undated), *Memo on US Ambassador – Financial Post*, undated.
[53] N.B. This pattern is not unique to Malawi, however donors' willingness to suspend aid has varied substantially between countries based on a variety of concerns, including geopolitical importance and macroeconomic management.

bring about more prudent macroeconomic management and to prevail on Bakili Muluzi not to run for a third term as president, in 2010 to discipline Mutharika for his dictatorial behaviour and refusal to devaluate the Kwacha, and finally in 2013 when the details of a corruption scandal emerged under Joyce Banda's presidency.[54] Importantly, the repeated and vivid demonstration of Malawi's dependence on its donors provided by the recurring collapse of the Malawian economy and its subsequent recovery with the resumption of aid, has severely undermined the country's negotiating capital and, thus, its ability to resist both economic and political policy impositions and maintain its sovereignty.

While the extent to which Malawi's donors have stood sentinel over its political developments and democratisation process is exceptional, even by African standards, the shifts in aid modalities are more representative, even if the attacks on sovereign decision-making were aggravated by the on/off nature of aid described above. It seems that serious efforts to better coordinate aid, to provide a united donor front and to increase the involvement of both bi- and multilateral donors in national decision-making processes began in earnest in Malawi in the late 1990s. Regular meetings of the international community in Malawi chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator – called the "Wednesday Group" – were held during the transition to democracy in 1993 and 1994. This practice gradually morphed into the "Aid Coordination Group" when the donor community felt the need for a forum that was "conducive to promoting closer forms of collaboration".[55] The aim of this particular group was to

> concentrate more on technical and in-depth discussions of aid coordination … The aim is to ensure that there is adequate information sharing within the donor community on aid management and donor coordination, to ensure adequate linkage between political and development issues, and in prioritising work overall for the donor community.[56]

[54] For details of the role of the donor community and the effects of the suspension of aid see for example Booth et al (2006), Cammack (2011). The economic effects of the suspension of aid during Bingu wa Mutharika's presidency are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.
[55] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1999), *Letter from UN Resident Coordinator to Diplomatic/Aid Community*, 22 March 1999.
[56] ibid.

This group was one that the Government of Malawi could ill afford to ignore, as it represented all major donors in the country and so approximately 40% of its national budget.[57] Besides presenting a more unified, and so powerful, face to the Government of Malawi, this new group also represented a number of other important changes in aid relationships. Not only would donors now meet regularly and jointly with the Ministry of Finance, but also with line Ministries, essentially undermining the ability of the Ministry of Finance to marshal the little negotiating capital it still possessed. Furthermore, it sought to institutionalise "donor participation in specific government mechanisms, e.g. Poverty Alleviation Programme Steering Committee" as well as "regular donor consultations chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator and periodic ones convened by the World Bank and IMF Representatives for visiting World Bank/IMF missions".[58]

Once the Aid Coordination Group had been established, it did not take long for the donor community to impose itself on the internal administrative and strategic process of government and its bureaucracy. In early 2000, the Aid Coordination Group undertook a Joint Government-Donor Review of Macro-Financial Support to Malawi to facilitate an "agreement on future modalities for macro-financial support and to initiate a dialogue on procedures that … will satisfy the donor's need for political and administrative accountability".[59] The "donor's need for political and administrative accountability" denoted a range of macro-economic and sectoral conditionalities that all donors could agree upon. A few short months later, the Common Approach to Budget Support (CABS) was negotiated, which saw the creation of new oversight structures both within the Ministry of Finance and line Ministries.[60] In 2001/02, the focus shifted to cooperation with the Government of Malawi on the drafting of the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (FAO, 7 November 2002). Malawi's first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

[57] At the time of its establishment, the Aid Coordination Group counted among its members the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank and IMF, Denmark, Norway, Canada, Germany, Japan International Cooperation Agency, United Nations Development Programme and one additional (yet to be determined) UN agency.
[58] ibid.
[59] Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and GoM (2000), *Joint Government-Donor Review of Macro-Financial Support to Malawi: DANIDA Final Report*, February 2000.
[60] Common Approach to Budget Support (CABS) Donors (2000), *Joint Preparatory Mission: CABS in Malawi*, June 2000.

covered the period between 2006 and 2011, and the second from 2011 to 2016. Each spanned more than one presidential and parliamentary period, demonstrating that the donor community, at least, expected no major policy changes as a result of these elections.

While the policymaking constraints of aid coordination have been amply felt in Malawi, the positive aspects of aid coordination – such as a reduction in competing demands between donors – have not materialised to the same degree. While the bilateral agencies now all function under the BWI framework outlined above, each donor still has its own development priorities that derive largely from domestic political imperatives in their countries of origin. Therefore German aid, for example, is focused on processes of decentralisation as German bureaucrats are keen to share their experience with decentralisation. Britain, on the other hand, espouses a strong 'poverty reduction' focus as a means of justifying aid to domestic constituencies and prefers to deliver its aid through budget support in order to reduce the costs of delivery (Hon. Andrew Mitchell, Public Lecture at Queen's College Oxford, 7 February 2013). Japan on the other hand is unable to provide budget support as a result of its legal structure (Interview, JICA, 2 February 2012). Within the agriculture sector there are also significant differences between donors. USAID for example prefers a market-driven approach to development and so has distanced itself from the subsidy programme, while DfID is more pro-subsidy but very concerned that subsidies reach only the poorest rural households.

Negotiating Policy: Donor Entanglement in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security

From the early 2000s onwards, Malawi experienced a rapid decline in its ability to manage its aid and, most importantly, the conditionalities and agendas it brought with it. However, the archival data to chart the progress of aid relationships from 2002 onwards is not available as the documents outlining these processes have not been deposited in the archives as yet and, in some cases, have gone missing from the archives. Therefore, this section looks in detail at the structures that have arisen as a result of the move towards aid 'partnerships'

within the MoAFS. I argue that the 'embeddedness' of various donor agencies within the Malawian state and its bureaucracy is not merely 'technical assistance' but a concerted effort by donors, in this case particularly the European Union, World Bank and DfID, to limit the policy choices of government. Donors are not simply 'embedded' in the Malawian state but are actively involved in shaping it in order to see their policy preferences realised. As one might expect, this has far-reaching implications for interactions between government and the bureaucracy in the process of policymaking and, indeed, its outcome.

The spectre of donor influence hangs over policy-making in Malawi, as we have seen above, severely restricting the policy choices available to technocrats within the MoAFS and limiting policy discourses and debates to such an extent that it is frequently difficult to trace the influence that donors do, in fact, exert over policy discussions. This is particularly so as donor officials are inclined to stress the "partnership" aspect of aid relations, while bureaucrats and politicians on the Malawian side have frequently found a useful scapegoat in the donor community, which can be blamed for any unpopular policies, from the size of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, to the devaluation of the Kwacha and the fuel crisis that crippled the economy between 2010 and 2012 (e.g. Interview, DfID, 3 April 2012; Ministry of Finance, 15 February 2012). It is necessary, therefore, to trace the structures that donors have created to facilitate their work with the state and to extend their control over the Malawian government, in order to understand the manner and extent to which different donors influence decision-making. This section, consequently, outlines the structures that have been created to "facilitate collaboration", "ensure good policy-making" and "prevent corruption", through which donors exert their influence on policy-making in the agricultural sector (e.g. Interview, Technical Advisor to the Joint Taskforce on Food Security and Nutrition (JTFSN), 7 April 2012).

The Joint Taskforce on Food Security and Nutrition (JTFSN)

The JTFSN is the most important of the structures that was created at the behest of the donor community in order to improve policy-making within the agriculture sector following the famine of 2001/02. As discussed in Chapter 2, the poor harvest of 2001 resulted in a famine due to a number of factors, including the

overestimate of national root and tuber production by the Ministry of Agriculture's statistics department, the insistence of the donor community that the government sell its strategic maize reserves in the months prior to the worst of the famine and the mismanagement of these sales by Muluzi's administration. The donors' aim in establishing the JTFSN was, therefore, to create new structures of organisation and accountability within the Ministry of Agriculture, in order to oversee and supervise any policy decisions taken by the government regarding questions of national food production and security (Interview, Technical Advisor, JTFSN, 13 September 2007). This came to include the oversight of such diverse aspects of the Ministry's work as agricultural production statistics and the evaluation of their food and nutrition security impact, any potential humanitarian responses to an unfolding crisis, including but not limited to the release of maize from the Strategic Grain Reserve, as well as any policies and programmes initiated by the MoAFS that affect food and nutrition security in Malawi (Interview, Technical Advisory, JTFSN, 7 April 2012). Given the precarious nature of food security in Malawi and its centrality to the work of the MoAFS, this covered a great deal of the Ministry's mandate and, importantly, its most politically sensitive decisions. The JTFSN was created in April 2002, initially to deal with the immediate crisis of the famine and was institutionalised later that year, when the temporary Taskforce was transformed into a permanent project, with a Technical Secretariat and technical as well as financial assistance from the European Union (Interview, European Union Representative, 20 July 2007).

Once established, the Technical Secretariat of the JTFSN set about creating the structures that would transform decision-making in the name of partnership and better management of the sector. This was done, primarily, through the establishment of committees – six in total – that would oversee decision-making processes. The first of these was the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC), which fell under the Ministry of Development Planning and Cooperation, and was mandated with "provid[ing] government and other stakeholders with timely information on food security and vulnerability in Malawi" (Interview, MVAC Coordinator, 13 January 2012). In collaboration with a number of other organisations, including Save the Children, Oxfam, and the UN's World Food

Programme and Food and Agriculture Organisation, the Committee was tasked with assessing the accuracy and implications of the Ministry of Agriculture's crop production statistics soon after harvest, usually in April and May. Furthermore, it determined the districts in which households were expected to have "missing food entitlements" and their magnitude (Interview, Technical Advisor to JTFSN, 7 April 2012). Its focus extended beyond the more simple question of household food production to livelihood strategies to determine the extent to which household "food entitlements" were likely to be met in the months prior to the next harvest. Based on these assessments, which were presumed to be less politically influenced and more reliable as a result of the involvement of international organisations, MVAC reported to the Humanitarian Response Committee in June or July detailing the areas in which food and nutrition insecurity was to be expected in the following months and what the magnitude of these shortages was likely to be (Interview, MVAC Coordinator, 13 January 2012). Here donor oversight existed in order to ensure that production and food insecurity estimates were not over or understated, in order to ensure a rapid response to food crises but also to prevent government overstating problems of food insecurity either to release additional grain from the strategic reserves or to access additional donor funding.

The Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA), which fell under the Office of the President and Cabinet, rather than the Ministry of Agriculture, chaired the Humanitarian Response Committee, which was the second of the JTFSN committees. Its membership included an array of interested parties, including government, donors and organisations involved with humanitarian crises, particularly food security. Notable donors involved in this committee were DfID, the European Union and the World Food Programme. Their role was to ensure that the data provided by MVAC was realistic, reviewing it against the data and experiences available to the members of this second committee, and then to draft a plan of action based on the information provided by MVAC. Its assessment of the quantity of maize and other food stuffs that would be needed to respond to the expected missing "food entitlements" was of particular importance as this determined the amount of maize that could be withdrawn from the Strategic Grain

Reserve (SGR). The distribution of food aid and the organisation of public or food-for-work programmes were discussed at length in this committee, as its members were usually also the organisations – governmental, non-governmental and international donor agencies – that would implement these programmes (Interview, Deputy Coordinator DoDMA, 15 February 2012). Once this committee had agreed upon a plan of action and produced an estimate of the quantity of maize that their programmes would require, in addition to their own stocks, they made a formal request to the third JTFSN committee, known as the SGR and Commercial Maize Committee.

The SGR and Commercial Maize Committee was, arguably, the most important creation of the Joint Taskforce, at least from a political perspective, as was evidenced both by the decisions it took as well as its membership. Its primary role was to review the formal requests for withdrawals from the country's largest maize silos [61] based on the plans submitted by the Humanitarian Response Committee and to sign off on these, if it was satisfied that due process has been followed and that distribution plans were realistic. Thus, before the MoAFS's Permanent Secretary, who chaired the committee, could formally make a request to the Head of the National Food Reserve Agency for the withdrawal of maize, the country's most important donors scrutinised the application (Interview, Head of NFRA, 16 February 2012). These included the IMF, World Bank, DfID, European Union and WFP, all of whom wielded considerable power in the agriculture sector and Malawi's economy at large. Assuming that consensus regarding the need for a given maize withdrawal was achieved, the Permanent Secretary then made an official request to the Head of the NFRA, who confirmed the availability of the requested quantity of maize, before sending the request on to the Treasury. The final go-ahead was then only given by the Treasury once funds had been guaranteed in order to replace the maize that would be withdrawn from the silos, which frequently meant a further meeting of the Committee in order to find a donor who was willing to pay for the maize or provide in-kind replacement (Interview, Technical Advisor to JTFSN, 7 April 2012).

[61] These are the silos that were constructed by Kamuzu Banda's government as a part of its maize self-sufficiency policy, with a storage capacity of 180,000MT, as outlined in Chapter 2.

It is worth noting here, that the Permanent Secretary of the MoAFS was officially only advised by this Committee and, therefore, was able to request a maize withdrawal even in the absence of consensus in the Committee and was ultimately responsible for her decision. However, while she was able to take an executive decision on such matters, several of my interviewees suggested that this would be extremely difficult, as the donors who sat on this Committee would be unlikely to pay for such a withdrawal and that donors, particularly the IMF and the World Bank, would be likely to look unfavourably upon such a unilateral decision (Interview, JTFSN, 7 April 2012). A secondary role of this committee was to ensure that maize traders, who may be affected by large grain releases from the reserves, were involved and aware of decisions made around the SGR. Thus, the Agricultural Commodity Exchange and the Grain Traders and Processors Association (GTPA) also sat on this committee (Interview, Agricultural Commodity Exchange, 6 February 2012; GTPA, 2 March 2012). Consequently, this committee was explicitly created to prevent the Government of Malawi from accessing its maize reserves in the absence of a food security crisis and without having persuaded the donor community of the authenticity of the crisis. The fact that this committee continued to exist in this form, more than a decade after the 2001/02 famine, and that it was still overseen by various donors in 2012, was indicative of differences in opinion between donors and the government on the role of the SGR. If donors were confident that the government would not attempt to use the reserve to manage maize prices, their involvement would not be necessary. This committee, thereby, represents the 'teeth' of donor conditionalities, in this case particularly those of the World Bank, used to ensure liberalised maize markets.

Donor oversight of the SGR does not end there, however. The fourth committee set up by the Taskforce, the Management and Information Systems Committee (MISC), was also important in holding the government accountable to donors, if perhaps less conspicuously so. As well as bringing together all actors in the country, from both the government and the donor community, who have data pertaining to government's indicators on food and nutrition security, the MISC was also the committee to which the National Food Reserve Agency reported on

the day-to-day functioning of the SGR. Of particular importance were the figures that the NFRA reported on the cost of storing maize per MT and their losses per annum, which provided the committee with proof that maize was being handled correctly and not being misappropriated or used for political purposes. As one anonymous interviewee explained

> Now they [were] called losses, but actually what was happening was that … not the last president, but the one before that [Muluzi], would just go and say "oh we need to give out maize somewhere" and would come and take it. And he would even go there and say "Oh, I think we've got lots of maize, we should export some to Kenya" and then he would pocket the money (Interview, Anonymous, 7 April 2012).

This new system led to a sharp decrease in the cost of storing maize as well as a reduction in storage "losses" from between 23 and 41% prior to the inception of the Taskforce in 2002 to less than 0.4% in 2011 (Interview, Technical Advisor to JTFSN, 7 April 2012). While the reduction in political misuse of the SGR subdued donor concerns and so saved the reserve from being reduced to a negligible size or abolished entirely, this came at the cost of very high levels of donor intrusion into policy-making processes far beyond mere 'embeddedness'. The European Union, for example, audited the figures provided by the NFRA on SGR losses and the cost of storage to ensure that all aspects of the SGR's function were indeed being reported to the Joint Taskforce committees and, thus, the donor community (Interview, Anonymous Donor Official, 2 April 2012; Head of NFRA, 16 February 2012).

The fifth committee was the Nutrition Committee, which was tasked with sharing information on the nutrition situation throughout the country and is chaired by the Department of Nutrition and HIV/AIDS under the Office of the President and the Cabinet. It brought together three primary sources of data on nutrition, namely data from demographic, health and integrated household surveys, and the information generated by Health Facilities such as clinics and hospitals and from Community Management of Acute Malnutrition systems. The Nutrition Committee corroborated the reports drafted by MVAC and the Humanitarian Response

Committee, providing further reassurance for the donor community as to the veracity of reports of food insecurity, where this was required.

The final structure created by the Taskforce was the Committee on Policy and Programmes, which reviewed any initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security in light of its impacts on issues of food and nutrition security. It saw itself as an advisory body to the Programme Development Unit within the Ministry. As such, it advised this Unit on issues ranging from the impact of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme on nutrition and food security to the marketing of maize surpluses (Interview, Technical Assistant to JTFSN, 7 April 2012). This committee was instrumental in determining the policy agenda and its outcomes in the agriculture sector.

It is conceivable that the Government of Malawi's technocrats and politicians had in fact assimilated the liberalisation policies of the donor community and that it valued these committees for the services they provided, such as the dissemination of data and information as well as preventing abuse of the SGR, as much as the bi- and multilateral agencies that funded them. However, this was not the assessment of donors. The EU-funded Technical Secretariat and the associated technical assistance was drawing to a close at the time of my fieldwork in 2012, with all external assistance due to terminate at the end of May 2012. In this context, a number of my donor interviewees expressed their concerns about the longevity of these structures once the EU ceased its funding of the Secretariat. As one anonymous interviewee argued:

> But if push comes to shove, and the Government's got a choice between buying some more fertilizer or getting the information sorted out, they might just buy some more fertilizer (Interview, Anonymous Donor Official, 7 April 2012).

Discussion was on-going in the donor community as to whether it was indeed wise, from a donor point of view, to cease funding the Taskforce's Secretariat

> because [some have argued that] we don't want to be in a world, in Malawi, where we don't know the information

> about the Farm Input Subsidy Programme … where we don't have the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Report… where these committees don't meet and things just sort of happen and we don't know about it (Interview, Technical Advisor to JTFSN, 7 April 2012).

When I returned to Malawi in September 2013, the Technical Secretariat of the JTFSN was still functioning, albeit without an international technical assistant and under the broader structures of the Sector-Wide Approach, due to a last-minute decision by DfID to fund it (Interview, DCAFS Coordinator, 13 September 2013). This is indicative of the extent to which the donor community valued these structures, over-and-above the worth attached to them by actors either within the Ministry of Agriculture or the Government of Malawi.

The Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security

The Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security (DCAFS) brought together donors[62] who worked directly with the MoAFS, without representation from the Ministry of Agriculture itself, with the purpose of ensuring

> that what the donors are doing is well-coordinated among themselves so that they can provide common support, a harmonised investment towards the implementation … [of] the government's [sector strategy]. … They have got different approaches, they have different programmes but still they would want to harmonise themselves first, before they make a position to the government, so that they take a common position. … The DCAFS provides that forum. (Interview, DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012).

DCAFS members had been meeting monthly since the early 2000s[63] to flesh out a donor consensus on a wide variety of policies and to coordinate their support to the sector. The outcomes of these discussions were then shared with the minister, the permanent secretary and her deputy as well as the directors at the MoAFS in

[62] The DCAFS brings together twelve institutions, namely the African Development Bank, the UK's Department for International Development, the European Union, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Irish Aid, JICA, Norway, the United Nations Development Programme, the United States' Agency for International Development, the World Food Programme and the World Bank.

[63] N.B. As the DCAFS is an informally constituted committee, the details of its beginnings are not well documented, but its Coordinator believed it to have been an important forum for donor discussions and meeting regularly since approximately 2004 (Interview, DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012).

monthly meetings (Interview, IFAD, 6 February 2012). More importantly, perhaps, a sub-group of the DCAFS, referred to as the Troika and consisting of the outgoing, incoming and current chair of the committee, met with the Ministry's Permanent Secretary *every* Monday morning for a thirty minute meeting to discuss any pressing policy issues and to receive a progress report on important policies and programmes. The Troika was joined by the DCAFS Coordinator, who was responsible for much of the meeting follow-up and preparation of donor position papers on various policies (Interview, DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012; Irish Aid, 24 February 2012).

This relatively informal committee wielded a great deal of power, as it oversaw the Ministry of Agriculture's work in great detail, ensured that government officials were aware of any development in donor policy preferences, and, significantly, portrayed a relatively united donor front to the Government of Malawi. The DCAFS' influence over agricultural policy was clearly visible: in 2011 it was able to finalise the Medium-Term Plan for the evolution of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme in collaboration with the MoAFS. In early 2012, on the other hand, the most important question under discussion was the issue of harmonised funding among donors, particularly the question of establishing a Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF), which would be overseen by the World Bank and be the main channel of funds between donors and the MoAFS. The intention was for the MDTF's management to be handed over to the Ministry once it had "learned" to comply with donor procedures and adopted suitable financial and administrative systems (Interview, DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012; World Bank, 30 September 2013).

While DCAFS was as much a forum in which differences between donors were played out as one in which joint donor policy or positions were fleshed out, it nonetheless extended the influence that individual donors could exert over the Ministry's work, particularly given the large number of meetings it held with Ministry staff at all levels. If nothing else, the weekly meetings with the Permanent Secretary served the purpose of keeping her abreast of developments in donor thinking and which issues were likely to cause friction with various donors to the

sector (Interview, PS MoAFS, 21 May 2012). Furthermore, it is not entirely clear whether the DCAFS, as is often claimed, reduced the Ministry's aid management workload. In fact, at least in 2012/13, the DCAFS generated a great deal of work with its demands for improved donor-government interactions through various other aid structures, particularly the Agriculture Sector-Wide Approach.

Sector Wide Approach Structures

Since the signing of the Paris Declaration in 2005, the institutional arrangement that has come to dominate in aid dependent countries is the Sector-Wide Approach, for which various review structures are created to 'facilitate' donor-government collaboration. Although Sector-Wide Approaches in the agricultural sector are not generally regarded as particularly successful and have proven extremely difficult to implement fully (Cabral 2010; Foster et al. 2000), many of the institutions that accompany them have been or are in the process of being created in recipient countries. Of particular note are the Sector Working Group, the Technical Working Groups that feed into it, and the Joint Sector Reviews, all of which are managed by line ministries. Sector Working Groups are expected to meet monthly, so that all actors in the agriculture sector can report on their work and, more importantly, feed into the process of policy-making within the Ministry in question. Where particular issues prove controversial, or are deemed to require further technical input or expertise from various stakeholders, Technical Working Groups are formed to make recommendations to the Sector Working Group. In this manner, the process through which policies are designed and drafted is under constant review by development partners and donors to the sector.

Furthermore, these new aid management structures, as conceived by the donor community, are intended to include both private sector representatives and civil society actors. In Malawi it was unclear how private sector representatives were chosen, beyond the participation of certain professional associations, such as the Grain Traders and Processors Association (Interview, GTPA, 18 September 2013), while 'civil society' was limited to the participation of large NGOs from the global north, such as Oxfam, and those based in Malawi but funded by international aid

agencies. [64] In addition, two Joint Sector Reviews are expected to be held annually, one that focuses on reporting all activity in the financial year just completed and the other in order to present and discuss plans for the upcoming year, including the Ministry's budget and work plan. Joint Sector Reviews serve the dual purpose of keeping donors, development partners and stakeholders involved in these processes, as well as providing the Ministry of Finance with all the data necessary for national-level negotiations with its development partners, particularly those providing budget support (Interview, Deputy ASWAp Coordinator, 15 February 2012).

In Malawi these structures were being set up at the beginning of 2012 (Interviews, Deputy ASWAp Coordinator, 15 February 2012; DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012; World Bank, 21 May 2012). Malawi's Agriculture Sector-Wide Approach (ASWAp) Memorandum of Understanding was adopted in late 2011 by government, development partners, civil society and the private sector and provides a detailed outline not only of the priority activities and the harmonisation of donor funding for the sector as a whole, but also describes the accountability structures, mainly between donors and development partners, that would be adhered to by its signatories (GoM 2011b). As is accepted good practice within the current paradigm of aid harmonisation and SWAps, Malawi's ASWAp makes provisions for monthly Sector Working Group meetings, ad hoc Technical Working Groups where deemed necessary, and biannual Joint Sector Reviews (Deputy ASWAp Coordinator, 15 February 2012). Sector Working Group meetings were being held irregularly and the first Joint Sector Review was planned for the first half of 2012 at the time of my fieldwork (DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012). Regular monthly meetings between donors and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security were still being held in the first half of 2012, in anticipation of the full institutionalisation of ASWAp sector structures (ibid.). Following donor complaints of the "sluggish" pace within the Ministry of Agriculture with regards to the institutionalisation of the ASWAp, a Secretariat was set up to drive the process and three members of staff were hired in order to facilitate

[64] See Williams (2010) for a discussion of 'civil society' as conceived of by the World Bank and the problems inherent in this.

implementation (Interview, DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012). The World Bank, the Kingdom of Norway and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation provided technical and funding assistance to the Secretariat (Interview, DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012). Beyond concerning itself with the ASWAp's implementation, the Secretariat was also charged with collaborating with the donor community on the establishment of the Multi-Donor Trust Fund. While the donor community discussed SWAp structures in terms of easing the workload of aid coordination, it is questionable whether this was indeed the case, given the time consuming nature of these coordination efforts.

Farm Input Subsidy Programme Taskforce and Logistics Unit

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one element of the ASWAp structure preceded the others, reflecting donor priorities and aspirations to influence the work of the Ministry. The Food Security and Risk Management Working Group, conceived as one of the Technical Working Groups to feed into the Sector Working Group, was the most active working group in 2012, as it comprised the FISP, which was of interest to both donors and government. This particular working group, collaborated closely with the FISP Taskforce. As the DCAFS Coordinator explained:

> … there is a taskforce [specifically for FISP], that is very active and it plans [to] bring resources whenever they have got limitations, come to the development partners timely… and development partners come in, like for example, last year in the middle of the year the government realised that it has got a challenge to meet the fuel demand for delivery of fertilizer even to unlock some of the fertilizer from suppliers that were contracted (Interview, DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012).

The FISP Taskforce is based within the Ministry of Agriculture and tasked with the day-to-day running and strategic planning of the programme. In this context, it is also charged with overseeing relationships with stakeholders interested in FISP, most importantly those donors also involved in funding components of the programme, namely DfID, the Government of Norway and Irish Aid, on issues of policy and logistics (Interview, FISP Taskforce, 28 May 2012). Through this structure, the donor community has continuously pursued its goal of placing the question of the FISP's future, particularly the question of its phasing out, on the

agenda. This strategy has been successful, in that the development partners and officials at the MoAFS completed a Medium-Term Strategy for the FISP in late 2011, which included a small reduction in beneficiary numbers for the 2012/13 season to 1.4 million beneficiaries and a cap at this level for the following two years (Interviews, DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012; Irish Aid, 24 February 2012).

In order to ensure that the policy decisions made by the Taskforce in conjunction with the Working Group are implemented and that the FISP was insulated from political pressures, the donors have overseen and funded the establishment of a separate FISP Logistics Unit. Funded by DfID and regularly audited by the European Union, the Logistics Unit was charged with overseeing the delivery of subsidised fertilizer to ADMARC outlets, minimising coupon fraud and ensuring that the levels of fertilizer supplied to beneficiaries was kept within the limits defined by the Medium-Term Strategy and other agreements between the donor community and the Government of Malawi (Interview, FISP Logistics Unit, 13 March 2012).

Common Approach to Budget Support (CABS)

Finally, the Ministry of Agriculture's work and policy-making also fell under the supervisory mandate of the CABS structures. The CABS donors[65] included those agencies that provided budget support to the Government of Malawi and, therefore, had a vested interest in the progress made towards the implementation of overarching macroeconomic conditionalities as well as the sector-specific priorities that are deemed important to overall levels of economic growth. The aim of the group was to harmonise the aid jointly provided in the form of budget support, to ensure that the principles that govern budget support were adhered to, and that progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and implementing Malawi's Second Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS II) – its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – was in line with agreed plans and timeframes.

[65] As of February 2013, the CABS development partners included the African Development Bank, the UK's Department for International Development, the European Commission, Norway, and the World Bank as full members. The IMF, Germany, UNDP and Ireland participate in the process as observers.

In line with the Joint Framework that guided the collaboration between CABS development partners and the Government of Malawi, review meetings were held biannually between the two parties and were co-chaired by the minister of finance and the CABS Chairperson (which rotated among development partners). The Joint Performance Assessment Framework (JPAF) and its associated targets and conditionalities formed the basis for assessing Malawi's progress in this context and sought to ensure that the government's budget priorities were indeed in line with the goals set out in the MDGS II. Budget support donors used these two indicators to decide on the level of general budget support they were willing to commit or disburse (GoM 2013a).

The CABS grouping, while formally under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, was of relevance to the Ministry of Agriculture and its policy-making processes, as the CABS meetings provided a means for donors to ensure that policy issues that were a priority or a concern to them became the basis for budget support discussions. As we will see in Chapter 5, the donor community did not hesitate to suspend budgetary support to Malawi based on discussions held within the CABS forum. While the issues that led to the suspension of aid were generally related to questions of macroeconomic and political governance, policy-making at the level of line ministries played an important role in assuaging donor concerns regarding the use of their funds (GoM 2013a; 2013b).

In this manner, for example, the issue of the management of the Strategic Grain Reserve and the elaboration of the mandate of the National Food Reserve Agency became part of the JPAF targets that determined budgetary support to the Government of Malawi in February 2013, following the problems experienced by the SGR in 2012.[66] One of the JPAF indicators for agriculture read

> A draft comprehensive disaster risk mitigation strategy is developed to better coordinate contingency plans, emergency financing instruments, insurance mechanisms and early warning tools (by June 30, 2013) (GoM, 2013b).

[66] These issues are discussed at length in Chapter 4.

Similarly, the CABS JPAF has been used to hasten the implementation of the agreed ASWAp structures, particularly its institutional components, such as the formation of working groups and convening of regular Sector Working Group meetings (GoM 2013b).

Conclusion

This chapter began with the assertion that the ability of aid recipients to contain the stipulations attached to the loans and grants they receive is largely a result of their ability to insulate their government and policy-making institutions from donors (Whitfield 2009). The Government of Malawi has not been able to insulate itself and has, instead, experienced high levels of donor interference in its institutions and donor efforts to restructure the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to ensure donors' policy preferences are implemented. The combination of aid discourses, notions of good technocratic administration or policy-making, and the 'good governance' agenda have created a situation where donors have high levels of control over the policy-making process and work very closely with the state at all levels to ensure that Malawi implements 'good' policies.

Donors are now so entrenched within the Malawian civil service at all levels of the state that those institutions tasked with generating and implementing national agricultural policies are no longer able to do so independently of its donors. Instead, they work together with technical assistants and donor representatives to draft the policy documents that will win the approval of its financiers and generally bear an uncanny resemblance to those outlined in formal donor policy documents. Even the policy monitoring systems created by the Ministry of Agriculture in the last decade or so reflect the priorities of the donor community, rather than those of government. Further, the everyday running of the agricultural sector, including such basic components as monitoring food security and the release of grain from national strategic reserves, is heavily policed by donors and has the potential to affect the nature of donor-government relationships, which in turn determine the health of the Malawian economy. These same structures that have been put in place to ensure 'good governance' and good policy-making, not only increase the leverage of donors, but also of those actors that the international

community deems beneficial to a functioning democracy, such as the private sector and civil society. There is no evidence that these actors are representative of anything other than the donor consensus on agricultural policy, and it remains unclear how they could speak on behalf of the majority of Malawians who would be on the receiving end of these negotiated policies.

Thus, it is extremely difficult for political or technocratic actors to develop policies that reflect the interests and views of Malawian actors, be they politicians or farmers or that are better suited to Malawi's political, economic and agricultural context than the orthodox policies advocated by donors. Where Malawi's policies have been found wanting by donors in the past, they have not stopped short of creating the structures necessary to constrain policy choices. Yet, this is not to say that there is no resistance to the neo-liberal policy agenda of the donor community, simply that any resistance to it no longer takes place at the negotiating table as a result of the knowledge produced by the Ministry of Agriculture or as a result of ideas generated through an open, national political process. Instead, as we will see in the next chapter, resistance has taken the form of passive strategies such as non-implementation after conditionalities have been agreed upon or unilateral policy decisions taken by the president. Such resistance has usually engendered the creation of further structures that increase donor control over the government in order to prevent "neo-patrimonial" or "political" policy-making. The Strategic Grain and Commercial Maize Committee is perhaps the best example of this, but the ASWAP structures under construction in 2012 arose for similar reasons. The outcome is a relationship between donors and the government that is characterised by suspicion of the motives of Malawian policymakers and politicians. The next chapter discusses how consecutive governments have sought to maintain some control over agricultural policies despite the country's aid dependence.

Chapter 4

Constrained Agricultural Policy-Making: A Game of Compliance and Defiance

Introduction

As we have seen, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS) was reorganised to suit donor needs and to prevent it from elaborating and implementing heterodox policies. This chapter considers the evolution of agricultural policies under donor influence between 1980 and 2013. It focuses on the structures and policies most important to smallholder food production and food security, namely the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation's (ADMARC) restructuring, the strategic grain reserve (SGR), and input subsidies. The donor community in effect sought to dismantle the coherent and stable system of state marketing and input supply, described in detail in Chapter 2, that it had identified as an impediment to economic growth and development in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I make two arguments about the evolution of agricultural policy under this new aid regime. The first is that while donor policy impositions resulted in many changes and U-turns in agricultural policy, this was the result of the efforts of consecutive governments to mitigate the impact of liberalisation on smallholder farmers. In other words, the many changes should be seen as a consequence of the attempt to maintain as much policy coherence as possible. The second argument is that the more donors became involved in the day-to-day running of the state through the technical assistance provided to the Ministry and the oversight structures created in the process, the more resistance to donor-impositions moved away from the 'negotiating table'. As this occurred, resistance increasingly took the form of presidential initiatives or ad hoc policies, which put further strain on donor-government relationships and made it difficult to trace the origins of these policies, which were instigated at the highest political levels. The consequence was an ever more erratic process of policymaking as donors moved to clamp down on the policies they opposed and the government sought to find other ways of breaking away from these policy constraints, usually by instigating reform in other areas of food security and maize production policy.

This chapter contributes to the broader arguments about the African state and politics, by demonstrating that the Malawian state is certainly not insulated from political pressures in the manner that neopatrimonial theories of the state suggest. Instead, Malawi's political leaders sought to defend much more than patronage networks, namely the state and the services it provided to smallholder farmers. In fact, patronage networks became increasingly important only in those instances when politicians were not able to protect the agricultural services that smallholders had come to expect from the state since the late 1960s. And the inability to respond to the political demands of smallholder farmers drove the need for the types of horizontal linkages that could be established through patronage networks.

This chapter begins by looking at the restructuring of ADMARC and the liberalisation of agricultural markets in the 1980s and 1990s, and resistance to this process from 2004 onwards. The second section considers the SGR and conflict between donors and government over its role in food security. These conflicts, coupled with allegations of corruption against senior politicians led to a significant expansion of donor influence over the sector. The final section argues that this expansion was so damaging that Mutharika had little choice but to implement a large-scale fertilizer subsidy in order to reverse the decreases in maize yields resulting from liberalisation, which had increased both chronic and acute hunger in rural Malawi, even though this meant openly contravening donor preferences.

Agricultural Markets: the Liberalisation of ADMARC

1980 to 2001: Cutting Back ADMARC's Scope and Influence

Between 1980 and 2000, ADMARC's role in maize marketing was transformed as a result of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) Malawi signed with the World Bank. The Bank saw the restructuring of ADMARC as the first step in liberalising agricultural markets, with the ultimate aim of allowing the private sector to replace the services provided by the institution. As detailed in Chapter 2, until the signing of the first SAP in 1980, ADMARC was the sole legal trader of both inputs and outputs in rural Malawi. The rationale for ADMARC's dismantling proffered by the World Bank was twofold. Firstly, it argued that the administration

of pan-seasonal and pan-territorial prices was detrimental to economic growth as the maize account was subsidised by the more profitable cash crop accounts (Chirwa et al. 2005). Secondly, it argued that as long as ADMARC continued to dominate rural markets, there could be no role for traders in rural development (Christiansen and Stackhouse 1989). Kamuzu Banda, however, was wary of liberalising markets, as this would leave smallholders vulnerable to intra-seasonal price increases and substantial inter-seasonal price shocks (should Malawi experience either an extraordinarily good or bad maize harvest) and so would threaten his political support base. The negotiated result was a gradual restructuring of ADMARC that saw it withdraw from marketing activities and allowed for traders to step into the breach, while ADMARC retained its position of buyer and seller of last resort, in order to protect rural maize producers. This role of buyer and seller of last resort is widely referred to as ADMARC's 'social role' as it is seen as a form of social protection for Malawi's poorest. However, as the organisation was no longer able to control prices, this role became extremely costly and opened up opportunities for traders to exploit the arbitrage opportunities created by ADMARC itself. Furthermore, when exactly ADMARC's services were needed in order to ensure food security for the poorest or indeed what was meant by 'food security' was imperfectly defined and so its interventions frequently appeared arbitrary (World Bank 2003; 2007). The main point of contention, consequently, was the difficulty of containing the budgetary implications of a system that sought to foster private sector participation, while preventing hunger by ensuring that all households could afford to purchase maize.

In the course of restructuring, ADMARC went from being the sole trader in rural Malawi to frequently failing to deliver on its heavily curtailed 'social role'. However, despite these changes, smallholder farmers continued to demand that ADMARC protect them against the high levels of price volatility that are the root cause of food insecurity:

> Until now [2013] in many people's minds it [ADMARC] is the nation's grain trader or commodity trader. Grain trader because usually when people talk about ADMARC, they think about maize. […] And when they think about ADMARC, they think about places where they can buy maize

> at the cheapest price. And ADMARC is expected to have stocks of maize that would be sold at the lowest prices throughout the year (Interview, ADMARC Chief Executive Officer (CEO), 23 September 2013).

Though consecutive governments failed to protect the parastatal from the conditionalities attached to SAPs, efforts to maintain ADMARC's 'social role' represented an attempt to defend the remnants of the services that smallholders had come to expect of the state as a result of the agricultural policies of the 1960s and 1970s (as discussed in Chapter 2).

By the late 1990s, ADMARC had been weakened and reformed, at the behest of the donor community, to such an extent that it was no longer able to protect smallholder farmers against the vagaries of the market. In the absence of an adequate budget to sell subsidised maize to areas affected by food insecurity, Muluzi's regime began to use the institution to make ad hoc interventions in maize markets. Senior officials in the Muluzi government provided ADMARC with maize from the Strategic Grain Reserves for sale at its rural markets, without following due process. ADMARC's board included individuals such as Friday Jumbe, who also served as Muluzi's finance minister. An investigation into the sale and procurement of maize from the SGR between 1999 and 2001 conducted by the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, stated that

> ADMARC had unlimited access to the maize [in the SGR] and sold a total of 78,186 MT worth K373,272.063.50 without authorisation from NFRA [National Food Reserve Agency]. The Government later on paid this amount to NFRA on behalf of ADMARC. … Further, the sum of K22,700,000.00 realised from the sale of the Strategic Reserve, allegedly remitted to NFRA from ADMARC according to the Ministry of Agriculture report dated 2nd July 2002, was never received by NFRA, raising suspicions on the whereabouts of the money (Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee 2002).

This report goes on to detail two different forms of misconduct by Muluzi's government with regards to the SGR in order to explain the disappearance of these funds. The one was the abuse of the reserves by members of the NFRA board and

their cronies who either purchased maize from the SGR below the market rate or, in some cases, failed to pay for it at all. They then used this maize for their personal financial or political gain. The other unsanctioned use of the SGR served to ensure the supply of cheap maize to smallholder farmers through ADMARC, in the absence of an adequate budget for the institution (ibid.). Given pressures from the donor community to liberalise agricultural marketing, the only means of ensuring that ADMARC had adequate supplies of maize was for this to be provided to the corporation outside of official government channels at the behest of senior politicians (e.g. Interview, Anonymous, 7 April 2012). This service was of particular importance in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when fertilizer subsidies had been cut back substantially and per capita maize production was declining.

2002 to 2012: Resistance to Further Liberalisation

As agricultural markets were slowly liberalised during the 1980s and 1990s, ADMARC's 'social role' became increasingly expensive and the World Bank argued that ADMARC's privatisation had not progressed sufficiently. It argued that the parastatal was proving a hindrance to economic growth and macroeconomic stability as it consumed a large share of the national budget, often resulting in poor "fiscal discipline" (World Bank 2003; 2007). While the failure to implement SAP conditionalities in the agricultural sector alone did not result in the suspension of aid to Malawi, these same conditionalities have often been tacked onto packages negotiated for the resumption of aid. For example, having suspended its budget aid to Malawi in 2001 due to high levels of corruption and macroeconomic mismanagement during Muluzi's presidency (Resnick 2012), the Bank made the resumption of aid in 2004 and a US$64 million loan partially conditional upon a more comprehensive reorganisation and privatisation of the corporation. The rationale for this was that ADMARC had become "a drain on public resources (from June 2000 to August 2001, it received budgetary support of 1.75% of GDP)" and that "[t]he GoM justifies the need for subsidization referring to ADMARC's 'social function' without specifying what this entails and what costs are involved" (WB 2003: 14). For the reasons detailed above, ADMARC's financial difficulties were the result of attempts by the corporation to fulfil its 'social role', while also allowing private sector traders to profit from arbitrage opportunities. Thus, the conditionalities contained in its Country Assistance Strategy for the years 2004 to

2006 included "advancing parastatal reform (which is expected to include… the divestiture of ADMARC's non-core subsidiaries)" and "improving agricultural markets" which was deemed possible only with a further reduction of ADMARC's presence in rural, agricultural markets (WB 2003: 26).

Initially, the donor community, with the World Bank as the lead donor, had pushed for a full privatisation of the corporation. This threat was sufficiently credible that the Agriculture, Land and Natural Resources Committee of Parliament (ALNRC) conducted a public consultation on the future of ADMARC. The Committee concluded that

> [t]here is a general perception that in planning for the future of ADMARC, the government may be trying too hard to please donors. Their [the public] perception is that donors are more concerned with the financial viability of ADMARC than with its social functions … people are of the view that the privatization of ADMARC will not be consistent with the government's poverty alleviation drive (ALNRC 2002: ii).

The reasons cited by those who made submissions to the committee fell into three categories, namely that too many rural markets would close leaving farmers vulnerable to exploitative traders, that inequality would worsen, and that there would be no "social service" provision for the food insecure. The committee did not receive a single written submission, out of 36, in favour of privatisation and none of the attendees at the public meetings held by the committee expressed a preference for privatisation either (ibid.).[67]

The strength of donor pressure on the government during this period is beyond doubt. The minister of finance argued in parliament in June 2002 in a debate about

[67] It is unclear how representative these views were, as the report only states that "[t]wo modes of consultation were employed: call for written submissions and a public hearing" (ALNRC 2002: ii) and later that its authors "believe that the views are representative of the majority of people in the country, since amongst the 36 submissions were those from NGOs that work with many people in the country" (ALNRC 2002: 3). The Members of Parliament involved in organising the public consultation were also opposed to ADMARC's privatisation (Interview, MCP MP, 25 January 2012). However, my interviews with smallholder farmers certainly supported the report's conclusions (see Chapters 7 and 8).

ADMARC that the government had little choice in the matter as "[w]e do not just do things on our own. When they tell us the necessary things that we need to do, we are supposed to do them" (ibid.). At this point, largely as a result of the 2001/02 famine, relationships between the government and donors had deteriorated to such a degree that the division of labour within the donor community had become blurred and bilateral donors had become more vocal. Thus, the IMF and the British Government were particularly vocal on the question of parastatal reform in June 2002, even though this issue had previously been left largely to the World Bank. Given the dismal condition of state finances towards the end of Muluzi's presidency in 2004, the minister of finance was certainly not overstating donor influence (see data in Chapter 2). However, given how unpopular a privatisation of ADMARC was, the decision was eventually made to "commercialise" the corporation. This would see some 80 ADMARC markets managed on a commercial basis by "ADMARC Ltd" while the other 200 would be entrusted to a legal entity called "ADMARC Trust" which would fulfil "social functions" and be funded by government (Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee 2003).

This bill was eventually pushed through parliament, without a clear definition of ADMARC's "social functions" and how these would be funded, as a result of donor pressures. This precluded any constructive dialogue either within Malawi or between the MoAFS and its donors, most importantly the World Bank, on the future of ADMARC. The result was a further weakening of the marketing corporation, leaving it unable to fulfil its "social marketing" role in many remote and food insecure areas, and without a clear strategy as to how situations of acute or chronic food security, frequently the result of market failures, would be dealt with:

> Without adequate resources, it proved that ADMARC was just there in name, [and] was not able to meet its obligations (Interview, Anonymous NGO Representative, 31 July 2007).

While the MoAFS continued to express a desire to see a return to "ADMARC's heyday" when smallholder produce prices were guaranteed, this round of reforms

further reduced its access to the resources necessary to do so (Interview, Hon. Kutsaira, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, 12 September 2007). World Bank loan conditions stipulated that ADMARC should divest itself of the parastatals that had at one time sustained the organisation, and that ADMARC's operations should be "commercialised" as described above (World Bank 2003). Thus, ADMARC began to divest itself of its non-core subsidiaries, including the Shire Bus Company and the Grain Milling Corporation, with the result of reducing its income, and therefore viability, further (Interviews, Hon. Kutsaira, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, 12 September 2007; ADMARC CEO, 23 September 2013; Nkhoma 2009; World Bank 2003).

The main concern among the political elite remained the provision of core services that would ensure national and domestic food security, while the World Bank remained of the opinion that the geographical spread of ADMARC should be further reduced so that it would serve only those communities too remote to be attractive to the private sector (e.g. Interview, Former PS, MoAFS, 10 April 2012). The Malawian consultant hired by the World Bank to oversee the restructuring of ADMARC explained the logic as follows:

> ADMARC needs to … confine its activities to providing social marketing services loosely defined as provid[ing] marketing services where there are market failures. So wherever the private sector is unable to go, ADMARC should maintain a presence and where private sector is able to go to, ADMARC should withdraw (Interview, Consultant hired to restructure ADMARC, 16 September 2007).

The rationale was that by limiting ADMARC's presence, better estimates could be drawn up in advance of the quantities of grain that would need to be purchased from or sold to these areas to protect livelihoods and these expenditures could then be ringfenced. This would allow the exact costs of ADMARC's maintenance to be determined for each area and compared to the cost of other possible interventions or policies. As market access and infrastructure improved in rural areas, as a result of infrastructure development projects and private sector support programmes, a gradual withdrawal from all rural areas was envisioned (Interview, ADMARC Consultant, 16 September 2007).

To the government this sounded far too much like a further reduction in the "social services" ADMARC would be able to offer to smallholder farmers. While Parliament had voted for ADMARC's reform in order to ensure the resumption of multilateral aid in 2004, it failed to allocate the necessary funds for its implementation, although it allowed the corporation to use some of the divestiture profits to cover ongoing restructuring and running costs (Interview, ADMARC Consultant, 16 September 2007; Minister of Agriculture, 12 September 2007). While this would seem a logical manoeuvre for a government attempting to avoid restructuring a politically important parastatal, it also withdrew funding from ADMARC's operating budget. My interviewees only hinted at the reasons for this. The most likely explanation seemed to be that President Mutharika, who also served as minister of agriculture at the time, was conscious that the World Bank and the IMF's opposition to ADMARC was based in no small part on the grounds that the institution had the potential to consume a large share of the national budget. Therefore, no budget was allocated to ADMARC, and instead the organisation received its funds in the form of bailouts when necessary. In other words, Mutharika chose a strategy of obfuscation, even though this would prove costly in the long run, in order to avoid donor-imposed conditionalites. Hon. Kutsaira, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security hinted at this:

> They [the World Bank] are happy with what we have done because the World Bank wants us to stop completely subsidies on ADMARC … This year … in the budget there is no provision for subsidising ADMARC. Now ADMARC have to do extreme business and be able to survive and compete … But as government we have to see what we can do … and come in if ever there is indeed a real problem (Interview, Hon. Kutsaira, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, 12 September 2007).

Given ADMARC's importance in agricultural marketing and food security, politicians, notably President Mutharika, calculated that simply following donor dictates and dismantling its structures would mean the loss of popular support and considerable political fallout. When I discussed this period in the corporation's history with the Chief Executive Officer in 2013, he told me that

senior staff at ADMARC had advised President Mutharika that the scaling-down of ADMARC's presence in rural areas would

> Not [be] good for the president. ADMARC is a very big organisation in the country, the profile that ADMARC has… so if your government actually does that and shrinks ADMARC to the bone – nothing to do with profitability or viability – this would not be good for you [the president] (Interview, ADMARC CEO, 24 September 2013).

Nonetheless, Malawi's aid dependence prevented government from maintaining the levels of agricultural marketing services that the electorate, particularly smallholder farmers, had come to expect from ADMARC. In an effort to assuage donors, while maximising ADMARC's leverage over rural maize markets in particular, President Mutharika's administration took the decision to cease funding ADMARC directly, while insulating the institution, as far as possible, from donor influence. As mentioned above, this meant officially "commercialising" ADMARC, such that the institution was expected to cover its own operational costs and subsidised maize sales through trading staple crops profitably wherever possible (Interview, ADMARC CEO, 23 September 2013). The organisation was expected to source working capital on a commercial basis, where necessary, and to repay these loans with any money it earned through maize sales, as well as subsidising those maize sales needed for its 'social role' (Interviews, Grain Traders and Processors Association, 18 September 2013; ADMARC CEO, 23 September 2013). Naturally, as ADMARC had essentially been asked to fulfil its 'social role' without any financial backing, and given the unpredictable and sizeable nature of this aspect of its mandate, the corporation was frequently left unable to service its loans, pay its debts or even to finance its operating costs, resulting in the accumulation of debts (Interview, ADMARC CEO, 23 September 2013; IMF 2012).

Despite the changes in ADMARC's financing and the official expectation that the organisation fund itself, the Government of Malawi found a number of ways to support the corporation during this period. Besides occasional bailouts as well as budgeted expenditures on maize purchases for the Strategic Grain Reserve, from which ADMARC was able to earn some profits, it also received support through the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) introduced by Mutharika in two ways.

Firstly, ADMARC was awarded contracts to supply fertilizer to the subsidy programme every year between 2005/06 and 2011/12 in order to "help ADMARC generate a little bit of revenue, knowing how cash strapped it is" (Interview, ADMARC CEO, 24 September 2013). While this was a relatively small amount, approximately 10,000MT per season, it nonetheless provided "an injection of money, which we use in our cash flow, which can be very useful" (ibid.). Furthermore, ADMARC tendered to supply additional fertilizer to the programme on occasion, to increase its income from FISP (ibid.). Secondly, contrary to donor preferences, ADMARC was tasked with the sale of FISP fertilizer, which again allowed the organisation to cover a small percentage of its operating costs by charging the MoAFS for certain overhead costs and staffing (Interview, ADMARC CEO, 24 September 2013). While these contracts were insufficient to cover ADMARC's running costs, they may partially explain Mutharika's reluctance to allow for subsidised fertilizer to be procured through private sector companies despite ongoing pressure from the donor community (for other reasons see Chapters 5 and 6). Similarly, they may be the reason behind the preference given to ADMARC in the procurement of fertilizer, despite the corporation's repeated failure to deliver on these contracts on time, which the World Bank, for example, frequently raised as a concern with the MoAFS (Interview, Irish Aid, 24 February 2012).

In the face of the rigidity with which donors traditionally approached the question of ADMARC's reform, President Mutharika's government undertook a determined, and largely successful, effort to insulate the marketing corporation from the donor community's influence. Since the end of the last, only partially successful, attempt to restructure ADMARC in 2002/03, the government had succeeded in creating a certain degree of autonomy for ADMARC by keeping it outside of the all-encompassing aid structures that dominated the rest of the sector (as described in Chapter 3). Despite the interest within the donor community to resolve the question of ADMARC's mandate, particularly regarding the extent of its 'social role', the donor-government committees that were otherwise so prolific and influential in the sector appeared to have comparatively little influence over this politically and economically significant institution. Quite how this was achieved

remained a secret that was almost as closely guarded as the day-to-day operations of the institution. As the IMF stated "question marks remain with regard to parastatal agricultural operations, whose finances are somewhat nontransparent" (IMF 2010). An interviewee from the World Bank was more direct in his analysis of attempts to obfuscate the workings of ADMARC:

> The issue is also the lack of transparency. I mean, who knows what is ADMARC? Who runs ADMARC? Who knows what is exactly the role of ADMARC? Who manages ADMARC? Who gives orders? The issue is also what about the proceeds? The incomes of ADMARC? What do they do? (Interview, World Bank, 21 May 2012)

While the attempt to keep the workings of ADMARC out of the donor eye was a direct result of efforts to prevent the organisation from being restructured, it was also an expression of how weak Mutharika's government was *vis-à-vis* the donor community at the beginning of his presidency. He was unable to challenge donors directly on ADMARC's role and so, instead, attempted to obscure it. As we will see below, he directly contravened donor preferences through other means, by instituting a fertilizer subsidy.

2012 to May 2014: Active Resistance

When President Joyce Banda took over the reigns of power upon Mutharika's death in 2012, she was faced with a donor community that had become increasingly critical of Mutharika's input subsidies and so she needed to find new ways of safeguarding the public provision of agricultural services. The importance of these services to her political aspirations were clearly reflected in her choice of presidential campaign slogan – "More Maize, More Fertilizer" – in 2014 (e.g. Malawi News 2014). However, her options were limited by the substantial debts accrued by ADMARC during Mutharika's presidency, which led to the institution once again coming under scrutiny from Malawi's donors. The IMF noted the reduction of parastatal debts as a priority for the resumption of its Extended Credit Facility in 2012 (IMF 2012). Thus, shortly after her inauguration, President Joyce Banda found herself in a similar bind to that of her predecessors: the constituency that she hoped would re-elect her in 2014 clearly favoured the ADMARC of old, while the donor community upon whom she relied to resume aid

in order to restore macroeconomic stability and, hopefully, growth was once again concerned with ADMARC as a drain on government resources. In an effort to solve this seemingly intractable problem, she resorted to drastic measures, firing Mutharika's man at the head of the organisation, Charles Mtabwa, and appointing a new CEO within a couple of months of her inauguration (The Nation, 31 May 2012). President Banda had a very specific task for her new CEO, as he put it:

> My coming in, it was clearly on a very specific mandate: [to] restructure ADMARC. ADMARC must be able to stand on its own. If need be, ADMARC must be so commercially viable that it would be able to contribute towards the national purse … So what she gave me, the assignment she gave me is "I want you to return ADMARC to its past glory, at least its past glory" (Interview, ADMARC CEO, 24 September 2013).

As is evident from the discussion above, it was all but impossible for ADMARC to maintain its presence in rural areas and function as a preferred buyer and seller of last resort as well as to achieve the stated aim of being "commercially viable". As a former Chairwoman of ADMARC, President Banda was all too aware of the constraints placed on the corporation and her idea for squaring the ADMARC circle was a return to its more economically active days, where profits generated from other ADMARC investments would be used to subsidise its core functions (ibid.). Under Banda ADMARC constructed three cotton ginneries and began investing in the processing of pulses, as a means of generating profits "to meet the expectations of government and the general public [in terms of its social role]" (Interview, ADMARC CEO, 24 September 2013). While this latest development saw ADMARC coming "full circle", President Banda hoped that because ADMARC was working through strategic partners, and used a shareholder model, this would appear sufficiently new and market-friendly to avoid donor interference (ibid.). Despite these efforts, several members of the donor community expressed their concerns over developments within ADMARC (e.g. Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September, 2013).

It is clear that consecutive Malawian governments only reformed ADMARC as a result of severe fiscal pressures and donor conditionalities. ADMARC was of

primary importance to state-society relations in Malawi due to the services it provided to smallholder farmers, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, ADMARC was also of consequence as it was the main site of interaction between the Malawian state and the majority of the population. It is therefore unsurprising that all governments since the 1980s attempted to protect the institution, and where this was not possible sought to initiate complementary policies that would mitigate the damage done by ADMARC's absence.

Stabilising Prices: the Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR)

As the liberalisation of ADMARC progressed haltingly, and maize prices were liberalised gradually in the 1990s, the role of the Strategic Grain Reserve came under scrutiny. It had been conceived by Kamuzu Banda as an integral component of ADMARC that would allow for better price management as more maize could be purchased or released onto the market, depending on the season and the size of the harvest, as well as serving as a reserve for years in which Malawi as a whole experienced an inadequate harvest. However, once maize prices had been liberalised, the primary role of the reserve, i.e. price management, had ceased to be relevant. As agricultural marketing systems were dismantled, this introduced greater risk and volatility into markets, which in turn increased the costs of ancillary activities, such as the maintenance of strategic food reserves. As a result, the SGR became the focus of donor attention in the late 1990s. Discussions began over the appropriate size of the reserves for this new role, how this should be administered, and who should have control over the national maize stockpile.

1999 – 2002: Initial Reforms

The National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) was created as an independent entity to oversee the reserves in 1999, following donor pressure to reduce the overall costs of the SGR and to improve the predictability of expenditure on the reserves (Cromwell and Kyegombe 2005). This then opened up a debate about whether physical grain reserves were indeed the best protection against famine, with the IFIs, particularly the IMF, arguing that financial reserves would provide the same benefits at a much lower cost while eliminating the risk of government reverting to price stabilisation by releasing maize from the SGR (Devereux 2002). The Government of Malawi, particularly its technocrats within the MoAFS, argued that

a financial reserve would be unsuitable as it did not recognise some of the specific difficulties faced by Malawi. They were especially concerned with the problems caused by the covariance of harvests in the region and, therefore the costs and delays involved in emergency imports of maize (Interview, MVAC, 14 September 2007).

At best, donor logic took a cavalier attitude to the structural difficulties faced by Malawian smallholder farmers and was indicative of the attitude that Malawian smallholders simply needed to "learn" to store grain rather than relying on parastatals. At worst, it indicated a willingness to permit significant food shortages, possibly even famine, in the name of market development. In the late 1990s, the World Bank wrote that government grain storage

> would discourage local farmers and traders from holding supplies through to the 'hungry season'. Eventually the system will have to swim by itself and it may be best to let it do so as soon as possible (World Bank 1998).

Faith in markets at the IMF and the World Bank was so steadfast that beyond the financial reserves, inadequate provisions were made for cases where the private sector did not succeed in filling the void left by the parastatals. It was assumed that at times of food shortages, the arbitrage opportunities created by high food prices would attract the private sector, so that the price of maize would not exceed import parity. With adequate financial reserves, maize could then be purchased on the regional market to provide food aid to those households unable to afford food at the market price. Given the logistical difficulties of importing large quantities of maize at times of regional food shortages, this proved unrealistic.

In the end, the donor community saw its policy preferences implemented and its influence over policymaking extended as a result of the gross corruption and mismanagement that characterised Muluzi's second term as president. In the first year or so, the creation of the NFRA did not result in ADMARC relinquishing its control over the reserves as the president appointed his cronies to the board of the newly-established NFRA (Booth et al. 2006). These included high profile individuals, such as Friday Jumbe, who also served as Muluzi's minister of finance,

and Joyce Banda, who was MP for Zomba Malosa for the United Democratic Front (UDF) at the time [68] (Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee 2002). However, like ADMARC, the SGR was supposed to run on a cost-recovery basis without support from government or donors, which given the difficulty inherent in price fluctuations had resulted in the NFRA amassing considerable debts, having taken out a commercial loan at very high interest rates. At the same time,

> [t]he IMF and World Bank were increasingly concerned that the size of the SGR was "excessive", the NFRA operations risked distorting the market, and that holding this level of reserve was fiscally unsustainable. (Devereux 2002: 73).

The NFRA's financial difficulties prevented the regular renewal of maize stocks held in reserves in the early 2000s, and so the IMF also recommended that the maize from the SGR be exported only a few the months before the extent of the 2002 food shortages became clear. It argued that this would allow for the agency's debts to be cleared and for a smaller quantity of maize to be purchased to replenish the stores. Thus, 35,000 MT of maize were exported to Kenya and Mozambique (Devereux 2002). Concurrently, some 60,000 MT of maize were most likely misappropriated or purchased by members of the NFRA board, including the Minister of Finance, Friday Jumbe and the future President Joyce Banda (Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee 2002). It has been argued by many that Muluzi, having been forced into the sale of the SGR and unable to distribute it to food insecure smallholder farmers used this opportunity to reward his cronies and political creditors by allowing them to buy the maize stocks at concessionary rates knowing that their value would soon climb rapidly (van Rooyen and Sigwele, 1998; Bird et al, 2003). While a Parliamentary Inquiry subsequently named all those who had purchased the maize, this was never followed up with legal or other action (Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee 2002).

Once the dust of the 2001/02 famine had settled, any possibility that the NFRA would be able to administer the SGR independently was quashed as the donor

[68] She subsequently became Minister for Gender and Community Services, before becoming Mutharika's Minister of Foreign Affairs and then his Vice President in 2004.

community insisted on further reforming Malawian food security systems to prevent both price regulation attempts and corruption. The operating procedures for the SGR were thus amended as a result of donor pressures, this time spearheaded by the European Union, to ensure that the reserves would be used only as a humanitarian stockpile and that it could not be used either to control prices or for the ends of the political elite. The result was a far-reaching restructuring of the systems in place to manage the SGR within the MoAFS, overseen by the EU-funded Joint Taskforce on Food Security and Nutrition, as detailed in Chapter 3. These new structures afforded donor oversight of the NFRA and ensured that it operated a "grain out, grain in" policy to prevent the reserve being depleted (Interviews, NFRA, 16 February 2012; JTFFNS, 7 April 2012). Having lost the ability to withdraw from the Strategic Reserve in the absence of the resources needed to replenish it, the government relied on donors to maintain the reserve (Interview, JTFFNS, 7 April 2012), rendering its decision-making increasingly dependent. The arrangements put in place following the 2001/02 famine stripped government of the ability to respond to popular expectations, by limiting its ability to control prices and ADMARC's capacity to fulfil its 'social role'. On the other hand, it also prevented the abuse of the reserves by presidents wanting to pay off elite political clients.

While these new SGR management structures undermined the government's ability to intervene in agricultural markets and mediate the effects of maize production shortages, they did have certain benefits for both donors and government. The day-to-day running of the reserves was no longer fraught with disagreements, allowing a certain amount of trust to be established, at least temporarily, which ultimately allowed for a resumption of budget support following the 2001/02 famine, although this did not occur until after the presidential election of 2004. Furthermore, the running of the SGR ceased to be such a drain on national resources as 'operational' and 'storage' costs came down drastically when maize could no longer be withdrawn so easily by those with political connections (Interview, JTFFNS, 7 April 2012). The new system also heralded an improvement for senior civil servants within the MoAFS who were better positioned to resist political pressures to release maize when requested to

do so through informal channels (ibid.). The political costs for the ruling party, however, both in terms of electoral support in rural areas and maintaining elite patronage networks, were still evident in agricultural policymaking during both Mutharika and Joyce Banda's presidencies, as we will see below.

The SGR was certainly abused by self-serving politicians during Muluzi's presidency, but these abuses gained their political relevance from the fact that political leaders were unable to respond to the demands of rural voters. As a result, patronage and elite networks became more important for Muluzi to retain his political support base. The mechanisms of control established by donors over the SGR were, therefore, necessary not because the Malawian state was insulated from its citizens and used patronage to establish horizontal links between the state and society. Rather, they became important because donors stood in the way of these relationships.

2003 – 2013: Circumventing Donor Policy Impositions

Bingu wa Mutharika decided to respond to declining rural living standards in the 1990s and early 2000s mainly by implementing a large-scale fertilizer subsidy due to donor restrictions on other interventions in the agricultural sector (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion). Mutharika also sought to create further maize storage capacity that would be kept outside of the control of the donor community during his first term. As his deputy minister of agriculture argued "it is important that we should also have emergency storage capacity" under government's control (Interview, Hon. Kutsaira, Deputy MoAFS, 12 September 2007). The minister of finance explained further that in order to make up for the loss of control over maize pricing and the only large modern silos in the country, the government built a number of other, smaller silos in each of Malawi's three regions. The aim was ultimately to build enough storage capacity to sustain the country for two years rather than as an explicit means of regulating prices (Interview, Hon. Gondwe, Minister of Finance, 11 September 2007). Construction of these silos began in 2007, at a time when budget support had been resumed as the IMF declared Mutharika and Gondwe's macroeconomic management sound and the economy was achieving growth rates of up to 7% (World Bank 2008a).

The reserve once again came to the forefront of interactions between donors and the government in late 2012, less than 6 months after Joyce Banda's inauguration. The reserve had not been central to Mutharika's agricultural policies, but was increasingly important to Joyce Banda's administration. As the Farm Input Subsidy Programme came under threat as the result of suspended aid (see Chapter 6), coupled with the poor agricultural season of 2011/12, Banda sought other means of retaining rural political support. In October 2012, the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee issued the second round of its annual estimates of the number of households that could be expected to lack 'food entitlements' and need food aid prior to the 2013 harvest. These estimates subsequently made their way through the well-established bureaucratic procedures and committees described in Chapter 3, and their conclusion that 1.9 million households would require food aid or cash transfers was presented to the Strategic Grain Reserve Committee a little while later. The World Food Programme, in collaboration with the Humanitarian Response Committee jointly concluded that the food aid component would require the distribution of 57,000 MT of maize (Interviews, Anonymous, 26 September 2013; Anonymous, 23 September 2013). The Strategic Grain Reserve Committee was asked to release this quantity of maize to the World Food Programme and was tasked with finding a donor who would commit to replacing the same quantity.

At the time, the reserves held 100,000MT of maize, of which only 25,000MT had been previously earmarked for subsidised sale through ADMARC (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 2013). Thus, adequate maize reserves remained in stock to cover missing national food entitlements, but a financial backer needed to be found before any maize could be released, according to established procedures:

> if there is need to release maize, there should be a willing donor – government or donors – that should replace, replenish the maize in the next season. So it's supposed to work on a grain-in, grain-out [sic] basis. So there's no monetary attachments there (Interview, NFRA, 17 September 2013).

Government had not allocated a budget for this purpose and had difficulty finding a donor willing to commit to ensuring that any grain taken out would be replaced. For fear of establishing a precedent of third parties taking maize from the reserve without having obtained a firm commitment for its replacement, and concerned about problems that this would potentially create both with internal auditors as well as the donor community, the MoAFS was keen to adhere to established procedures (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 2013). Lacking the institutional memory to see the irony in their position, members of the donor community, particularly Norway and Irish Aid, reportedly felt that the government should make an exception, arguing that

> You can't end up in a situation where you have plenty of maize in storage, you have plenty of people who need it and still you're refusing to help them because you may end up in a situation where you can't meet future needs (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 2013).

Fortunately, this debate was curtailed when the Royal Norwegian Embassy was able to redirect undisbursed aid and commit 50 million Krone (roughly US$7.5 million) to restocking the reserves. Concurrently, Irish Aid received additional funds from its headquarters as a result of cuts in its budget support to Uganda, and so committed a further US$ 1.3 million for the purchase of maize for the reserves, bringing the total available to US$ 8.8 million (Nyasa Times 2013).

However, this did not entirely address the concerns of the Ministry as both the Royal Norwegian Embassy and Irish Aid were only able to commit *financial* resources to restocking rather than pledging to purchase and deliver 57,000MT of maize to the NFRA, due to their own internal organisational and administrative procedures (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 2013; Agricultural Commodity Exchange, 10 September 2013). After further negotiations with the Ministry of Finance, an exceptional agreement was reached that Irish Aid and Norway could make a financial commitment, and that maize would be purchased with this money following the 2013 harvest, when prices were expected to be considerably lower than during the 'hungry period' of 2012/13, which had seen unusually high prices (Interviews, Grain Traders and Processors Association, 18

September 2013; ADMARC CEO, 23 September 2013). Much to the chagrin and surprise of all parties involved, a second consecutive poor harvest in 2013, coupled with the devaluation of the Kwacha and high rates of inflation, meant that maize prices remained unusually high, and did not decline substantially following the national and regional harvest (FEWS-Net 2013). It was thus clear early on that the funds available from Norway and Ireland would be insufficient to ensure the complete restocking of the silos.

The difficulties experienced as a result of this unorthodox arrangement between donors and government did not end there. Rather than putting out an unrestricted tender to source maize worth US$ 8.8 million, Norway, which took the lead in this process, decided to restrict tenders to three bidders, namely the Agricultural Commodity Exchange (ACE), the National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM) and ADMARC. The government had wanted to conduct the entire procurement process solely through ADMARC, while the contributing donors wanted to support NASFAM – an organisation that had been supported financially by Norway – in order to provide smallholder farmers with a fair price for their produce and to encourage government to use a broader range of suppliers through the involvement of ACE. At the insistence of the MoAFS, ADMARC was also asked to tender, despite Norway and Irish Aid's reservations, having found ADMARC an unreliable collaborator in the past (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 2013). As these organisations' tenders were awaited and reviewed, maize prices continued to rise above and beyond reasonable expectations, and both NASFAM and ADMARC found that they were unable to source adequate quantities of maize at the prices they had quoted in their tenders. As its name implies, the Agricultural Commodity Exchange functioned in a slightly different manner to ADMARC and NASFAM, and so had agreed to deliver maize at the daily market rate plus a profit margin. Therefore ACE was the only one of the three suppliers able to supply maize as agreed in its contract with Norway and Irish Aid (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 20130).

In the course of renegotiating the prices at which these three suppliers would furnish the NFRA with the required maize, NASFAM was dropped as a supplier as its quoted prices were much higher than those of the other two (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 2013). ADMARC withdrew from the process shortly thereafter, as its senior staff were unhappy with the manner in which the process had been managed in the context of soaring prices, rendering the delivery of maize at pre-agreed prices extremely difficult (Interview, ADMARC CEO, 24 September 2013). Furthermore, the 2013/14 budget granted ADMARC an unusually generous MWK 1.3 billion (approx. US$4.12 million) in order to procure maize for the corporation to sell in the coming lean period, that was by this time expected to be longer, more pronounced and more widespread than was the norm. The Royal Norwegian Embassy thus continued to work with ACE in order to procure the necessary maize and once the decision was made for the price ceiling to be revised every two weeks, the maize began to arrive at the NFRA silos more rapidly if, ultimately, not in sufficient quantities to restock the maize originally withdrawn by the WFP (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 2013). Rather than the 57,000MT that were distributed through the WFP, a mere 27,000MT were procured with the funds donated by Irish Aid and Norway (Interview, ACE, 10 September 2013).

While the interim Head of the NFRA was reserved in his judgement of the donor community's failure to fully replenish the 57,000MT of maize provided to the WFP, a representative from the Grain Traders and Processors Association was critical of the donor community's role in this debacle:

> This is a case where we have clear rules of the game. … Government wanted them to buy immediately without touching the SGR, but the donors said "no, because now the maize is a little bit expensive. We will buy after harvest". But now at harvest it hasn't happened that the maize [price] is lower, it's actually higher. But they leave that to the government and say "It's your problem. You accepted that we would buy at harvest". Yet it was their suggestion. I find that not to be fair (Interview, Grain Traders and Processors Association, 18 September 2013).

The difficulties experienced by the NFRA and its SGR over this period were further aggravated by problems with the silo's infrastructure. As mentioned earlier, in November 2012 the SGR held in the neighbourhood of 100,000MT of maize, of which 57,000MT were allocated to the WFP, and a further 25,000MT had been allocated to ADMARC for sale at subsidised prices in its outlets. By February 2013, ADMARC had extracted its maize and the WFP had withdrawn 42,000MT of its allocation, leaving 33,000MT in the Lilongwe silos. The remaining maize was found to be discoloured or rotten as a result of substantial structural damage to several of the bins (Interview, CISA-Net, 30 September 2013). While some of it would still have been fit for human consumption, if prepared correctly, this was deemed too risky and the decision was made to sell these 33,000MT as animal feed (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 2013). The silos were, consequently, completely empty as of March 2013, at a time when it was becoming increasingly evident that the upcoming harvest was not going to be sufficient for national consumption needs and that food shortages were to be expected.

This further complicated the process of restocking described above, as the NFRA attempted to use the money made from selling the discoloured maize to procure some replacement stock at the same time as the Royal Norwegian Embassy was procuring maize for the SGR, creating price competition between the two tenders and driving prices up even further (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 23 September 2013). Finally, as a result of the lack of clarity in procurement procedures, the large quantities of maize being purchased for the SGR and the emerging evidence of coming food shortages, rumours spread among traders that the government would soon be purchasing 80,000MT of maize at a kilogramme price of MWK 140 (ibid.). While maize was purchased at the unusually high price of MWK 133 per kg in the course of this restocking project, it is unclear where the rumours regarding these maize purchases originated. Nevertheless, this was sufficient to lead a number of traders to hoard their stocks, resulting in further price increases (ibid.).

Once again, the result of these interactions between government and donors left the implementing agency, in this case the NFRA, wanting greater autonomy from donor interference (Interview, NFRA, 17 September 2013). As discussed in

Chapter 3 and evidenced by the Permanent Secretary of the MoAFS' reluctance to release maize from the SGR before having found a donor, the ability of the bureaucracy to develop and implement agricultural policies that fell outside of donor preferences was extremely limited. It again fell on the president to find ways of creating a stronger NFRA. Joyce Banda's solution was to create a 'commercial' maize stock of 40,000MT that the agency would procure and sell under the supervision of the Chief Executive with the aim of generating profits to cover some of the operating costs of the agency, as well as stabilising market prices (Interview, NFRA, 17 September 2013). The need for this independence from donor interference was compounded by the concurrently mounting donor pressure on ADMARC, as discussed above, and on the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, discussed below.

The extensive oversight mechanisms that donors put in place to prevent abuses of the SGR prevented government from taking reasonable and swift action in the face of food insecurity and put further strains on donor-government relationships. These structures and relationships not only stood in the way of responsive policy-making and increased the incentives for patronage-based politics, they also prevented the state from functioning effectively to ensure the food security of its smallholders.

Subsidising Inputs Rather than Outputs

Malawi has a long history of input subsidies. They were an integral part of the stable state-managed agricultural production structures that was put in place in the first two decades after independence, as we have seen in Chapter 2. Prior to the first liberalisation efforts, input subsidies were conceptualised as complementary to the subsidy of agricultural production through the control of output prices and every Malawian administration since independence intervened in these markets to varying degrees and with fluctuating levels of success in terms of stimulating maize production. These subsidies were put in place largely in response to the need for smallholder farmers to increase the productivity of their ever-dwindling smallholdings and the preference for maize self-sufficiency and, thus, their political demands of their leaders. Input subsidies became more important in guaranteeing minimum production and living standards for Malawi's

rural population as ADMARC's marketing services declined and public reserves were no longer used to maintain price stability, and as maize self-sufficiency became the only feasible means for households to ensure their food security.

The universal fertilizer subsidy that was in place prior to donor-imposed liberalisation, was phased out throughout the 1980s, which combined with the liberalisation of maize markets resulted in severe food shortages in the mid-1990s, as discussed in Chapter 2. From 1996 onwards, the resumption of fertilizer subsidies took the form of a 'Universal Starter Pack' (USP) programme, which supplied all rural households with 15 kg of fertilizer, 2 kg of hybrid seed and 1 kg of legume seeds (Harrigan 2008). It subsequently became the Targeted Inputs Programme (TIP), as donors deemed the USP programme insufficiently market-friendly and too costly. Considerable pressure was brought to bear on the government by the IMF to alter this scheme. The IMF made the "transform[ation of the] universal starter pack distribution into a Targeted Input Programme (TIP) for 2001/02" a necessary condition for Malawi to receive debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Country scheme (IMF 2006: 5). Similarly, the European Commission (EC) withdrew its support for the USP programme in 2002, following the drafting of its second Multi-Annual Food Security Programme, which heralded a significant policy change, with an emphasis on livelihood diversification and food accessibility. Despite its previous support for maize production policies, the EC became increasingly critical of these subsidies (Booth et al 2006). Likewise, the World Bank made a large percentage of its assistance conditional upon reduced interference in maize and fertilizer markets (WB 2003).

These conditionalities meant the programme ceased to enhance smallholder productivity and instead functioned as a safety net scheme. This shift was followed by annual food shortages until the 2006 harvest, making the policy extremely unpopular, with the Muluzi government taking much of the blame. A fairly typical assessment of the USP and TIP policies expressed by smallholder farmers in rural Ntcheu was

> Bakili didn't come up with good policies. […] The Starter Pack wasn't enough and people were dying of hunger. Our

> maize did not do well in the fields and at this point in time [just before the next harvest] we would have been looking for maize husks to eat (Interview, Smallholder No. 01/39, Lopati Village, 25 April 2012).

These fertilizer programmes initially suffered much the same fate as other government policies, which were rendered unrecognisable by donor intervention and left the overarching policy framework lacking in coherence. By the end of Muluzi's second term in office, the agricultural sector was in disarray with declining maize productivity and heightened food insecurity (see Chapter 2), partly due to the impossibility of establishing a coherent set of policies, given donor conditionalities, smallholder preferences and the policy U-turns within aid agencies (Harrigan 2003; 2005), but also due to his government's mismanagement. When President Mutharika left the UDF in February 2005, less than a year after his election in May 2004, he was keenly aware of the need to move away from donor-imposed policies and to increase smallholder productivity to improve national and household food security, if he was to create a political support base for himself. The Farm Input Subsidy Programme was yet another presidential initiative that sought to wrest back control over policymaking from the donor community, and one that Mutharika attempted to insulate from donor pressure. The extent to which this was successful, the impact that donor influence nonetheless had over this policy, and how this manifested itself in rural Malawi is the subject of the second half of this thesis.

Conclusion

The three policies examined in this chapter are examples of the maintenance and expansion of donor influence since Malawi agreed to its first Structural Adjustment Programme in 1980. It is in examining them jointly that we can appreciate that what initially appears to be a high level of policy incoherence in the face of conflicting donor requirements actually reveals a concerted effort to maintain the closest possible approximation to the comprehensive system of state marketing and support for smallholder maize production developed by Kamuzu Banda. The frequent changes in policy direction by Malawi's various political administrations since the introduction of multi-party democracy are often characterised as poorly planned, lacking in vision or simply an exercise in vote-

buying. Considering them from this alternative angle reveals their political importance and their fundamental coherence. It also demonstrates that the Malawian state, and the political leaders at its helm, are not insulated from society and political pressures, but have been thwarted in their efforts to remain so by donors. It is the inability to respond to these demands that drove at least some of the need for patronage networks during the various phases of structural adjustment.

When Malawi's agricultural marketing and production system first came under scrutiny from the IFIs during SAP negotiations for its failure to engender economic development and its failure to comply with prevailing norms and ideologies, the system was not dismantled all at once. Instead, certain institutions and policies drew greater attention at certain times than at others, making room for 'policy inconsistencies' or protective measures against the adverse effects of liberalisation on smallholder farmers. This new phase, in which the IFIs purchased policies in exchange for aid monies and which saw the beginnings of liberalisation in Malawi's agricultural sector. It began with a focus on ADMARC. As ADMARC drew the lion's share of donor attention, Kamuzu Banda attempted to remain responsive to rural demands for agricultural production support, by retaining agricultural input subsidies for as long as possible. However, as subsidy levels were also eroded as initially IFIs and later the European Union withdrew their support in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the living standards of smallholder farmers declined further. As a last resort, the Muluzi administration used the Strategic Grain Reserve to support smallholder farmers through maize price controls.

Due to Muluzi's use and abuse of the SGR and the 2001/02 famine, the donor community, spearheaded by the EU, extended its influence over the sector to such a degree that the SGR was restructured and redefined as a humanitarian reserve. As a result Malawi experienced several consecutive years of food insecurity, as smallholder farmers received minimal subsidies, ADMARC struggled to fulfil its 'social role' and maize production declined. By the time President Mutharika was elected as Muluzi's successor, he inherited a situation that was unsustainable

politically and economically, with the SGR operating under a narrow mandate while ADMARC faltered. His focus, therefore, was in the area of input subsidies, a move that would eventually earn him great accolades, as well as much criticism, both nationally and internationally.

The case studies examined in this chapter also reveal an important change in the manner in which donors and government interact. As donors became less hesitant about interfering directly in the workings of the Malawian state bureaucracy, the locus of resistance to policy impositions moved away from the negotiating table. Thus, while there is only scant documentary evidence from time to time of the IFIs imposing conditionalities through high-level negotiations with the Ministry of Finance, the rest of the bilateral donors – in agriculture, particularly the European Union, DfID, Norway and Irish Aid – gave teeth to these conditionalities by working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and constraining the policy decisions of its technocrats. For that reason, resistance to donors is no longer primarily seen at the donor-government negotiating table in Malawi or even in the policies developed by the MoAFS. Instead, resistance took the form of presidential initiatives.

Part II

Chapter 5

The Realities of Keeping the Gate: Bingu wa Mutharika's Presidency

Introduction

When Mutharika passed away on the 5th of April 2012, the promise and hope of his first term as president had long since evaporated, and the disarray in which he left Malawi economically and politically was reflected in the chaos surrounding his death and the subsequent power struggle.[69] His death came after two years of intermittent but increasingly grave shortages of imported goods, notably fuel and medicines, which in turn were the result of a protracted foreign exchange crisis. This had resulted from global increases in fuel and fertilizer prices, poor tobacco harvests and prices, Mutharika's refusal to devalue the currency and the subsequent suspension of aid. In the months leading up to his death, Mutharika alienated the international community further by becoming increasingly authoritarian. Explanations for his inscrutable behaviour fell into two categories. The first stressed the continuity in his behaviour and blamed his authoritarian personality, pointing to his previous dismissal as Secretary General of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the neo-patrimonial dynamics of Malawian politics, and his efforts to consolidate his Democratic People Party's (DPP) power base, and insisted that these traits had only been kept in check by the DPP's parliamentary minority in his first term. The second set of arguments attributed his behaviour during his second presidential term to a wide range of factors, including old age, alcoholism, his first wife's death, and his second wife's cupidity. In keeping with the reality of politics in Malawi, in which political power is concentrated in the hands of the president, the majority of explanations revolved around the president himself.

[69] The circumstances of Bingu wa Mutharika's death are beyond the scope of this thesis. The bizarre events surrounding his death, its announcement and the DPP's failed coup attempt, are described in detail in the report of the Commission of Inquiry into his death (GoM 2013c).

I will argue here, however, that Mutharika's failure to carry over the achievements of his first term into the second, demonstrated the limits of presidential authority in Malawi at least as much as its excesses. Particularly, I argue along with Daniel Wroe (2012) that the events of 2011 and the subsequent deterioration in economic and political governance "are best understood as a further expression of dependency relations" between the Government of Malawi and its donors, and as efforts to escape them where they contradict internal political demands (Wroe 2012: 136). However, while Wroe and other observers such as Cammack (2011 and 2012) accord aid a more benign role, namely that of policing Malawi's democracy, I argue that aid has a more central role to play in the configuration of these political dynamics. Analysts of Malawian politics have tended to assume that the dynamics of corruption, patronage and self-interested pursuit of power underpins all political dynamics and any break from such behaviours are deemed to be the result of exceptional circumstances. Authors such as Cammack et al. coined the phrase *developmental patrimonialism* to describe such situations (e.g. Cammack et al. 2010; Chinsinga and Poulton 2014). In this chapter, I argue that it is not the relatively politically responsive performance and broad-based economic growth of Mutharika's first term that needs elucidating, but rather his failure to carry this over into his second term. Further, I seek to demonstrate the importance of agricultural policies, particularly the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, which allowed President Mutharika to walk the tightrope of tensions between the internal and external constituencies on which any Malawian leader relies. This chapter serves two purposes: firstly, it introduces the second section of this thesis, which focuses on the Farm Input Subsidy Programme as a case study; and secondly, it provides the political backdrop, namely the increasingly rapid and punitive cycles of aid suspension and resumption, against which the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) was implemented.

I begin by looking at the political and economic conditions that President Mutharika inherited, arguing that he was faced with the difficult task of reconciling internal political dynamics with the external pressures created by the suspension of aid during Muluzi's presidency. The second section discusses how

Mutharika was able, temporarily, to placate both constituencies with sound economic management and food security. This resulted in impressive growth rates, even though his internal and external constituencies did not necessarily agree on the means used to achieve these results. The final section discusses how Mutharika ultimately lost control over the tensions between his domestic political supporters and external financers. In the process, he risked his flagship agricultural programme, as well as his goal of ensuring that his brother would succeed him as president, which he pursued with increasingly authoritarian means.

Mutharika's Election and its Aftermath

While the election of Bakili Muluzi in 1994 was greeted with near-universal enthusiasm both within and outside of Malawi, this optimism was soon dampened when it became clear that his administration would not only see the opening up of the political sphere but would also widen access to rents and opportunities for corruption, with deleterious effects on economic growth. The economic decline of Muluzi's second term was aggravated by a lack of experience among those elected and appointed to the new government in managing economic policy and a failure to maintain constructive relationships with the international financial institutions (IFIs). Cammack et al. (2010) write that "[m]oney was illicitly earned and used to fund political careers, pay off supporters, hire youth to crush opponents, and to get rich". Malawi's democratisation had, as hoped, curtailed the power of the presidency, yet this also meant that Muluzi lacked the ability to control the use of economic rents to ensure that they were channelled towards development goals. Instead they were distributed to political cronies as well as being dealt out to a wider constituency through the patronage networks that Muluzi relied upon to consolidate his political power (ibid.).

In part because of his failure to generate macroeconomic stability and therefore adequate economic growth and donor support, Muluzi's political manoeuvres drew heavy criticism, both domestically and internationally. As Malawi's constitution allows only two presidential terms, the third presidential and parliamentary elections after democratisation, held in May 2004, were of particular importance as they provided a window of opportunity for new

presidential aspirants. In Muluzi's second term the party system devolved into a fractured and shifting network of parties in which politicians formed only relatively short-term political alliances (Rakner et al. 2007, Lemon 2007). As a result of these manoeuvres, and compounded by three years of food shortages, voters struggled to evaluate politicians based on past performance and many expressed disillusionment with the democratic process. Harri Englund has termed this political manoeuvring "chameleon politics" and argues that "when a Malawian casts his or her vote for a particular political party or individual, he or she must be prepared, it seems, to observe baffling manoeuvres before the next opportunity to vote arises" (Englund 2002: 13).

If all had gone according to Muluzi's plan he would have contested a third election, and both party and electoral dynamics may have been quite different. However, Muluzi narrowly missed the two-thirds majority needed for the constitutional amendment that would have permitted this. Defeated in his attempts to remain president, he chose the second best option, namely to handpick a successor – Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika – who he believed to be easily manipulable as he was a relatively new and little-known politician, without a sizeable constituency to call his own, and so would permit Muluzi to remain the power behind the throne. Muluzi retained the chairmanship of the party he founded, the United Democratic Front, and personalised his control over the UDF support base in order to weaken Mutharika (Maroleng 2004).

Internal Constraints on Mutharika's Presidency

Mutharika did not succeed in obtaining a particularly healthy mandate in 2004, receiving only a slightly higher percentage of votes than the other two candidates and only 35% in total (Jødal, 2004). Simultaneously, the UDF lost its parliamentary majority. Following the election, a coalition, consisting of the UDF, the Alliance for Democracy (AforD) and a number of smaller parties and independents, was forged to secure the president's parliamentary majority (Lemon 2007). The coalition soon collapsed and rifts began to appear within the UDF as Mutharika made it clear that he was unwilling to act as Muluzi's puppet and his anti-corruption campaign resulted (not unintentionally) in the arrest of several senior cabinet ministers (Hall-Matthews 2007). Feeling threatened, Muluzi withdrew his support

for the president and two factions developed within the UDF. In February 2005, Mutharika resigned from the UDF, just days before the party's National Executive Committee had scheduled a meeting to discuss Mutharika's expulsion. On February 28th, he founded his own Democratic Progressive Party (Rakner et al. 2007). In order to attract a sufficient number of MPs to his new party his appeal needed to extend beyond the regional support bases on which the other three major parties relied (the UDF, MCP and AforD held the majority of seats in the southern, central and northern regions respectively). He also lacked any constituency of his own – the reason for Muluzi choosing him as his successor – as a result of his status as a relative newcomer to Malawian politics. A year into his tenure, Mutharika was therefore president in little other than name, as he lacked the national power base or the political support within parliament or his own political party that would allow him to govern effectively, the concentration of power in the institution of the Presidency notwithstanding.

Furthermore, Mutharika's ability to act was severely constrained by the abysmal state of the Malawian economy at the time of his election. While Muluzi's presidency had commenced so well that the United States Agency for International Development had declared the country a 'star macroeconomic performer' and 'a model for Africa' (cited in Harrigan 2001: 331) it had come to be seen as an unmitigated economic disaster by the donor community less than a decade later in 2004. The agricultural sector was, once again, in disarray as a result of inconsistent fertilizer policies, low levels of tobacco production and sales and the liberalisation of input and output markets, as discussed in Chapter 4. These policies and the misfortune of poor rains had resulted in declining levels of agricultural productivity, particularly of maize, which led to several years of food shortages. The shortages had severe macroeconomic repercussions including, but not limited to, budgetary deficits, balance of payment problems and inflationary pressures (Devereux 2002; Harrigan 2001). Other sectors of the economy, even where they were not directly impacted by the economic instability resulting from food insecurity, also fared poorly in the 1990s. Muluzi's administration oversaw a period of de-industrialisation during which Malawi became less competitive due to a reduction in labour productivity that meant the industrial sector was unable

to survive trade liberalisation policies. Many industrial producers who relied on imports suffered under the additional pressures of the devaluation of the Kwacha (Harrigan 2001). From 1997 onwards, the deterioration of fiscal discipline, as politicians sought to purchase electoral support, forced a further steep devaluation of the Kwacha, leading to annual inflation rates as high as 44.8% in 1999. Jane Harrigan argues that "fiscal consolidation has now been made more tricky by the politics of democracy whilst the economy's vulnerability to exogenous shocks such as drought complicates matters." (Harrigan 2001: 323-4). In other words, a combination of poor weather, external factors and economic mismanagement left Mutharika in the unenviable position of inheriting an economy in disarray.

Finally, it is worth emphasising that the food security problems experienced under the UDF government did not end with the 2001/02 famine. The late 1990s had brought a reduction in per capita maize production and an incapacitated ADMARC. The majority of smallholder farmers were frustrated in their efforts to be food self-sufficient. Mid-level households were struggling to harvest enough maize for 5 to 6 months while the poorest often grew as little as one month's worth of food on their land (Fahy-Bryceson and Fonseca 2005). Traditional coping strategies had come under severe stress and, in some cases became untenable, as discussed in Chapter 7. It would be difficult to overstate the pressure on Mutharika to reverse the collapse of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

External Constraints

While there is a general consensus regarding the precarious nature of Mutharika's domestic political position in 2004 and 2005, the extent to which the president's options were constrained by external factors – namely the donor community – is frequently excluded from political analyses. Mutharika's internal troubles were reinforced and aggravated by the constraints imposed on him by the donor community, primarily the World Bank, which was heading up the negotiations for the resumption of aid on behalf of the donor community, in keeping with the division of labour among donors, as described in Chapter 3. Firstly, the suspension of aid that had preceded Mutharika's election had resulted in severe foreign exchange shortages, crippling large sections of the private sector. Negotiating the

resumption of aid was thus a priority but proved difficult as it resulted in the imposition of further conditionalities that would render the creation of internal constituencies extremely difficult. These included, for example "improving expenditure management (including progress on fiscal decentralization)", which involved a reduction in expenditure on agricultural policies (World Bank 2003: 26). The World Bank stated that such "[c]onditionality would be closely coordinated with the Fund and the CABS donors" meaning that World Bank conditions needed to be fulfilled to guarantee the resumption of other donors' aid (ibid.). Thus, the donors' relief that Muluzi's presidency had come to an end did not translate into a more relaxed approach to conditionalities. Rather, the Bank used this opportunity to ensure that its reform policies were adhered to, prior to the resumption of aid. The fact that Mutharika had been democratically and peacefully elected and that Muluzi had been prevented from running for a third term provided Mutharika only with limited bargaining power.

Mutharika consequently found himself in an extremely difficult situation immediately upon being elected: he needed to reconcile divergent internal and external constituencies in order to maintain and reinforce his tenuous grip on power, to restore some order and stability to the national economy and to improve the perilous food security situation. He succeeded in holding the tensions of these contradictory forces together remarkably well for the duration of his first term.

The Calm Before the Storm

In order to assuage the donor community, in particular the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mutharika appointed Goodall Gondwe, a former Director of the IMF's Africa Division as his minister of finance, who was well-versed in the orthodox policies of the IFIs. He has been widely credited with reducing Malawi's inflation, negotiating its debt jubilee, and controlling its balance of payments (Cammack et al. 2010). Mutharika also began a campaign against corruption, which shored up his grassroots support while eliminating some of his political opponents as well as endearing himself to the donor community (Hall-Matthews 2007). Most importantly, though, he introduced the Farm Input Subsidy

Programme,[70] as a means of tackling Malawi's on-going food insecurity, a priority for both his internal and external constituents. The majority of donors[71] were initially strongly opposed to a fertilizer subsidy, despite its popularity with Malawi's smallholder farmers. Mutharika gambled – correctly as it turned out – that, provided he could persuade donors that he was doing enough on the macroeconomic front, they would forgive him the reintroduction of a large-scale fertilizer subsidy. As Martin Ott writes, he recognised that

> [t]he economic successes of Malawi presidents from Banda to Muluzi and Mutharika to Joyce Banda have always depended and continue to depend on whether they are able to manage the availability of seeds and fertilizer to the farming population for free or at affordable costs (Ott 2013: 9).

As Mutharika also needed to achieve this very quickly, if he was not to be impeached, he needed a rapid path to increased maize output. The input subsidy, coupled with good rains, succeeded in boosting maize production in the season following its introduction and reversing much of the decline in per capita maize production that had characterised Muluzi's presidency (Imperial College et al. 2007; see also Chapter 2). In addition, the subsidy functioned as a cash transfer to rural households, either by reducing their outgoings or by generating income as fertilizer vouchers could be sold on the black market (ibid.). Importantly, the programme also benefitted the urban poor and middle classes who depended on the purchase of reasonably priced food in order to maintain their living standards. The macroeconomic stability brought about by a combination of Goodall Gondwe's sound macroeconomic management and Mutharika's subsidy also benefitted these segments of the Malawian population. Private sector representatives lauded the initiative for the arbitrage and trade opportunities provided by increased maize harvests (Interview, GTPA, 18 September 2013).

Both academics and donors have criticised the FISP as a policy that emerged from either neo-patrimonial or populist impulses, rather than anything resembling

[70] Initially referred to as the Agricultural Input Subsidy Programme.
[71] The disagreements, factions and policy U-turns of Malawi's various donors *vis-à-vis* the FISP are outlined in detail in Chapter 6.

democratic responsiveness. DfID, although more supportive of the FISP than most donors, clearly felt it to be populist when it wrote that

> To break out of the patronage system, the political leadership has to find an alternative way of winning and retaining power, such as responding to the needs and aspirations of voters… In the absence of these possibilities, government actions tend to be populist with a short-term perspective (DfID 2007: 13).

Chinsinga and Poulton (2014) make a similar argument citing the second rounds of coupon distribution as evidence of patronage and populism. They argue that until the 2008/09 agricultural season, Mutharika ensured the political support of the Northern region, and especially its village heads, by distributing additional fertilizer vouchers to them outside of the normal bureaucratic structures. While these second rounds of coupon distribution undoubtedly played a part in Mutharika's re-election, these authors draw the rather unsatisfactory conclusion that once this method of garnering political support was no longer available to the president he resorted to more authoritarian methods of control, discarding the possibility that his policy was genuinely responsive to calls for economic growth and food security. Their analysis also does not allow for the possibility that these second rounds of coupon distribution were born of a desire to evade donor restrictions on the overall size of the subsidy (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this).

Given the nature of a large-scale fertilizer subsidy programme and the manner in which it was implemented – i.e. strongly controlled by government –Mutharika was able to distribute the benefits of the programme to members of the political elite who were willing to support him. The seed component of the subsidy was structured in such a fashion as to allow his political allies to become involved in the distribution and sale of improved seeds, with very little starting capital (Interview, Dr. Chinsinga, 5 March 2012). The most important political players, such as the Mulli Brothers or Simama General Dealers who helped finance Mutharika's re-election, also received lucrative contracts for the import and distribution of subsidised fertilizer (Chinsinga and Poulton 2014).

In order to ensure that the FISP translated into political support, Mutharika drew heavily on the centrality of maize to Malawi's sense of national identity and its economic development. It is no coincidence that he chose three maize cobs as his party's logo and personally took on the Agriculture and Food Security portfolio. Mutharika also made maize self-sufficiency an important political goal in order to distance himself from Muluzi's unpopular agricultural policies and to stress his independence by saying that he would not "get down on his knees and beg the donor community" or import maize (Interview, Anonymous Donor Official, 14 September 2011). His subsidy policy certainly made Mutharika popular with the majority of smallholders, a point which my interviewees stressed repeatedly during my elite interviews in 2007: "Eliminating hunger is a political point… fertilizers have removed hunger and that is the biggest achievement" (Interview, Malawi Economic Justice Network representative, 27 July 2007) and by all of the smallholder farmers I interviewed in 2012. The Afrobarometer survey of 2008 found that 70% of its respondents positively evaluated Mutharika's economic policies regardless of their ethno-religious backgrounds so paving the way for the first presidential election in 2009 that was not dominated by regional voting patterns (Ferree and Horowitz 2010). It also seems the most likely reason for the electoral success of Bingu wa Mutharika's brother in the 2014 presidential elections.

Technical evaluations of Mutharika's fertilizer subsidies, on the other hand, were less effusive, cautioning that subsidised fertilizer sales displaced a considerable quantity of commercial vending, approximately 65,000 MT of fertilizer, and that the programme might negatively affect the small agrodealers who were previously enabling smallholder access to fertilizer (Imperial College et al. 2007). Despite the programme consistently leading to smallholder farmers reporting improved household food security throughout Mutharika's first term, they cautioned against the balance of payments problems associated with the programme due to its large foreign exchange requirements (Chirwa and Dorward 2010).

During his first term, Mutharika's strategy was less successful in the National Assembly than in rural areas. Although his popularity encouraged a number of MPs to cross the floor to join his Democratic Progressive Party, in contravention of Section 65 of the Constitution, he had amassed only 54 seats at the end of his first term compared to 58 MCP seats, 43 UDF, and 38 independent MPs or smaller parties. According to Section 65 of the Malawi Constitution, MPs who join another party between elections lose their seats and a by-election must be called. Yet, during Mutharika's first term, the DPP MPs who had crossed the floor prevented the Speaker of the National Assembly from declaring their seats vacant through prolonged legal battles that remained unresolved until the 2009 election (Resnick 2012). The opposition MPs attempted to protest against this unconstitutional state of affairs by using their numerical supremacy to delay or prevent the passing of the budget each year. Civil society organisations responded by conducting candle-lit vigils outside parliament to encourage the opposition to relent and pass the budget, while lead donors, including the US and UK, wrote to the opposition to express their dismay at these delays. In the words of Danielle Resnick, "[t]he clash between development and democracy objectives within the donor community came to the fore during this episode." (Resnick 2012: 8). Such tolerance for Mutharika's unconstitutional behaviour ended abruptly once Malawi's economic growth started to slow in his second term, as we will see below. Retrospectively, many have come to see the role of the opposition in a more positive light, most notably Joyce Banda:

> So he was running government with a minority government. He depended on the masses to pass any bill in the government. … Now because of that […] he had to be a different [less autocratic] man. And I say this with all due respect. All you need to do is go and punch on your internet "Bingu wa Mutharika, COMESA Report", and you see how he conducted himself in the last job, before he came to Malawi (Interview, VP Joyce Banda, 30 January 2012).

In summary, the Farm Input Subsidy Programme was instrumental in allowing Mutharika to garner and retain the support of his internal and external constituencies throughout his first term. While the programme remained a contentious issue in the government's relationship with its donors it did not come

to define them. Importantly, it ensured macroeconomic stability and economic growth and guaranteed the political support of a large rural constituency as well as the small middle class whose livelihoods had been repeatedly threatened by spiralling food prices. The political and urban elite, on the other hand, benefitted not only from association with Mutharika and his newfound popularity, but also from access to large fertilizer and seed contracts. In other words, the FISP fulfilled the broad-based electoral demand for economic growth and food security but given the imperfect nature of Malawi's democracy, it also ensured the necessary support of other important domestic, political actors, particularly Mutharika's financiers.

Things Fall Apart

> "If you think there is no fuel in the country, go and lie on a road and see if you don't get run over" – Bingu wa Mutharika[72]

By the time of Bingu wa Mutharika's death, the picture was far less promising than it had been during his first term. The economy was, once again, in disarray and his second term had been characterised by economic mismanagement and political oppression. Much of the analysis of Malawi over this period is based on the underlying assumption that the political norms of neopatrimonialism are only relinquished by politicians when they are forced to do so and that Mutharika's approach in his second term simply signified a return to these norms (Cammack 2012; Chinsinga and Poulton 2014). This argument does not adequately explain why Mutharika did not simply continue with the tactics that had served him so well in his first term. I argue that the reason for this was not so much a "reversion" to neopatrimonialism as his inability to maintain good relations with donors, whose policy preferences stood in stark contrast to those of his domestic political supporters, particularly those of rural voters who make up almost 80% of the electorate.

[72] This statement was widely attributed to Bingu wa Mutharika, and told as a joke throughout Malawi in late 2011 and early 2012. I have not been able to establish whether Mutharika did indeed say this. However, what is of importance here is that it was seen as emblematic of his refusal to respond to popular demands that he resolve the foreign exchange and fuel crises.

Malawi initially held its breath when rumours began to circulate that Mutharika had passed away and then breathed a sigh of relief – and in some cases people celebrated in the streets – when his death was announced. The extent and speed with which Mutharika's presidency deteriorated, both by political and economic benchmarks, had certainly been astounding and unexpected. Both local and international observers had welcomed his re-election in 2009. The African Development Bank, for example, wrote that "[the] DPP will, for the next five years, command a majority in parliament, which should allow for a smooth transaction of its business" (AfDB cited in Resnick 2012: 8). In part, the deterioration can be explained by the problems of presidential term limits, which create incentives during the second term for self-enrichment, protecting oneself against future prosecutions, and selecting a successor. However, it was when these dynamics came up against the tensions that arose from the internal demands of Malawian politics and the external constraints of aid dependence that Mutharika was no longer able to prevent them from spiralling out of his control. Before continuing with this line of argument, it is worth noting – as many commentators have done – that Mutharika's old age and ill health may well have played a part in this loss of control. Unverifiable rumours also circulated throughout 2011 that he was suffering from alcoholism and that he had not recovered from the loss of his first wife.

Upon being returned to State House with a sizeable mandate in May 2009, Bingu wa Mutharika took two notable actions, both of which were designed to improve the likelihood of his brother, Peter Mutharika, succeeding him to the presidency in 2014. Firstly, he dismissed "the best finance minister in Africa", Goodall Gondwe. Gondwe was said to be amassing a substantial political following in his own right, which posed a threat to Mutharika's aspirations for his brother (Interviews, VP Joyce Banda, 30 January 2012; Nation journalist, 30 November 2011). Gondwe was also generally credited with the macroeconomic management of the economy during Mutharika's first term and with insulating Mutharika's fertilizer subsidy from donor pressures by ensuring it could be financed from the general budget, without direct donor assistance (Interview, Minister of Finance,

11 September 2007). Secondly, Mutharika side-lined his Vice President, Joyce Banda because, as she explained

> there's so many things that he did and his friends and family convinced him that he would be safer with him [Peter Mutharika]… because again there has never been any president who came in after multiparty system of government came in, who did not lock up the previous president, who did not arrest the previous president. So that he told me "you haven't assured me". And I said, "I don't know how to do that, because I don't know what you have done" (ibid.).

The decision to sideline these two political actors precipitated the crises that came to dominate Mutharika's second presidential term. Goodall Gondwe's replacement, Ken Kandodo, was less experienced and seemingly less able to stand up to Mutharika, most notably on the question of whether or not to devalue the Kwacha. The global increase in energy and particularly fuel costs between 2008 and 2010 increased Malawi's import bill, meaning foreign exchange was soon in short supply and the Kwacha came under pressure. The value of the Kwacha was, nominally at least, controlled by Mutharika and Kandodo, resulting in the advent of a black market where the Kwacha was traded at almost twice its official price by the time of Mutharika's death (Cammack 2012). This led to macroeconomic decline as balance of payments problems worsened, government was forced to borrow domestically and internationally, foreign investment declined year-on-year and imported intermediary goods became increasingly expensive (ibid.). The lack of foreign exchange led to fuel shortages, which threatened to completely paralyse Malawi's already unreliable and costly transport system. As a result, the pain of the foreign exchange shortage reverberated through the economy, resulting in increased paraffin prices, the shortage of basic goods such as sugar, persistent blackouts and more and more businesses going bankrupt. Pressure on the Kwacha's value increased in 2011, after a disastrous tobacco-selling season, which generated only a fraction of the foreign exchange earned from tobacco sales in 2010 (Cammack 2012; Wroe 2012). Mutharika's other notable action during this period was to purchase a presidential jet for himself worth just over £8 million. This led to the first suspension of aid during his presidency, as the decision

led to DfID cutting their budget support by £3 million for the 2010/11 financial year (The Guardian 2011b).

Despite the patronising assurances of the president's wife, Callista Mutharika, that the rural poor did not need fuel and that they need not concern themselves with such matters, all Malawians suffered under Mutharika's policies (Nyasa Times 2011b). However, the urban middle class, as well as the urban and peri-urban poor, felt the economic squeeze first and as early as 2010 (Cammack 2012). The rural poor soon began to suffer too as hospitals and dispensaries ran out of imported drugs and public services disintegrated (Wild and Cammack 2013). Mutharika's flagship programme – the Farm Input Subsidy Programme – was threatened by these developments as fuel shortages meant that fertilizer deliveries were late in rural areas and the planting of maize was delayed. From 2011 onwards, the spectre of food insecurity, the banishing of which had so substantially underpinned Mutharika's political support base, once again raised its head when more than a third of districts were thought at risk of food shortages in early 2012 (Cammack 2012).

Perhaps the most criticised of Mutharika's policies, certainly by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank but also by his critics within Malawi, was his refusal to devalue the Kwacha. This led to the IMF declaring Malawi's Extended Credit Facility 'off track' and withdrawing its support, which in turn encouraged other donors to retract their general budget support promises (ActionAid and Malawi Economic Justice Network 2011). However, what was rarely acknowledged was that while devaluation might in the long run be inevitable or had in fact already occurred for those segments of the market with access to the black market, it would cause considerable pain to the very same smallholder farmers who Mutharika sought to support through the FISP. Although the IMF acknowledges that a currency devaluation is equivalent to an exogenous shock, commensurate with the size of the devaluation, and provides countries which pursue this policy option with buffer funds intended to protect the economy and its most vulnerable, these are rarely adequate or timely. A former minister of

finance, who was not otherwise known for supporting Mutharika, defended him on this point as follows:

> Properly managed, after devaluation, it will not be a shock. But it will remain a shock and I will tell you why: if the government did accept to devalue […] the IMF does not come immediately. There's a lag actually. They will bring another foolish argument and say "oh, by the way your human rights is not good, this is not good, this particular law there and the like" and therefore it may take another year. Therefore, the devaluation will not be supported by reasonable resources of forex. It will send a spiral of speculation (Interview, Hon. Jumbe, 6 February 2012).

Mutharika failed to make this argument as eloquently to either his internal critics or the IMF, instead simply challenging his detractors to "give me a reason why I should tell my mother in the village that things will be expensive" (Mutharika, quoted by Hon. Jumbe, Interview, 6 February 2012). Furthermore, a substantial devaluation of the Kwacha, of the kind that would have been required to eliminate the difference between official and unofficial exchange rates, would have almost doubled the expense of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, given that its cost was driven heavily by imported fertilizers and fuels and that it remained a largely domestically financed initiative.[73]

Mutharika's refusal to devalue the Kwacha was therefore a political gamble – he hoped that he would be able to contain the fallout of the foreign exchange crisis until after the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014 and so prevent the increase in fuel, food and fertilizer prices that would undoubtedly result from a devaluation and cause distress to poor rural voters. However, Mutharika's refusal to devalue the currency and the resultant economic crisis stretched relationships with donors to their limits and saw him facing a barrage of domestic criticism, to which he responded with increasing authoritarianism. Now that he was no longer

[73] Certain donors did contribute foreign exchange to FISP, but this was mainly for the seed component, rather than fertilizers. The fungibility of funds notwithstanding FISP was therefore largely domestically financed, with the exception of the 2011/12 programme which needed to be bailed out by DfID, Irish Aid and the Royal Norwegian Embassy due to the foreign exchange crisis. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

constrained by a parliamentary minority as in his first term, he was able to be much more dismissive of his domestic critics.

It was not long before the political repercussions of this emerging economic crisis were felt. In early 2011, Blessings Chinsinga, a Lecturer from Chancellor College in Zomba was summoned by Mutharika's Chief of Police and close ally, Peter Mukhito, for teaching the Arab Spring to his students and therefore, supposedly, inciting a revolution and violent protest (Interview, Dr. Chinsinga, 5 March 2012). Unsurprisingly, this led to protests on campus, particularly when a number of other lecturers were suspended for insisting on their academic freedom to teach the syllabi of their choice (University World News 2011). As this was clearly an incident in which the president had overstepped the bounds of his constitutional powers, it also provided a rallying point for an increasingly irate civil society, consisting of an assortment of key but disparate organisations and individuals, including the Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC), the Institute for Policy Interaction (IPI), the Consumer Association of Malawi, a number of churches and university lecturers. These organisations and individuals had become increasingly vocal about governance abuses since 2009, but increasingly so in early 2011, when Mutharika had suspended the Malawi Electoral Commission. He claimed that this would allow the Ministry of Finance to investigate fraud, but in reality this allowed Mutharika to further delay municipal elections until 2014, thus concentrating power in the political centre (Tambulasi 2011; Rakner and Svåsand 2013). When he started to hold political rallies to promote Peter Mutharika as his successor in early 2011, he lost any remaining support among civil society activists (Cammack 2012).

Unlike in his first term, Mutharika and the Democratic Progressive Party enjoyed a substantial parliamentary majority following the 2009 election. In May 2009, the Democratic People's Party won 114 of the 193 seats in parliament and subsequently augmented their numbers further as MPs crossed the floor [74]

[74] The issue of Section 65 remained unresolved throughout both of Mutharika's presidential terms, but attracted considerably less attention during his second term as it was much less common and graver governance transgressions became the focus of civil society protests.

(Resnick 2012). This meant that Mutharika could attempt to legislate against the inconvenience of an increasingly vociferous civil society. He introduced legislation such as the Police Act, which allowed the police to search any property without a warrant, the Civil Procedures Act, which allowed government a three-day grace period to respond to any injunctions filed against it, and the Local Courts Act, which introduced a system of courts that would run parallel to other court structures (Cammack 2012). While much less threatening to Malawi's democratic foundations, parliament's vote to change the national flag to one that better symbolised the fact that Malawi had become a developed country under DPP's leadership drew much ridicule as well as serving to highlight Mutharika's delusions of grandeur (News24 2010). He had had some success at ensuring the loyalty of the political elite through a combination of intimidation – his fallout with Joyce Banda provided an excellent demonstration of what one might expect from disagreeing with the president – and by rewarding those loyal to him with Cabinet positions. By 2011, his Cabinet counted over 40 ministers (Wroe 2012).

By the middle of 2011, Mutharika had clearly lost control of the tensions that existed between domestic and donor demands and he was facing increasing disapproval and anger from Malawi's middle class, civil society and the international community. As critical voices grew louder in Malawi, the donor community in Lilongwe echoed the criticisms of civil society. As its criticisms met with the explosive rage and threats of the president, it increasingly responded by withholding its aid (Cammack 2011). Imprudently, Mutharika demonstrated his unwillingness to accept criticism from his donors when he expelled the British High Commissioner for calling him "ever more autocratic and intolerant of criticism" in a confidential email to his superiors at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (The Guardian 2011a). For reasons that had more to do with pressure from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office than aid policy, this led ultimately to the suspension of British aid to Malawi, which would otherwise have accounted for 13.4% of GDP (private communication, former Minister of State for Development, Andrew Mitchell).[75] The suspension of British aid was ultimately

[75] The influence of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in this decision can also be surmised from the very different treatment that Rwanda received in May 2011 when its President Paul

slightly less drastic as a result of DfID's decision to bail out the fertilizer subsidy programme in late 2011 by contributing £10.1 million to fuel and fertilizer purchases (Africa News 2011). Nonetheless, aid withdrawals were sizeable and constituted a considerable economic shock. The extent to which Mutharika was trapped by his position as arbiter of domestic and donor pressures is evidenced by the fact that even his flagship programme – the fertilizer subsidy – was threatened by the lack of foreign exchange, a situation he would have sought to avoid at all costs.

It soon became clear to the Government of Malawi that it could not count on donor budget assistance for the financial year covering the period July 2011 to June 2012. It therefore took the rash decision to introduce the "zero-deficit budget" (GoM 2011). The aim of this budget was to finance all recurrent expenditure from domestic resources through increased taxation, including on basic goods such as bread and milk, and government borrowing, while external resources would be used only to fund development expenditures. In theory, demarcating recurrent expenditure for domestic financing would make for sound aid and macroeconomic management, but the manner and timing of this change in aid administration simply served to increase inflation (Wroe 2012). Nobody was convinced by Mutharika's insistence that this was proof of the quality of his leadership and that Malawi could prosper without aid, not least since his Minister of Finance, Ken Kandodo, attempted to have Malawi's aid reinstated, in vain, throughout 2011 and early 2012 (e.g. The Daily Times 2011; Nyasa Times 2011a). Naturally, Mutharika's refusal to adhere to any conditions agreed upon or to negotiate a currency devaluation and his inflammatory rhetoric made these missions all the harder for his minister of finance.

The single most devastating incident of Mutharika's presidency was undoubtedly the rioting of July 2011, which was of an unprecedented scale in Malawi and set the tone for the last months of his leadership prior to his death. Increasingly

Kagame was accused of plotting to assassinate a political dissident in London. In this case, DfID issued a statement that this would not affect its aid relationship with Rwanda (OpenDemocracy 2011).

frustrated by its inability to influence Mutharika's administration, civil society, led by the HRCC and IPI, applied for and was afforded permission to hold protests on the 20th of July 2011. A number of organisations collaborated to mobilise peaceful demonstrations and to agree on a set of demands that would be handed over to District Commissioners at the end of these marches. It was not until the days before the planned demonstrations that the threat of violence became a distinct possibility when members of the DPP's youth wing began intimidating members of the general public in order to prevent their participation and were seen driving around major urban centres waving their machetes (The Nation 2012). On the evening of the 19th of July a court injunction was issued banning the demonstrations, at the request of the DPP (Wroe 2012). When crowds gathered the next day in Malawi's urban centres – most notably Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu – they were unable to set-off as planned and were left waiting for several hours. When a counter-injunction had been filed and the marches departed, tensions ran high, the police over-reacted and the demonstrations descended into chaos, with the looting of shops, rioting and police violence towards demonstrators. Although the numbers remain controversial, at least 20 protestors are thought to have died at the hands of the police who shot live rounds at demonstrators (Interview, VP Joyce Banda, 30 January 2012).

The violence on the 20th of July 2011 was most certainly aggravated by Mutharika's inadequate leadership as he spent the day at State House delivering a lecture on history and politics, which was broadcast on state radio (Cammack 2012). The incident demonstrated the extent to which he was no longer able to rise to the challenges of the Malawian presidency, his unwillingness to engage with the reality of the political and economic situation in the country, and the hardship faced by the majority of Malawians as a result of his policy decisions. Nonetheless, the organisers of the demonstrations succeeded in handing over their list of 20 demands to district commissioners, which resulted in UN-sponsored negotiations between government and a consortium of civil society organisations. Yet, predictably, the government stalled and prevaricated, while Mutharika continued with his firebrand rhetoric that Malawians had now become used to until his death in April 2012, and the negotiations failed to achieve any

significant progress. In September 2011, the assassination of Robert Chasowa, a student activist at Blantyre Polytechnic who had threatened to blow the whistle on the DPP's attempts to end demonstrations by buying off its organisers, further demonstrated how ruthless the regime was now willing to be to suppress dissent and protest (The Nation 2011).

The events of mid-2011 saw a further deterioration in donor-government relationships and Malawi's economy ground to a halt. The rest of Mutharika's presidency will be remembered for his loss of control over Malawi's political dynamics, the on-going conflicts between government and the donor community, between civil society and political representatives and Mutharika's efforts to shout them all down. Naturally, the more authoritarian Mutharika became the less inclined the donor community was to reinstate aid, which would necessarily bolster his political support. Even the catastrophe of the zero-deficit budget and failed efforts to increase tax revenue to cover the budget shortfalls in the absence of aid did not persuade the donor community to resume aid as long as Mutharika was unwilling to devalue the currency (e.g. Interview, Anonymous donor official, 1 April 2012). The result was a general sense of despondency as Malawi steeled itself for a long wait until the 2014 elections.

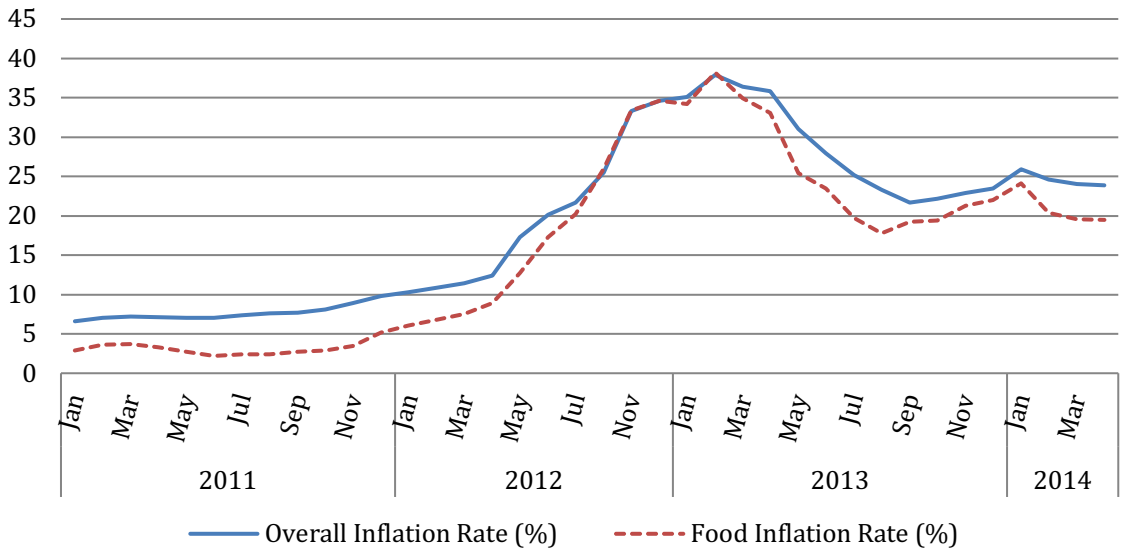
It is impossible to predict the fate of Malawi's democratic institutions and economy if Mutharika had not died in April 2012, leaving Vice President Joyce Banda, to deal with the fallout of his leadership. President Banda succeeded in defeating Peter Mutharika and his henchmen's attempts to take power unconstitutionally after Mutharika's death, but this was really only the beginning of the challenges she faced. Despite the general euphoria with which the donor community greeted her inauguration and despite Joyce Banda's best efforts, aid was slow to come on-stream in late 2012. Upon her inauguration, she acted quickly to repeal the worst of the DPP's laws, to investigate the crimes committed by the previous administration, and, crucially, to devalue the currency. On the 9th of May 2012, she devalued the Kwacha from MWK 164 to MWK 251 to the US dollar and paved the way for a floated Kwacha that saw its value fall further over the next two years. On the day she faced the Malawian electorate – the 20th of May

2014 – the exchange rate had dropped to MWK 390 to the dollar (Oanda 2014). Despite Joyce Banda's willingness to devalue the Kwacha in May 2012, as predicted by Friday Jumbe, the IMF did not resume disbursements to the Central Bank until July 2012 (Interview Hon. Jumbe, 6 February 2012; IMF 2012). Equally, other donors did not resume their funding as swiftly as one might have expected from a community celebrating the inauguration of Africa's second female president and the end of Mutharika's reign so vociferously. As has happened so frequently in Malawi's past, the suspension and restoration of aid provided an opportunity for donors to push through their preferred policies. For example, DfID did not resume budget aid until the end of 2012 and in planning its aid resumption talked of the need for strengthening budget processes and democratic institutions as well as involving the private sector in fertilizer distribution through the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (House of Commons 2012). In other words, while they were delighted that Mutharika's presidency had come to an end before even more damage was done to the economy and especially so as his successor was a woman, the IFIs as well as the bilateral donors were either unable to resist the temptation of using this opportunity to ensure their conditionalities were fulfilled or too risk adverse to resume aid until they were sure that governance would improve under Joyce Banda.

Crucially, this meant that Joyce Banda could not deliver on the expectations of Malawians, who looked to her, first and foremost, to ease the economic hardship of Mutharika's second term. Regardless of the fact that economic growth recovered somewhat under Banda and that fuel queues almost instantly became a thing of the past, the devaluation led to a spiral of inflation, which remained as high as 23.9 per cent in April 2014 (Reuters News 2014). In fact, inflation throughout Joyce Banda's presidency remained consistently above the levels experienced under Mutharika (see Table 1).[76] Incomes did not keep up with rates of inflation, which proved particularly detrimental to urban and peri-urban residents who continued to struggle to maintain their living standards. Food prices in general, but most importantly maize prices, reached unprecedented

[76] Data source: Reserve Bank of Malawi (accessed at http://www.rbm.mw/inflation_rates_detailed.aspx on 24 May 2014).

Figure 1: Year-on-Year Inflation Rates, 2011-14



nominal and real prices in 2013 and 2014, which hit maize deficit producers hard (FEWS-Net 2014). Maize prices in April 2013 reached an unprecedented high of MWK 105.79/kg compared to MWK 42.21/kg during the same period in 2012 (CfSC 2014). In April 2014, the picture was no better, with maize prices peaking at MWK 125/kg in Lilongwe (FEWS-Net 2014).

As discussed in Chapter 4, Joyce Banda did have some ideas for how she would rectify the situation by reforming ADMARC and the National Food Reserve Agency, but these were long-term strategies, the effects of which were not felt before the May 2014 presidential, parliamentary and local elections. Clearly, she was as aware of the importance of her rural constituency as any of her predecessors, and her presidency saw a resurgence of politicised distributions of maize and other basic goods at political rallies and through her charitable foundation, the Mudzi Transformation Trust (e.g. Malawi Today 2014). Even her election campaign stressed the role and importance of her foundation in providing for rural Malawians as was evidenced by the fact that her campaign posters were frequently accompanied by others advertising the Mudzi Transformation Trust and the centrality of the Trust in her election manifesto and advertisements published in the national press (e.g. The Nation 2014).

Conclusion

Mutharika's presidency was characterised and ultimately marred by similar dynamics to those of Kamuzu Banda and Bakili Muluzi because he was unable to master the tensions that typically arise in Malawi as a result of its aid dependence. Mutharika's inability to carry over the achievements of his first term into his second, against the background of his succession planning, can be partially understood in these terms. While during his first term Mutharika did exceptionally well at holding those tensions in check, overseeing some of the fastest economic growth in Malawi's history, he ultimately lost control over them as other presidents before him had done. Agricultural policies, particularly those that are central to maize production have always been indispensable to Malawi's economic success, but Mutharika also used them to navigate the political difficulties he faced at the outset of his presidency. With the use of the FISP, he succeeded in generating the economic growth, and to a lesser degree macroeconomic stability, that the donor community expected him to deliver, while also reversing the rural decline that Malawi had been experiencing for some time when he was first elected in 2004. The FISP was therefore more than simply a neo-patrimonial policy – as has often been posited by its critics – but one that permitted Mutharika to garner a legitimate constituency among rural smallholder maize producers without risking the support of his financial backers, even though they may not have approved of the policy per se. In addition, the fertilizer subsidy afforded him a certain degree of support from the political elite, as members of parliament sought to associate themselves with his economic success, and as a result of the patronage opportunities created by the programme. The programme, therefore, served both patronage purposes at the elite level as well as responding to the demands of Mutharika's rural political constituency, namely smallholder maize producers.

As global fertilizer and energy prices increased and the FISP grew in size and cost, and the tobacco harvest simultaneously declined, the programme was no longer sufficient to keep the tensions between internal and external constituents under Mutharika's control, especially as he sought to ensure his brother's succession to the presidency. Within two years of his election, the majority of donors had lost

faith in his ability to deliver economic development while also, to a much lesser degree, being concerned with his authoritarian tendencies, and began to suspend their aid. Mutharika gambled on the support of his rural voters when he refused to follow donor advice and maintained an overvalued Kwacha to prevent inflation, even though this lost him a great deal of foreign aid, causing foreign exchange, and therefore fuel, shortages. Mutharika's dealings with the donor community and his response to the aid crisis in 2011 and 2012 demonstrate both the importance of agricultural policy to economic growth and the centrality of the rural constituency to political survival. It also puts paid to reductionist theories of aid that see African states and elites acting merely as gatekeepers to the resources provided by donors. Mutharika was not simply keeping the gate and distributing its resources, he was attempting to protect the interests of domestic political constituencies against the strings attached to aid, while protecting his own political interests.

The details of the FISP's creation, and the impact of donor pressure and influence on the form it has taken, are discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 and 8 then explore resistance to these donor impositions by smallholder maize producers and their political fallout.

Chapter 6

The Rise and Fall of a 'SMART' Fertilizer Subsidy

Introduction

Any policy that consumes a substantial proportion of government funds will always be subject to, and the result of, a myriad of political pressures, negotiations, and compromises. What sets the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) apart from other policies is the extent to which its design and, ultimately, fate were influenced not only by those directly affected and those with a recognised interest in Malawian politics, but by the international community and its representatives in donor organisations. As we have seen, the relationship between the Government of Malawi and its donors in the agricultural sector has been fraught with ideological, technocratic, and political differences. Since the early 1980s, when Kamuzu Banda began to lose his iron grip on policy making in the country, there has rarely been agreement between Malawi's consecutive political administrations and the donor community on how best to achieve agricultural growth for the purposes of food security or export crop production. Even basic agreement on how these two goals relate to each other and which should take priority has frequently proved elusive. Although the nature and the content of the debates have fluctuated over time, the fundamental point of contention has always been the respective roles of the market and the state in driving production increases and food security. Building on arguments made in Chapter 5, this chapter discusses efforts by the Government of Malawi to insulate the FISP from donor influence and analyses how and why these efforts ultimately failed. It will furthermore elucidate how Malawi's Farm Input Subsidy Programme came to be, as well as the form it has taken against the backdrop of donor-government disagreements about agricultural policy. Subsequent chapters will examine how the subsidy's implementation differs from policy-makers' intentions, as well as its political ramifications.

This chapter begins by arguing that the Government of Malawi chose to implement a fertilizer subsidy to resolve the problem of rural decline and food insecurity for

political reasons. It then outlines the success of the FISP in terms of increasing maize production and its contribution to food security. The next section tells the story of how Mutharika and a few key individuals designed the subsidy and attempted to insulate it from donor involvement, as the proposition did not initially meet with donor approval. Donor attitudes to the subsidy were not static but evolved over time, from initial disapproval to widespread acclaim, before returning to a position of scepticism. Each of these phases saw donors extend their influence over the subsidy in different ways. Lastly, the chapter turns to the question of whether donor perceptions of the FISP as either a populist policy intended primarily to garner votes or a patrimonial policy to distribute resources are correct, and argues that this is a distraction and the more important issue is the manner in which donors prevent government from moving towards responsive forms of policy-making. In making these arguments, I draw on interviews with government officials and donor representatives, as well as analyses of published papers and policy documents on the Farm Input Subsidy Programme.

The Decision to Subsidise Fertilizer

As we have seen, in 2004 Malawi's agricultural sector was in dire need of government and donor assistance in order to escape the "low productivity maize trap", avert further food security crises, and to see an overall reduction in alarmingly high poverty levels. Like many other observers of agricultural policy in Malawi, the former Minister of Finance, Friday Jumbe, who oversaw Malawi's economy during its greatest period of rural decline in the 1990s, placed the blame for these conditions squarely at the door of liberalisation policies and, thus, the donor community, who "would not let us starve, but would not let us develop either" (Interview, Hon. Friday Jumbe, UDF, 6 February 2012). A number of options were available to any Malawian government wishing to improve food security and maize production, all of which would have found favour with smallholder voters. Electoral campaigns could have focused on controlling the price of outputs rather than inputs, notably maize, by reinvigorating ADMARC and once again redefining the role of the Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR) to include the stabilisation of maize prices through grain sales at ADMARC. However, while such an electoral promise would have undoubtedly appealed to rural voters

(Interviews, CISANet, 12 December 2011; Oxfam, 20 January 2012), its implementation would have proved extremely difficult due to the donor-imposed conditionalities discussed in Chapter 4. Donor influence was heightened by the suspension of budget support during Muluzi's second term, meaning that persuading donors to resume disbursements would be a priority regardless of voter demands for certain agricultural policies. At this point in time, many in the donor community, particularly the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, did not favour another agricultural input subsidy as the primary means of solving chronic food insecurity at the national and household levels. Nonetheless, it was easier for the Government of Malawi to ignore donor preferences on subsidies than on parastatal reform, for reasons discussed below.

Other options advocated by the donor community at around the same time, including agricultural diversification and the development of private sector markets to bring down the price of inputs and improved marketing structures for outputs, were longer-term strategies that would need to be implemented over several electoral cycles before their positive impacts would be felt by the electorate. Furthermore, given the experiences of Malawi's smallholder farmers with liberalisation policies in the 1980s and 1990s, which were followed by a long and drawn out decline in rural living standards as well as acute hunger, these policies were unlikely to have won the support of the electorate at large. To some extent, all governments and presidents in Malawi have also been constrained by the expectations previous regimes had cultivated in rural areas, both through the nature of policies and the inconsistent manner in which they were implemented, as discussed in Chapter 2. Without exception, the smallholder farmers I interviewed in Ntcheu sought to cover their maize consumption needs through household production due to the risks involved in relying on other produce, the price of which was not linked to maize or other food crops, to generate the necessary income to sustain the household. In the words of one smallholder farmer:

> When we have cultivated [cash] crops we know that we have got money, but when we go to the market we are having problems now because things are getting expensive.

> Our money can only buy very little maize (Interview, Smallholder Farmer No. 2/02, Phalula village, Ntcheu, 27 April 2012).

Just as ubiquitous was the distrust of private traders, who were widely considered to be "stealing from us farmers", due to the frequently exploitative nature of their dealings with smallholders. Again, the context of Malawi's fragile democracy and the constrained national dialogues around agricultural productivity and food security meant that these approaches, while preferred by the donor community, were not politically viable options. Thus, subsidies were the optimal political tool – leaving the question of their effectiveness aside for the moment – for responding to farmers' needs to increase the productivity of their ever-dwindling smallholdings and the preference for maize self-sufficiency. As discussed in previous chapters, poorly enforced conditionalities and the consequent on/off nature of agricultural policies and inadequately harmonised policy frameworks reinforced the importance of subsidies in electoral politics by making fertilizer and other input policies appear in the gift of Malawi's presidents (see also Harrigan 2003 and Chapter 8).

Consequently, by the time of the 2004 presidential election in which Bingu wa Mutharika was elected president as the United Democratic Front's candidate, the provision of an input subsidy had become one of the main campaign issues for all candidates and parties (Chinsinga, 2007). As Blessings Chinsinga argues, differences in the platforms of the two main parties, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), were indicative of their regional power bases and, therefore, the agro-ecological and economic differences between Southern and Central Malawi. Thus, the MCP attempted to woo voters in its campaign in 2004 on the basis of a universal fertilizer subsidy for maize, coupled with a supplementary subsidy to encourage the production of tobacco, as preferred by smallholders in the central region. The MCP also distinguished itself from other parties by emphasising 'Farmers' Clubs' as a means through which smallholders would access subsidised fertilizer, credit and extension services, as well as improved access to markets for cash crop production (Interview, MCP MP and Agriculture Spokesperson, 25 January 2012). The UDF, on the other hand,

promised its voters only a universal subsidy for maize, responding to the desires of its constituency in Southern Malawi, where tobacco is not as important an income source as in Central Malawi (Chinsinga, 2012).

However, despite the UDF's repeated campaign promises and a strong national consensus on agricultural policy, Mutharika did not implement a universal subsidy for the 2004/05 agricultural season, even though there would have been sufficient time to do so, but instead chose to expand the unpopular Targeted Input Programme (TIP). Several interviewees speculated that Mutharika's reluctance to introduce a universal fertilizer was due to the external pressure he found himself under from the donor community (e.g. Interview, Former Permanent Secretary (PS), Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, 10 April 2012). As a result of these dynamics, Mutharika, who was clearly unsure of how best to deal with the competing demands for a subsidy and the need to ensure the swift resumption of aid, postponed his decision until late in the day, before finally deciding to implement an extended version of the TIP, hoping to please both parties. This delayed decision overwhelmed the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS) to procure adequate amounts of fertilizer in time for the agricultural season and caught private sector importers off-guard which, coupled with a poor rainy season, led to large food shortages prior to the 2005/06 harvest (Chinsinga 2012). Given his narrow political support base, conflicts within his own party and a strong opposition presence in parliament, Mutharika increasingly came under pressure to take a definitive stand on the issue of food security, particularly subsidies (Interview, Former PS, MoAFS, 10 April 2012).

Contrary to common perceptions of the subsidy programme domestically and abroad (c.f. New York Times 2007), the FISP was not so much Mutharika's brainchild as the result of the combination of pressures exerted on him by the opposition-dominated parliament and the donor community (Chinsinga 2008; Kanyongolo 2010). As Mutharika was weak and isolated in early 2005, the MCP took this opportunity to table a motion for a universal maize fertilizer subsidy,

coupled with a smaller component to subsidise tobacco fertilizer.[77] Based on recommendations of the Parliamentary Group on Agriculture, which was dominated by the MCP, parliament voted in favour of a universal subsidy of NPK[78] and urea for maize production and DAP to support the production of tobacco (Interview, Former MCP MP, 22 February 2012). Caught between his parliament's binding vote and donor pressure, President Mutharika tasked his Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Andrew Daudi, to discuss the subsidy with donors to the sector and attempt to persuade them of its necessity. Daudi described the meeting to me as follows:

> [On a] Monday I championed [the subsidy] at a first meeting with all the donors and they didn't like it! One question I was asked was, "What happens if you have over-produced maize?". So I said, "Well, we will invite you for a maize party". They didn't like that and all of them walked out. And when I briefed the Head of State, that this is the reaction from donors; he said "No, let's continue anyway." … We had to use our own money from our government.
>
> … For example, one of the areas they saw some danger was at the start of [FISP]. "Can we have a timeframe for the subsidy programme?" ... So I said, "Do you have a timeframe for eating? No you don't! This subsidy programme is part of our food security, part of everyday life so there is no timeframe for this!"
>
> … They [the donors] said "Yes, [we subsidise our own agriculture sectors] because we have got money. If you have got money, then you can do anything you want to do. So why don't you look for money yourselves in government?" That was their argument.
>
> … a full subsidy, if the resources are there, is fine. A full subsidy has cost implications. If it's a targeted subsidy, it is [because of] cost implications (Interview, Former PS, MoAFS, 10 April 2012).

[77] The Hansard volumes covering debates around the fertilizer subsidy in 2004 and 2005 are missing from the Parliamentary Library in Lilongwe. According to opposition politicians, this is due to Mutharika's desire to claim the credit for the subsidy among domestic constituents once it had proved successful (Interview, MCP MP, 25 January 2012).

[78] NPK is a fertilizer composed of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium and DAP is made up of diammonium phosphate.

In an effort to square the circle between his parliament's binding vote and the donor community's unwillingness to support a fertilizer subsidy, President Mutharika decided to implement a near-universal, but still "targeted", subsidy beginning with the 2005/06 growing season. In the first year of the subsidy, the programme provided coupons for two 50 kg bags of fertilizer (one bag of NPK and one bag of urea) to approximately 1.6 million households,[79] drastically reducing the cost of a 50 kg bag of fertilizer from between MWK 3500-4000 (approx. US$ 25-30) to MWK 950 (approx. US$7) (Interview, Hon. Kutsaira, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, 12 September 2007).

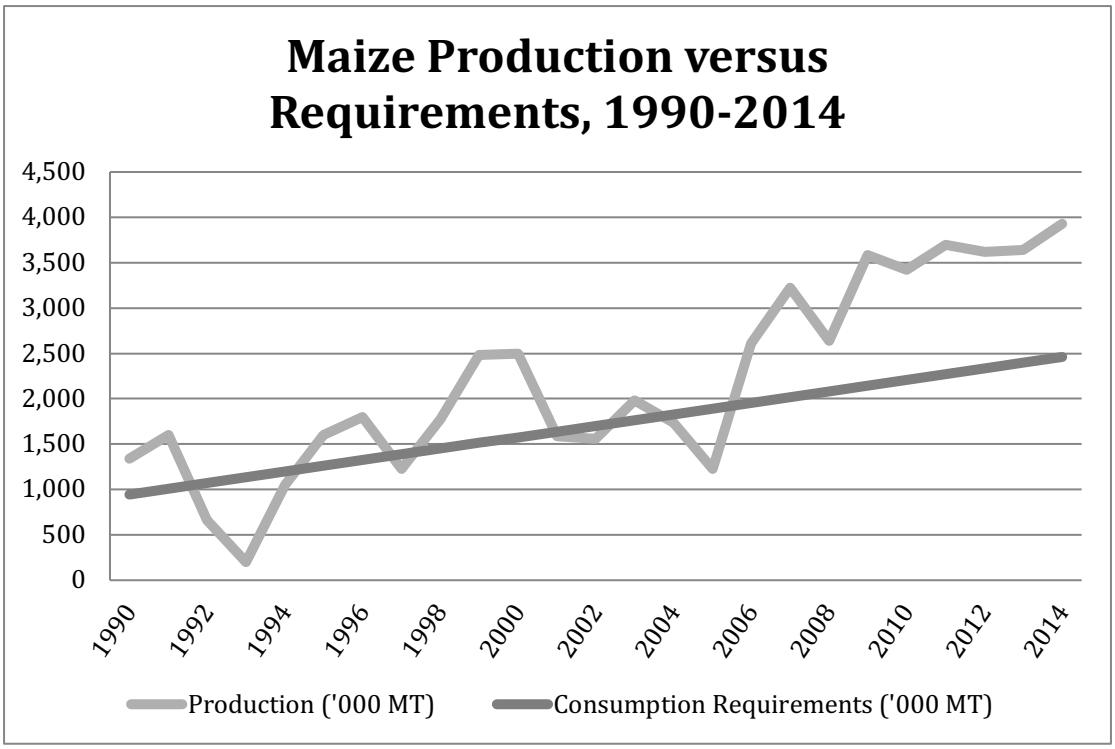
The FISP's Impact

Before looking at how donor views on the subsidy have evolved and how this has shaped the programme's design, size and implementation, it is worth outlining how the subsidy has affected maize production, food security – both at the household and national levels – and Malawi's development more broadly. The most reliable studies of the FISP and its impact are those conducted by Ephraim Chirwa and Andrew Dorward and were funded by the UK's Department for International Development as part of the biennial reviews of the programme.

Most importantly, the FISP had an immediate and substantial impact on the national maize harvest and, therefore, food availability and security at the household level and more broadly Malawi's economy. In the years prior to its inception, agricultural production fluctuated significantly and frequently fell short of national consumption requirements (as discussed in Chapter 2). Since its inception, on the other hand, production has consistently exceeded national requirements and usually substantially so. Maize production figures are contrasted with consumption requirements in Figure 6.1 below.

Figure 6.1

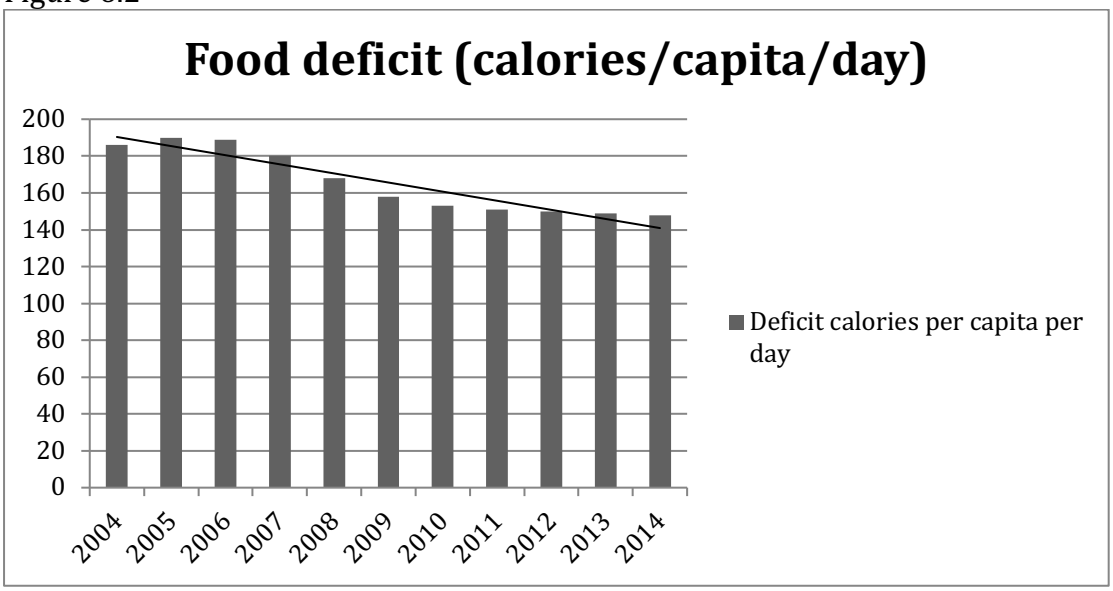
[79] The number of rural households in Malawi remains contentious. This is discussed further below.



Source: www.indexmundi.com and Dorward and Chirwa (2014)

These increases in maize production have had a significant impact on economic growth and poverty levels. GDP per capita grew between 8.3 and 9.5% per annum in the first three years after the FISP's inception and until the foreign exchange and political crisis (as described in Chapter 5) began to negatively impact growth in 2010. During this period consumer price inflation rates remained comfortably below 10% as a result of lower maize price fluctuations (World Bank 2014). Furthermore measures of nutrition, such as calories consumed and levels of stunting among children, improved between 2004/05 and 2010/11. This reduction was particularly pronounced amongst the poorest household groups in Northern Malawi, where calories consumed increased by as much as 58.4% (Verduzco-Gallo et al. 2014). The incidence of stunting nationally declined from 43.8 to 30.4% over the same period, while severe stunting fell from 19.8 to 13.8% (ibid.). Figure 6.1 demonstrates the degree to which increases in maize production influenced the food deficit. The food deficit, in terms of the calorie shortfall in consumption per capita per day, fell by almost 5% per annum between 2004 and 2014.

Figure 6.2



Source: World Bank 2014

Evaluations of the FISP have conclusively demonstrated that these increases in maize production and improvements in food and nutrition security are indeed attributable to the FISP, rather than favourable weather conditions, for example. In the programme's first year, for example, the government subsidised 130,000 tonnes of fertilizer, which led to an increase in fertilizer application of around 45,000 tonnes compared to previous years. This suggests that two-thirds of the subsidised fertilizer replaced the use of unsubsidised fertiliser rather than encouraging an increase in its use. Nevertheless, Imperial College London et al. (2007) control for other factors affecting production levels, including the weather, and estimate that the additional 45,000 tonnes of fertilizer used resulted in the production of an extra 300,000 to 400,000 tonnes of maize. This was a significant amount in national and food security terms, as it represented between 14 and 18% of maize requirements in 2005/06. Furthermore, the harvest of 2005/06 was the first since 2000 that allowed national maize requirements to be met through domestic production, once post-harvest losses were taken into account (Denning et al. 2009).

The subsidy, therefore, contributed to the aim of assisting smallholder farmers to escape the low-maize productivity trap by increasing production at the household levels as well as ensuring national maize self-sufficiency. Beyond the subsidy's

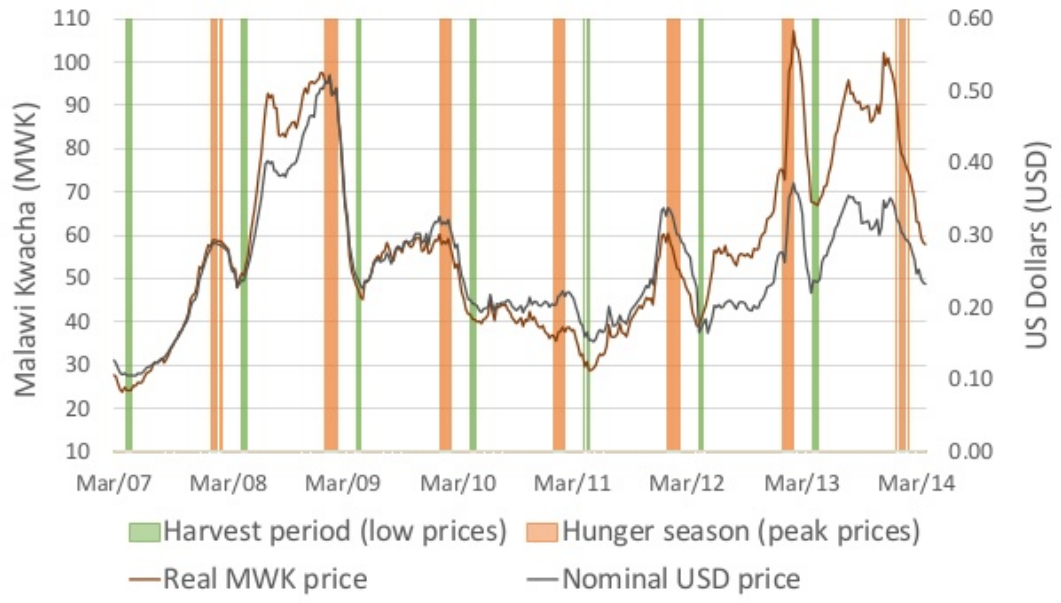
direct and intended impact, it positively affected smallholder households in a number of other ways. The programme also acted as a direct cash transfer to those households that chose to sell their coupons. In the run-up to the 2005/06 season, for example, households unable to pay MWK 950 to purchase their subsidised fertilizer could sell their coupons reportedly for as much as MWK 1500 (US$11) (Imperial College London et al. 2007). This transfer only increased in subsequent years, particularly in 2008, as the world market price for fertilizer increased significantly. For households that normally purchased fertilizer for their maize plots, these funds could be diverted towards other economically productive activities or household necessities. Or where funds for the purchase of fertilizer were earned through *ganyu* the hours spent working for wages could be reduced, freeing up household labour for other activities. As the 'hungry season' became shorter for a large percentage of households, the period in which their labour power had to be utilised to do *ganyu* for food also decreased. Not only did this reduce seasonal cash shortages but led to a reduction in supply of labour, thus increasing *ganyu* wages (Dorward et al. 2011c, Chirwa and Dorward 2013c).

As the subsidy continued to have a positive impact on food security – and, perhaps more importantly, smallholder farmers perceived it as beneficial to household food security (as will be discussed in depth in Chapter 7) – as well as serving as a cash transfer for the poorest households, it contributed considerably to Mutharika's popularity during his first term (e.g. Interviews, 2/23, Phalula, 2 May 2012; 3/47, Zaunda, 14 May 2012). This also meant that Mutharika's gamble on the subsidy *vis-à-vis* the donors paid off: as FISP became a domestic political success and the donors softened their stance on the programme, Mutharika chose to associate himself closely with the subsidy and repeatedly presented it has his 'gift' to the people of Malawi. In due course, therefore, the subsidy became a mainstay of his political support and attempting to phase it out, as repeatedly suggested by various representatives of the donors community, "would be political suicide!" according to the deputy minister of agriculture and food security (Interview, Hon. Kutsaira, Deputy Minister of MoAFS, 12 September 2007).

A Note of Caution

The government of Malawi's maize production figures have come under criticism since 2008 from several quarters, most notably Chirwa and Dorward, the Grain Traders and Processors Association as well as several donors. These criticisms are based on continuing high intra-seasonal maize price fluctuations; above and beyond the levels expected if maize production estimates were indeed correct. These critics argue that if maize production exceeded consumption to the extent calculated by government, one would see much smaller increases in maize prices between harvests, with maize prices remaining well below import parity. However, real maize prices do not indicate large surpluses as demonstrated by Figure 3 below.

Figure 6.3: Maize Price Fluctuations, 2007-2014



Source: Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) Market Prices (2007 to 2014)

There are a number of possible explanations for the concurrence of surplus production and high maize prices. The first is that large quantities of maize are being purchased by the public sector, either to restock the Strategic Grain Reserve or for exports, and by the private sector wishing to exploit cross-border arbitrage opportunities. These exports are especially likely to have gone undocumented if they had taken place in informal cross-border trade. Another possibility is that the demand for maize increased in line with production, as a result of falling poverty

levels and as households consume a greater amount of their own production. Another possibility is that increased maize availability has resulted in a change in consumption patterns, with more maize being used as livestock feed. It has also been suggested that storage losses could have become more significant as less hardy hybrid maize varieties have become more prevalent as a result of the FISP's focus on improved seeds. However, household surveys and complementary data do not seem to suggest that any of these other factors are more than contributory elements. Instead, Chirwa and Dorward argue that maize production figures are most likely inflated, given the pressure on the government of Malawi to prove the effectiveness of the FISP (Chirwa and Dorward 2013c; Dorward et al. 2011c). Dorward et al. write that

> … the subsidy program has not led to increases in maize supply as large as those suggested by increases in maize crop estimates from 2006/07 onward, particularly in 2007/08 and 2008/09, when prices appeared to be very high compared with estimated supplies. (Dorward, Chirwa and Jayne 2011c: 307).

Nevertheless, while the government production figures may well overestimate the quantity of maize that has been produced in Malawi, the positive impact of the FISP in terms of nutrition and improved rural living standards cannot be denied, as we have seen above. While Chirwa and Dorward (2013c) bemoan the lack of reliable data especially as this prevents reliable cost-benefit analyses of the subsidy, many of the positive impacts of FISP, particularly the eradication of acute hunger, cannot easily be quantified. The smallholder farmers I interviewed regarding their experiences with FISP were unanimous in their assessment that it had significantly improved their living standards, whether they were direct beneficiaries or not. The consensus among these smallholder farmers – echoed by many of my interviewees in the Government of Malawi – was that without FISP they would be condemned to a return to regular seasonal hunger and, every few years, significant food shortages that would lead to malnutrition and death among the young and elderly (see Chapter 7). Furthermore, while other interventions, for example in health care, may have higher economic returns than an expensive subsidy programme, it is inconceivable that gains made in these areas would be

sustainable in the absence of policies that addressed Malawi's chronic food insecurity. For these reasons, FISP has been influential beyond Malawi's borders and has contributed to a rejuvenation of agricultural policies throughout the continent with other countries – such as Rwanda – adopting similar fertilizer subsidy programmes.

A Story in Three Acts: Donor Attitudes Towards the Subsidy

The FISP has undergone a number of permutations, of greater and lesser significance, since its inception in 2005/06. It began life in late 2005 as the Agricultural Input Subsidy, but became the Farm Input Subsidy Programme in the 2006/07 season. Its overall size, in terms of tonnage of fertilizer subsidised and beneficiaries targeted, has waxed and waned, as represented in Table 6.1 below. As we will see, the programme's evolution since 2005 reflected both local political dynamics and donor influence on the programme.

Act I: From Misgivings to Acclaim

The FISP was introduced on the back of almost 20 years of Structural Adjustment Programmes and agricultural reform driven by the donor community, particularly the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs), and aimed at a restructuring of the agriculture sector away from government-driven towards market-based development. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the reaction in the donor community was largely negative, with the exception of a few donors, such as Norway, DfID, and Irish Aid, who were willing to entertain the idea of a subsidy given the depth of chronic and acute food insecurity in the years preceding the subsidy's implementation. Blessings Chinsinga distinguishes between three groups of donors with respect to their approach to the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, namely those supportive of subsidies, those who did not object to a subsidy provided that it was 'SMART' and avoided some of the pitfalls of universal subsidies, and those that were, at least initially, entirely opposed to this form of intervention in agricultural markets (Chinsinga 2007). In 2005/06 Norway, supported only by a number of international NGOs, such as ActionAid and Oxfam, was alone in the first category. Arguably, Irish Aid and DfID fell into the second of these categories, pushing for a greater inclusion of the private sector in the subsidy's implementation and a greater focus on hybrid and legume seeds for

diversification. Unsurprisingly the BWIs and the African Development Bank were opposed to the subsidy, but tolerated its implementation, so long as it did not contravene the macroeconomic and sector-specific conditionalities outlined in their agreements with the Malawian government. Other donors did not take a position on the subsidy or are difficult to classify due to their frequent policy U-turns. The EU is an example: it supported the Universal Starter Pack, the Starter Pack and the Targeted Input Programme, but then suddenly withdrew all its support from any form of subsidy in the sector in 2002, choosing instead to plough a large percentage of its budget into rural livelihood diversification with the justification that economic growth and poverty alleviation would thereby be better served (Interview, EU Farm Income Diversification Programme, 20 July 2007).

Table 6.1: Evolution of the FISP

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/2010	2010/11	2011/12
1st Round Distribution	2,740,120	3,000,000	3,400,000	3,400,000	3,200,000	3,200,000	2,800,000
2nd Round Distribution	583,000	1,002,560	920,000	507,372	0	0	0
Total Allocations	3,323,120	4,002,560	4,320,000	3,907,372	3,200,000	3,200,000	2,800,000
Coupons Redeemed	2,627,760	3,493,760	4,331,066	3,949,960	3,191,700	3,210,620	2,798,020
No. of Beneficiaries*	1,313,880	1,746,880	2,165,533	1,974,980	1,595,850	1,605,310	1,399,010
Households Targeted, MoAFS estimates (%)	39.97	53.14	65.88	53.82	43.49	41.04	35.77
Households Targeted, NSO estimates (%)	52.87	70.29	87.14	79.28	64.06	66.45	57.91
Fertilizer Subsidised (MT)	131,388	174,688	216,553	197,498	159,585	160,531	139,901
Maize Seed Subsidised (MT)	N.A.	4,524	5,541	5,365	8,652	10,650	8,245
Legume Seed Subsidised (MT)	0	0	24	1	1,551	2,726	2,562
Redemption Price (MK/50kg)	950	950	900	800	500	500	500
Level of Subsidy (%)	64%	72%	79%	91%	88%	91%	93%
Total planned programme cost (MWK millions)	5,100	7,500	11,500	19,480	21,908	19,700	21,586
Actual programme cost (MWK millions)	4,480	10,346	13,362	33,922	15,526	21,868	23,455

* Assuming each beneficiary receives one complete FISP package.
Source: Chirwa and Dorward 2013; Chinsinga and Poulton 2014.

While there are considerable differences in the attitude and ideological approaches across various donor agencies, President Mutharika was clearly trapped between the demands placed on him by his parliament and the financial constraints imposed by the suspension of aid, as Norway was the only donor willing to consider funding a subsidy. Constrained in this fashion Mutharika and his Minister of Finance, Goodall Gondwe (who held the portfolio from 2004 to 2009), devised the subsidy in such a fashion that it would not contravene their most fundamental agreements with the IMF and the World Bank, by ensuring that macroeconomic conditions were adhered to. As so little financial assistance was available, the universal subsidy that parliament had endorsed was not an option. Instead, they created a targeted subsidy, which would allow the majority of farmers[80] to access enough fertilizer for household production at approximately 25% of the commercial price, using a system of vouchers. This subsidy structure had two further advantages, the first being that the targeted nature of the subsidy appealed to a number of donors – DfID, Irish Aid, and Norway – who were potentially or actually supportive of the programme due to their institutional focus on ensuring that their aid reached the poorest households in their partner countries and whose reservations could be assuaged by implementing a 'SMART' subsidy (the topic of targeting and 'SMART' subsidies is discussed further below) (Interview, Former PS, MoAFS, 10 April 2012). Secondly, given the subsidy's political importance and donor hostility towards it, funding the programme domestically had the advantage of partially insulating it from donor pressures and ensuring that the president, who also served as minister of agriculture and food security, and the minister of finance retained control over the policy. The minister of finance's response to my question of whether the donor community was involved in funding the subsidy was:

> No! Well, money is fungible… but we've done this in such a way that it is very much our own… We have not wanted them [donors] to get involved, because they will come out

[80] The percentage of farmers targeted in the first year of the FISP is unknown due to the discrepancy in estimates of the number of farm households in Malawi (see discussion below) but is likely to have been between 40 and 53% in 2005/06 and to have increased to between 66 and 87% at its peak in 2007/08.

> with conditionalities, some of them we may not accept. So we have pretty well wanted to do this on our own (Interview, Hon. Gondwe, Minister of Finance, 11 September 2007).

As argued above, these fears were not unfounded: donors could not be relied upon to support subsidies consistently, and so could jeopardise the programme's aims and objectives, as well as the president's political aspirations. In the same interview, however, Gondwe expressed the government's desire to continue subsidising maize inputs for at least another 10 years, with no substantial changes to the levels of subsidy and disbursement methods prior to the 2009 election (ibid.). A recent paper by the International Food Policy Research Institute demonstrates very clearly that President Mutharika maintained, and perhaps even extended, his control over the subsidy programme throughout his presidency, ensuring that all decisions with regards to this policy remained firmly within his grip, rather than resting with the technocrats in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (Aberman et al. 2012).

Donor attitudes softened considerably towards the subsidy when a bumper harvest – Malawi's largest ever, in fact – reduced maize prices, and increased household food security following the 2005/06 season (Interview, Former PS MoAFS, 10 April 2012). These reports were largely substantiated by a team of independent consultants, hired by DfID to conduct biennial evaluations, beginning in 2007 (see Imperial College London et al. 2007; Dorward et al. 2010; Dorward and Chirwa 2011a). Furthermore, as Malawi's economy recovered from the corruption and mismanagement of Muluzi's second term, and experienced GDP growth rates consistently above 6% p.a., and as high as 11% in 2008, the FISP was rightly seen as an important contributory factor to these achievements (Dorward and Chirwa 2011b). As the donor community's attitude to Malawi's agricultural subsidy became more positive, praise began to flow in for Mutharika's courage in implementing the policy in the face of donor opposition. This was reflected in international media, such as the *New York Times*' oft-quoted article "Ending Famine, Simply by Ignoring the Experts" (New York Times 2007) and was followed by awards for Mutharika's work in ensuring food security for Malawi from a variety of organisations, including the UN's Food and Agriculture

Organisation in 2008, the UN's Special Millennium Development Goal Award in 2010 and many more. At home, his success was also widely fêted, including by his party, who dubbed him "Mose wa Lero", which is best translated as "modern-Day Moses", for leading his people to food security. This phrase was also used as one of his slogans during his re-election campaign in May 2009. His praise was, at times, sung almost as loudly by international organisations, as it was by the musicians and dancers hired to do so at his rallies. As the international profile of the subsidy's success grew as a means of increasing agricultural production levels while maintaining positive relationships with the donor community, it served as inspiration for other countries seeking to improve their food security through input subsidies (see for example Rwanda's Crop Intensification Programme) (Chirwa and Dorward 2013).

The praise Malawi received for FISP emboldened the government to extend the programme. As the above table shows, the officially sanctified "first round" of coupon distributions increased between 2005/06 and 2007/08, as did the overall number of coupons redeemed and tonnes of fertilizer subsidised. The first years of the FISP also saw a second, unofficial round of coupon distribution by both politicians and civil servants, which was conducted outside of the purview of the donor community (Interview, Dr. Chinsinga, 5 March 2012; Imperial College London et al., 2007). This practice was successfully hidden until the first extensive FISP evaluation was published in 2008 and it was not fully understood until the second assessment was conducted and presented two years later (SOAS et al. 2008; Dorward et al. 2010). The primary purpose of these "second rounds" was to reach a larger number of beneficiaries with the FISP while circumventing the need to seek donor approval for these increases, preferring instead to let expenditures for the programme exceed its planned budget. In other words, it was clear to the Government of Malawi that even the most supportive donors, such as DfID, Irish Aid, and Norway, would not support a larger fertilizer subsidy. These unofficial coupon distributions, furthermore, provided an additional benefit in that they allowed for the distribution of coupons to chiefs, political supporters, Members of Parliament, and those areas where Mutharika's support could be expected to be

weak (especially the Northern region) in the run-up to the 2009 presidential elections (Chinsinga and Poulton 2014).

Before moving on to the discussion of how the donor community subsequently sought to influence the structure of the FISP, it is worth noting that while many of the bilateral donor agencies either put aside their ideological reservations to subsidised inputs or increased their support to the programme, the multilateral agencies did not follow suit to the same degree. The IMF, World Bank, and African Development Bank continued to either voice their opposition to market-distorting subsidies or withheld direct support. A review of World Bank policy documents, for example, reveals that the Bank may have tolerated the FISP, but certainly was not supportive of it. Its Country Assistance Strategy for Malawi for the period from 2007 to 2012 makes no mention of the subsidy (WB 2007), despite the Bank's role as the lead donor agency for agriculture and the fact that the programme made up 43% of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security's budget in 2005/06 and as much as 16% of total government expenditure, equivalent to 6.6% of GDP, in 2008/09 (Dorward et al. 2008; Dorward and Chirwa 2011b). Instead, it lamented the "distorted incentives [that] keep farmers in subsistence farming" and the World Bank's failure in "reducing the negative effects of some ADMARC operations in these [input and output] markets" (WB 2007).

Act II: The Magic Bullet – 'SMART' Subsidies

President Mutharika and his Finance Minister, Goodall Gondwe, attempted to protect the FISP from donor influence, but these efforts were not entirely successful. Most importantly, while the subsidy was initially implemented against donor advice and preference, it was – right from the start – heavily influenced by the constraints placed upon the government by its financial backers. The single most important element of the subsidy with regards to its structure – as will be seen in the next chapter – is the fact that it is supposedly targeted at poor, land-owning households, a *de facto* condition that was indirectly imposed upon Mutharika's government as a result of its need to access foreign aid, live within its means, and source domestic resources for this large-scale programme. The use of vouchers, to target certain 'worthy' smallholders, rather than providing a

universal subsidy, meant the donor community considered the FISP a 'SMART' subsidy, rendering it considerably more palatable than other forms of intervention in agricultural markets.

The term 'SMART' subsidy derives from the project management mnemonic, designed to help decision-makers to set meaningful and achievable objectives, i.e. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound goals. In the context of input subsidies, Dorward et al. (2008) provide a description of what a 'SMART' subsidy *should* be:

> … so-called "smart" input subsidy programmes […] have a significant impact on the availability of food in the short run while stimulating growth and rural development and increasing (or at least not suppressing) effective demand for and commercial distribution of inputs in the long run.
>
> […] their design and sustainable implementation must promote smallholders' incremental access to and productive use of inputs, build sustainable demand and private sector supply, and be integrated with other policies for increasing agricultural productivity, rural development and management of incremental production to provide rural people with reliable improvements in food access and real incomes (Dorward et al. 2008: 1-2)

Although not addressed in Dorward et al.'s definition, the question of whether or not a subsidy is time-bound and has a clear exit strategy that will allow governments to gradually withdraw over a period of several years, is another frequently cited component of a 'SMART' subsidy. In this context, there is a general consensus among Malawi's agricultural donors that input subsidies should be a temporary strategy, to be phased out after a period of three to five years, once farmers have accessed subsidised inputs for several seasons and have, therefore, generated surpluses and embarked on a more productive path that they can then sustain independently of government assistance (c.f. World Bank 2008a; Imperial College London et al. 2007).

The preference for a targeted subsidy among all donors to Malawi's agricultural sector also reflects the uncomfortable marriage between an increased focus on

"pro-poor" policies, particularly by bilateral donor agencies, and to a lesser degree the World Bank, and the need to simultaneously foster economic growth for sustained and sustainable development. The World Bank's 2001 *World Development Report*, "Attacking Poverty", demonstrates the complexity of attempting to unite these two positions. In an effort to bring these two concepts together, it strongly advocates targeting and safety net approaches to assisting the poor, while allowing for free markets to do the work of generating economic growth (WB 2001). By the time the WB published its World Development Report on agriculture in 2008, targeting and safety-net approaches had become a part of the international consensus, and its recommendations for spurring agricultural growth in this manner were unsurprising to the international community and aid recipient governments. Furthermore, it was frequently argued that the elements of universal subsidies that were perceived as problematic in the 1980s and 1990s, such as elite rent-seeking and capture, bureaucratic weaknesses in their administration, and their interference in the functioning of markets, could be solved with effective targeting (Mkandawire 2005).[81] Finally, through community selection of beneficiaries, targeted interventions were thought to reduce the burden on administratively weak states, lessen the fiscal costs of targeting, as well as mitigating some of the more harmful effects of structural adjustment on the poorest members of society (WB 2001; WB 2008a). As we have seen, the need to target agricultural policies in order to retain aid was something that President Mutharika was perfectly aware of in 2005/06.

While the problems of community-based targeting encountered in the implementation of the FISP are extensively discussed in the next chapter, it is worth briefly outlining some of the theoretical objections that have been voiced by scholars of the aid industry. Amartya Sen argues that "benefits meant exclusively for the poor often end up being poor benefits" as the beneficiaries of such interventions are frequently those least able to make their concerns known to their elected representatives or other government officials (Sen 1992: 14). Furthermore, targeted policies frequently do not meet the needs of those they

[81] For further theoretical debates on universal versus targeted subsidies, see for example Minot and Benson (2009) and Morris et al. (2007).

seek to assist, as any safety net or targeted policy must be dependable and unchanging if it is to work for the poorest (Dercon 2001 cited in Mkandawire 2005). Naturally, the dependable nature of targeted interventions is further undermined if targeting is carried out within communities, as these are themselves subject to local politics. Finally, some research has shown that 'Type I errors' – where someone who "deserves" to be a beneficiary is denied the transfer – tend to be numerous in African countries. Coady et al. (2004) found that a quarter of targeted programmes, across 48 developing countries, were regressive and that the poorer a country the less effective targeted programmes tend to be. While similar studies of 'Type II errors', where benefits accrue to "undeserving" beneficiaries have yet to be conducted, to the best of my knowledge, one can only assume that these are also substantial, as we will see in the next chapter.

The influence of donors is not limited to the question of targeting. Donors have had considerable influence on the subsidy's design, implementation procedures and logistics. As one of the earliest supporters of the FISP, the main sponsor of its biennial reviews, and a large budget support donor, DfID's imprint on the programme is particularly visible. In view of the emerging evidence that the Government of Malawi was printing additional coupons in order to extend the size of the programme, DfID lobbied for extremely tight controls to be enforced over the distribution of FISP coupons. Thus, from 2011 onwards, FISP coupons were printed by DfID in an undisclosed location and were equipped with more security features than Malawian banknotes. The coupons were printed on special paper that allowed ADMARC personnel to distinguish them from counterfeits with the assistance of a marker pen provided for this purpose and featured a watermark. As a result of the introduction of these coupons, ADMARC staff could be held *individually* responsible if they redeemed a counterfeit coupon, effectively shutting down any means by which the Government of Malawi could print additional coupons for *its own subsidy programme*. In the eyes of donors, these new coupons were an unmitigated success as they brought a considerable reduction in the use of counterfeit coupons to redeem subsidised fertilizer, controlled the cost of the programme, and ensured that legitimate beneficiaries did not miss out on subsidised fertilizer as a result of traders buying up available

inputs with counterfeit coupons (Interview, DfID, 3 April 2012). Concomitantly, this means that the government could not circumvent donor impositions on the size of the programme for political or food security reasons, by printing additional coupons. It is worth noting that in the absence of these additional coupons, Mutharika unilaterally increased the level of the subsidy from an initial subsidy level of 64% in 2005/05 to 93% in 2011/12 (see Table 6.1).

DfID also funded the FISP Logistics Unit that was based within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, though it had a semi-autonomous status. The Unit predated the FISP as it was initially established to oversee the running of the Starter Pack Programme in the late 1990s, again under the purview of DfID. It provides some insight into the broader ideological approach within which assistance was provided to the Government of Malawi. A former DfID employee, involved in the negotiation and design of Starter Packs, wrote:

> The use of the semi-autonomous Logistics Unit accords with the current agenda of redefinition of the role of government to concentrate on policy, regulation, support, coordination and monitoring, rather than implementation. This is a matter to which other countries considering Starter Pack programmes would need to give careful consideration (Potter 2005).

As a donor-funded entity within the Ministry it was headed up by a Scottish national rather than a member of the Malawian civil service and scrutinised regularly, in the same manner that donor-funded projects are, including through external audits (Interview, FISP Logistics Unit, 13 March 2012). The EU conducted an audit of the unit in 2011 and found its performance less than satisfactory. In particular, the handling of coupons was deemed inadequate to prevent fraud and unintended beneficiaries from accessing subsidised fertilizer, for example by buying coupons from beneficiaries.[82] This audit led to an indefinite suspension of

[82] The same audit also faulted the FISP Logistics Unit for its "lack of critical thinking regarding fuel shortages", which some of my respondents argued demonstrated that the audit was unnecessarily critical. The Logistics Unit itself responded in writing to this criticism as follows: "How on earth one is supposed to think critically about fuel shortages when the Government could in some cases not keep ambulances running is beyond the imagination of the LU" (EC 2011).

EU aid to the subsidy programme in late 2011 (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 2 April 2012).

DfID, in collaboration with other donors, particularly Irish Aid, has also been instrumental in widening the scope of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, to include the subsidy of improved maize and legume seeds. These seeds, at the insistence of the donor community, were distributed through private agrodealers, with DfID and Irish Aid making up the difference between the commercial and subsidised price of seeds (Interviews, DfID, 3 April 2012; Irish Aid, 24 February 2012). This element of the subsidy was funded by donors and reflected the relative importance accorded to diversification, as well as private sector development, by the donors involved. This element of the subsidy was certainly not the result of a response to the demands of smallholder farmers, who appreciated the subsidised seeds that accompany the FISP, but did not consider these as essential to their food security as fertilizer, as became evident in the course of my rural fieldwork (e.g. Interview, Smallholder Farmer, Lilongwe Rural, 17 March 2013).

In an effort to ensure that FISP was truly 'SMART', DfID, Irish Aid, and the World Bank insisted in 2006/07 that fertilizer sales be channelled through private agrodealers, rather than the parastatal ADMARC (Interview, DfID, 3 April 2012; World Bank, 21 May 2012). However, this lasted for only one season as the government insisted that private dealers were cheating the system and selling other products, including alcohol and iron sheets for roofing, to farmers in exchange for coupons (Interview, Former PS MoAFS, 10 April 2012). It is unclear how much truth there is to this, although it appears unlikely to have been a common phenomenon given the value attached to fertilizer by Malawi's smallholder farmers and the fact that DfID appears not to have believed that this was a major problem (Interview, DfID, 3 April 2012). The Former Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security argued for government retention of fertilizer distribution on the grounds of easier administration and that private sector involvement in the programme was ensured through tendering for private sector companies to import the fertilizer for the programme (Interview, Former PS MoAFS, 10 April 2012). The Government of Malawi was able to return

to providing subsidised fertilizer solely through ADMARC, while seeds continue to be sold through private agrodealers without much resistance. Presumably this was because the change coincided with much of the international acclaim for "Bingu's subsidy" (Interview, Irish Aid, 24 February 2012). As discussed in Chapter 5, retaining control over the allocation of contracts for fertilizer supply and distribution was also important for Mutharika in retaining the political support of his 2009 election campaign financers. While wholly inadequate to ensuring the corporation's survival, as discussed in Chapter 4, by delivering the FISP through ADMARC some of the organisation's operating costs could also be underwritten by the government (Interview, CEO ADMARC, 23 September 2013).

The most important source of influence over – or the biggest threat to – the subsidy, depending on one's perspective, was the ability of the donor community, either individually or collectively, to withhold budget support. Malawi was exceptionally dependent on donor support to maintain its government expenditure, balance of payments, and development programmes. Approximately 40% of the government budget, excluding many development projects, was sourced from either general or sector budget support (WB 2008b). As Malawi does not produce inorganic fertilizer domestically, the subsidy programme was also heavily dependent on foreign exchange earnings. Not only was the possibility of aid suspension or withdrawal, therefore, a Damoclean sword that threatened the health of Malawi's economy, it also jeopardised the input subsidy and national food security.

In light of these facts, Bingu wa Mutharika or Goodall Gondwe's insistence that the fertilizer subsidy was "Malawian" and that as long as Mutharika retained the presidency fertilizer would be subsidised (Interview, Hon. Gondwe, 11 September 2007), appeared more like an aspirational statement than representative of Malawi's policy-making reality. Nonetheless, it remained imperative for Mutharika to maintain the impression that the fertilizer subsidy was under his control and to persuade the Malawian electorate that he would continue the programme, in order to retain political support.

Act III: Disillusionment

The third act of donor-government engagement over the FISP demonstrates the contradictions and tensions between the domestic political realm and the exigencies of aid that any Malawian head of state must negotiate. From 2010 onwards Mutharika's popularity within the donor community declined and so did the donors' willingness to support his flagship programme. The programme was increasingly seen even by Malawi's most supportive donors as contributing to the acute foreign exchange crisis and a political tool for Mutharika to maintain his increasingly autocratic rule (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 2 April 2012). Simultaneously, a number of "technical" issues concerning the FISP increased the sentiment among many donors that the programme was being abused in order to maintain Mutharika's popularity. Firstly, the accuracy of production estimates was increasingly questioned, with evidence mounting that they were systematically overstated. Secondly, estimates of the number of rural households in Malawi continued to differ substantially between the National Statistical Office (NSO) and the Ministry of Agriculture, leading to suspicions that the Ministry was inflating figures in order to augment FISP's overall size. Given the generally negative assessment of Bingu wa Mutharika's presidency and the sense of despondency over Malawi's economic prospects prevalent among the donor community in late 2011 and early 2012, both were seen as evidence that the FISP had become a patronage tool and that these tendencies needed to be kept in check (Interview, Dr. Chinsinga, 5 March 2012).

The accuracy of production estimates was questioned not only by donors but also by a number of my interviewees, including those working for NGOs involved in food security and private sector representatives, particularly maize traders (e.g. Interviews, FEWS-Net, 20 January 2012; Grain Traders and Processors Association, 17 September 2013). Maize prices had begun to rise in 2008/09 and remained consistently above the levels that might be expected if production estimates were indeed correct. Chirwa and Dorward furthermore found that "there are difficulties reconciling national production figures with estimates of consumption and export" (Chirwa and Dorward 2013: 130). While my interviewee from FEWS-Net considered the fuel crisis in 2011/2012 to be the

main explanatory factor for high maize prices in both years, it appears unlikely that the maize surplus was as large as suggested by official statistics (Interview, FEWS-Net, 20 January 2012). While the incremental increase in maize production, as calculated by Chirwa and Dorward (2013), is still substantial and positive, the disputed nature of these figures served to undermine confidence in the government and the FISP.

Concurrently, the discrepancy in estimates regarding the number of rural households in Malawi became ever more apparent. According to the National Statistical Office Malawi had approximately 2.5 million rural households in 2005/06 and this increased gradually to 2.8 million by 2011/12, while the MoAFS registered in the neighbourhood of 3.3 million households in 2005/06 and 3.9 million in 2011/12 (Chirwa and Dorward 2013). Naturally, these discrepancies were of great concern to the donor community and the bilateral donors closely involved with the programme were particularly keen to see this issue resolved (i.e. Norway, DfID and Irish Aid), as the percentage of households targeted differed dramatically according to which set of figures were being used (see Table 6.1). One official I interviewed at the MoAFS insisted that his Ministry was better placed than the NSO to estimate the number of rural households, given its extensive network of agricultural extension agents and the annual registration of farm households carried out as part of the FISP (Interview, MoAFS official, 12 March 2012). Donors on the other hand were concerned that additional households were being created and registered simply to access coupons and that village leaders and other political actors were thus benefitting from access to the subsidy as well (Jerven 2013). The extent to which the creation of 'ghost' households may have had an impact on the MoAFS figures remains disputed. But perhaps more importantly it is worth noting that while donors were greatly concerned with this issue, the Government of Malawi did not see this as a pressing issue and made no efforts to resolve the contradiction (Interview, Dr. Chinsinga, 5 March 2012). It seems not unlikely, therefore, that this was as much a strategy by the government to circumvent donor concerns over the size of the subsidy as an attempt to misappropriate coupons at the village level.

Given the general misgivings of the donor community towards FISP, Mutharika did not do himself any favours with his increasingly vitriolic rhetoric towards donors, dismissing the IMF's advice, for example, as follows:

> … they [IMF officials] are just arrogant, undermining what a black man can do. They think that because they are Westerners they know everything. … If donors are going to criticise, saying this is [not a] democracy, to hell with you. I have had enough. If any donor wants to withdraw from this country, let them leave and go (Mutharika cited in ThinkAfricaPress, 2012).

As one might expect, this refusal to engage with the donor community severely endangered Mutharika's flagship programme and the source of his landslide election win in 2009. The foreign exchange crisis and government budget shortage forced the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to request emergency assistance from DfID, Irish Aid, and Norway for its programme in late 2011, when it became clear that the government would not be able to purchase sufficient quantities of fertilizer or the fuel necessary to distribute the fertilizer already in the country (Interview, Norwegian Embassy, 1 April 2012; Irish Aid, 24 February 2012). For Mutharika this effectively meant permanently relinquishing control over FISP that he and Gondwe had worked so hard to retain throughout his first term. After considerable deliberation – due to concerns that any support to the Farm Input Subsidy would also shore up Mutharika's presidency and his popularity in rural Malawi – the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Norway came to the rescue of the programme. The UK's Department for International Development provided additional support worth £10.1 million (£9 million for seed and £370,000 for fuel purchases), the Irish government contributed €3.7 million (€2.1 million for seeds and € 1.5 million for fertilizer), while Norway made a total of £7.54 million available for the programme (of which £3.82 million were earmarked for fertilizer purchases, while £3.72 million were allocated to the seed component) (Africa News, 2011). Although most of these funds were earmarked for expenditures other than fertilizer, they eased the foreign exchange constraints on the programme sufficiently to allow for FISP to be delivered in a fairly timely fashion to 1.4 million smallholder households. This represented a reduction of 200,000 beneficiaries compared to 2009/10 and 2010/11, and was considerably

less than the 2.2 million beneficiaries targeted in the largest FISP season of 2007/08 (Dorward and Chirwa, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). Given Malawi's rapid rate of population growth, this also represented a decrease in the number of farming households targeted either from 41 to 36% or 66 to 58%, depending on whether MoAFS or NSO data are used (see Table 6.1 for comparison). Unsurprisingly, Mutharika did not comment publicly on the assistance rendered by Norway, the UK, and Ireland, but his Minister of Finance, Ken Lipenga, expressed his gratitude to the donor community:

> Our development partners have responded to our call for assistance like true friends. We all know that the FISP programme is very successful and has transformed Malawi from a situation of chronic food insecurity to one where we consistently have surpluses at national level (quoted in Africa News, 2011).

This intervention to save the subsidy programme made donors acutely aware of their role in underpinning Mutharika's political support. Several of my interviewees expressed concern that they were indirectly supporting his presidency when they had grave concerns about his governance record (Interviews, Norwegian Embassy, 1 April 2012; DfID, 3 April 2012; Irish Aid, 24 February 2012). Several also made it clear that their organisations, particularly their headquarters, would not allow for the disbursement of such large sums of money following a last minute appeal again, and they were equally sceptical that their organisations would provide money towards the FISP as part of planned expenditure programmes, given the prevailing governance situation (Interviews, Norwegian Embassy, 1 April 2012; DfID, 3 April 2012).

Beyond the financial implications of the programme and the withdrawal of budget support, the general political situation allowed old concerns regarding the programme, and subsidies in general, to resurface. Once again the market-distorting effects of the subsidy, even if targeted, and the macroeconomic implications of a programme that consumed large quantities of foreign exchange, were debated with renewed vigour in the donor community (Interview, Norwegian Embassy, 1 April 2012). In the process, the concept of a 'SMART' subsidy also lost some of its appeal, and questions about the subsidy's aim,

objectives and, therefore, structure were revisited. In particular, there was a noticeable shift in the perception of input vouchers as a means of targeting subsidies: where these were initially seen as an innovative solution to the problem of elite capture and the displacement of commercially purchased fertilizer (c.f. Dorward et al. 2008), they were gradually portrayed as means by which patronage could be targeted in both academic and donor discourse (Chinsinga and Poulton 2014). Furthermore, the issue of whether a subsidy like FISP should, in fact, target the poorest households rather than those capable of the largest production increases with this type of assistance – i.e. whether it was essentially a safety net or an economic growth policy – was reopened, with different options being touted by different aid agencies and individuals (e.g. Interviews, World Bank, 21 May 2012; Anonymous Donor, 2 April 2012). For example, the Bank's most recent Country Assistance Strategy, spanning the period from 2013 to 2016 voiced the institution's reservations towards the subsidy, stating in an introductory section that

> [s]tagnant poverty levels raise questions on the effectiveness of the [sic] Malawi's Farm Input Subsidy Program (FISP) in alleviating poverty and food insecurity in a sustainable fashion (WB 2012).

The role the donor community played in birthing a subsidy fraught with contradictions was not, to my knowledge, openly acknowledged as a result of the difficulties of tracing the origins of different aspects of the subsidy and a high turnover in agency staff. Furthermore, it appears that efforts at aid harmonisation are currently geared towards developing joint funding mechanisms, with less focus on policy coherence (e.g. Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security, 2011). Equally, environmental concerns were voiced more vociferously at this time, with many donors arguing that the subsidy was detrimental to soil fertility in the long run. They argued that increasing attention needed to be paid to integrated soil management techniques, rather than reliance on inorganic fertilizer, despite Malawi's low levels of fertilizer use compared to donor nations (Interview, UNDP, 2 April 2012).

The overall outcome of the increased pressure on the Malawian state was to magnify the power that donors wielded over the subsidy. This was most evident in the drafting of a Medium-Term Strategy for the FISP in 2010 and 2011, a document driven and heavily influenced by Malawi's donors. The need for such a strategy to be developed was identified by the donor community, rather than the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, the Ministry of Finance or other Malawian actors, political or technocratic (Interview, Anonymous Donor, 9 February 2012). The aim of this strategy was to clarify the aim of the FISP, how it would continue to be implemented over the next four years in order to achieve that goal, and to serve as a policy document against which the subsidy could be evaluated. The Medium-Term Strategy pegged the number of beneficiaries at 1.4 million until 2016, representing, in effect, a gradual reduction in the percentage of households reached, given that Malawi's annual population growth lay between 2% and 3% (GoM, 2006). Further, it did not allow for subsidy levels to be adapted to speed recovery following a poor agricultural season. Ultimately, though, the fear among officials in the Government of Malawi was that donors were paving the way for a *phasing out* of the subsidy (Interviews, Dr. Chinsinga, 5 March 2012; Former PS MoAFS, 10 April 2012). Officials at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security were clearly cognisant of the dangers inherent in allowing donors this degree of control over policy making, as active and passive resistance to the policy document had resulted in a three-year delay in its drafting. Observers of the agricultural sector argue that it is no coincidence that donors were able to press this strategy on the government in 2011, when it was at its most vulnerable to donor influence in order to ensure the survival of the FISP and access to at least some foreign exchange (Interview, Dr. Chinsinga, 5 March 2012). It is worth recalling here that the donor community had access to policy-making on the FISP through a number of mechanisms at this point, most importantly the weekly meetings between the Troika of the Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security and the FISP Taskforce as described in Chapter 3 (Interview, DCAFS Coordinator, 9 February 2012).

The underlying debate around subsidies and the role they *should* play in development had only ever been displaced, but never resolved, by the success of

FISP in the first few years. The consensus among those donors who did not oppose subsidies outright, had always been that they should be a short to medium-term intervention to demonstrate the utility of inorganic inputs to smallholders and to provide them with the necessary means to produce sufficient surplus to be able to purchase inputs without subsidy after a few years (e.g. Interview, FAO, 10 February 2012). The lack of "exit strategy" was widely bemoaned by donors. DfID commissioned work on how a phase out from FISP might be possible as part of the FISP evaluations (Chirwa et al. 2011b). The Government of Malawi, on the other hand, had always been clear that poverty in rural Malawi was much deeper than this approach allowed for and that the "low productivity maize trap" could not be escaped so easily (e.g. Interview, Goodall Gondwe, 11 September 2007). It is no coincidence, therefore, that the scepticism of donors towards a subsidy resurfaced at the time that it did and that President Mutharika's close association with the subsidy served to compound their doubts.

The FISP: A Responsive, Populist, or Patrimonial Policy?

Beneath the technocratic and ideological disagreements, much of the conflict over the FISP between donors and government was driven by one underlying dispute, namely whether the policy was responsive to smallholder needs in a way that was appropriate in a democratic setting or whether the policy was populist or even neo-patrimonial, creating patronage networks for the president that he was then able to exploit in order to maintain his political position. There are elements of the FISP that certainly exist for reasons of patronage, such as some of the second round coupon distributions that occurred prior to the 2009 elections and which helped to shore up support for the Democratic Progressive Party and Bingu wa Mutharika himself. Similarly, the awarding of fertilizer import and transport contracts to Mutharika's political financiers served important political purposes (Chinsinga and Poulton 2014). The abuse of the subsidy programme for Mutharika's political ends has gradually become more important in interactions between donors and the government, with many of the discrepancies between donors' ideas of 'best practice' and the realities of the FISP being attributed to political calculations made by Mutharika and his party.

However, the more important question is the extent to which the donor community not only influenced the programme, but what the implications of this influence were with regards to the question of responsiveness versus patronage. DfID, for example, exhorted Malawi's government to relinquish its "patronage system" in favour of more responsive policy-making in its Country Assistance Strategy for 2007 to 2011 (DfID 2007) without seemingly acknowledging the extent to which DfID – although less so than those donors opposed to the subsidy – was in fact obstructing attempts by the Government of Malawi to do just that, by limiting the overall size of the subsidy and ensuring that targeting followed 'best practice'. We have seen above that the Government of Malawi, in particular President Mutharika, repeatedly attempted to break out of the restrictions imposed by the donor community, first by distributing more coupons than had been agreed in negotiations with donors, then perhaps by augmenting the number of farm households registered in Malawi, and finally increasing the level of subsidy (Chinsinga and Poulton 2014). In a situation in which it was very clear that the majority of smallholder farmers in Malawi favoured a universal subsidy, donors clearly stood in the way of the Government of Malawi meeting their demands. In such a context, it is not, therefore, surprising that Mutharika resorted to patronage and corruption in order to secure his political future. The very presence of donor policy-impositions in the sector, consequently, exacerbated the need for patronage-based strategies, as responding to smallholders' demands was not an option.

Finally, the manner in which donors engaged with the FISP over the years illustrated just how far certain donors had penetrated the Malawian state and the degree to which they were willing to breach Malawi's sovereignty. These infringements were justified in a number of ways, including the need to prevent corruption, ensuring 'best practice', and developing rural markets. Despite the best efforts of President Mutharika and his Finance Minister, Goodall Gondwe, the subsidy could not be permanently insulated from donor pressures and interference, particularly during Mutharika's second term. And so the Government of Malawi had to not only relinquish control over the size of the subsidy and its structure, but also the printing of the subsidy's coupons.

Conclusion

The Government of Malawi's response to the problems of the rural economy, in particular the "low productivity maize trap", was driven by two political imperatives: the need to respond to the demands of the median rural voter; and the concomitant necessity of ensuring both the continued support of donors, so that voter demands could be financed, while limiting their involvement as far as possible. Other options for tackling Malawi's food security problems, for example by reviving ADMARC, were politically unfeasible. The donors were initially largely sceptical of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, as it challenged the prevailing orthodoxy on agricultural development, but the tide of opinion turned when the subsidy did indeed make substantial positive contributions to household food security and increased national maize output, even when other factors, such as rainfall, had been accounted for. However, as the subsidy programme became a seemingly permanent feature of Malawi's agricultural policy and Mutharika rendered himself increasingly unpopular with the international community, Malawi's donors became disillusioned with his flagship programme.

At each stage in the subsidy's life cycle, donors were able to exert more influence over the design, structure, and nature of the subsidy than is commonly acknowledged. In the first instance, Mutharika was forced to ignore his parliament's vote for a universal subsidy, implementing instead a targeted programme. Throughout every phase, the donor community reigned in the size of the subsidy by controlling overall budget expenditure, clamping down on the printing of additional coupons and querying the number of rural households registered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. Over the subsidy's lifetime, donors also began regarding the use of coupons as a means of allocating the benefits of the subsidy to political supporters, rather than as an effective, technocratic tool that limited the extent to which the subsidy would undermine markets. As Malawi's economic situation deteriorated, partly as a result of a poor tobacco harvest and the overvalued Kwacha, and partly as a result of the suspension of aid by the majority of its large donors, their influence over the subsidy became even more significant. As a result, the FISP ceased to be a

"Malawian" policy that the government could claim to have meaningful ownership over.

The donor community showed a willingness not only to interfere with the everyday functioning of the Ministry of Agriculture, but also to undermine the independence of policymakers and politicians with regards to the country's most important policy. While exhorting the Government of Malawi to respond to its electorate, the donor community repeatedly stood in the way of a government that was attempting to do just that. That is not to say that the FISP did not also serve patronage needs, but as I have argued these became necessary, in part, as a result of the government's thwarted efforts to respond to electoral demands. While Malawi was a relative success story – experiencing high annual growth rates and Mutharika was perceived to be broadly fulfilling donor standards on 'good governance' – the donor community was willing to tolerate or even provide limited support to his departure from orthodox policy prescriptions. However, as the economy faltered and the subsidy gradually became a permanent fixture of Malawi's policy landscape, the donor community returned to their original, more sceptical stance towards the FISP. The effects of this inconsistent approach to the FISP by donors on smallholder farmers will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

SMART Subsidies, Smarter People

Introduction

Donors', politicians' and technocrats' intentions for the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) are at best half the story as the process of implementation, and thus the structure the subsidy actually takes, is determined by its implementers and beneficiaries. This chapter seeks to trace the manner in which the programme diverges in its implementation from the intentions of its designers and to explore the reasons for this. It is concerned with the question of how the FISP is received by smallholder communities and how its intended aims and design interact with the realities of maize production, risks and livelihoods in rural Malawi. I argue that the FISP did not suit the realities of rural Malawi, and that both the targeted nature of the subsidy and the gradual decline in coupon numbers have put pressure on community structures, maize production efforts, and risk management systems. Smallholders' subversion of the targeting component of the subsidy should, I argue, be seen as a rejection of prevalent donor notions of how rural development should proceed in Malawi and an articulate – if currently unheard – demand for broader assistance to rural livelihood strategies in which production risks are, at least partially, absorbed by the state.

This chapter explores the efforts of smallholder farmers to create a subsidy that suits their needs, regardless of policy makers' endeavours. I begin by outlining the FISP as it was intended to function in the 2011/12 season. I then present my main findings that contrary to FISP design, rural communities refused to implement the targeting component of the subsidy and I outline how and why the farmers in the villages where I conducted my fieldwork chose to subvert the subsidy in this way. The chapter then analyses ADMARC's role in fertilizer distribution and the difficulties smallholders experienced in attempting to redeem their vouchers. Finally, I discuss farmers' assessments of FISP, their implications and the gradual decline in coupon numbers.

FISP: As it is Intended

Before delving into the reality of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme this section outlines how the FISP's administration was conceptualised by technocrats within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS), with assistance and oversight from donors. This will allow for a better understanding of where government priorities differed from those of the donors involved in the FISP and, most importantly, how its implementation – particularly the selection of beneficiaries – differed significantly from that intended by policy makers as a result of smallholder farmer resistance.

Due to the donor pressures described in the previous chapter, the FISP came into existence as a targeted, rather than a universal, subsidy. It is the targeting aspect of FISP that comprised the largest administrative component of the programme for the Ministry of Agriculture, its donors and the Logistics Unit. Initially, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security determined the allocation of coupons per district, after which their distribution among villages was decided by a working group of traditional leaders, extension officers and District Commissioners (Chirwa and Dorward 2013c). The selection of beneficiary households happened at the village level, where poor but land-owning households were supposed to be selected, according to MoAFS guidelines, with preference given to vulnerable households, such as those headed by women or affected by HIV/AIDS. Which households were considered vulnerable was outlined in the FISP guidelines issued annually by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to its Extension Officers who were responsible for sharing this information with Village Heads. What constitutes a vulnerable household varied from year-to-year, reflecting the transient priorities of donors and the government. The mixed focus of the targeting – the productive poor as well as the most vulnerable – is in itself reflective of unresolved questions over targeting (Chinsinga and Poulton 2014).

At the village level, the process of beneficiary selection begins each season with the task of determining the number of village households, in order to ascertain the aggregate total of beneficiaries in any given year. It falls on the Village Heads, in

collaboration with their Village Development Committee[83] and the Agricultural Extension Officer, to register all households in their village.[84] Once the number of coupons a village is to receive has been determined, based on household figures, the Village Head is given the responsibility of organising a participatory process of beneficiary selection. Village Heads are instructed to collaborate with Extension Officers to call a village meeting at which beneficiaries are to be selected according to MoAFS criteria. These meetings are intended to be open-ended and participatory, allowing for all members of the community to be heard so that a consensus may be reached. It once again falls on the Village Head to communicate the names of beneficiary households to Ministry officials, who will then publish the list of beneficiaries. Beneficiaries collect their fertilizer and seed vouchers (commonly referred to as coupons) from the District Agriculture Development Officer in the presence of the Village Head. Having received their coupons, beneficiary households can then purchase fertilizer from any ADMARC outlet within the district at their leisure once the fertilizer has arrived at the point of sale. Seed vouchers, on the other hand, could be redeemed either at an ADMARC depot or a commercial outlet, as a result of donor pressures to involve the private sector.

FISP beneficiaries were entitled to one 50 kg bag of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium mix (commonly referred to as NPK), one 50 kg bag of urea, a 5 kg pack of maize seed and 2 kg of legume seeds (MoAFS, undated; Chinsinga and Poulton 2014). During the 2011/12 agricultural season, which directly preceded my fieldwork in rural Lilongwe and Ntcheu, recipients of FISP vouchers could purchase urea and NPK for the nominal sum of MWK 500 each (approx. US$3) instead of the commercial price of roughly MWK 10,000 (US$ 61) for the NPK and MWK 8,000 (US$49) for the urea. The seed element of the subsidy, on the other hand, had a fixed value of MWK 1500 (US$9). In other words, the seed voucher

[83] Village Development Committees are supposed to define development priorities at village level and provide opportunities for participation in local planning. It is overseen by the Village Head. The problems experienced by Village Development Committees are discussed by O'Neil et al. (2014).

[84] Given that the number of households registered in a given village determines the number of coupons received, this has created an incentive for villagers and their Heads to register as many households as possible. This is one of the possible explanations for the discrepancy in rural household figures held by the MoAFS and the National Statistical Office (NSO) (as discussed in Chapter 6).

allowed beneficiaries to either purchase seed worth MWK 1500 or to use the voucher as part payment for higher value and quality seed (MoAFS, undated). Thus, in total, the FISP package was worth approximately US$120 in the 2011/12 agricultural season.

Subverting the Subsidy

As one might expect, the introduction of a fertilizer subsidy package, worth approximately US$120, targeted at 40% of households in a context in which access to fertilizer both largely determined household food security and was beyond the means of the majority, was likely to provoke conflict. Prior to the introduction of FISP, 70-80% of households were unable to cover their consumption needs through subsistence maize production, largely due to their inability to purchase inputs at commercial prices, particularly fertilizer (Poulton et al. 2006).[85] Of interest here is the manner in which the communities under study chose to deal with this source of conflict, namely by subverting the targeting component of the subsidy. Instead of following Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security guidelines, which had engendered considerable conflict in the past, communities opted to share the inputs they were allocated, turning a targeted subsidy into a smaller but universal contribution to farming households. It must be noted here that my fieldwork is not representative of Malawi as a whole, as it was conducted only in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu. However, there is evidence to suggest that the sharing of fertilizer was widespread throughout Malawi (Dorward and Chirwa 2011a).[86] In fact, fertilizer sharing was so common in both Ntcheu and Lilongwe Rural that it frequently proved difficult to find smallholder farmers who had received a full

[85] Estimates of the percentage of households unable to meet their maize requirements from their own production vary between sources. See Chapter 2.

[86] Sharing has been found to be widespread by the FISP evaluation team led by Andrew Dorward and Ephraim Chirwa. They estimate that 75% of rural Malawian households received one or more fertilizer coupons in the 2010/11 season, with 47% of households sharing in the Southern region, compared to 23% in the Northern region and 38% in the Central region. However, in the course of my fieldwork, I found levels of sharing that were higher (near universal, in fact). My respondents indicated that the sharing of coupons had become more prevalent as the number of coupons declined, which may explain the discrepancy. It is also possible that this was due to the underreporting of sharing to researchers known to be associated with the MoAFS. Dorward and Chirwa argue that coupon sharing is less pronounced in the North due to higher education levels, which mean that recipients are better informed about the FISP's structures. However, the northern region has also consistently received the highest level of FISP packages per capita, perhaps rendering sharing less essential.

set of coupons or households that had not benefitted from the subsidy at all. In several villages it was more common for interviewees to admit to having purchased additional coupons illegally, even though one would expect substantial underreporting of such activities, than it was to find households that had received the full compliment of vouchers for NPK, urea and seeds (e.g. Zalengera and Phalula Villages, Ntcheu District).

While coupon sharing was common to all of my field sites, the manner in which it was organised varied, particularly with regards to the role of the Village Head in managing the process. In some villages, the Head oversaw the distribution of coupons personally to ensure that all households received an equitable (though not always equal) share of fertilizer, while in others the task of managing the fertilizer distribution and resultant conflicts was left to extended families to manage as they saw fit. Before delving into the distribution mechanisms put in place in each village, it is worth noting that the question of how to define a household arose in all villages. Usually this was not too much of a concern to those tasked with registration as incentives were clearly aligned to register as many households as possible, with the hope of receiving more FISP packages. However, a number of issues arose in the course of my interviews with regards to defining a household, including the questions of whether a household was determined by who ate, farmed or lived together, how to deal with divorced couples, or men who had more than one wife, couples who were not yet married or who did not have children.

In the four villages under study in Ntcheu, each community allocated the fertilizer available to the village as a whole in a slightly different fashion. In Phalula, where the Village Head was very concerned about the threats of physical violence he had received when he had followed MoAFS guidelines on coupon allocation, he had set up a system where each household contributed the price of one bag of subsidized fertilizer (MWK 500). He then accompanied those individuals who were officially registered as FISP beneficiaries to the nearest ADMARC depot to supervise the collection of fertilizer. Upon returning to the village all the fertilizer and the seeds included in the FISP package were then distributed equally to all households in his

village – regardless of household size, landholdings or wealth. Accordingly, in this village all households initially received slightly less than one bag of urea or NPK and most of a bag of seeds, approximately 40% of all of the individual elements of the subsidy package. However, bartering and negotiation continued after this initial distribution of fertilizer in an ad hoc fashion and thus some households received slightly more fertilizer, though usually not in excess of 50% of a complete package (Interview, VH, Phalula, 27 April 2012; Smallholder No. 2/06 and 2/08, Phalula, 27 April 2012).

A slightly more complicated system was in operation in Zalengera, where beneficiaries were selected at an open meeting by the village as per Ministry guidelines, and those who were both poor and known to be amenable to sharing were listed as the official beneficiaries. Half of the coupons received in any given year were shared amongst the official beneficiaries, so that these received half a FISP fertilizer package, while the remaining coupons were then shared out among the rest of the village's households at a ratio of approximately one FISP package to three households. Furthermore, all the seed vouchers were given to the poorest 80 households, so that these would each have a complete seed set (alongside 50% of a fertilizer package). The Village Head worked very closely with his Village Development Committee throughout the selection and distribution process so that he could not be accused of favouritism (Interview, VH, Zalengera, 26 May 2012). This system was chosen as it was deemed fair, as no one was excluded, but still allowed for additional assistance to the poorest households as required by MoAFS rules (Interviews, VH, Zalengera, 26 May; VDC Vice Chair, Zalengera, 26 May 2012). In Zaunda village, the Head oversaw the distribution of fertilizer, in collaboration with the heads of extended families, so as to avoid being drawn into decisions around the exact amounts that each household should receive. Each extended family was allocated their share of subsidised fertilizer based on the number of households in the family and the exact distribution was then negotiated within the extended family, depending on household size and wealth. Distribution was nonetheless very close to equitable, with households reporting the receipt of between 30 and 50% of a full FISP package. There were reports of conflict in Zaunda where households could not afford their MK 500 contribution but still

wanted to divide up the FISP package as well as reports of fertilizer theft (Interview, VH, Zaunda, 8 May 2012; Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with Smallholders No, 3/12, 3/13, 3/14, 3/15 and 3/16, Zaunda, 9 May 2012).

Finally, in Lopati village it proved impossible to ascertain the exact nature of the Village Head's involvement in the fertilizer allocation process, as he was clearly nervous to admit to an outsider that anyone in his village shared coupons. While he insisted that there was no coupon sharing in his village, in accordance with MoAFS rules, smallholder farmers in Lopati were more open about the fact that sharing meant that everyone in the village was allocated at least some fertilizer. It appeared that the process of fertilizer sharing was much less institutionalised than elsewhere, meaning that some households did not benefit from the FISP and others did not share their FISP package. While both categories of household were rare, this resulted in higher levels of conflict between households than elsewhere. There was also some anecdotal evidence to back up the observation made by Chirwa and Dorward (2011a) that poorer households shared their fertilizer more frequently and with more households than comparatively better off families, as villagers were left to barter and arrange their own exchanges (Interview, VH, Lopati, 17 April 2012; Smallholder No. 1/11, Lopati, 19 April 2012; Smallholder No. 1/32, Lopati, 24 April 2012).

The fact that all of the villages under study operated a more-or-less institutionalised system of coupon or fertilizer sharing for reasons that will become apparent below, may give the impression that programme implementation was harmonious and that FISP generated little conflict within communities. While there did appear to be a surprising degree of consensus regarding the necessity of coupon sharing among households, this did not mean that the implementation of FISP always ran smoothly or that there was no conflict over the manner in which coupons were distributed. In particular, the lack of information on changes in the programme's structure, administration, size and scope led to considerable dissent within communities and gave rise to rumours of corruption and misappropriation. A great deal of discontent over the design, implementation and execution of FISP was expressed openly by virtually all

interviewees, while other complaints were related mainly through the circulation of uncorroborated rumours about persons from outside the immediate community as well as gossip about prominent members of the village. These conflicts around the allocation of coupons and the rumours prompted by FISP are relevant to the political implications of the policy and so are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Why Share Subsidies?

When discussing the issue of targeting with smallholder farmers, their most common response to my questions regarding their decision to share inputs was "We are all poor in this village. Do you see anyone here who is not poor?" (e.g. Interviews, VH, Zaunda, 8 May 2012; VH Phalula, 27 April 2012). This was the rationale presented for ignoring the targeting criteria specified by the MoAFS and choosing to distribute subsidised inputs more equally across households, without regard for household or farm size, and without considering relative need. As discussed in the section on rural livelihoods post-liberalisation in Chapter 2, there is some evidence to suggest that this statement is indeed correct. Moreover, the percentage of households who are deficit producers and unable to cover their household's consumption needs – a very reliable poverty indicator in rural Malawi – exceeds the availability of FISP coupons. It is also true that the vague targeting criteria specified in the MoAFS guidelines for allocating FISP vouchers correspond to the majority – and in some cases all – of the households registered in a given village (MoAFS, undated).[87] Nonetheless, this does not explain why people decided to share subsidised fertilizer rather than allocating it to the *poorest* members of their community or according to some other criteria. There are two principal reasons for the widespread refusal to identify only the poorest households as FISP beneficiaries, both of which are linked to the political economy of maize consumption and production in rural Malawi. The first is the nature of the "low productivity maize trap" which makes the purchase of sufficient quantities of fertilizer at commercial prices extremely risky and, more

[87] The Guidelines for the 2009/10 FISP specify only that the programme should benefit "a resource poor Malawian… that owns a piece of land" with special consideration being given to households with elderly, disabled, or HIV positive members, and female/child/orphan headed households (MoAFS, undated, p. 6).

importantly, unaffordable to all but a small minority of smallholder farmers. The second is the precarious nature of maize production and marketing, which has rendered even comparatively wealthy households susceptible to the risks of inadequate maize production, and thus, food insecurity.

Previous chapters have described the liberalisation of agricultural markets in Malawi in the 1980s and 1990s, concluding that the process had resulted in a deepening of poverty and an increase in food insecurity. My respondents in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu substantiated those conclusions and felt ADMARC's absence particularly keenly. Specifically the absence of floor prices for producers and ceiling prices for consumers, which limited pan-seasonal and pan-territorial fluctuations in food prices (e.g. Chilowa 1998; Kydd and Christiansen 1982) were still lamented in 2012. In the words of one elderly smallholder farmer

> ADMARC was like a granary – when you had plenty of maize you could store it there, and when you ran out of maize later in the season, you could take it out again (Interview, Smallholder No. 2/22, Phalula, 1 May 2012).

By serving as a 'granary', ADMARC buffered smallholder farmers against price shocks, allowing for higher levels of investment, for example in production enhancing technologies, such as inorganic fertilizer, or the accumulation of livestock (Chirwa et al 2005). This was particularly crucial in shortfall years, when ADMARC prevented the otherwise inevitable distress sales of valuable productive assets. As another respondent explained:

> When I was young, up until Bakili [Muluzi] became president, ADMARC had maize all the time. You could rely on it, even in the worst years. You could always go and buy cheap maize. Now if you go to ADMARC you will find no maize (Interview, Smallholder No. 2/03, Phalula, 27 April 2012).

Reflecting the policy debates on the absence of well-established markets in rural Malawi, private traders oftentimes retained the monopsony previously enjoyed by ADMARC, and exploited it in order to maximise their trading profits. This was repeatedly highlighted by my interviewees:

> Our maize has become worthless; we take it to market and we can no longer buy anything for it, not even salt, sugar, soap. And in the hungry season, we cannot afford to buy maize at all (Interview, Smallholder No. 2/34, Phalula, 3 May 2012).

Thus, as one would expect from earlier discussions, households in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu who were dependent on maize purchases during the 'hungry season' or those who depend on maize sales directly after harvest to raise cash have seen their livelihoods and assets eroded since the process of liberalisation began in the early 1980s. Thus, the general decline in living standards that resulted from liberalisation and put further pressure on the already food insecure smallholder population (e.g. Chirwa et al. 2005) had also increased the percentage of net deficit producers in Ntcheu. The category of farmers who consider themselves poor, as well as those who fell below the national poverty line, was therefore much larger than the 40% targeted by the subsidy. The difference in the ability of households to achieve food self-sufficiency would nonetheless provide some means by which to determine FISP beneficiaries. The subsequent sections attempt to explain why people nonetheless chose to share coupons more widely rather than, for example, allocating vouchers only to those households whose maize production lasted for less than six months of the year.

Production Risks

The price volatility and unreliable nature of Malawi's maize markets continues to affect the dynamics of production and food security. Each of the four groups of maize producers and consumers – namely poor consumers, net deficit producers, net deficit sellers and surplus producers – identified by Poulton et al. (2006) are adversely affected by the absence of state marketing structures, albeit in slightly different ways. Poor consumers who do not produce any maize at all make up a very small percentage of Malawians, as even urban residents usually maintain a small plot of maize. Nevertheless, this group's real income and asset base is eroded by price increases, especially in years of poor harvests. Conversely, they benefit from low maize prices at the beginning of the agricultural season (ibid.). However, it is worth noting here that all of the households I interviewed cultivated at least a very small piece of land and thus produced some maize for personal

consumption. The only exceptions were individuals who were unable to cultivate for reasons of mental or physical ill health, in which case they considered themselves 'dependents' of other households, rather than landless maize consumers, and when they benefitted from subsidised fertilizer they contributed this to the communal family or household farming enterprise (FGD, Smallholder Nos. 2/09, 2/10, 2/11, 2/12, Phalula, 28 April 2012).

Net deficit producers, the majority of rural households, are forced to depend upon the market to buy additional maize when prices are at their highest during the 'hungry season' (e.g. Interview, Smallholder No. 1/14, Lopati, 19 April 2012; Poulton et al. 2006). This group's maize production serves to fulfil mainly subsistence, rather than commercial, goals meaning that even though the application of fertilizer is highly valued by these households, this remains an unattainable aspiration as the money required for the purchase of inputs cannot be raised through maize sales. As the majority of smallholder land is given over to the production of maize for the duration of the one annual growing season, the only other widely available source of income is *ganyu* (piece work) (FGD, Smallholder Now. 4/06, 4/07, 4/08, 4/09, Zalengera, 19 May 2012). According to National Statistical Office estimates approximately 50% of household income is derived from agricultural activities (NSO 2005), while the majority of the shortfall is made up for through *ganyu* (Dorward 2006). Thus, other sources of income represent a small percentage of overall household income. The problems involved in earning sufficient income for the purchase of fertilizer through *ganyu* work are discussed below.

Net deficit sellers – a subset of the above group – not only fail to cover household subsistence maize needs, but are also forced into distress sales directly after harvest, when maize prices are at their lowest and frequently substantially below production costs. These households are, thus, often forced to sell their maize below production cost only to have to buy food later in the season at inflated prices. It was common for my interviewees to report having sold at least some of their maize, including at the beginning of the season when prices were low, as they had no other means to cover necessities, such as school and hospital fees, despite

knowing that they would not have enough maize to last until the next harvest (Interview, Smallholder No. 3/50, Zaunda, 14 May 2012). It is difficult to determine to what extent this contributes to food insecurity, as generally smallholders did not keep records and so were only able to give vague answers such as "we sold a plate from time-to-time when we needed some cash" (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/09, Lopati, 18 April 2012).

Surplus producers, on the other hand, saw their ability to increase or intensify production through the use of inputs undermined by price volatility and the extremely risky nature of maize production. As maize prices fluctuate, the use of yield-increasing technologies, such as fertilizer or hybrid seeds, becomes increasingly economically risky as, in a particularly good year, smallholders may be forced to sell their produce below cost. Furthermore, even the 20 or 30% of households able to achieve food self-sufficiency – generally the wealthiest of households in a village – are able to produce larger quantities of maize because they have access to larger plots of land, rather than through the intensification of agricultural production (Interview, Smallholder No. 3/18, Zaunda, 9 May 2012).

Finally, it is worth noting that households would need to produce very large surpluses in order to earn enough money to purchase the amount of inputs provided to FISP beneficiaries (Interview, Smallholder No. 3/38, Zaunda, 10 May 2012). The monetary value of the two bags of fertilizer received by FISP beneficiaries prior to the 2011/12 agricultural season was substantial – MWK 18,000 (US$110) – even for the wealthiest of rural households. In the 2011/12 agricultural season MWK 18,000 was equivalent to between 260 and 720 kg of maize, depending on whether the maize was sold at the beginning or the end of the agricultural season (price data from FEWS Net 2012).[88] This represents a large surplus in an area where average crop yields have ranged from 1.5 and 2.5 MT/ha since the introduction of FISP and average household landholdings are less than 0.8 ha. Given that the average household of five people would consume

[88] Reliable price data is not available for Ntcheu for this period, so calculations are based on Mitundu (Lilongwe Rural) prices. These calculations do not account for storage losses, which are estimated to be as high as 30% in southern Africa (Ricker-Gilbert and Jones 2012)

approximately 700-800 kg of maize per year, such a household would not be able to reliably produce adequate surpluses to purchase fertilizer at commercial prices every year, especially considering that any maize sold would also need to cover other essential household expenditures (Derlagen 2012). Purchasing small amounts of fertilizer, by the plate or bucket, at a premium from traders was, however, widely reported (Interview, Smallholder No. 3/38, Zaunda, 10 May 2012). The only exceptions were smallholder farmers in Lopati who had access to *dimba* land, where they were able to cultivate crops, usually potatoes or tomatoes, profitably in the dry season and so were sometimes able to purchase larger quantities of fertilizer (Interviews, Smallholder No. 1/03, 1/04 and 1/06, Lopati, 17 April 2012).[89]

It is worth noting too, that all households, but especially deficit households, were deterred from producing cash crops, such as tobacco or cotton, by price volatility, which could leave households unable to purchase sufficient quantities of food in exchange for the income earned through the sale of cash crops (Interview, Smallholder No. 2/02, Phalula, 27 April 2012). Due to price instability, "there are no farmers that can say, 'OK, I'll grow tobacco so I can buy maize for my family'" (ibid.). Clearly, the heavy reliance on maize by individual households entails a concomitant increase in the aggregate vulnerability to production shocks.

The assertion by my interviewees, therefore, that "we are all poor here" in relation to the targeting element of the FISP is not only a reflection of the depth of poverty in the villages where I conducted my fieldwork, but also expresses the difficulties experienced by the majority of farmers in purchasing fertilizer at market rates, whether they would officially be classified as "poor" or not. In interviews, resentment or a sense that sharing was "unfair" to poorer farmers was more frequently expressed regarding civil servants and Village Heads who were accused of malfeasance in the process of distributing the coupons, as explored in Chapter 8.

[89] *Dimba* is the name used to refer to land next to rivers or streams which either retains sufficient humidity or can be easily irrigated during the dry season (Peters 1996).

Interdependence and Maize Production – Ganyu and Livelihood Strategies

As we have seen above, households dependent on maize purchases during the 'hungry season' or those unable to store their maize harvest for a full twelve months, have seen their livelihoods eroded since the process of liberalisation began in the early 1980s. As a result, the majority of Malawi's smallholder farmers became increasingly reliant on other sources of income to ensure access to food throughout the year. Mid-level households, in the absence of a substantial fertilizer subsidy programme, usually harvested enough food for 5 to 6 months while the poorest often grew as little as one month's worth of food on their land (Fahy-Bryceson and Fonseca 2005).

The traditional system of *ganyu* provides an income-generating activity or safety net for these groups for a large part of the year. In contemporary Malawi, any form of short-term agricultural labour is referred to as *ganyu*, however the National Statistical Office defines it as:

> short-term labour hired on a daily or other short-term basis. Most commonly, [it consists of] piecework weeding or ridging on the fields of other smallholders or agricultural estates. However, *ganyu* labour can also be used for non-agricultural tasks, such as construction and gardening (NSO 2004).

However, it is argued by Fahy-Bryceson, Fonseca and Chinsinga that traditionally *ganyu* was a wage-labour arrangement built around reciprocal relationships of support between wealthier, labour-scarce households, and poorer, food-scarce families (Fahy-Bryceson and Fonseca 2006; Chinsinga 2004).

The extent to which *ganyu* has retained the qualities of a reciprocal support relationship, following liberalisation and the chronic and acute food shortages of the 1990s and early 2000s, has become a contentious issue among those studying the institution. There are two broad perspectives on the nature of *ganyu* contracts in this period, with anthropologists such as Englund (1996, 1999) emphasising the patron-client nature of these labour relationships as they allow households to cement their relationships and to meet their obligations to kin and community. He writes:

> The ability to employ ganyu labour for extensive periods, for other than sporadic and menial tasks, empowers the employer to engage in patronage. Therefore, by selecting his or her ganyu labour, the employer generates, and reproduces, valued relatedness. In the moral discourse of borderland villagers, different labour arrangements are distinguished according to the extent to which the employer is willing to assist the employee in return for the latter's labour. In effect, patronage grants personhood to its subjects (Englund 1996: 167).

Other studies have emphasised that as *ganyu* relationships came under pressure from liberalisation, wage rates declined and in some cases the institution became increasingly exploitative during the 1980s and 1990s. This was particularly so due to the prolonged stress of famine and food insecurity that continued until the implementation of the FISP in 2005/06 (e.g. Peters 1996a; Fahy-Bryceson and Fonseca 2006). One study estimated the decline in *ganyu* wage rates to have been as much as 50% between 1982 and 1990 as the supply of labour (i.e. those relying on *ganyu*) increased (Whiteside 2000). On the upside, however, Chirwa and Dorward (2013c) report an initial increase in *ganyu* wage rates following the introduction of the FISP (in 2005/06) and again between 2009 and 2011. Furthermore, Ricker-Gilbert (2011) finds a positive correlation between levels of subsidy received in a community and *ganyu* wage rates. Despite these new pressures, *ganyu* had clearly retained its basis as an institution embedded in social relationships and expectations of reciprocity.

There is considerable evidence that it has become an institution upon which an increasing percentage of smallholder farmers were forced to rely (Chinsinga 2005). All of my interviewees who were unable to produce enough maize to be self-sufficient reported relying on *ganyu* to cover the majority of their food deficit. They also supported the argument made by Chinsinga (2004) that, contrary to the pre-liberalisation era, the poorest households are no longer those who are forced to rely on poorly remunerated piecework, but those who are sick, elderly or disabled and are not able to reduce their food deficits by resorting to this institution.

My interviewees frequently complained of the difficulty of earning sufficient income from *ganyu* to cover food shortfalls and stated that wage rates were too low, usually, to be able to generate sufficient surplus from this kind of labour to purchase inputs or other household necessities in excess of food for a hand-to-mouth existence. This was, of course, aggravated by the large increases in the price of commercial fertilizer beginning in 2008/09, initially as a result of world market price increases and subsequently the devaluation of the Kwacha (e.g. Interview, Smallholder No. 3/27, Zaunda, 9 May 2012). A number of farmers reported that they had found it difficult even to generate the MWK 500 required per bag of subsidised fertilizer through *ganyu*, while also covering household consumption needs during the 'hungry season'. In the words of one farmer:

> In the past we were able to buy maize without problems [from *ganyu* earnings] but after the coming of multiparty [in 1994] we are having problems to access maize. If you don't work hard in the field you will kill your children with hunger (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/39, Lopati, 25 April 2012).

Nonetheless, despite the decreasing returns to *ganyu* labour, a substantial proportion of the income-generating activities available to net deficit producers was created by the small percentage of households able to generate maize surpluses and frequently as a result of a sense of social obligation and a means of assisting poorer households (Chinsinga 2004; Takane 2008). While food production had become very expensive, due to the high commercial price of fertilizer, even wealthier households were forced to reduce their input usage and paid lower wages as these were usually paid in kind and in maize, than when they were able to increase their fertilizer usage through access to subsidised inputs.

Thus, an increase in production by comparatively wealthy households creates employment opportunities and strengthens the very limited safety nets available to net deficit producers, i.e. the majority of households. As a result, the fertilizer subsidy, if shared among households, ensures poor households have access to *ganyu* opportunities later in the season. Interviewees frequently justified sharing subsidised fertiliser equally at the village level, regardless of differences in relative wealth in the following manner:

> We are also being helped out with the coupons that we share with other households, as we are then able to do *ganyu* for those people who have food [because of the coupons they received] to get maize and other crops for consumption, as payment, to eat with our children (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/25, Lopati, 21 April 2012).

Furthermore, while the institution of *ganyu* has certainly came under considerable pressure since liberalisation, and has been subject to decreasing wage rates throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, its reciprocity and its role as a means of supporting poorer members of the community appears to still be felt by those who provide *ganyu* opportunities. The most common retort expressed by interviewees when challenged on the question of whether they should be eligible for fertilizer coupons despite the fact that they might be slightly better off than other members of the community was

> Are we not members of this community too? If we do not receive our share of coupons, should we still participate in community development? We still have to share our food [with those looking for work] (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/28, Lopati, 23 April 2012).

Both those households relying on *ganyu* to meet their maize needs as well as those who provided these labour opportunities, therefore, saw the sharing of subsidised fertilizer as a means of cementing the reciprocity of the institution.

Village Heads frequently complained of the divisive nature of coupon targeting, which left those who did not benefit feeling that they were no longer members of the community. This, in turn, led them to withdraw from activities that they were expected to participate in, such as community-organised development work, and generated resentment when they were nonetheless expected to share their harvest with other members of the community by providing *ganyu* opportunities. Village Heads either reported this type of protest in previous years, before sharing had been introduced, or voiced fears that this would happen, if they followed targeting guidelines (Interviews, VH, Zaunda, 8 May 2012; VH, Phalula, 27 April 2012; VH, Zalengera, 26 May 2012). Consequently, as Englund argues, differences in maize harvests among households created obligations to provide *ganyu*

opportunities for less fortunate households but this "generosity does not mean throwing things away. It 'places' the thing in the recipient's memory so that when the recipient has objects of value they will return to the original giver" (Englund 1996:145). This in turn meant that differential access to subsidised, and thus virtually free, fertilizer resulted in the expectation that these windfalls be shared.

Sharing to Mitigate Risk

The programme itself introduced a considerable element of risk for maize producers as a result of the fluctuating number of coupons, which meant that in the absence of sharing, households could not be sure if they would benefit from one year to the next. This not only renders graduation from the programme impossible, but as one smallholder explained, potentially leaves households in a precarious position:

> To be home means having something to eat, every day. So they are suggesting that this year we should be given [fertilizer coupons], the next year we should not receive coupons. Eating one year, not eating the next year – how could that work? (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/16, Lopati, 20 April 2012).

The FISP was designed to alleviate the constraints faced by smallholders in accessing inorganic fertilizer and improved seeds, thereby allowing them to break out of this poverty trap. However, the increases in maize production – at the national and household levels – could not be maintained in the absence of a large subsidy programme. This was due to the fact that increases in maize production were, in large part, consumed by households, rather than sold in order to generate cash for future fertilizer investments. Thus households that benefited from FISP – whether they were among the exceptional households that received a full package or among the majority that shared their subsidy package – experienced this not as a productive investment that provided the household with monetary returns that may be invested in subsequent seasons, but as a 'gift' that, at best, allowed them to produce enough maize for one season:

> In Bakili's time people were dying of hunger or living with hunger. If you had come here then, we wouldn't have been able to talk to you with a powerful voice, but now we are

> able to talk to you like this because we can produce food from the coupons. But without the coupons, we would again be hungry. It would not last (Interview, Smallholder No. 4/37, Zalengera, 24 May 2012).

Following President Mutharika's death in April 2012, this same fear was expressed frequently as grief for him:

> Now we are crying for the coupons, we the elderly and the needy. Are the coupons going to continue? [If not] then we will die of hunger! (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/11, Lopati, 19 April 2012).

In a situation in which the annual allocation of fertilizer vouchers per village was extremely unreliable and targeting criteria differed each year, distributing fertilizer equally was also a means of ensuring a predictable supply at the household level.

As discussed in Chapter 6, at its height, FISP targeted between 66 and 87% of households in 2007/08 but only between 36 and 58% of households in 2011/12. While it was not possible to establish the exact number of coupons received in the villages under study in Ntcheu or Lilongwe Rural in the seasons prior to 2011/12, the reduction in coupons was keenly felt and was consistently expressed as the primary concern regarding the programme. However, in a typical village, the reduction in coupons since 2007/08 would mean that an additional 30% of households would no longer be receiving any FISP benefits, if they adhered to the targeting criteria. In a situation of widespread sharing, the decrease in fertilizer access at the household level would be much less drastic; at worst representing only a decline from a full package to 40% of the intended set of benefits. This reduction was sufficient, however, to increase the levels of conflict over FISP allocations, as we will see in the final chapter.

In other words, the need to share subsidised fertilizer was also dictated by the need to ensure its predictability. A system where villages selected the poorest or "neediest" beneficiaries anew every year would be subject to very large fluctuations in the amount of fertilizer received at the household level due to the declining number of coupons. It would also prove extremely difficult to select

beneficiaries as those who had received coupons in the previous season, and therefore produced adequate amounts of maize, would no longer qualify amongst the poorest at the time of the next meeting to select FISP beneficiaries. Sharing inputs equitably allowed for a more predictable supply of fertilizer – just under half a full package in the last couple of seasons in the case of my interviewees in Ntcheu. This also explained why even poor smallholder farmers were fairly magnanimous with regards to sharing with comparatively wealthier households. If they were willing to share the coupons that they had officially received, they could rely on assistance from other households should they not be chosen among the official beneficiaries in subsequent years. Sharing had become so ubiquitous and institutionalised that in some cases my interviewees claimed that they preferred *not* to be named as the official FISP beneficiaries to save themselves the considerable inconvenience of going to ADMARC to purchase their fertilizer:

> We are just thankful when our names are not on the list [of FISP beneficiaries]. Then we don't have to go to ADMARC to buy [inputs] and face the problems in the queue – overcrowding and waiting for hours – to buy fertilizer (Interview, Smallholder No. 4/23, Zalengera, 23 May 2012).

The Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation

The problems that plagued FISP from the viewpoint of smallholder farmers did not end with the targeted nature of the subsidy or the insufficient number of coupons. Instead, they also experienced difficulties accessing subsidised fertilizer once coupons had been awarded. ADMARC, theoretically, had clearly delineated responsibilities with regards to the delivery of FISP: it served as the only outlet that sold subsidised NPK and urea, in exchange for fertilizer coupons and a payment of MWK 500 for each 50 kg bag (approx. US$3). Alongside privately owned agrodealers, ADMARC also sold subsidised seeds. The FISP Logistics Unit carried the responsibility for organising the transport of adequate quantities of fertilizer – equivalent to the number of authentic fertilizer coupons distributed in the area expected to be served by a particular outlet – to the market in time for the planting season. Thus, ADMARC was the primary locus of interaction between FISP beneficiaries and the state, following some interaction with the Agricultural Extension Officer charged with registering beneficiaries in conjunction with the Village Head. The experience of smallholder farmers at these ADMARC outlets is,

therefore, important in mediating their relationship with the state in the context of FISP and important to the interpretation of the policy and its political importance.

Chaos has been widely reported at ADMARC depots throughout Malawi, not just in Ntcheu and Lilongwe Rural, and appeared to be a common phenomenon. In both districts, smallholders and local leaders considered ADMARC markets that did not experience logistical difficulties during the FISP sales period the exception rather than the norm. The problems experienced by smallholders looking to buy their FISP package were, in large part, the result of beneficiaries' concerns that the subsidised fertilizer at their ADMARC depot would run out before they purchased their inputs – a problem that was not uncommon, despite the best efforts of the Logistics Unit (Interview, Logistics Unit, 13 March 2012). FISP beneficiaries, consequently, arrived in large numbers as soon as ADMARC announced that its markets were open for fertilizer purchases in an effort to source their inputs before stocks ran out (Interview, Smallholder 2/23 and 2/25, Phalula, 1 May 2012; Smallholder 1/05, Lopati, 17 April 2012; Smallholder 4/28, Zalengera, 24 May 2012; Smallholder 3/47, Zaunda, 14 May 2012).

In addition, it was not uncommon for fertilizer to arrive at ADMARC outlets relatively late in the season, when smallholder farmers were acutely aware of the fact that they should, ideally, already have applied fertilizer to their crops for the best returns to their investments (Interview, Extension Agent, TA Chadza, Lilongwe Rural, 17 March 2012; Smallholder No. 1/28, Lopati, 23 April 2012). The overcrowding reported at ADMARC outlets was such that it was not uncommon for beneficiaries to spend several days and nights queuing before they could make their purchase (Interview, Smallholder 1/14, Lopati, 19 April 2012). In some cases, the overcrowding and panic at ADMARC depots was said to have been so bad that people were hurt or even killed in the queues:

> Sometimes women are pushed [while queuing for fertilizer]. Sometimes they fall down with their children strapped on their backs. One woman, from a village near here, lost her child in a stampede (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/07, Lopati, 18 April 2012).

A small number of interviewees, in Phalula and Zaunda village, reported having had to travel large distances, at great cost, in order to purchase their subsidised inputs as their nearest ADMARC outlet had run out of fertilizer before they had been able to purchase theirs, either because they had been delayed in going to ADMARC or because they had had to give up their place in the queue. While they were not able to recall the exact amount that they had spent on transport costs, the expenditure meant they lost a great deal of the value of the subsidy and some of their group had opted to sell their fertilizer vouchers in order to buy smaller quantities of fertilizer at commercial rates instead (Interviews, Smallholder No. 2/23 and 2/24, Phalula, 1 May 2012; Smallholder No. 3/13, Zaunda, 9 May 2012). The ability to access fertilizer at all and the chaos, discomfort and insecurity of having to spend several days queuing for their turn at the ADMARC outlet was, as a consequence, a near-universal concern.

The long queues and over-crowding at ADMARC markets also provided an opportunity for corruption to its employees. ADMARC managers reported particular difficulties with the temporary staff that were hired only for a few weeks to assist with the FISP period and who, therefore, sought to maximise their income while they were in ADMARC's employment (ADMARC Manager, Kambilonjo, 26 April 2012). While ADMARC's managers in Ntcheu vehemently denied the accusations of corruption levelled against their permanent staff – as one might expect – smallholders reported that it was impossible to procure the FISP fertilizer package without bribing staff in the region of MWK 500 to 2000, depending on a variety of factors, including the quantity of fertilizer left in stock and the length of the queue, or spending several days queuing for fertilizer at the risk of missing out altogether (FGD with Smallholders No. 1/03, 1/04, 1/05, 1/06, Lopati, 17 April 2012; No. 3/14 and 3/15, Zaunda, 9 May 2012). Higher status individuals who had the necessary influence to make effective complaints, on the other hand, were ushered to the front of the queue without needing to bribe ADMARC staff. As the Zaunda Village Headman explained:

> As a Village Headman, they don't make me pay bribes or wait in the queue [at ADMARC]. When I go there, they just

> say “come in, you should buy, you should not be waiting in the queue” (Interview, VH Zaunda, 8 May 2012).

The majority of my interviewees, however, were not so fortunate and, as few of them could afford to pay the necessary bribes, they described having to wait for several days, frequently sleeping outside depots in order not to lose their place in the queue (Interview, FGD Smallholder Nos. 3/22 to 3/32, Zaunda, 9 May 2012). As we have seen, the situation was so chaotic at many ADMARC outlets that non-beneficiaries were understandably relieved not to have to endure the process of purchasing fertilizer where sharing had become an institutionalised system.

Not only did this situation create opportunities for corruption, it also provided FISP beneficiaries with a front row seat to observe those who were able to bribe ADMARC staff and purchase fertilizer, sometimes in large quantities, from their local outlet. Unsurprisingly, many of those who were able to afford the payment of bribes to jump to the head of the queue, the price of which frequently exceeded the cost of the subsidised inputs themselves, were identified by interviewees as being from outside of the area and, possibly, not smallholder farmers at all (FGDs, 1/18, 1/19, 1/20, Lopati, 20 April 2012 and 3/27, 3/23, 3/30, Zaunda, 9 May 2012). Some interviewees expressed the conviction that these individuals must be fertilizer traders who had purchased coupons from smallholders who could not afford the MWK 500 per bag of fertilizer, those who had been forced into selling their coupons as their local ADMARC outlet had run out of fertilizer or those who were rumoured to have acquired their coupons as a result of their connections with employees at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (FGD, Smallholder No. 2/28, 2/29, 2/30, 2/31, 2/32, Phalula, 3 May 2012).

While it was not possible to establish the truth of these stories, corruption was blamed by FISP beneficiaries for their difficulties in accessing the fertilizer at this stage in the process. As one FISP recipient argued:

> We wonder [about fertilizer shortages at ADMARC, because] when producing the coupons they are supposed to produce a bag of fertilizer per coupon. So why does the fertilizer get finished whilst people still have coupons? (Interview, Zaunda Village Head, 8 May 2012).

Undoubtedly, corruption did occur at ADMARC depots in the days and weeks when subsidised fertilizer was sold, as was evidenced by the fact that one ADMARC Manager admitted to finding it difficult to discipline temporary staff and to prevent short-term security employees, who were often in charge of the queuing process, from taking bribes (Interview, ADMARC Manager, Kambilonjo, 26 April 2012). However, it is worth noting that many of these incidences of supposed corruption could be explained by the logistical difficulties experienced by an understaffed and underfunded institution that had been chosen by government to implement the programme in an effort to ensure its continued presence in rural areas and in order to retain control over rents generated by FISP. According to the Logistics Unit, the vast majority of incidences of ADMARC running out of inputs were the result of inadequate fertilizer deliveries and, frequently, the need to stagger deliveries for logistical reasons. As these decisions were poorly communicated or not trusted by smallholders, beneficiaries, alarmed by the possibility of not being able to redeem their coupons, travelled further afield consequently making it virtually impossible to supply each market with the correct quantity of fertilizer (Interview, Logistics Unit, 13 March 2012).

While nowhere near as widespread as the decision to share fertilizer coupons, where ADMARC outlets served villages with exceptionally active traditional leadership structures, the problems of overcrowding and corruption at markets had been largely resolved in 2011, when fertilizer was being sold for the 2011/12 season. In these areas, this had usually come about when several Village and Group Village Heads sought the advice of or complained to their Traditional Authority (TA), who was able to negotiate with local ADMARC management on their behalf.[90] For example, as a result of complaints from villagers and their Village Heads in Phalula and Lopati, their TA was successful in preventing overcrowding and ensuring that local smallholders were given preferential access to fertilizer by collaborating with ADMARC management (Interview, TA Mphando,

[90] While each village has a traditional leader, known as the Village Head, a group of villages comes together under the leadership of a Group Village Head. A Traditional Authority, usually referred to as the TA, is responsible for a much larger area. Ntcheu, for example has nine TAs. The official role of Village Heads is discussed in further detail in Chapter 8.

Kambilonjo, 16 April 2012). This was done by announcing the dates on which each village would be permitted to buy its allocated quota of fertilizer well in advance of the fertilizers' arrival, thus staggering the arrival of FISP beneficiaries at the Kambilonjo ADMARC market. Anyone who brought their coupons to the outlet on a day not allocated to their village, or someone who was not from the area serviced by the outlet, would be refused the opportunity to purchase their fertilizer from that particular market until all villages in the area had had an opportunity to complete their transactions (Interview, ADMARC Manager, Kambilonjo, 26 April 2012).

This, of course, could only work where Village Heads were willing to collaborate with their TA and where they took the time to confirm the identities of all of their villagers at the ADMARC market on their allotted day (Interview, ADMARC Manager, Sharpevalle, 25 May 2012). Limiting the number of people who were permitted into the grounds of the ADMARC depot on any given day obviously reduced the time spent queuing and the more general problem of overcrowding and its associated hazards. However, just as importantly, it gave ADMARC staff the time and space required to verify the authenticity of the coupons received, and to turn away any individuals who may have purchased their coupons from farmers in other areas – at least until all local beneficiaries had received their allocated fertilizer (Interview, TA Mphando, Kambilonjo, 16 April 2012). For FISP beneficiaries, not only did this considerably reduce the amount of time they spent queuing, but it also provided some assurance that they would be able to access their fertilizer allocations, even though this system could not, of course, guarantee against late or insufficient fertilizer deliveries (Interview, VH, 17 April 2012).

While this innovative solution to the problem of overcrowding seemed to have been very effective where it was implemented, this was the exception rather than the norm, as it appears to have been an initiative of the Traditional Authorities and Village Heads whose communities were served by the Kambilonjo ADMARC. It seems that in most outlets in Ntcheu, at least as far as TAs and smallholder who had travelled further afield were aware, long queues remained typical with many people reportedly still sleeping outside ADMARC gates in 2011 and 2012 for

several days in order to ensure that they were served or paying bribes to speed up the process.

Evaluations of FISP

Despite the problems inherent in FISP's design and implementation – many of which remained unresolved in 2012 – there was no doubt in the minds of the smallholder farmers I interviewed that the programme had an overwhelmingly positive impact on their maize production, and therefore their household's food security and livelihoods. Even the very small number of interviewees who had not managed to acquire any subsidised fertilizer at all saw some indirect benefits accrue to their households in the form of gifts of food from neighbours and relatives or the increased ease with which they were able to find *ganyu* opportunities.[91] Additionally, the sharing of coupons allowed communities to restructure the subsidy to better fit rural realities, even if this did not eradicate conflict caused by the programme. Initial responses to questions about FISP and its impacts both at the household and community level were thus, almost without exception, effusive and resonated with gratitude for the 'gift' of virtually free fertilizer. The response of one Lopati villager was typical of the assessment of FISP's impact on local livelihoods:

> Since Bingu was elected president, we have never slept on an empty stomach, unlike in the past when Bakili [Muluzi] was our president. Because of the cheap fertilizer our yields are much higher, we can eat and we don't suffer from the diseases that come with hunger (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/38, Lopati, 25 April 2012).

Nonetheless, the sense of powerlessness, with regard to the administration and problems of the FISP, was frequently palpable:

> If you have been given a coupon, you don't ask questions. We just receive what we have been given. A gift is a gift. We don't ask questions (Interview, Smallholder No. 4/37, Zalengera, 24 May 2012).

[91] Dorward and Chirwa (2013c) provide statistical evidence for this observation, having found that both the availability of *ganyu* opportunities and its wage rates increased as a result of the FISP, in all regions of Malawi between 2005/06 and 2010/11.

This sense of powerlessness and frustration with the programme was a result of the gradual decrease in coupon numbers beginning with the 2008/09 season, which according to smallholders was beginning to impact their yields and household food security (Interview, VH Zalengera, 26 May 2012). It also reflects the extent to which relationships with the state were marred by distrust and initiatives were seen to be the result of the personal largesse of individual politicians, usually the president. The reasons for this are further explored in Chapter 8. The gradual decline in the number of subsidised fertilizer packages, coupled with population growth, led to fears that the programme would slowly be eroded until it resembled Muluzi's unpopular Starter Pack of the late 1990s, which saw households receive only 15 kg of fertilizer, 2 kg of hybrid maize seed and 1 kg of legume seeds (Harrigan 2008).

The lack of information available to smallholders on the future of the policy, naturally, curbed enthusiasm for the programme, but also fomented a considerable degree of conflict within communities. It had also led to vocal demands for the programme to be restructured. Crucially though, this debate about how the subsidy should be structured could not be conducted in any meaningful fashion that would influence policy decisions in the Ministry of Agriculture. Instead, the sharing of coupons should be read as a forceful rejection of the logic behind the FISP, that individual households should be selected to benefit from the programme for several years and that they would then be able to graduate from the programme. Nevertheless, the decision to subvert the subsidy through a more-or-less communal decision to share subsidised inputs should not be confused with satisfaction with the decision to share. Sharing inputs was a means by which to express dissatisfaction with the subsidy, its size and structure, and above all else a necessity.

Many of the smallholders interviewed were also acutely aware of the fact that rather than solving the difficulties inherent in maize production in rural Malawi, through the development of more reliable markets and widely-available affordable fertilizer, FISP was simply creating a dependence on fertilizer subsidies as beneficiaries were unlikely to "graduate" from a programme that – once shared

– provided comparatively little fertilizer to each household. In less memorable ways, many smallholders echoed the sentiments expressed by Zalengera's Village Head that "FISP will not let us die, but it will not let us live as farmers either" (Interview, VH Zalengera, 26 May 2012). The fear of a further decline in coupon numbers and the effect that this might have on maize production levels and food security were ubiquitous. The reduced quantity of fertilizer since 2007/08 was felt in 2012:

> The harvest has changed [decreased] in all our households. But especially in those who cannot buy extra fertilizer, those who just wait for the coupon (Interview, Smallholder No. 4/44, Zalengera, 26 May 2012).

And the viability of sharing coupons, particularly if the trend in declining coupon numbers continued, was widely questioned:

> How can you [continue to] share your fertilizer with a friend? When NPK is for growth and urea is for the crops and you have a big field? (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/09, Lopati, 18 April 2012).

Finally, it is worth noting that far fewer complaints were made regarding the ability and ease of purchasing subsidised seeds, partly because these could usually be sourced relatively easily through private sector suppliers, meaning that queues for them could be avoided. However, this was also indicative of the fact that they were valued a great deal less than the far more expensive fertilizer component of the FISP, as seeds could be sourced comparatively easily and cheaply, should a household not be able to keep seeds from the previous harvest. Finally, while hybrid maize seeds were valued for their increased yields and ability to withstand drought, they were often rejected on grounds of taste (e.g. Interview, Smallholder No. 1/17, Lopati, 20 April 2012). As discussed above, this also explained the government's relative willingness to allow private sector participation in seed distribution, while not being willing to relinquish fertilizer distribution to the private sector.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to answer the question of how FISP's design interacted with the realities of maize production in rural Malawi and to shed light on how its implementation differed from the processes intended by technocrats within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and by those donors who were actively involved in programme design, such as DfID, Norway and Ireland. Undoubtedly, the most important divergence between the technocratic intentions of FISP's designers and the programme's beneficiaries was the issue of targeting. While the political difficulties of targeting were evident in the unclear criteria of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, smallholders had even greater reservations. These reservations appeared to be so great that in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu, coupon sharing was almost universal and in some cases so institutionalised that the only tangible difference between the group of beneficiaries and others was the onerous task of having to travel to ADMARC to purchase fertilizers. The decision not to allocate fertilizer to the "poorest" 40% –or for that matter according to any communally-defined targeting criteria – is perhaps surprising when viewed from the technocratic position of the donors who insisted upon it. However, it is the logical outcome of the realities of maize production. The most frequently tendered explanation was "we are all poor", an expression both of the depth of poverty and the risky nature of maize production in rural Malawi. The majority of Malawi's rural households are "poor" in that they are at risk of food insecurity in the absence of a reliable parastatal marketing organisation coupled with the near-universal dependence on rain-fed agriculture. Moreover, given the extremely volatile nature of maize prices, investments in fertilizer at commercial prices were frequently uneconomical. Finally, the reciprocal nature of *ganyu* came under considerable strain as a result of the declining rural living standards in the 1980s and 1990s, and the decision to share subsidised fertilizer represented a concerted effort to protect the institution, and the benefits it generated, particularly for the poorest members of the community who depended on it for survival. Thus sharing fertilizer mitigated risk by sustaining labour relations that were couched in social norms of reciprocity and by improving the predictability of coupon availability year-on-year.

The Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation would, at first glance, appear to have a relatively simple role in FISP's implementation as it is tasked simply with the distribution and sale of subsidised fertilizer. However, it not only lay at the heart of donor-government disputes over how the sector should be run, but it was also the organisation through which President Mutharika controlled the distribution of the programme's rents to his political allies as well as maintaining the state's presence in the agricultural sector. As a result of ADMARC having been partially dismantled from the 1980s onwards, it frequently struggled to deliver on its relatively simple role of distributing and selling fertilizer, with outlets experiencing considerable overcrowding and, as a result, corruption. In a number of localities these problems were resolved by traditional leaders in collaboration with ADMARC management, but the majority of outlets continued to experience considerable difficulties.

The discrepancy between FISP as planned and FISP as it is implemented underlines the extent to which the subsidy did not respond to smallholder needs and demands. As we have seen, the majority of smallholder farmers were positively inclined towards the subsidy programme, given the impact that it had on maize production and livelihoods. However, the debates implicit in the subsidy's subversion as well as those being voiced more openly by smallholders who would prefer a restructuring of the subsidy were not being held in any structured manner and were certainly not being heard. This resulted in a palpable sense of powerlessness, expressed in a variety of ways, including gratitude towards President Mutharika who was cast as bestowing a gift of fertilizer on smallholder farmers and anger towards those who benefitted illicitly from the subsidy, such as ADMARC staff. The political implications of smallholders' experiences and views, and thus the political implications of FISP's dependence on donor support, are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 8

"Where Have All the Coupons Gone?": The Political Implications of Donor Influence on the Farm Input Subsidy Programme

Introduction

> As in a chemical process, macro-difference emerges, therefore, from the interaction of many small different factors and mechanisms. These, in turn, are only loosely linked and cannot be depicted by a single principle, for example neopatrimonialism (Bierschenk 2010: 16).

The second section of this thesis has, thus far, considered the influence donors have had on the Farm Input Subsidy Programme's (FISP) design and looked at how the intentions to craft a very specific type of subsidy played out on the ground. In order to evaluate what the political implications of aid dependence are in Malawi's agricultural sector, and specifically of the FISP, this chapter turns its attention to analysing how the FISP affects relationships between smallholder farmers, political parties and representatives, 'traditional' village leaders and, finally, the state, as represented by ADMARC and the extension service. The programme, as one would expect, both by virtue of its size and importance to rural livelihoods as well as its design, has had significant impacts on a number of rural institutions. In addition, interactions with local state representatives have structured expectations both of state institutions and political leaders. When they have not been met by the FISP, it has undermined trust in the state's ability to deliver on the promises of political leaders. The problems of representation in rural Malawi and the conflicts between smallholders and political actors extend beyond the effects of the FISP, but I argue that FISP is central to the absence of public debates in which politicians are able to represent the demands and aspirations of their constituents. As a result of the many small reactions set in motion by the FISP, the institutions of the Village Head and the presidency have been strengthened, while those of local councillors and parliament have been undermined. This chapter returns to the themes first raised in Chapter 4, namely representation in an aid-dependent democracy, the manner in which political

leaders attempt to remain responsive and the strategies to which they resort when they are no longer able to react to these demands.

The first task, then, is to look at the different relationships of representation with which smallholders in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu engaged and how these were affected by the FISP. The second section discusses national-level institutions, that is to say political parties, members of parliament and the institution of parliament itself, and argues that part of the reason for their ineffectiveness is that any meaningful contribution that they might make to fertilizer policy has been usurped by donors. This is followed by an analysis of state-society relations as mediated by ADMARC and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security's bureaucracy in the administration of FISP, which shows how the last remnants of trust in this institution were eroded by accusations of corruption. Finally, I make the argument that these dynamics, when combined, had the effect of concentrating power in the hands of the president.

Local Relationships of Representation

Chiefs and Other Traditional Leaders

Village Heads are among the most important actors in the FISP's delivery chain and the programme had contradictory effects on the institution, both strengthening and undermining their position. The manner in which chiefs' roles changed and the tensions this created is reflected in smallholders' accounts of their interactions with their Village Heads in relation to the FISP. Smallholders in both Ntcheu district and Lilongwe Rural related gossip and rumours about their views on the subsidy, its political importance and the manner in which various aspects of the fertilizer subsidy, which provide compelling insights into relationships of representation were frustrated and undermined by the programme. The rumours recorded during my fieldwork represent the desire by comparatively powerless actors in the policy process – resource-poor maize farmers – to hold their leaders to account, to make sense of the conflicting information and experiences that characterised the implementation of the subsidy programme, as well as to express their understandings of the forces at play. This section begins by discussing the importance of rumours and gossip for shedding

light on relationships between chiefs and their communities, before discussing the historical role of chiefs and finally their interactions with the FISP.

The main academic debate surrounding the interpretation of rumours in social contexts is around the question of whether they serve simply to provide individuals or communities with explanations of poorly understood experiences in the absence of reliable information, or if they are an expression of social realities and relationships. Touré Keita, for example, argues that where there is a paucity of information on political decision-making, the desire to make sense of the situation sparks intense conjecture which eventually creates alternative sources of information that people come to rely on to make sense of their surroundings, giving rise to a "radio trottoir" (Keita, 2007). Or in the words of Mwelwa Musambachime, "rumours are often fuelled by a desire for meaning, a quest for clarification, or the search for a logical explanation of an event; they are more prevalent in times of crisis" (Musambachime 1988: 201).

However, while the absence of concrete information allows for rumours to flourish, it fails to explain the persistence of rumours and their content. The content of rumours serves a purpose beyond filling a perceived information void. Amy Kaler, in her study of the rumours of sterility that frequently accompanied immunization campaigns in Northern Nigeria and Cameroon, concludes that rumours persist where they can explain "conjunctions between day-to-day experiences and larger historical processes" and may, in fact, be a means for articulating conflicts and constituting resistance to the subjects under discussion (Kaler 2009: 1714). Furthermore, it is useful to conceive of rumour as revealing underlying power imbalances, as a means for those who perceive themselves to be powerless to voice their criticisms and provide alternative interpretations to the dominant discourse (Lomnitz 1995; White 1993). Rumour may also provide insight into the dynamics of social transformations during times of far-reaching change (Tanner 1978), such as the reordering of rural livelihoods and relationships that has accompanied the FISP. Rumours regarding the FISP and the agents charged with its implementation therefore shed light on the sense of powerlessness among Malawi's smallholder farmers, elucidate their

understanding of who retains power over the FISP, and express both the conflicts and resistance spurred by this policy.

Finally, it is important to distinguish between gossip and rumour. While rumours allow communities to make sense of profound social and economic changes and to express their ambivalence towards such transformations, gossip fulfils a slightly different purpose. Here the concern is a certain type of gossip, within the specific context of asymmetric power relations and of smallholder farmers attempting to ensure that they are able to access subsidised fertilizer. Thus, gossip, defined as "evaluative social talk about individuals" serves to hold individuals to account by, essentially, revealing their transgressions to a wider community (Di Fonzo and Boardia, 2007: 19). The threat of gossip and subsequent judgement or even the threat of social exclusion and the desire by individuals to avoid such censure, is not only a tool by which communities may exert pressure on members who are perceived to be transgressing social norms but a means to encourage members to self-police their behaviour. It therefore functions both to punish those who have transgressed community norms and to prevent unwanted behaviour. As such it is an important tool for the FISP's relatively impotent beneficiary communities who have no other means of holding members of their community accountable for their role in the large-scale agricultural policies that are transforming livelihoods and social structures in their communities (Schoeman, 1994; cited in Foster, 2004). In addition, gossip serves the purpose of allowing communities to express their frustrations in a relatively non-confrontational fashion by attributing socially unacceptable behaviours to those who they wish to sanction without challenging them directly (Foster, 2004). As discussed in Chapter 7, food security and livelihood strategies are based on reciprocal relationships that need to be maintained and cultivated which render aggrieved individuals or groups even less likely to speak out, particularly where they are especially dependent on these relationships.

Before looking at the rumours that circulated about chiefs, as well as some of the malicious gossip that was disseminated about individual chiefs, we need to first look at the role of chiefs both in implementing government policy and as

''guardians of traditional norms'' (Senjonyo 2004; cited in Chinsinga 2006: 258). Tony Woods argues that traditional authorities were weakened, in some cases to the point of extinction, by invasions and the disruption caused by the slave trade and migration, prior to the establishment of colonial authority over the area that is today Malawi (Woods 1990). By 1912, however, colonial authorities had re-established or strengthened the institution in order to administer Nyasaland through 'indirect rule'. In many cases, chiefs were appointed amidst uncertainty over who should hold the position and "the exact pedigree of the people who ascended to chieftaincies and headmanship remained obscure" (Woods 1990: 266). The fact that many appointees also held comparatively influential positions in the colonial administration is indicative of the fact that the process mainly served the colonial administration's search for reliable collaborators (ibid.). Despite this, they appear to have been considerably less despotic than in other countries in the region. Individual contact with the state was mediated through the institution of chieftaincy, as well as more senior chiefs, which at the local level represented the state's executive, legislative and judicial powers (Eggen 2011).

After independence, Hastings Kamuzu Banda retained the institution of the chieftaincy with very little change in their roles, as he drew much of his legitimacy as president from associating himself with 'traditional' institutions and 'traditional' Malawian culture. However, like all institutions under Banda, chiefs were subordinate to the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and their position became conditional upon their support for the party and Banda himself, thus limiting their independence and authority (Eggen 2011). The introduction of multi-party democracy in 1994, once again saw their roles evolve due to the confluence of a number of factors. These included the reduced presence and influence of the MCP in daily life, the pruning of the civil service under structural adjustment and a concomitant decline in the esteem enjoyed by public servants (ibid.). Officially the traditional leader in a Malawian village is called the Village Head, the person responsible for a group of villages is the Group Village Head and above this sits the Traditional Authority. It is common in Malawi, however, to refer to the Village Head as "chief" and I use the terms interchangeably.

In contemporary Malawi, therefore, Village Heads are "in charge of such tasks as conflict resolution, crime prevention; they preside over various ceremonies, keep population registers […] and play a critical role in the moral restoration of society" (Chinsinga, 2006: 271). Two recent developments have drawn Village Heads further into the state, increasing the ambiguity of their position. The first is the absence of local councillors in Malawi since democratisation, except for a short period between 2000 and 2005. This has brought an expansion of traditional leaders' roles to include the administration of development projects and an increase in their respective powers, as they are automatically members of the otherwise elected village development committees. They have been able to exploit this relative power vacuum to defend and strengthen their dominant positions in rural Malawian politics (ibid.). The second development is the depoliticised view of the donor community that chiefs can serve as non-partisan grassroots actors to organise government and development interventions in the absence of effective local government. This has allowed chiefs to bolster their authority based on their gatekeeper roles with regards to resource access and by appropriating the language of development (Fokwang 2005). To donors, the supposedly non-partisan nature of Village Heads has increased their appeal as development actors, given the politicisation of service delivery to communities in Malawi since the introduction of multi-party democracy (Muriaas 2009).

In this context, then, it is unsurprising that Village Heads were accorded roles in the implementation of the fertilizer subsidy programme. Since 2008/09, they have been charged with the administration of undoubtedly the most controversial aspect of the programme: organising the participatory selection of beneficiaries at the village level. As discussed in Chapter 7, they are intimately involved in all aspects of the fertilizer programme at the village level, which leaves them open to accusations of theft and corruption (such as when registering households, transmitting household names to the MoAFS, and finally distributing coupons) (e.g. Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Smallholder Nos. 3/28, 3/29, 3/30, 3/31, Zaunda, 9 May 2012; MoAFS, undated). Furthermore, they have in many cases taken on unofficial roles, some of which may be just as important as their official roles, including organising and overseeing the sharing of coupons, resolving any

conflicts that might occur during the process, and assisting their communities with purchasing subsidised fertilizer at the local ADMARC depot when problems of overcrowding or insufficient fertilizer supplies occurred (e.g. Interview, VH, Lopati, 17 April 2012; ADMARC official, Sharpevalle, Ntcheu, 25 May 2012).

The ambiguity of the chiefs' new roles in the context of the fertilizer subsidy was expressed in the ubiquitous rumours that circulated about the violence that had been inflicted on chiefs who had been found to be involved in the misappropriation or misallocation of coupons in *neighbouring* villages. The most frequent rumour involved a local chief, from a village a few miles away, who had been found guilty of not distributing all of the coupons allocated to his[92] village and retaining some coupons for his own personal use, sale, or exchange. In these rumours the Village Head was confronted by a group of young men after dark for stealing their coupons, and then beaten, resulting in the Village Head losing his teeth (e.g. Interviews, Smallholder No. 1/31, Lopati, 23 April 2012; Smallholder No. 2/22, Phalula, 1 May 2012; Smallholder No. 3/40, Zaunda, 11 May 2012). While the story appeared perfectly plausible, and incidents of violence against chiefs in the context of the FISP were occasionally reported in the national press (e.g. Daily Times, 2013), the village that everyone was talking about could not be identified, even though all the interviewees who related this story insisted that it had occurred in the same Traditional Authority area, and never more than a few miles away (e.g. Interview, VH, Phalula, 27 April 2012). Senior chiefs, civil servants and agricultural extension officers were all familiar with the story, but none were able to give details of where this incident had occurred (Interviews, Agricultural Extension Officer, Lopati, 26 April 2012; VH, Zalengera, 26 May 2012; ADMARC official, 25 May 2012).

Frequently, interviewees relayed gossip about their own Village Headman, stating that they believed him to be involved in the misallocation or misappropriation of coupons, and that therefore he needed to be concerned about the threat of

[92] While there are some female Village Heads in Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu, rumours surrounding violence inflicted upon chiefs as a result of coupon allocation disputes were always about male Village Heads.

violence from members of the village community. For example, one smallholder in Lopati village reported that "some people think it's the Village Headman's fault [that there are not enough coupons] and that he is going to see war" (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/16, Lopati, 20 April 2012). Again, there was no evidence that the Village Head in question had actually misappropriated or misallocated coupons in 2011/12: the number of people who reported receiving coupons and the number distributed to the village according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security database were the same.[93] Of course, given the widespread practice of sharing fertilizer and coupons, it may have been possible for the Village Head to have kept back a small amount of fertilizer without this necessarily being traceable several months later. Of all the smallholders interviewed, none admitted to having received additional coupons or fertilizer allocations from the Village Head. Naturally, due to the fact that fertilizer coupons were so highly valued the fear of community sanctions would quite possibly have prevented more people from revealing how or if they had accessed coupons other than through the community-organised distribution process.

Notwithstanding the fact that it is virtually impossible to verify whether any embezzlement or preferential distribution of fertilizer coupons had, in fact, taken place, the proliferation of rumours and gossip on this subject is interesting in its own right. Gossip about Village Heads and possible malfeasance on their part, was "evaluative social talk" (Di Fonzo and Bordia, 2007: 27) and ensured that Village Heads were aware of the fact that their subjects were keeping a close eye on the process of coupon distribution and, frequently, that they were not happy with the unexplained decline in the numbers of coupons in recent years. Village Heads were certainly aware that these conversations were taking place and interpreted them as efforts to hold them to account. Zaunda village's Headman was frank with regards to these exchanges:

> These things [about changes to the coupon system] you need to tell the people openly. If you don't do that, if you

[93] As discussed in Chapter 5, it is possible that the chief in question had benefitted from the second round coupon distribution in previous years, leaving villagers suspicious. However, by the time of my fieldwork in the agricultural season of 2011/12, these additional, undocumented distributions had largely come to an end (e.g. Chinsinga and Poulton, 2014).

> don't tell them, that is when you hear [gossip and rumour about] other Village Headmen being beaten up, being slapped or even being booted out (Interview, VH, Zaunda, 8 May 2012).

The gossip about chiefs also reflected the lack of information and transparency on the part of the government in clarifying who should receive coupons and how many coupons each village should expect. It became apparent during my interviews that a significant minority of smallholders were not fully aware of the process that was to be followed to allocate coupons. The most frequent complaint, especially in Lopati village, was that while all households were registered for the programme (the first step in beneficiary selection), far fewer coupons were distributed several months later (e.g. Interviews, Smallholder Nos. 1/16, Lopati, 20 April 2012; Smallholder Nos. 1/22, 1/23, 1/24, 1/25, Lopati, 21 April 2012). The fact that the programme was intended to reach only 40% of households, and that these were to be selected by villages themselves at an open meeting and in a participatory fashion was not universally accepted as the real reason for there being fewer coupons than households. One interviewee told me "we just receive the coupons, we don't know who to blame [for the small number of coupons], who brings the problems…" (Interview, Smallholder No. 4/41, Zalengera, 25 May 2012). The lack of information and its frequently contradictory nature created an environment in which rumours and gossip about chiefs and their role in coupon distribution flourished. As we will see below, this was compounded by interactions with other actors in the FISP delivery chain.

However, these rumours about Village Heads are not simply the result of a lack of information. Instead, they also reflect the extremely difficult situation that this targeted subsidy had created for village leaders. The smallholder farmers I interviewed expected their leaders not to favour some households over others in the execution of their role as Village Head and to ensure that the benefits of any government programmes, such as the FISP, were equally distributed to all members of the village. These expectations were at odds with Village Heads' new role as facilitator of a participatory community process – as conceived in the FISP design – that would select 40% of village households only. The Zaunda Village Head expressed the dilemma he faced with regards to coupon allocation using the

metaphor of a father responsible for ensuring that all of his children are fed: "If I have one lump of nsima and two children, I cannot give one child the one lump, while the other one remains hungry" (Interview, VH, Zaunda, 8 May 2012).

It is worth noting that while Village Heads were not the only people accused of favouritism, misappropriation or general malfeasance in the allocation of coupons, rumours about civil servants, employees of ADMARC or agricultural extension officers differed. Such individuals are not deemed responsible for the welfare of smallholder farmers in the same manner. The rumours that do circulate around these other actors in the subsidy programme, and what they reveal about attitudes towards the bureaucracy and the state, are discussed further below.

The proliferation of rumours about chiefs and other traditional leaders are also indicative of the increasing importance of this institution in the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. While many of my smallholder interviewees were quick to cast aspersions on the village chief or to relate rumours about what could happen to chiefs found to be embezzling coupons, many smallholders also reported instances in which their Village Head had been able to assist them by advocating on their behalf for a greater allocation of coupons to the village. For example, the Village Headman in Lopati successfully lobbied for an increase in coupons for his village during Mutharika's first term. According to a number of interviewees in Lopati, he initially took their complaint to the District Agricultural Development Officer (DADO) when the list of beneficiaries was published and far fewer households were listed as recipients than the village had been asked to select as beneficiaries. Having been told that there was nothing the DADO could do as this was a problem with the computer, the Village Head travelled to the Ministry in Lilongwe where he received additional coupons for his village (Interviews, Smallholder No. 1/23 and 1/05, Lopati, 17 April 2012; VH, Lopati, 17 April 2012). It was not possible to ascertain with any degree of certainty during which agricultural season this had happened, but interviewees agreed that it had occurred at a time when coupons were not quite as scarce and that it had been during Mutharika's first term. Most likely this means that Lopati's Village Head travelled to Lilongwe at a time when coupons were still distributed in a second

round which largely served the purpose of ensuring that President Mutharika maintained good relationships with Village Heads in exchange for their political support (see chapters 5 and 6). Furthermore, Village Heads also saw their authority and influence expand as they were charged with conducting negotiations with ADMARC staff and Traditional Authorities on behalf of their subjects.

Thus, it is clear from the rumours, gossip and stories that the villagers of rural Ntcheu tell that the institution of the Village Head has been profoundly shaped by the FISP policy. The initial significance of the FISP for relationships between smallholders and their Village Heads was to increase the power of the institution. This had the additional benefit for Mutharika of shoring up the political support of chiefs, which undoubtedly helped his re-election campaign. While the second phase of the FISP, during Mutharika's second term, did not see a complete erosion of that increase in power, it did result in the institution coming under considerable pressure as coupon numbers dwindled. This changing nature of chiefs' roles in the FISP contributed to the overall sense of powerlessness of both chiefs and smallholders and, as we will see below, contributed to undermining the effectiveness of Members of Parliament and parliament itself with regards to representing smallholder demands.

Local Councillors

Malawi's decentralisation efforts, which began with the introduction of multi-party democracy, had come to a standstill between 2005 and the tripartite elections of 2014. With regards to the FISP, local councillors were most notable for their absence, which further bolstered the influence of chiefs, who had been deployed to fill the gap by both government and donors. Decentralisation was first discussed in the Malawian context as the process of political liberalisation gained ground and was included in the constitution, which came into effect in early 1995. As in many countries it seems that this was largely a donor-driven exercise that had been initiated for ideological reasons, based on the belief that it would strengthen local, participatory democracy as a means for facilitating development, rather than a detailed understanding of local politics in Malawi (Chinsinga 2008).

As Diana Cammack writes "[d]ecentralised systems designed with donors for post-transitional states are … part of the larger governance agenda" and the argument for these institutions is that they will lead to a rapprochement of citizens and their government, thus improving public service delivery and result in more rapid poverty reduction (Cammack et al. 2007: 5).

It has become clear in the last twenty years, since the introduction of multiparty democracy in Malawi, that domestic interest in local democracy has been weak. Local government elections have been held only once, in November 2000, for a five year term for the country's 848 local councillors in 28 district assemblies, for which national turnout was a mere 14%. By the time their terms expired in November 2005, 35% of local councillors had found their position so untenable that they had resigned. This was largely due to the fact that the respective roles of elected councillors of the district assemblies and the administrative secretariat under the District Commissioners were insufficiently clarified and certainly remained unclear to the protagonists themselves, frequently resulting in an impasse (Chinsinga 2008; Cammack et al. 2007). Central government expressed its lack of interest in local councillors by failing to provide the funds for their relatively modest salaries of US$25 a month. Finally, as in other parts of the continent, Village Heads and traditional authorities sought to undermine councillors as they saw their own power base threatened, frequently citing 'tradition' to justify their positions. Councillors, on the other hand, argued that chiefs lacked the legitimacy conferred by democratic elections (Chinsinga 2008: 89).

President Mutharika, as seen in Chapter 5, lacked a strong rural support base in 2005 when local elections were scheduled, and so he prevented these elections from taking place through a mixture of politicking and prevarication that contributed towards alienating the donors who had agreed to finance them. MPs, District Commissioners who had become the *de facto* heads of district administrations, and Village Headmen made no concerted efforts to protest against this state of affairs either (Chinsinga 2008), and local elections were only finally held in May 2014 as part of the presidential and parliamentary elections.

Instead of holding local elections between 2005 and 2014, the president decided to institute a Community Development Fund, to be administered by District Commissioners and MPs. Members of Parliament are said to have greatly favoured this new policy for another reason, namely the fact that local councillors had the potential to become a threat to an MP's re-election chances, given their ability to work more closely with communities, in theory with adequate resources from central government to affect real change. Thus, postponing local elections permitted for the centralisation of power, rather than its devolution, and allowed for the strengthening of chiefs' positions through the FISP without competition from local councillors (Chinsinga 2008; Tambulasi 2011).

National Relationships of Representation

Political Parties and Members of Parliament

In the run-up to Malawi's tripartite elections, the Head of the European Union's delegation and Chair of the Common Approach to Budget Support (CABS), Alexander Baum, opened a workshop of the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) with a challenge to the institution to increase its efforts at educating voters. He was quoted by the Maravi Post:

> Everyone focuses on elections as if they solve all the problems. Elections are overestimated. Of course, Malawians will get the leaders they deserve, but the fact remains that the multiparty democracy has not delivered. The parties are a reflection of the values, sentiments and behaviour of the people. Politicians behave according to the expectations. It is paramount to change the behaviour from the grassroots level; otherwise the multiparty democracy will not deliver for the people (Maravi Post, 22 February 2014).

This statement was certainly intended to be controversial in order to stimulate debate at the NICE workshop. However, it also sheds light on the underlying approaches to Malawian politics that inform EU, and many other donors', views. It is clear that Baum saw the absence of institutionalised political parties and Members of Parliament as detrimental to multiparty democracy and that he believed that these had not evolved as the electorate had not held its leaders to account and failed to demand a departure from patronage-based politics. In Baum's view, the neo-patrimonial nature of Malawian politics was to blame for the

fact that "multiparty democracy has not delivered". He did not consider the possibility that the institutionalisation of political parties required a coherent ideological and programmatic basis, and that the donor community may have played an important role in undermining its emergence.

The neo-patrimonial view of politics in Malawi is widespread not just among the donor community but also among researchers involved in policy-making in Malawi. Cammack et al (2010), for example, argue that Malawi's politics since independence have been characterised by neo-patrimonialism, which has at times been more or less 'developmental'. Cammack and her colleagues, like Baum, conceive of voting in Malawi as an exercise in accessing resources, rather than holding leaders to account or even a choice between policies or political parties. She writes:

> MPs are better placed to distribute resources locally (jobs, development projects, relief aid, etc.) if they belong to the ruling party and their leader is Malawi's president. Voters know this and cast their votes accordingly (Cammack et al. 2007: 19).

The advantages of being close to the president and associated with his party leads to the frequent changes of affiliation among Members of Parliament that Harri Englund has termed the "politics of chameleons" (Englund 2002). This has been particularly pronounced since Bingu wa Mutharika left the United Democratic Front in 2005 to set up his Democratic Progressive Party and then after his death when large numbers of MPs rushed to join Joyce Banda's People's Party.

While Cammack and Englund differ in their analyses of Malawian politics, they agree that the problem, at least in part, lies with the lack of institutionalised parties able to elicit loyalty from politicians and followers. As argued by numerous scholars, political parties are essential to the functioning of a representative democracy as they are the vehicle through which open competition between political philosophies and ideologies becomes possible, and act as a means of holding politicians to account and as a means of recruiting new political talent (e.g. Smith 2003).

However, in the absence of differentiation between parties along ideological or programmatic lines, it becomes extremely difficult either to interpret an election result in these terms or for voters to hold their Members of Parliament to account in the manner desired by Baum. As Kings Phiri writes

> [i]t is a sad, open fact that the political parties we have in Malawi are weakly grounded ideologically and preoccupied with a narrow range of national issues. … the political parties surveyed were all preoccupied with governance or human rights issues, and spoke the same developmental language (Phiri 2000: 73).

Phiri's observation that governance and human rights issues dominate the agenda of Malawi's political parties reflects the extent to which donors circumscribe political debates and options. In the context of agricultural policies and the FISP, political representatives are unable to act on the views of smallholders forward in parliament and elsewhere, as a result of donor influence over these policies. Despite this, I argue, smallholders do attempt to hold their Members of Parliament to account, contrary to Alexander Baum's assertion that the problem lies with their low or misguided expectations of their leaders.

Political Parties and Fertilizer Policy

Given the importance of fertilizer policy to household-level food security and livelihoods, one would expect fertilizer policy to be one of, if not the, most important political fault line along which parties differentiate themselves and along which they seek to recruit party members and garner votes. Substantial differences do in fact exist regarding fertilizer policy preferences, and they galvanise and divide opinion. Food security and agricultural policies, thus, have the capacity to win or lose votes for political parties. This was abundantly clear in the focus group discussions I held, where opinions were split between those who were in favour of a universal subsidy – even if this meant a much lower subsidy level in terms of percentage of commercial price – and those who would give preference to a smaller contribution to the price of fertilizer even if this meant a continuation of sharing and access to smaller quantities of fertilizer overall

(Interviews, VH, Zalengera, 26 May 2012; Smallholder Nos. 4/06, 4/07, 4/08, Zalengera, 19 May 2012).

The primary distinction was between those smallholders who were comparatively better off and so confident that they would be able to afford fertilizer at a lower subsidy level – perhaps 50 to 75% – and were willing to pay this premium in order for the subsidy to be expanded to include all households (e.g. Interviews, Smallholder Nos. 1/03 and 1/05, Lopati, 17 April 2012). Poorer households who did not feel that they would be able to afford more than the current level of MWK 500 were in favour of a continuation of FISP, with an expansion to include all households in order to avoid the targeting aspect. Unsurprisingly, these same households would prefer this to mean access to a full FISP package per household, but even they preferred seeing a smaller universal subsidy, if this meant avoiding the process of targeting and the concomitant conflict (e.g. Interviews, Smallholder Nos. 3/06 and 3/07, Zaunda, 8 May 2012). Targeting was only countenanced, and even then many were still very unhappy with the thought, if it was two-tiered and the poorest households continued to receive a package similar to the FISP, while others would be able to purchase subsidised fertilizer at lower subsidy levels. Interestingly, the poorest households were often opposed to this as they felt it was unlikely that such a system would not fall victim to a similar logic as the FISP targeting process (FGD, Smallholder Nos. 4/19, 4/20, 4/21, 4/22, Zalengera, 23 May 2012).

Not all questions of fertilizer structure revolved around the price, with many smallholders expressing their frustrations about their dependence on the FISP and, in essence, the control it had over their farming activities. This was not only in relation to the reliability of the FISP, in terms of fertilizer distribution at ADMARC (as discussed in detail below), but also in terms of being able to decide how much fertilizer to apply to their fields and to which crops. In essence this can be understood as a call for a subsidy that allows for the purchase of varying quantities and types of fertilizer, at a subsidised price, and a subsidy that is stable and constant from year to year (e.g. FGD Smallholder Nos. 4/39, 4/40, 4/41, Zalengera, 25 May 2012).

But despite the importance of these conflicting views, such distinctions manifested themselves only peripherally in party manifestos and during the campaign period in the run-up to the 2014 elections. In contrast, during the campaign for the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections fertilizer policy was quite widely discussed on the campaign trail due to the long period of declining maize productivity and food insecurity, with differences emerging between the two main parties. As discussed in Chapter 6, the United Democratic Front and the Malawi Congress Party each attempted to attract voters with their fertilizer policy, and the difference in policy reflected the regional powerbase of each party. While the differences between the two parties' proposals remained significant, neither party was able to see its plans to fruition as a result of donor-imposed limits on fertilizer policy. The upshot of this was that political parties were seen to be irrelevant to the process of fertilizer policy-making (e.g. FGD, Smallholder Nos. 4/29 to 4/38, Zalengera, 24 May 2012; Smallholder No. 1/16, Lopati, 20 April 2012; Smallholder Nos. 2/02 and 2/03, Phalula, 27 April 2012). My interviewees reported that their MP was now irrelevant to the FISP and debates around its structure and that he had been of no consequence to fertilizer policy since he had ceased to distribute coupons in the area after the 2007/08 season (e.g. Interviews, Smallholder Nos. 1/16, Lopati, 20 April 2012; 1/32, Lopati, 24 April 2012).[94] Many smallholders said that they would vote for "whoever has the best [fertilizer] policies" (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/02, Lopati, 17 April 2012) in the parliamentary elections of 2014, while also being cognisant of the fact that the only person who had any real decision-making power over fertilizer policy was the president (e.g. FGD Smallholder Nos. 1/03, 1/04, 1/05, 1/06, Lopati, 17 April 2012; 2/13, Phalula, 28 April 2012; 3/44, Zaunda, 11 May 2012).

The consequences of the irrelevance of political parties and the inability of Members of Parliament to represent their constituents' wishes regarding fertilizer

[94] Members of Parliament did not have an official role in distribution of coupons at any point in the FISP's lifetime, but were frequently tasked with "second round distributions", as detailed in Chapters 5 and 6.

and agricultural policies was highlighted by Mutharika's death in April 2012. Within a few days of Joyce Banda's inauguration as president a number of MPs crossed the floor to join her People's Party, including all five MPs from Ntcheu district (Zodiak Malawi 2012). Defections were so commonplace that President Peter Mutharika lamented that "[b]efore the death of Bingu wa Mutharika, we had 144 MPs under DPP in parliament. However, only 31 remained after the demise of Bingu" (Nyasa Times, 2014). When I asked my respondents for their interpretation of these events one respondent answered that

> He [the MP] has done a good job by crossing the floor to PP because Joyce Banda seems promising. As of now those people who were not in coalition with Bingu, she has started to befriend them. That is a good sign that she is going to help us (Interview, Smallholder No. 4/27, Zalengera, 24 May 2012).

This view was by no means unusual, and the consensus view among my interviewees was that, in the absence of being able to effect policy-making, an MP's role was to ensure that the constituency remained on the right side of the president and that they would therefore benefit from these resources as a result (e.g. Interviews Smallholder Nos. 2/02, Phalula, 27 April 2012; 4/28, Zalengera, 24 May 2012). Interviewees also welcomed the establishment of the Constituency Development Fund and hoped that it would allow the MP to carry out development projects in their area, but complained frequently that they were not seeing the benefits of this fund in their local area (e.g. FGD, Smallholders No. 3/39, 3/40, 3/41, 3/42, Zaunda, 11 May 2012).

Alexander Baum's notion that Malawians generally failed to hold their elected representatives to account is not borne out either by evaluations of MPs in rural Ntcheu or by election results. The dissatisfaction reported by my interviewees with their inability to influence fertilizer, and more generally agricultural, policy and MPs' failure to "bring development" to the area (e.g. Interview, Smallholder No. 1/05, Lopati, 17 April 2012), was reflected in the 2014 election result, as only two of Ntcheu's seven MPs retained their seats. This level of turnover is not exceptional in Malawi: approximately 70% of parliamentarians lost their seat in May 2014 (Chr. Michelsen Institute 2015).

Voters in rural Ntcheu did attempt to hold their political representatives to account in the 2014 elections and had very forceful opinions about the types of policies that they wished to see implemented, with regards to their agricultural livelihoods in general and fertilizer policy in particular. However, they were not able to hold their representatives to account in any meaningful way, due to the failure of Malawi's political parties to differentiate themselves from each other on an ideological or programmatic basis. The ability of MPs to represent their constituents was undermined by donor insistence on their preferred policies, which in turn weakened political parties. Therefore smallholder farmers' attempts to hold their Members of Parliament to account in rural Ntcheu were thwarted, despite their best efforts at the ballot box.

Parliament

In the absence of strong and institutionalised political parties and members of parliament who are able to represent their constituencies politically, one would expect parliament to be a weak institution. Just how feeble the role of Malawi's parliament was with regards to fertilizer policy is perhaps most suitably demonstrated by the fact that it passed a resolution to instigate a universal fertilizer subsidy, which President Mutharika promptly disregarded, choosing instead to target the subsidy at certain households as a result of donor and fiscal pressures (see Chapter 6). Parliament's inability to fulfil its role more generally is constrained by donors in a variety of ways.

Malawi's Parliament has a number of Committees tasked with critiquing and refining policies proposed either by political parties or the executive and, due to its aid dependence, those championed by donors (Rakner et al. 2004). This includes a Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, mandated with ensuring that disparate preferences, demands and interests are represented, and able to shape the final policy (Interview, Hon. Dzoole-Mwale, 25 January 2012). However, Parliamentary Committees lack the necessary funding to set their own agendas and to pursue those issues that are most salient to parliamentary debates or even

MPs' constituencies. Instead, their agenda is frequently set by agencies willing to fund their work. As Rakner and her colleagues write:

> Although government funding only covers plenary leaving no funding for committee work, a variety of donors (with a variety of funding arrangements) has [sic] facilitated committee meetings. … this type of support has not produced a comprehensive, Malawian-owned program that goes beyond the various donors' agenda. Of the 13 committees at Parliament, the donors have selected 6 or 7 for funding. The others do not meet (Rakner et al. 2004: 10).

This assessment was confirmed by Hon. Ghambi, who chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture at the time of my fieldwork in 2012. He lamented the difficulty of running a committee, given the shortage of funds for routine and policy work, which led to the Committee focusing on oversight issues for which they were able to source donor funding (Interview, Hon. Ghambi, 26 January 2012). At that time, the Committee was engaged in overseeing the implementation of FISP, in particular following up accusations of corruption, and the problems with the restocking of the Strategic Grain Reserve, both of which were issues close to donors' hearts.

The Committee's difficulty in fulfilling its role was most evident in the period preceding the motion that would gradually see the birth of FISP. Prior to the motion being debated in parliament, the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture played the role that one would expect of such a committee, fleshing out the details of the proposed motion and costing the different options available to government, including the possibility of a universal subsidy. This work was made possible by ActionAid which provided the necessary funding, technical assistance and introductions to relevant international experts and bodies conversant with fertilizer policy and options (Interview, Hon. Chimphonda, Former MCP Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, 22 February 2012). Thus, the committee was able to play its mandated role at this point due to the unique confluence of events, in particular the fact that the Democratic Progressive Party held a parliamentary minority and therefore the MCP and its chairman were able to take the lead, in collaboration with ActionAid (ibid.). As a result of the

Committee's preparatory work, the motion for a universal fertilizer subsidy was tabled, policy options debated and finally the motion passed. When the Farm Input Subsidy Programme was implemented, in ways that differed substantially from the details fleshed out by the committee, and became such an integral element to President Mutharika's survival strategy, the Committee was chaired by a DPP member of parliament (Interview, Hon. Dzoole Mwale, Former Chair, Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, 25 January 2012). The DPP-chaired Committee appeared to have once again become less active as a result of funding issues:

> In fact, this is the question, which we as a Parliamentary Committee, we wanted to know, to check in the field. We wanted to organise a field trip so that we go out and find out what are these problems that the farmers are facing [vis-à-vis FISP]. But we have not yet been funded… (ibid.)

It also appeared that those members of the Committee who were not members of the DPP were increasingly sidelined. They were not asked to contribute to the work of the committee and indeed were often not kept abreast of its work. While the DPP Chairman of the Committee in early 2012 claimed that the Committee was active in following up the work of the FISP, particularly investigating corruption by fertilizer suppliers and at ADMARC outlets, as well as looking into reducing the problem of coupon fraud, other, non-DPP members of the Committee did not appear to be involved in this process (Interview, Hon. Dzoole Mwale, 25 January 2012).

As a result of funding constraints on Parliamentary Committees, donor conditionalities, and internal politicking, the legislature in Malawi was weakened in its ability to provide oversight and the background work necessary in order to ensure sound policy-making. While representative relationships between rural voters and MPs on agricultural and fertilizer policy were imperfect, as discussed above, this was aggravated by the constraints on Parliamentary capacity.

Interactions with the State's Bureaucracy

The everyday confrontations and encounters between the state and rural voters, however, are as important to political dynamics in rural Malawi as relationships

of representation themselves. It is here, after all, that people experience the state with any regularity (Lund 2007). As a result of these quotidian interactions, ideas about and insights into the state are formed, and these in turn influence voter demands and perceptions of policies as well as their outcomes. This is also the site where state institutions are created and expectations are generated. The process through which state institutions come to be is termed 'sedimentation' by Thomas Bierschenk who argues that they are the result of previous, as well as contemporary, policies and attempts to shape them (Bierschenk 2010). Perceptions of the bureaucracy and its ability to translate the intentions of policymakers into recognisable outcomes for the electorate are as integral to political processes as the institutions of political parties, members of parliament and local representatives.

Two local manifestations of the state are particularly important to the delivery of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme and to perceptions of the state more broadly, as they are the main sites of interaction between rural Malawians and the state. These two institutions also happen to be some of the most underfunded and controversial parts of the Malawian bureaucracy, namely ADMARC and the extension service (for a discussion of why this is so see Chapter 4). These two institutions, perhaps more so even than most other parts of the Malawian bureaucracy, have been subject to 'sedimentation' where

> each institutional reform and each round of development policy intervention leaves behind an institutional legacy which slots into the group of existing institutional arrangements. More than 50 years of development policy have not led to the homogenisation of these institutional arrangements; instead they become more and more complex (Bierschenk 2010: 7).

A similar process is mirrored in the society with which this bureaucracy interacts, where each policy implemented by these institutions has created expectations of their roles, responsibilities and their perceived value. In other words, not only do the policies enacted through ADMARC and the extension service affect the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, they also mould the political demands made by, and views of, smallholder farmers.

Interactions with ADMARC

As a result of this process of sedimentation and the creation of expectations, both within ADMARC and within the communities served by the corporation, the experience of interacting with ADMARC in order to access the benefits of the current subsidy programme is processed through the filter of previous experiences. Of great importance here is the constant comparison that takes place between the role that ADMARC *should* fulfil, namely something akin to its pre-liberalisation role – and ADMARC as it is experienced in the everyday, since liberalisation. Older interviewees reminisced about ADMARC's heyday when it functioned (or is remembered as having functioned) faultlessly as the national granary, a supplier of inputs and, when all else failed, as a safety net in times of famine: "In the past, when I was young up until I was an adult [in the early 1980s], ADMARC had maize all the time. But now if you go to ADMARC you will find no maize" (Interview, Smallholder No. 2/03, Phalula, 27 April 2012).

Whether ADMARC was ever as reliable or for that matter had only a positive impact on smallholders' livelihoods is debatable. But this is not of primary importance with regards to how smallholders relate to the bureaucracy of the state as it provides a very clear statement of the thwarted expectations of smallholders and should be understood, in itself, as an effort to demand government accountability and change. This message is received and certainly understood by politicians, who frequently promise changes to ADMARC on the campaign trail: "ADMARC is mostly mentioned during campaigns. They say it will restart its services like buying our crops and they say it will be open all the time" (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/36, Lopati, 25 April 2012). These campaign trail promises are not realised. This ADMARC of a previous era therefore provides a useful comparative tool for expressing the disillusion of smallholders with ADMARC and the allegations of corruption against its staff.

Corruption allegations are neither a new thing nor entirely unfounded. They are, however, at least in part the result of a general dissatisfaction with and misunderstanding of ADMARC's role post-reforms. The perception of ADMARC as

corrupt is compounded by the difficulties experienced by the corporations' inadequate budget as well as some opportunism and cupidity. Distrust of ADMARC staff predates the FISP and is likely the result of earlier reforms, particularly the gradual withdrawal of the organisation from maize marketing, as expressed by this smallholder:

> When we take our crops for sale [to ADMARC] they say they don't have money to buy anything. Even when we want to buy maize they say they don't have any of it. (Interview, Smallholder No. 1/39, Lopati, 25 April 2012).

There was thus widespread disillusionment with the fact that ADMARC was no longer anything other than a negligible player in the market, and some interviewees accused the staff of abusing the contradictions in liberalising the agricultural marketing system, by allowing private traders to peddle maize, but maintaining a marketing board that was mandated to fulfil a poorly-defined 'social role' (e.g. Interviews, Smallholders No 2/23, Phalula, 2 May 2012; 3/38, Zaunda, 10 May 2012). Since the liberalisation of agricultural markets began in the 1980s, ADMARC's role has been redefined as a 'buyer and seller of last resort' for smallholder farmers, intended to provide a minimum price for maize in those parts of the country where private markets are deemed to function particularly poorly and to sell maize during times of shortages, when private-sector prices are exorbitant or where maize is simply no longer available on the commercial market (Interview, ADMARC CEO, 23 September 2013). However, it has not been provided with the necessary budget to fulfil this role and frequently only receives the inadequate funds allocated to it too late in the season to be of use to the majority of smallholder farmers. Frequently, those wishing to sell their produce to the organisation are turned away with the assertion that there is "no money" to purchase their commodities (ADMARC Manager, Kambilonjo, 26 April 2012; ADMARC Manager, Sharpevalle, 25 May 2012).

When ADMARC staff were then spotted trading in maize at the local market on the weekends and sometimes even during office hours, they were accused of abusing their ability to access ADMARC resources by smallholders and private maize traders. Staff were said to be benefitting from the arbitrage opportunities of

purchasing maize on the commercial market at very low prices at the beginning of the season and then selling it on to ADMARC at higher prices (Interview, Maize traders, Kambilonjo, 4 May 2012). Equally, when ADMARC was supposed to be selling maize at the end of the season, ADMARC staff were accused of buying the government stockpiles that were delivered to their outlet and of selling these on the open market (ibid; Interview, Smallholder Nos. 3/43, 3/45, Zaunda, 11 May 2012). While it was not possible to ascertain to what extent allegations of such behaviour were correct, the fact that ADMARC's role is so poorly defined, coupled with limited capacity at its outlets, has certainly created the circumstances that would make such abuse possible.

The history of suspicion towards ADMARC as an institution and, therefore, the bureaucracy of the state in its dealings with smallholder farmers, predated the introduction of FISP by at least a decade. Accordingly, it is unsurprising that any difficulties experienced at ADMARC outlets during FISP, particularly the fact that local coupon numbers and fertilizer availability did not match up, were interpreted as further proof of the dishonest and venal bureaucracy charged with implementing government programmes. As a result any problems experienced at ADMARC were seen as the result of corruption and mismanagement, underscoring the general perception that the state cannot be trusted to carry out the policy of the government.

The Extension Service and the District Agriculture Development Office

The District Agriculture Development Office (DADO) and the extension service it organised carried their own, very different, institutional baggage. The results of this sedimentation were also evident in the interactions between FISP recipients – official and unofficial – and this part of the state's bureaucracy. The extension service was linked by smallholder farmers to the authoritarian periods of Malawi's past, when the extension service assumed smallholders were ignorant and incapable of making the right decisions for themselves and were coerced into using certain production methods or growing certain crops. The authoritarian approach to extension work had not been completely erased from the service as was evidenced by the views of some of the extension officers interviewed in

Lilongwe Rural and Ntcheu and the distrust frequently expressed towards members of the service by smallholders. While the Extension Officer in Lopati accused the farmers in his district of being "closed minded" and "ignorant" for not wanting to adopt the soil conservation and organic fertilizer techniques he was attempting to teach, smallholders complained that the Extension Officer either rarely deigned to visit them or that when he did his knowledge was of little use to them (Interviews, Extension Officers, Lilongwe Rural, 17 March 2012; Extension Officer, Lopati, Ntcheu, 26 April 2012; VH, Lopati, 17 April 2012).

This atmosphere of suspicion informed the relationship between smallholder farmers and the DADO in the implementation of the FISP. As outlined in Chapter 7, Extension Officers were the main contact point between beneficiary communities and the state bureaucracy as they collaborated with the Village Head and assisted communities with the process of registering all of their households, selecting beneficiaries, and distributing the allocated coupons. Interpretations of these actions by villagers did not simply reflect existing tensions but further underscored and aggravated them. In a context within which smallholders were attempting to make sense of the changing nature of FISP, existing suspicions towards Extension Officers thrived. The number of coupons available at the village level determined food security outcomes in such a tangible and significant way that one interviewee clearly thought my question as to how her household had been impacted by not receiving a coupon was naïve in the extreme and she answered "I was disappointed, of course. I didn't know how I was going to feed my children" (Interview, 1/27, Lopati, 23 April 2012). Given the importance of FISP to livelihoods and the fraught relationship with the Extension Agents who were central to the distribution of coupons, these state employees were frequently the first to be accused of misappropriating fertilizer vouchers. In Phalula I was told

> [The decline in coupons] is the fault of the people who register the names, like the chairman [of the Village Development Committee], the Village Head and the Extension Worker because they are trying to benefit from the coupons themselves (FGD, Smallholder No. 02/18, Phalula, 1 May 2012).

When recipients did enquire with the DADO about the reduction in coupon numbers in the previous years, or why only a small percentage of households had been accorded coupons, they often received the answer from MoAFS employees that "the computer has cut the list", a response that was meaningless to most. As one smallholder farmer put it "we are uneducated, how can we know what a computer is?" (Interview, Smallholder No. 01/17, Lopati, 20 April 2012). In the absence of any corroborating and reliable evidence regarding the number of intended beneficiaries and a general atmosphere of suspicion towards Extension Agents, the most plausible explanation for most interviewees was that actors within the state bureaucracy were misappropriating fertilizer coupons (Interview, Smallholder No. 02/19, Phalula, 28 April 2012).

The lack of information and the contradictory statements made by various actors along the FISP's implementation chain provided fertile ground for rumours and perceptions of corruption to flourish. These rumours were the result of more than merely a lack of information, they are indicative of the relationship between Malawi's smallholder farmers and the state. As Nielsen (2007) argues, where individuals interact with a weak state that makes only sporadic appearances in their lives, their perceptions of the state are both formed and reflected in the rumours that they share about the nature of the state. Here, the gossip about Extension Agents betrays the sense of powerlessness and distrust that is generally felt with regard to the state. Such gossip highlights the fear that the limited access to yield-enhancing fertilizer that the FISP has afforded many food insecure smallholders, was being eroded by corruption and misappropriation. Given that access to FISP can make the difference between "an empty and a full granary" and determines the ability to feed one's children, the question of where the coupons have gone is not insignificant (Interview, 1/27, Lopati, 23 April 2012). The chair of the Village Development Committee in Zalengera voiced the vulnerability experienced by all but a few households when she said

> Our harvests have gotten smaller [since the number of coupons was cut back], particularly in those households that cannot afford to buy extra fertilizer. But we just receive what we have been given. We don't have the power to go and research why we have been given so few coupons

(Interview, Smallholder No. 4/37 and VDC Chair, Zalengera, 24 May 2012).

Where the rumours about Village Heads speak of changing power relationships brought about by FISP and the ambivalence of many towards the Village Head's new role, gossip about and appraisals of Extension Agents reveal an almost ubiquitous distrust. The consequence of this deepening lack of confidence in the state to deliver on essential programmes is twofold. First, the roles of political representatives are further undermined, as they are not only unable to contribute to policymaking but where policies are made the state cannot be trusted to implement them. Secondly, as we will see below, lack of confidence in the state has allowed President Mutharika to claim more credit for the programme than is his due, thus increasing the extent to which FISP is perceived as a patronage policy, rather than the result of responsive policymaking.

FISP's Primary Beneficiary: President Mutharika

The views of smallholder farmers with regards to the FISP have not been heard or debated in any of the formal institutions of representation, despite their importance to rural politics and livelihoods. Furthermore, the FISP itself, particularly as a result of the donor community's role in its design, has contributed to the erosion of the very institutions necessary for smallholder representation. As we have seen, the FISP's structure simultaneously strengthens the position of the Village Head, while increasing tensions, and fanning local conflicts. The inability of political parties and members of parliament to represent their constituency's views on fertilizer policy renders both of these institutions relatively ineffectual. The resultant weak parliament is undermined further by the funding priorities of the donor community. Finally, problems with the implementation of FISP result in an increased distrust towards the structures of the state tasked with carrying out the policies decided upon by elected officials. However, President Mutharika benefited from these dynamics in order to consolidate his position.

Mutharika benefitted from the suspicions of smallholder farmers towards representatives of the state such as extension agents, and the ineffectiveness of elected representatives as he was credited with having initiated the FISP against

donor wishes, without being held responsible for its failures. Smallholder understandings of the origins of the FISP's problems are best expressed in two quotes, both from smallholders in Phalula. The first interviewee explained how he interpreted the problems encountered with the FISP and where he believed the responsibility for them originated as follows:

> For the good parts of the [FISP] coupons, we thank President Bingu [wa Mutharika], because he is the one who came up with the programme. But the bad part of it, we blame those people working for the government, because that is where the corruption starts (Interview, Smallholder No. 2/12, Phalula, 28 April 2012).

Many of my interviewees also believed that President Mutharika had intended the subsidy to be universal, an opinion that had apparently been reinforced by the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation's (MBC) radio programmes. One of my interviewees explained that she heard that everyone was to benefit from the FISP on the radio:

> We hear from the MBC [Malawi Broadcasting Corporation] radio that all the people are going to benefit [from FISP] if there will be people who are not benefitting, they will be just a few (Interview, Smallholder No. 02/15, Phalual, 1 May 2012).

This understanding of the number of FISP beneficiaries may be the result of incorrect information being disseminated, intentionally or unintentionally, by the MBC or as a result of a misinterpretation of the statement frequently made by politicians and senior bureaucrats that the FISP will benefit the 'poor', which is locally understood to be virtually everyone. Whatever the case may be, the long delivery chain between decision-making and implementation, the fact that elected representatives, such as MPs, were not adequately involved in this decision-making process, as well as the confusion generated by the inconsistency of the programme's delivery and aims worked in the president's favour.

Mutharika was able to associate himself so closely with the programme without being held responsible for its problems as the reduction in coupons was blamed on other institutions and individuals. Village Heads were suspected of

misappropriation and threatened with violence; ADMARC staff were seen as profiting from the poverty of "average" smallholders by selling "their" fertilizer to traders and "people from town"; and extension agents were suspected of holding back coupons to use on their own plots of land. If these were all expressions of anger towards actors within the FISP chain President Mutharika escaped this same wrath from the majority of smallholders, as he did here for example:

> We do not hate Bingu. We are not angry with him. He was kind enough to come up with the coupon programme [FISP], so can he be the one who cut the list of beneficiaries' names? (Interview, Smallholder No. 01/24, Lopati, 21 April 2012).

In focus group discussions, when these questions came up, on occasion someone would argue that the programme had only ever been intended as a temporary measure or to provide coupons only to a small, particularly poor segment of smallholder households. This view was usually quickly refuted by those who believed that Mutharika had promised a universal subsidy, or at the very least one that would provide for everyone who was 'poor' and that he was attempting to deliver this. Frequently, these same interviewees stated that they had heard President Mutharika making either the promise "that everybody should receive a free coupon" (Interview, Smallholder No. 04/14, Zalengera, 23 May 2012) or that he intended for everyone "in need" to receive a coupon (Interview, Smallholder No. 2/15, Phalula, 1 May 2012). Many interviewees referenced his 2009 presidential campaign in which he was remembered as having promised an expansion of the programme in terms of beneficiary numbers and one of his campaign posters declared him "Mose wa Lero" for his achievements in improving national and household food security levels (Interview, DPP Ntcheu, 15 April 2012). In this context, Mutharika was seen by the majority of my interviewees as having delivered on his campaign promises with regards to fertilizer, as he had fought to maintain the subsidy, even in the face of the general economic crisis that Malawi had experienced in 2011/12.

Conclusion

While the widespread decision at local levels to share subsidised fertilizer created a subsidy that was better suited to rural realities, this has not resolved tensions

around fertilizer policy. Instead, it has had a profound impact on political institutions in rural Malawi, the ability of elected representatives to take the views of their constituency to parliament, as well as relationships between smallholders and state institutions. Central to the political implications of the FISP has been the targeted nature of the subsidy and the gradual reduction in coupon numbers, both of which caused distress and distrust. The extremely high stakes involved in fertilizer policy – the ability to feed oneself and one's children – put huge strains on these institutions. As a result, the uncertainty and conflict that FISP gave rise to, fuelled a rumour mill that sought both to provide explanations for the unknown as well as to hold actors to account, while most actors in the system saw their positions and democratic roles undermined to the point of irrelevance.

Perhaps the most important institution for FISP and the smallholder farmers who depend upon it, is that of the Village Head. The proximity to the beneficiaries themselves and the additional roles assigned to Village Heads rendered their positions both more central to the livelihoods of smallholders and considerably more controversial and consequently difficult. Smallholder farmers attempted to make sense of these new powers through rumours told about Village Heads in the 'next village' and used gossip to attempt to hold their own chiefs accountable. The pressure on the institution increased as coupon numbers dwindled, while the absence of local councillors since at least 2005, eradicated any competition to these new positions of power and influence.

Members of Parliament, on the other hand, saw their powerlessness highlighted by the FISP. As a result of donor interference and dominance in policymaking with regards to fertilizer, MPs have had little influence over all-important decisions and are unable to represent their constituents. Smallholders have strong, differentiated and sophisticated opinions on fertilizer policy. But as a result of donor primacy, no one is able to represent these views politically at the national level. In the absence of being able to represent their political views, smallholders expect their representatives to cultivate close relationships with the president, who does have some power over these issues. Attempts to hold MPs accountable for their performance resulted in high levels of turnover but were ineffective in

bringing about policy change. Parliament was further weakened by the absence of a well-functioning Committee system and the dependence on donor agendas and funding.

The civil servants entrusted with the distribution of FISP coupons or the sale of subsidised fertilizer were less embedded in communities than Village Heads but were equally subjected to the gossip of beneficiaries. The state, which these civil servants represented, sustained considerable damage to its reputation as perceptions of its trustworthiness plummeted. ADMARC staff were thought to be stealing fertilizer, complicit in selling it to people who had acquired coupons illicitly, or simply giving preferential treatment to those who could bribe employees. Extension Officers were accused of misappropriating coupons as numbers declined. They did not help their cause by explaining to smallholder farmers that beneficiary lists were "cut by the computer" – an explanation that was incomprehensible or implausible to most.

The gutting of politically representative institutions, the strengthening of Village Heads and the distrust towards institutions of the state that are to a considerable degree the result of donor influence on the subsidy programme, was astutely exploited by President Mutharika. The strengthened institution of the Village Head allowed Mutharika to bolster his re-election chances in 2009, while the lack of effective political representation by MPs with regards to fertilizer policy further strengthened the Presidency. Mutharika thus became the only actor seen to be capable of ensuring the continued livelihoods of the majority of voters, that is smallholders who depended on subsistence maize production. Furthermore, he was able to sidestep the negative fallout that might have accompanied the reduction in coupons, or indeed the narrow targeting of households, as the structures of the state – most notably ADMARC and the extension service – took the blame. The political manoeuvres by which Mutharika consolidated his power in the face of donor constraints and conditionalities, therefore, eroded trust in the state's institutions.

Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis began by asking what the effects of Malawi's aid dependence are on the capacity of Malawi's leaders to make independent policy decision and their ability to retain their political offices in the absence of donor support. In a situation where donors not only control a large percentage of a recipient's domestic budget, but also have the inclination and capacity to formulate policy on the recipient's behalf, one would expect aid dependence to result in significant political fallout. Despite the potentially significant effects on domestic politics, research and debates around aid dependence have focused more narrowly on the relationship between donors and recipient governments and on the nature of policies imposed. The former arguments focus on the extent to which aid and its structures infringe on sovereignty at the level of elite negotiations and within government bureaucracies. The latter are concerned with debating the question of whether the problem lies in the imposition of policies or with the types of policies – usually policies that further economic liberalisation – that are being forced on developing countries. Very little research has to date addressed the question of how aid dependence and the imposition of orthodox policy prescriptions affect domestic political dynamics, including relationships of representation and the responsiveness of the state.

In exploring these questions, I have touched upon a number of important themes and academic debates on aid and aid dependence to which I wish to return in this conclusion, including sovereignty, the process of negotiating and resisting conditionalities, and the effects of aid on the state. Thus, I reflect on the impact of aid dependence on relationships of representation, before turning my attention to the wider implications of Malawi's aid dependence, particularly the cycle of aid suspension and resumption within which Malawi found itself trapped from the late 1980s onwards. I conclude by arguing that these dynamics have profound consequences for the effectiveness of aid and that the domestic political dynamics of aid must, therefore, be considered central to questions and academic debates around aid effectiveness.

Malawi's Sovereignty

The decisions made by donors to fund certain policies and not others undermine a recipient government's sovereign policy-making capacity. However, the more pernicious and pervasive effects of aid on sovereignty are often far more complicated and far less discernible.

Following independence, Malawi designed and implemented its agricultural policies with domestic food security and broader development considerations in mind, and created the structures necessary to sustain a minimum level of food security, with particular regard for the problems faced by rural smallholder farmers. This political project of maize self-sufficiency was gradually dismantled by the policy impositions of the IMF and World Bank, which accompanied Malawi's structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and formed the basis of bilateral aid agreements. In this respect, Malawi has followed a similar trajectory to that seen in other countries and described by academics such as Whitfield and Fraser (2009) and Abrahamsen (2000) since the early 1980s.

In this process, donors have become increasingly 'embedded' within Malawi's policy-making structures, in a similar manner to that described by Whitfield in her work on Ghana (Whitfield 2005). However, this only represents the first assault on Malawi's sovereignty by its donors. A more pressing constraint emerges within the Malawian state itself, particularly the donor-created bureaucratic structures within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS), which were designed with the intention of limiting the policy choices available to Malawi's governments in line with donor preferences. In particular, these structures restrict the choices available to governments in responding to acute food security crises, their ability to manage maize prices and availability through state structures, and to oversee the formulation of all new policies.

Furthermore, the evolution of a more sophisticated division of labour within the donor community has brought with it a more complex and continuous interaction between donors and government. This not only means that elite-level analyses of

aid fail to capture the extent to which sovereignty is undermined by development assistance, it also means that even the broader concept of a 'sovereign frontier', as suggested by Harrison (2007), does not capture the extent of this phenomenon. The Farm Input Subsidy (FISP) case study demonstrates the extent to which sovereignty was not only undermined at the macroeconomic level in the context of structured negotiations, but in an everyday, routinized fashion, which is all but invisible to the casual observer.

These 'concealed conditionalities' are negotiated at the sectoral level between bilateral donors and line ministries. There are many examples of this with regards to the FISP, beginning with the seemingly apolitical technical assistance and financial support that is provided to the Logistics Unit in the distribution of fertilizer and the support to anti-corruption measures provided by an EU-funded audit of the unit. Perhaps nowhere is the nonchalance with which sovereignty is undermined better demonstrated, or its symbolism more powerful, than in the printing of fertilizer coupons by DfID. This apparently simple anti-fraud measure both curtailed the practice of statehood by limiting the government's ability to determine the size of its fertilizer subsidy, and disrupted the performance of this statehood as these coupons had more security features than the national currency and were printed in a secret location, known only to one DfID employee.

Restructuring the Malawian State

As discussed in the first chapter, the introduction of conditionalities was based on an understanding of the African state as a neo-patrimonial entity run by 'big men', whose main interests consisted of lining their own pockets and perpetuating their patronage networks, rather than implementing the more painful or difficult policies that would engender sustained economic growth. Thus, conditionalities became the justifiable means by which the IFIs ensured that their preferred policies were discharged, either in the name of maximising the returns to their investments or, more recently, in order to hold governments to account in the name of 'the poor' who were to benefit from the expected economic growth. However, in the case of liberalisation in Malawi's agricultural sector, the IFIs' policies neither spurred rapid rural development nor did they ensure that the

political elite enacted the policy preferences of smallholder farmers. Instead, as a result of the domestic resistance to agricultural liberalisations, conditionalities spurred a great deal of resistance to donor-imposed policies, both by the political elite and smallholder farmers. Interpreting such resistance as illegitimate, bilateral donors took to policing and restructuring the Malawian state in order to facilitate the delivery of aid and adherence to orthodox policies.

This restructuring project has taken place to varying degrees in all of Malawi's ministries and parastatals, with the MoAFS drawing a great deal of donor attention given the importance of the sector to the economy and its place in the liberalisation project of the IFIs. The World Bank has been especially influential in Malawi in setting the tone for institutional developments, particularly insisting upon the dismantling of the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation's (ADMARC) control of agricultural marketing from which all other reforms followed. Nevertheless, the role of policing the Malawian state was left largely to the bilateral donors. Without openly pushing the reform agenda or subscribing to the Bank's neoliberal agenda, the bilateral donors and the European Union provided the technical assistance necessary to create the technocratic state envisioned as the ideal aid recipient. The result was a far-reaching restructuring of the policy and administrative processes deemed most important to donors, rather than the government itself, and the creation of extensive oversight mechanisms. These additional structures not only allow donors to determine whether they are sufficiently happy with progress in the sector to continue providing sector budget support, but also ensure that all aspects of the MoAFS' work can only be planned and conducted under the supervision of interested donors.

The exchange of information through these mechanisms is reciprocal, of course, thus ensuring that the Government of Malawi is kept abreast of evolving views within donor agencies, specifically which policies and programmes are likely to lead to the intensification or withdrawal of donor support. Consequently, donors in the agricultural sector have been relatively successful in controlling what they deem to be the pathology of the African state. They have also created an array of

institutions that serve the purpose of limiting the influence of the political elite. The MoAFS now serves as a tool for constraining political decision-making and keeping it within the bounds set by the IFIs, rather than as a locus of policy instigation and implementation. While the IFIs provide the parameters for which policies are acceptable, bilateral donors provide the 'technical assistance' that polices the Malawian state.

The shifting role of the state in aid dependent Malawi not only affects relationships between the political elite and the bureaucracy, but also those between the state's implementing arms and its citizens, which form the basis of public authority and local politics. In the case of the agricultural sector, this primarily consists of relationships between ADMARC and maize producers and, to a lesser degree, relationships between representatives of the extension service and smallholder farmers. Here the effects of aid and its concomitant policy impositions are experienced mainly as contradictions between the policy preferences of smallholder farmers and the policies discharged by the state. Despite the continued efforts of smallholders to voice their opinions on the structure of the FISP, any efforts by the government to act on their demands almost always meant resisting donors impositions.

In the absence of adequate levels of responsiveness to their policy preferences, smallholder maize producers resisted the imposed structure of the FISP, chiefly the fact that it was targeted at only 40% of households. While solving the immediate problem of fertilizer availability and food insecurity, this led to heightened tensions in everyday interactions with the state, a greater distrust of the institution, and a displacement of the activities and authority of the state onto semi-official actors, most notably, village heads. As the gradual reduction in the number of coupons threatened the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, representatives of the state came under suspicion of coupon misappropriation. This had contradictory effects. While tensions between citizens and all actors involved in the FISP's delivery chain have increased, the institution of village heads has been strengthened. Official representatives of the state, such as extension agents and ADMARC employees, on the other hand, are held responsible

for much of the programme's problems. As a result of his insistence at rallies and in radio broadcasts that all smallholders should benefit from the FISP, Mutharika managed to claim the credit for the subsidy without being held responsible for its problems. Thus, the FISP also contributed to strengthening the position of the presidency.

Negotiating Aid and Resisting Conditionalities

A central argument of this thesis is that both aid negotiations and resistance to conditionalities no longer take place around a 'negotiating table' where donors and government meet with the relatively simple objectives of either maximising aid income or conditionalities per dollar disbursed. These negotiations have dwindled in importance as a result of recipients' increasingly undermined sovereignty and the intentional restructuring of recipient states, which has resulted in a blurring of boundaries between recipient and donors. Their importance now lies primarily in determining overall levels of support from the international financial institutions (IFIs) and, therefore, budget support from bilateral donors. In Malawi, donors are now embedded within the civil service, both constraining the policy agenda and ensuring that donor views are represented on both sides of the negotiating table.

In Malawi this has created a dominant discourse in which the liberalisation of the agricultural sector has become a conditionality that is no longer questioned by donors and any deviation from the prescribed policy trajectory represents an act of resistance. Not only has this seen the policy agenda restricted to the post-Washington Consensus, but it has also become much more difficult for officials within the MoAFS to question the technical knowledge of donor representatives and the policies they recommend on the basis of that knowledge. Candid and frank negotiation is therefore impossible and has been replaced almost wholesale by processes of resistance, obfuscation and damage limitation that are located outside of official negotiation channels. The sites of resistance to donor policy in the agricultural sector are primarily found outside of the MoAFS, either within the elite political realm where it has become the prerogative of the executive, or at the

grassroots level where smallholder farmers – frequently without knowing where policies originate – resist these impositions.

The MoAFS has ceased to play the role of translating political projects into agricultural policy and ensuring that policy decisions reflect political demands or even that they will not have significant negative effects on food security. Instead, its structures increasingly reflect the needs of donors to disburse aid and constrain the policy options of the political elite. Despite these constraints, consecutive governments have sought to respond to smallholder demands to reduce or reverse the effects of liberalisation. As aid dependence and donor preferences prevented a complete reversal of liberalisation policies, this has taken ad hoc and incomplete forms. In this context, Malawi's presidents have taken advantage of the limits of donor capacity to police policy-making in order to implement special initiatives that dampen the impacts of liberalisation. Such compensatory mechanisms come at a cost, creating policy inconsistencies that are used by donors to justify further technical assistance and civil service restructuring.

Importantly, the process of policy negotiation does not end with presidential initiatives or negotiations between bureaucrats and donors. In the absence of space within which to negotiate with politicians or donors, smallholders express their views by sabotaging policy intentions. Without necessarily being aware of donor influence on the policy-making process, smallholders subvert the targeted nature of the FISP. The widespread refusal by smallholder communities to submit to the FISP's target directives should be read as a call for broader safety nets that benefit the community as a whole, rather than just its poorest. These political demands have no direct effects on aid relations, but have a profound effect on everyday statehood and citizenship.

Much of what should be considered forms of aid negotiation, therefore, occur outside of official structures, either within the political realm – frequently taking the form of presidential initiatives – or through widespread subversion of policy structures. Existing theories of aid negotiation, particularly those that predate

Whitfield et al.'s (2009) work, describe a form of aid negotiation that occurred in Malawi only during a short period after the introduction of SAPs, before donors began the process of restructuring the Malawian state to facilitate the provision of aid. We need a more comprehensive lens to capture and analyse the full extent of aid negotiations in Malawi, and beyond.

Democratic Institutions, Aid Dependence, and Food Insecurity

Amartya Sen famously argued that there could be no famine in a functioning democracy, as the popular demands for food aid and assistance would exert sufficient pressure to elicit an effective response, thus ensuring that remedial action was taken before food distress could develop into a full-blown famine (Sen 1981). This thesis turns that argument on its head and looks at the political implications of a situation where democratically elected governments cannot respond to electoral demands for food security or demands for the state to absorb the livelihood risks of smallholder producers.

The links between food security policies, domestic politics, aid dependence and its concomitant conditionalities are exemplified by Malawi's large-scale fertilizer subsidy programme. While the FISP has made significant contributions to alleviating food insecurity, many of Malawi's donors continue to view the programme with deep scepticism, advocating an eventual phase-out and a targeted subsidy in the meantime. Thus, while playing very different roles *vis-à-vis* the programme, donors retain a large degree of influence over the subsidy, especially controlling its size and, therefore, its impact on food insecurity. Criticism of the subsidy by donor representatives generally fall into two categories: the first is that the subsidy has been used by the political elite, especially President Mutharika, to garner political support; the second is more generally sceptical of the ability of subsidies to stimulate levels of growth and poverty reduction that exceed the detrimental effects of any market distortions they may create.

The fact that the subsidy has come under attack for serving the political needs of Malawi's president and ruling party reflect the ambivalence and incoherence of

donor approaches to democratic institutions. While professing to support Malawi's democracy, for example by funding civic education initiatives and organisations or even funding presidential and parliamentary elections, donors remain largely unwilling to relinquish control over their aid monies to these same democratic processes, which they see as imperfect, corrupt, and reliant on patronage networks. The need for the Malawian government to be responsive to the general public is frequently stressed, but where responses to public demands stand in opposition to agricultural liberalisation, these are regarded with suspicion and frequently dismissed as neo-patrimonial. This is perhaps best demonstrated by DfID's efforts to control the overall size of the subsidy by printing coupons on behalf of the government.

Donors' ambivalence was most conspicuous towards the end of Mutharika's presidency when DfID and Irish Aid's decision to bail out the FISP was accompanied by concern that this was bolstering his political support. These unresolved concerns manifested themselves in the efforts made to control the exact structure of the FISP: the World Bank and IMF did so by limiting the national and agricultural budget and determining sectoral priorities; DfID, Irish Aid, and other bilateral donors engage the MoAFS on the implementation process of the FISP; and any donor with an interest in agriculture is involved in monitoring policy direction through the Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security. These actions and structures, of course, profoundly contradict the stated aims of all donors of furthering and supporting democratic governance in Malawi.

More important than the internal inconsistencies in these approaches to collaboration with the Malawian government are the consequences of the constraints placed on the capacities of political representatives to fulfil their roles. The FISP's structure, as determined to a considerable degree by donor pressures, and the manner in which it differs from the expectations of smallholder farmers, has important consequences. The enlisting of village heads in the programme's administration has resulted in an increase in their authority and influence over smallholders' lives, without any formal means for communities to hold them to account. This is aggravated by the absence of local councillors who might

otherwise have been able to provide a counterweight to village heads' increased influence. Political parties have seen their ability to make agricultural policy compromised, as the most important national political subject matter is largely outside of their policy-making control, and thus their ability to develop ideologically distinct positions is curtailed and the party system remains weak. Without effective party structures, MPs move between parties without consequences and voters struggle to effectively hold their representatives to account. The high turnover of MPs should be seen as an effort to demand this accountability, even though it, in turn, weakens the institution of parliament, which lacks institutional memory between legislative periods. Furthermore, parliament's ability to oversee policies is undermined by its lack of funding for activities that fall outside of donor priorities. The only institution that is strengthened by donor influence over the FISP is the presidency, as Mutharika managed to retain the credit for the policy while passing on the blame for its shortcomings to other actors in the political and administrative implementation chain.

Donor influence has had profound cumulative effects on the institutions of political representation in Malawi and, despite the rhetoric espoused by aid agencies, the manner in which they engage with Malawi's government and political representatives obstructs a break away from a political system that still heavily relies on patronage networks towards a more democratic one. The simplistic understanding of African states, governments, and politicians as "neo-patrimonial", as espoused by donors, obfuscates their role in Malawi's political systems and prevents a more nuanced understanding of their prolific influence on domestic politics. The question is not whether the Malawian government is corrupt or whether its leaders are power-hungry and, therefore, whether it "deserves" international aid. Rather, the question is whether the situation could be any different while donors are determining the most important policies and political leaders are unable to fulfil their role of representing the majority of the population. This is not to argue that politics in Malawi are driven by the aid agenda, but rather that the agendas around which political life revolves, with agriculture being just one of these, are all constrained by the preferences,

demands, and funding decisions of donors. Cumulatively, donor decisions regarding agricultural policy undermine representative political processes.

The Implications of Aid Dependence

When considered in this light, it becomes clear that donors are central political actors in Malawi, with the ability to make or break political careers and to determine the extent to which voices are heard and politically represented. The tensions between internal and external constituencies and their ability to determine political fortunes was most plainly demonstrated in the course of Bingu wa Mutharika's presidency even though this has been true for all of Malawi's presidents. Maintaining the façade that there is a clear distinction between domestic political systems and the donor community serves not only the World Bank's statutory need to remain apolitical, it also allows for a more heavy-handed approach to the suspension and resumption of aid than a more thoughtful consideration of the role of donors in creating governance structures and political decision-making processes would permit. Furthermore, the accelerating cycle of aid suspension and resumption that has resulted from this has served the donor community well: it has allowed for the gradual expansion of donor influence over many aspects of policy-making and the very structures of the state.

The agricultural policy preferences held by various donors and smallholder farmers differ greatly, as does the relative ability of each group to make its demands heard. Donors are able to use their economic leverage and their 'embeddedness' to pursue economic liberalisation. As they control over 40% of Malawi's annual budget, the government cannot afford to reject donors' chosen political-economic trajectory. Knowing that this rejection is not feasible, government officials spend their time calculating how far they may deviate from this policy orthodoxy before they face significant repercussions. In other words, donors not only have the ability to shape outcomes, they have sufficient power to shape what is the agenda in the first place. Their ultimate power is to render their influence invisible, because it is deemed to be incontestable. Consequently, donors are able to deny the extent of their influence on individual policies and the wider political-economic landscape. As such, they avoid acknowledging the extent to

which sovereignty and representative democracy are undermined by aid, or discussing the degree to which evolving aid modalities might be exacerbating such trends. Budget support relationships are therefore entered into without consideration of the dependence that this might create and the detrimental effects that budget support withdrawal would provoke.

Maintaining the fiction that they are external actors, donors lay the blame for policy failures at the door of the Malawian government. As a result, they are able to maintain that corruption, patrimonialism, and nepotism are beyond their realm of responsibility, often suggesting that these factors might be a distinctly African phenomenon. This, in turn, gives donors the freedom to suspend aid as a punitive measure against governments they deem to be underperforming, by governance standards or economic measures, whilst shifting the responsibility for the economic fallout onto the aid recipient. As Malawi is geopolitically and strategically unimportant to its donors, punitive cycles of aid suspension and resumption have been particularly vicious. As donors became increasingly frustrated with the "lack of political will" in the government and problems of corruption, the suspension of aid became morally justifiable and donors became progressively more willing to suspend aid when policy does not go their way. With each cycle, the economic stability needed for food security and growth is disrupted and donor leverage over policy-making increases, as the government seeks to regain aid inflows at any cost.

Since achieving independence, Malawi has not succeeded in raising the living standards of its rural population to any significant degree. In fact, many smallholder farmers have seen their living standards and food security decline, particularly since the beginning of agricultural liberalisation. The first two decades after independence are now recalled as a period of comparative affluence by those old enough to remember them, simply because the basics of food security – access to affordable maize – were guaranteed. The decline in living standards since the introduction of multi-party democracy and the inability of smallholder farmers to hold their representatives to account have resulted in widespread disillusionment with democracy as well as gross abuses of political power.

The reasons for Malawi's economic and agricultural stagnation are numerous and include the misfortune of being landlocked in a part of the world that has only a single annual rainy season. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that these disadvantages may be overcome in the absence of more responsive political relationships of representation or without coherent and consistent agricultural policies. These in turn depend on donors being held to account for their role in shaping both domestic political processes and agricultural policies. The political consequences of aid are not only important in their own right, but are also central to determining the effectiveness of aid and its ability to support or undermine democratic institutions and the capacity of the recipient state itself. In the absence of donor accountability, it seems unlikely that Malawi will escape the poverty and aid trap that so many of my interviewees – from a former minister of finance to Zaunda's Village Head – expressed in remarkably similar words when they said that they "won't let us starve, but they won't let us live".

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List of Elite Interviewees

Government and Civil Service Representatives

	Organisation / Individual	Position	Location	Date
1.	National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA)	Retired Operations Manager	NFRA Kanengo Silo Lilongwe	7.9.07
2.	Hon. Goodall Gondwe	Minister of Finance	Capital Hill Lilongwe	11.9.07
3.	Hon. Bintony Kutsaira	Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security	Capital Hill Lilongwe	12.9.07
4.	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC)	Coordinator	Capital Hill Lilongwe	14.9.07
5.	Anonymous		Kanengo, Lilongwe	29.11.11
6.	Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA)	Deputy Coordinator	Capital Hill, Lilongwe	15.2.12
7.	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security	Deputy ASWAp Coordinator	Capital Hill, Lilongwe	15.2.12
8.	Ministry of Finance	Budget Director	Capital Hill Lilongwe	15.2.12
9.	National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA)	Head	Kanengo, Lilongwe	16.2.12
10.	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security	Director of Planning	Capital Hill Lilongwe	16.2.12
11.	Ministry of Finance	Director of Debt and Aid Management	Capital Hill Lilongwe	21.2.12
12.	Smallholder Farmers' Fertilizer Revolving Fund of Malawi (SFFRFM)	Director	Kanengo Lilongwe	1.3.12
13.	Ministry of Finance	Director of Economic Affairs	Capital Hill Lilongwe	9.3.12
14.	Ministry of Agriculture	Controller of Agriculture	Capital Hill Lilongwe	12.3.12
15.	FISP Logistics Unit, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security	Head	City Centre, Lilonwe	13.3.12
16.	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security	Official	Capital Hill Lilongwe	12.3.12
17.	Ministry of Finance	Former Chief Economist	Zomba	7.4.12
18.	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security	Former Permanent Secretary	Zomba	10.4.12
19.	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security	Permanent Secretary	Capital Hill, Lilongwe	21.5.12
20.	FISP Taskforce	Employee	Capital Hill, Lilongwe	28.5.12

21.	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security	Deputy ASWAp Coordinator	Capital Hill Lilongwe	12.9.13
22.	Smallholder Farmers' Fertilizer Revolving Fund of Malawi (SFFRFM)	Chief Executive Officer	Kanengo Lilongwe	13.9.13
23.	National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA)	Head	Kanengo Lilongwe	17.9.13
24.	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC)	Chief Executive Officer	Lilongwe	23.9.13
25.	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC)	Chief Executive Officer	Lilongwe	24.9.13

NGO / Civil Society / Private Sector Representatives Interviewees

	Organisation	Position	Location	Date
1.	Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN)	Food Security Officer	Old Town, Lilongwe	27.7.07
2.	World Vision	Livelihoods Coordinator	World Vision, Lilongwe	31.7.07
3.	Anonymous		Lilongwe	31.7.07
4.	Africare	Food Security Coordinator	Africare, Lilongwe	3.8.07
5.	National Association of Smallholder Farmers of Malawi (NASFAM)	Livelihoods Coordinator	NASFAM, Lilongwe	16.8.07
6.	Anonymous		Lilongwe	24.8.07
7.	CARE International	Project Manager	CARE, Lilongwe	28.8.07
8.	Concern Worldwide	Area Programme Manager	Concern, Lilongwe	29.8.07
9.	The Daily Times	Journalist	Old Town Lilongwe	28.11.11
10.	The Nation	Journalist	Old Town Lilongwe	30.11.11
11.	Public Affairs Committee	Director	City Centre Lilongwe	5.12.11
12.	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace	Director	City Centre Lilongwe	5.12.11
13.	Committee for Human Rights and Reconciliation	Deputy Director	Lilongwe	7.12.11
14.	Catholic Development Committee	Director	Lilongwe	8.12.11
15.	Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN)	Director	Old Town Lilongwe	9.12.11
16.	Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISA-Net)	Director	City Centre, Lilongwe	12.12.11
17.	ActionAid Malawi	Food Security Coordinator	City Centre Lilongwe	16.12.11

18.	World Vision International	Food Security Coordinator	Old Town Lilongwe	20.12.11
19.	National Association of Smallholder Farmers (NASFAM)	Director	City Centre Lilongwe	22.12.11
20.	CARE International	Food Security Coordinator	City Centre Lilongwe	22.12.11
21.	Africare	Food Security Coordinator	Old Town Lilongwe	23.12.11
22.	Farmers' Union of Malawi	Director	Old Town Lilongwe	18.1.12
23.	Famine Early Warning System (FEWS)-Net	Project Leader	Old Town, Lilongwe	20.1.12
24.	Oxfam	Director	Lilongwe	20.1.12
25.	Agricultural Commodity Exchange (ACE)	Employee	Kanengo, Lilongwe	6.2.12
26.	Centre for Social Concern	Director	Lilongwe	1.3.12
27.	Grain Traders and Processors Association (GTPA)	Employee	Kanengo, Lilongwe	2.3.12
28.	International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)	Head of Project	Capital Hill Lilongwe	22.3.12
29.	Famine Early Warning System (FEWS)-Net	Project Leader	Old Town, Lilongwe	9.9.13
30.	Agricultural Commodity Exchange (ACE)	Programme Coordinator	Kanengo Light Lilongwe	10.9.13
31.	Oxfam	Director	Lilongwe	11.9.13
32.	Grain Traders and Processors Association (GTPA)	Vice Chairperson	City Centre, Lilongwe	18.9.13
33.	Farmers' Union of Malawi	Director	Old Town Lilongwe	19.9.13
34.	Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISA-Net)	Director	City Centre, Lilongwe	30.9.13

Political Representatives

	Organisation / Individual	Position	Location	Date
1.	People's Party	Agriculture Spokesperson	Lilongwe	24.1.12
2.	Malawi Congress Party	MP & Agriculture Spokesperson	Parliament, Lilongwe	25.1.12
3.	Democratic Progressive Party	MP & Agriculture Spokesperson	Capital Hill Lilongwe	26.1.12
4.	People's Party	VP Joyce Banda	VP's Residence Lilongwe	30.1.12
5.	Alliance for Democracy	Agriculture Spokesperson	Lilongwe	30.1.12
6.	Friday Jumbe, United Democratic Front	Former Minister of Finance & Agriculture Spokesperson	Crossroads Hotel, Lilongwe	6.2.12
7.	Malawi Congress Party	Former MP & Former Chair of Parliamentary	Area 3, Lilongwe	22.2.12

Committee on Agriculture

8.	Democratic Progressive Party	MP	City Centre Lilongwe	22.2.12
9.	Democratic Progressive Party	Regional Chairman	Ntcheu	15.4.12
10.	Hon. Andrew Mitchell, Conservative Party UK	Former Secretary of State for International Development	Queens' College, Oxford	7.2.13
11.	Malawi Congress Party	Former MP & Former Chair of Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture	Area 3, Lilongwe	9.9.13

Donor Representatives

	Organisation / Individual	Position	Location	Date
1.	European Union Farm Income Diversification Programme (FIDP)	Livelihoods Advisor	EU-FIDP Lilongwe	20.7.07
2.	International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Senior Economist	IMF, Lilongwe	11.9.07
3.	Joint Taskforce on Food Security and Nutrition	Technical Advisor	Capital Hill, Lilongwe	13.9.07
4.	Anonymous	Donor representative	Lilongwe	14.9.07
5.	Consultant to ADMARC		ADMARC Blantyre	16.9.07
6.	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC)	Technical Assistant	Capital Hill, Lilongwe	13.1.12
7.	JICA	Donor Official	City Centre, Lilongwe	2.2.12
8.	World Food Programme (WFP)	P4P Coordinator	City Centre Lilongwe	3.2.12
9.	International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD)	Project Coordinator	City Centre, Lilongwe	6.2.12
10.	Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security (DCAFS)	Coordinator	City Centre, Lilongwe	9.2.12
11.	Anonymous	Donor Official	Lilongwe	9.2.12
12.	United Nations Food And Agriculture Organisation (FAO)	Deputy Representative	City Centre, Lilongwe	10.2.12
13.	Flemish International Cooperation Agency (FICA)	Country Representative	City Centre Lilongwe	14.2.12
14.	Irish Aid	Donor Official	Irish Aid, Lilongwe	24.2.12
15.	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	Donor official	City Centre Lilongwe	1.3.12

16.	Norwegian Embassy	Official	Norwegian Embassy, Lilongwe	1.4.12
17.	Anonymous	Donor official	Lilongwe	1.4.12
18.	Anonymous	Donor Official	Lilongwe	2.4.12
19.	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Project Coordinator	UNDP Office, Lilongwe	2.4.12
20.	UK's Department for International Development (DfID)	Food Security Advisor	City Centre, Lilongwe	3.4.12
21.	Joint Taskforce on Food Security and Nutrition (JTFSN)	Technical Advisor	Capital Hill, Lilongwe	7.4.12
22.	Anonymous		Lilongwe	7.4.12
23.	African Development Bank	Agriculture Economist	Lilongwe	7.4.12
24.	World Bank	Senior Agricultural Economist	World Bank, Lilongwe	21.5.12
25.	Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security (DCAFS)	Coordinator	City Centre, Lilongwe	13.9.13
26.	Anonymous		Lilongwe	23.9.13
27.	Anonymous		Lilongwe	26.9.13
28.	Irish Aid	Agriculture Advisor	City Centre Lilongwe	26.9.13
29.	World Food Programme	P4P Coordinator	Old Town Lilongwe	26.9.13
30.	World Bank	Donor Official	City Centre, Lilongwe	30.9.13
31.	UK's Department for International Development	Food Security Advisor	City Centre Lilongwe	1.10.13

Academics

	Organisation / Individual	Position	Location	Date
1.	Dr. Blessings Chinsinga, Chancellor College	Senior Lecturer	Chancellor College, Zomba	5.3.12
2.	Dr. Alexander Phiri, Bunda College	Lecturer	Old Town Lilongwe	13.9.13

List of Rural Interviewees

Smallholder Farmers – Ntcheu

No	Village	Gender	FISP Recipient	Date	Interview Type
1/02	Lopati	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	17.4.12	Individual
1/03	Lopati	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	17.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/04	Lopati	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	17.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
10/5	Lopati	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	17.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/06	Lopati	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	17.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/07	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	18.4.12	Individual
1/08	Lopati	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	18.4.12	Individual
1/09	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	18.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/10	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	18.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/11	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	19.4.12	Individual
1/12	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	19.4.12	Household
1/13	Lopati	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	19.4.12	Household
1/14	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	19.4.12	Individual
1/15	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	19.4.12	Individual
1/16	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	20.4.12	Individual
1/17	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	20.4.12	Individual
1/18	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	20.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/19	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	20.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/20	Lopati	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	20.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/21	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	20.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/22	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	21.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/23	Lopati	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	21.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/24	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	21.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/25	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	21.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/26	Lopati	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.4.12	Household
1/27	Lopati	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.4.12	Household
1/28	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	23.4.12	Individual
1/29	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	23.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/30	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	23.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/31	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	23.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/32	Lopati	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	24.4.12	Individual
1/33	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	24.4.12	Life History
1/37	Lopati	F	Not FISP Beneficiary	25.4.12	Individual
1/38	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	25.4.12	Life History
1/39	Lopati	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	25.4.12	Life History
2/02	Phalula	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	27.4.12	Life History
2/03	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	27.4.12	Life History
2/05	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	27.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/06	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	27.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/07	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	27.4.12	Focus Group Discussion

2/08	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	27.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/09	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	28.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/10	Phalula	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	28.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/11	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	28.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/12	Phalula	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	28.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/13	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	28.4.12	Individual
2/14	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	28.4.12	Individual
2/15	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	1.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/16	Phalula	M	Dependent	1.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/17	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	1.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/18	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	1.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/19	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	1.5.12	Individual
2/20	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	1.5.12	Individual
2/21	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	1.5.12	Individual
2/22	Phalula	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	2.5.12	Life History
2/23	Phalula	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	2.5.12	Individual
2/24	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	2.5.12	Individual
2/25	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	2.5.12	Individual
2/26	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	3.5.12	Individual
2/27	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	3.5.12	Individual
2/28	Phalula	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	3.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/29	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	3.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/30	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	3.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/31	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	3.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/32	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	3.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/33	Phalula	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	3.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
2/34	Mphando	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	3.5.12	Life History
3/06	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	8.5.12	Individual
3/07	Zaunda	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	8.5.12	Individual
3/09	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	8.5.12	Individual
3/10	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	8.5.12	Individual
3/11	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	8.5.12	Individual
3/12	Majawa	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/13	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/14	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/15	Majawa	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/16	Majawa	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/17	Majawa	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/18	Zaunda	F	Dependent	9.5.12	Life History
3/19	Zaunda	F	Dependent	9.5.12	Life History
3/20	Zaunda	F	Dependent	9.5.12	Life History
3/21	Zaunda	F	Dependent	9.5.12	Life History
3/22	Zaunda	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	10.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/23	Zaunda	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/24	Zaunda	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/25	Zaunda	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion

3/26	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/27	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/28	Zaunda	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/29	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/30	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/31	Zaunda	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/32	Zaunda	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	9.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/33	Zaunda	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	10.5.12	Individual
3/34	Zaunda	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	10.5.12	Individual
3/35	Sitolo	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	10.5.12	Individual
3/36	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	10.5.12	Individual
3/37	Zaunda	F	Unclear	10.5.12	Individual
3/38	Zaunda	M	Unclear	10.5.12	Individual
3/39	Zaunda	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	11.5.12	Individual
3/40	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	11.5.12	Individual
3/41	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	11.5.12	Individual
3/42	Zaunda	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	11.5.12	Individual
3/42	Zaunda	F	Dependent	11.5.12	Life History
3/44	Zaunda	F	Dependent	11.5.12	Life History
3/45	Zaunda	F	Dependent	11.5.12	Life History
3/46	Zaunda	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	11.5.12	Life History
3/47	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	14.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/48	Zaunda	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	14.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/49	Zaunda	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	14.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/50	Zaunda	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	14.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/01	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	18.5.12	Individual
4/06	Zalengera	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	19.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/07	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	19.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/08	Zalengera	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	19.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/09	Zalengera	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	19.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/10	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	19.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/11	Zalengera	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	19.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/12	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	19.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/13	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/14	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/15	Zalengera	M	Unclear	23.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/16	Madimba	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/17	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/18	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/19	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Individual
4/20	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Individual
4/21	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Individual
4/22	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Individual
4/23	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Individual
4/24	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	23.5.12	Individual
4/25	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Individual

4/26	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Individual
4/27	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Individual
4/28	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Individual
4/29	Zalengera	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/30	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/31	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/32	Zalengera	F	Official FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/33	Zalengera	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/34	Zalengera	M	Official FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/35	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/36	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/37	Zalengera	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/38	Zalengera	F	Unclear	24.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
4/39	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	25.5.12	Individual
4/40	Zalengera	F	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	25.5.12	Individual
4/41	Zalengera	M	Unofficial FISP Beneficiary	25.5.12	Individual
4/44	Sharpevalle	F	FISP Beneficiary	26.5.12	Individual

Other Interviewees – Ntcheu

No.	Village	Gender	Position	Date	Type of Interview
6/01	Kambilonjo	M	Traditional Authority	16.4.12	Individual
6/02	Ntcheu Town	F	District Agriculture Development Officer	17.4.12	Individual
1/01	Lopati	M	Village Head	17.4.12	Individual
1/34	Lopati	F	Maize Trader/ Member of VDC	17.4.12	Individual
1/35	Kambilonjo	M	Maize Trader	25.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/36	Kambilonjo	M	Maize Trader	25.4.12	Focus Group Discussion
1/41	Lopati	M	Chair of the Village Development Committee	26.4.12	Individual
6/03	Lopati	M	Agricultural Extension Officer	26.4.12	Individual
6/04	Kambilonjo	M	ADMARC Manager	26.4.12	Individual
2/04	Phalula	M	Village Head	27.4.12	Individual
6/05	Kambilonjo	M	Maize Trader	4.5.12	Individual
6/06	Kambilonjo	M	Maize Trader	4.5.12	Individual
6/07	Kambilonjo	M	Maize Trader	4.5.12	Individual
6/08	Kambilonjo	M	Maize Trader	4.5.12	Individual
3/08	Zaunda	M	Village Head	8.5.12	Individual
6/09	Ntcheu Town	F	United Democratic Front District Chairwoman	15.5.12	Individual
6/10	Ntcheu Town	F	Malawi Congress Party District Women's Secretary	15.5.12	Individual
3/51	Zaunda	M	Member of the Village Development Committee	16.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/52	Zaunda	M	Treasurer of the Village Development Committee	16.5.12	Focus Group Discussion

3/54	Zaunda	F	Member of the Village Development Committee	16.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
3/55	Zaunda	F	Member of the Village Development Committee	16.5.12	Focus Group Discussion
6/11	Golomoti	M	Trader	18.5.12	Individual
6/12	Golomoti	M	Trader	18.5.12	Individual
6/13	Zalengera	F	Trader	18.5.12	Individual
6/14	Zalengera	F	Trader	18.5.12	Individual
6/15	Sharpevalle	M	Agricultural Extension Officer	25.5.12	Individual
6/16	Sharpevalle	M	ADMARC Manager	25.5.12	Individual

Smallholder Farmers – Lilongwe Rural

No.	Village	Gender	FISP Recipient	Date	Type of Interview
5/01	Chadza	Male	Official FISP Recipient	20.3.12	Individual
5/02	Chadza	Female	Official FISP Recipient	21.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/03	Chadza	Female	Official FISP Recipient	21.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/04	Chadza	Female	Official FISP Recipient	21.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/05	Chadza	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	21.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/06	Chadza	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	21.3.12	Individual
5/07	Chadza	Male	Unofficial FISP Recipient	21.3.12	Individual
5/08	Chiumba	Male	Unofficial FISP Recipient	22.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/09	Rabsom	Male	Unofficial FISP Recipient	22.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/10	Matselere	Male	Unofficial FISP Recipient	22.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/11	Kamphandira	Female	Official FISP Recipient	22.3.12	Individual
5/12	Chizimu	Male	Official FISP Recipient	23.3.12	Individual
5/13	Chizimu	Female	Not Recipient	24.3.12	Life History
5/14	Turuka	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	26.3.12	Individual
5/15	Turuka	Male	Official FISP Recipient	26.3.12	Individual
5/16	Matselere	Female	Not Recipient	26.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/17	Matselere	Male	Not Recipient	26.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/18	Mnongwa	Male	Not Recipient	26.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/19	Imphwa	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	27.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/20	Imphwa	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	27.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/21	Imphwa	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	27.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/22	Imphwa	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	27.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/23	Imphwa	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	27.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/24	Imphwa	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	27.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/25	Gakobwe	Female	Not Recipient	27.3.12	Individual
5/26	Lipenga	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	28.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/27	Lipenga	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	28.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/28	Lipenga	Male	Unofficial FISP Recipient	28.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/29	Lipenga	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	28.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/30	Lipenga	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	28.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/31	Lipenga	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	28.3.12	Focus Group Discussion

5/32	Lipenga	Female	Official FISP Recipient	28.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/33	Lipenga	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	28.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/34	Lunguzi	Male	Official FISP Recipient	28.3.12	Individual
5/35	Chiwala	Male	Not Recipient	29.3.12	Life History
5/36	Chiwala	Female	Not Recipient	29.3.12	Life History
5/37	Chiwala	Female	Unofficial FISP Recipient	29.3.12	Individual

Other Interviewees – Lilongwe Rural

No.	Village	Gender	Position/Role	Date	Type of Interview
5/38	Chadza	Male	Traditional Authority	16.3.12	Individual
5/39	Chadza	Male	Agricultural Extension Officer	17.3.12	Individual
5/40	Chadza	Male	Agricultural Extension Officer	17.3.12	Individual
5/41	Chadza	Male	Village Elder	17.3.12	Individual
5/42	Chadza	Male	Head of Farmers' Organisation	19.3.12	Individual
5/43	Chadza	Female	Village Elder	19.3.12	Individual
5/44	Chadza	Female	Treasurer of Farmers' Organisation	20.3.12	Individual
5/45	Chadza	Male	Village Headman	20.3.12	Individual
5/46	Lunguzi	Male	Group Village Headman	27.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/47	Imphwa	Male	Village Headman	27.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/48	Adziza	Male	Village Headman	27.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/49	Mitundu	Female	Maize trader	31.3.12	Individual
5/50	Mitundu	Male	Maize trader	31.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/51	Mitundu	Male	Maize trader	31.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/52	Mitundu	Male	Maize trader	31.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/53	Mitundu	Female	Maize trader	31.3.12	Focus Group Discussion
5/54	Mitundu	Male	Maize trader	31.3.12	Individual