

“THE PEOPLE’S VOICE!”

A COMMUNITY CONSULTATION¹ ON FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN MALAWI

For submission to the Food and Nutrition Security Policy Drafting Team

Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET)
Nurses & Midwives Council Building
P.O. Box 203
Lilongwe
Tel. + 265 1 775-540
Fax. + 265 1 775-540
E-mail cisanet@globemw.net

Funded by the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa
www.odi.org.uk/food-security-forum

¹ Conducted by CISANET member organizations; Action Aid International, Concern World Wide, Every Child, ASSMAG, MALEZA, OXFAM, Concern Universal and World Vision

“THE PEOPLE’S VOICE!”

**A COMMUNITY CONSULTATION ² ON FOOD AND NUTRITION
SECURITY IN MALAWI**

² Jointly compiled by Vincent Gondwe of Concern World Wide, Vic Mhoni of CISANET Secretariat and Edson Musopole of Action Aid International-Malawi

Summary

No return to hunger

No-one ever wants to see again the kind of hunger and disruption that swept across Malawi's rural communities in 2002 affecting a third of the population (3.5 million people).

The right government policies, properly implemented, can make a big contribution to making sure this doesn't happen.

In 2005 there is a unique chance to put these in place, through the new National Food and Nutrition Security Policy which will be included in the 2005-06 budget on which Parliament will vote in June 2005.

The people have spoken

Malawi has signed the international *Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, so now **parliamentarians have a legal as well as a moral obligation** to ensure all Malawians can access food. What policies should be in the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy to deal with hunger in Malawi?

This statement of the **government policies that would most help rural communities in Malawi reduce hunger and increase food security** has come from the first ever organised *bwalo* discussions about food security carried out with men and women, old and young, in sixteen rural communities across Malawi in April 2004.

This statement is unique and important because it is the **voice of rural people** themselves: their own suggestions on how best government can help them to better lives and livelihoods. Now this voice needs to be heard and acted upon by MPs and Ministers in the Budget vote.

In the past, rural communities have suffered from not understanding how they are governed and how they can make their views heard. An important part of the democratic process in Malawi has been that people increasingly do understand their rights, expect their elected representatives to fulfil them, and understand how to get redress if their views are ignored.

Food security: the right to be free from fear of hunger

"Food security" means not just 'no hunger' but no *risk* or *fear* of hunger. This is important because the fear of hunger – even if it doesn't happen this year - makes people behave in ways which can damage their lives and livelihoods in the long-run and limit economic growth for the nation as a whole.

Food security: money to buy food

The world over, **food security does not come from crop production alone**: more importantly, it comes from people having cash incomes to buy food, for example through selling crops or from jobs. It also comes from proper management of the nation's food stocks from year to year and, if necessary, imported food, bought using export income or other funds.

Food is more than maize

'Food' means more than *nsima* alone: maize gives energy but plenty of relish and a varied diet that includes other crops are needed for people's healthy growth, resistance to disease, and ability to work.

Rural people in Malawi know this: in the *bwalos*, they clearly said **food security in rural Malawi means:**

"having high yields of different food crops to last from one harvest to the next, and one or more livestock types, and stable income sources"

Coping with hunger and food insecurity is the norm

Not one of the sixteen communities said they have food security. The results of this are plain: the Demographic Health Surveys show that **nearly 50% of Malawian children under five years old are stunted**, i.e. are suffering from long-term malnutrition – *a shocking figure that is the highest anywhere in southern Africa*. Malnutrition brain damages children and directly affects their ability to work: it is estimated that every 1% increase in height is associated with a 2% increase in wages.

Communities listed the ways they have to cope with hunger and food insecurity. Many of these **copied mechanisms are very damaging for individual families' well-being and for the nation's longer-term economic growth:**

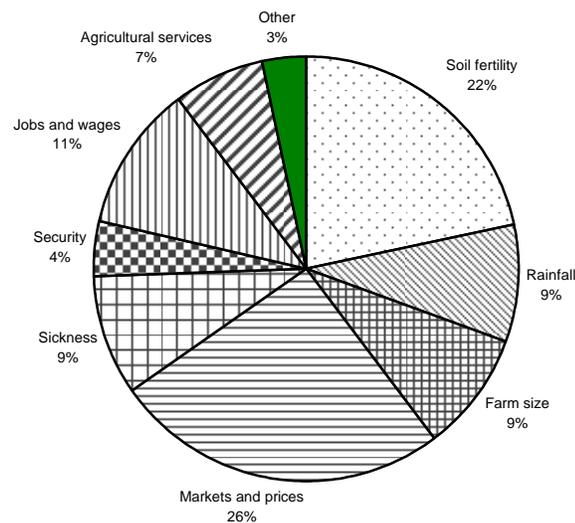
- buying food in markets – but there are not enough markets in many areas, prices are high and corruption is rife;
- selling labour for casual work (*ganyu*) – but this reduces own crop production and wage rates are low
- begging and prostitution
- borrowing and sharing – but traditional habits like this are under great threat from HIV/AIDS and economic recession
- petty business - but this is only for the few who have enough resources to buy stocks
- reducing meal frequencies and quantities
- making the best of foods like mangoes, pumpkin leaves, wild yams and banana leaves – but these inadequate foods directly increase hunger-related diseases.

What is causing food insecurity in Malawi and what can be done about it?

Hunger and food insecurity in Malawi are on-going problems related as much to **poor health of the rural population and low incomes** as to low maize production and drought. So far, the right policies have not been put in place to deal with these problems: 2002 will happen again unless District Assemblies, MPs and Ministers make some important changes in policies relating to health, employment and wages, as well as to agricultural production.

This is clear from the diagram below which shows the importance communities give to different causes of hunger and food insecurity in Malawi.

Figure: causes of hunger and food insecurity in Malawi: communities' view



Communities have clear and convincing explanations of the policies that would most help them deal with these problems: these **policy priorities are listed in order of importance** in the Table opposite.

Communities made three important additional points concerning policy priorities:

- **Food preparation and nutrition:** many families know how to prepare nutritious food: what prevents them is lack of money to buy items like cooking oil and legumes, and the scarcity of alternative foods due to over-emphasis on maize production.
- **Economic policies:** poor exchange rates, high interest rates, and problems with economic liberalisation have limited food production (e.g. through high input costs) and people's ability to buy food (e.g. through lack of jobs and income).
- **Economic and political governance:** communities fully understand that poor economic governance (of institutions like ADMARC and NFRA) has contributed to the hunger problem in Malawi. Communities also understand that poor political governance is denying them the right to make their views known in policy development and to hold their MPs and District Assembly representatives accountable.

Table : Community views on policy priorities for reducing hunger in Malawi

Food security constraint	Priority policies – community views
Weak markets & prices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better regulation of private traders. ▪ Place farmer representatives in markets to assist on price negotiation. ▪ ADMARC buy as well as sell crops, and ensure year-round availability. ▪ Government set minimum producer prices. ▪ More regulation and public education on food safety.
Poor soil fertility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Subsidies on transport costs and import duties of inputs; monitoring private trader input prices. ▪ More appropriate credit criteria (not tin roofs and animals); extend credit repayment periods; re-introduce credit clubs. ▪ Increase size and number of Starter Packs.
Lack of jobs & low wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide supportive environment for job creation in petty business, commercial agriculture and agro-processing, esp. in Jan-March hungry season.
Human sickness (malaria, cholera, HIV/AIDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase density of health centres. ▪ More health and environmental health education. ▪ Intensify provision of clean water, and better regulation of water pricing in peri-urban areas.
Small farms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fast-track land redistribution. ▪ More civic education on benefits of family planning. ▪ Stem reverse migration through job creation and health services.
Erratic rainfall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make treadle pumps and tree seedlings more available.
Failing agric. extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Place extension agents at community level. ▪ Use re-introduced credit clubs for extension delivery. ▪ Focus on crop diversification, irrigation, multiplication of planting material, family planning, nutrition education. ▪ Ensure appropriate extension advice and access to effective treatments for crops and livestock.
Poor security in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify effective means of reducing theft by unemployed youth and destitute families.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop safety nets programme that is effectively targeted, increases demand for goods and services, and allows the needy to engage in economic activities where possible.

Where next?

MPs and Ministers, on behalf of the people of Malawi, need to think differently about **hunger and food insecurity**, because they **are to do with poverty, lack of jobs and poor health services** as much as with maize productivity, agricultural extension and food aid.

Getting policies right on some of these issues needs further analysis. For example, communities' pleas to return to the old system of fertiliser subsidies, credit clubs, and guaranteed producer prices may not be right for Malawi in the early Twenty-first Century, with cheap maize easily available from elsewhere in southern Africa. **Accurate figures need to be presented.**

But some broad principles are clear: **better governance and economic policies** that encourage growth in jobs and income are not luxuries but necessities for ending hunger in Malawi; and action to improve food security must involve the whole of government and cannot be delegated to the Ministry of Agriculture alone.

Table of contents

Chapter	Topic	Page Number
1	Introduction	1
2	Methodology	2
2.1	Co-ordination and Coverage	2
2.2	Limitations	3
3	Community Perceptions of “Food” and Food Security”	4
3.1	Community Definition and Perception of “Food”	4
3.2	Community Definition of “Food Security”	5
3.3	Prevalence of food insecurity in rural Malawi.....	6
3.4	Impact of Food Insecurity & Coping Mechanisms.....	6
3.4.1	Market sources of food	6
3.4.2	Other coping mechanisms.....	7
4	Community Assessment of Constraints to Food Security	8
4.1	Markets & prices.....	8
4.2	Soil fertility.....	10
4.3	Employment and wages	11
4.4	Sickness.....	12
4.5	Farm size	13
4.6	Rainfall	14
4.7	Agricultural extension services	14
4.8	Minor factors	15
4.9	Food processing & utilisation	16
4.10	Governance and Decentralisation	17
4.11	Recommendations	18
5	Conclusions and Policy Recommendations	21
6	Annexes	25

Acknowledgements

This publication is a joint work of CISANET members in response to making community voices heard in the Food and Nutritional Policy formulation process. The process started in late March 2004 after a consultation meeting organized for the policy drafting experts held at Assemblies of God Sheaffer Conference Centre in Lilongwe, where the need for community consultation was identified. The meeting participants felt that community involvement in the process would legitimize the process and add some value to the process.

CISANET would therefore like to thank the Forum for Food Security for Southern Africa through the tireless effort of Elizabeth Cromwell, for the financial support, which made this work to be facilitated and produced. In a special way, we sincerely thank the following people and organizations for making this work possible and for their voluntary spirit in facilitating the community consultations: Daniel Kanyerere and Lameck Chimphero of World Vision, Harold Msusa and Memory Tchale of MALEZA, Yohane Kamgwira and John Makina of Oxfam, Abiel Banda and Jonathan Mdolo of ASSMAG, Wilford Kamuona and Thomas Moyo of Every Child, Lovely Chizimba of Concern Universal, Vincent Gondwe and Jim Goodman of Concern Worldwide, Edson Musopole, Barnes Saka, Harry Chikandiya and S. Lamba of Action Aid. I would also like to thank all the video documentors for the excellent work done in producing the videotapes for the consultation process.

Lastly, let me thank the support rendered by the policy-drafting experts and the Mr. Chintedza, the coordinator for the policy-drafting secretariat. These people offered all the support, which the team needed in terms of analytical knowledge. Special thanks to Mrs. Patricia Msutu of CISANET secretariat for logistical and secretariat support. It is my sincere hope that this work will add a voice from the communities in terms of how Government ought to ease their 'pains' in the quest for feeding themselves and their little ones.

Victor Mhoni
CISANET secretariat

1 Introduction

The Malawi Government launched the development of a new Food and Nutrition Security Policy in 2003 to replace the previous policy statement, which expired in 1990. This was in response to the 2002 Malawi food crisis, which was caused by a combination of inappropriate policies, climatic, soil degradation, governance and economic factors, amongst others.

The previous policy among other factors promoted dependence on maize, a crop most susceptible to drought. This policy was in response to the recurrent droughts experienced in the country. The production and utilisation of other crops such as cassava, sweet potatoes, yams, sorghum, millet and bananas, more tolerant to dry spells and drought, has remained on the periphery of staple foods.

Thus, the new policy formulation process started with a food and nutrition literature review followed by a food security situational analysis. A participatory process involving member organizations of the Joint Food Crisis Task Force provided initial feed back to the drafting team. As a follow-on, stakeholder consultations were carried out at regional and national levels. However, the process missed out rural communities, who represent about 80% of food producers and consumers in Malawi.

A civil society consultative workshop held in March 2004 agreed to facilitate a community consultative process to be conducted by CISANET member organizations. The aim of the consultation process was to facilitate contribution of rural communities to food and nutrition security policy formulation process.

It was felt that rural communities representing the majority of food producers and consumers in Malawi should have a voice in decision-making on matters that affect their own lives and that their voice should be at the forefront of the food and nutrition policy debate.

Therefore, the purpose of the consultations was to offer a platform for rural communities in Malawi to discuss and contribute policy recommendations on priority food and nutrition security issues.

The specific objectives of community consultation included the following:

- To articulate community opinion and recommendations on priority food and nutrition security issues to be addressed by the Food and Nutrition Security policy.
- To document scripts and video films of community group (*bwalo*) discussion proceedings on prioritized food and nutrition security policy issues
- To lobby and advocate with the drafting team, Government of Malawi and donors for the adoption of community input into the policy formulation process.

2 Methodology

An adapted form of the citizen jury approach, locally known as “*bwalo*”, was adopted to facilitate the process of grass-root community consultation. Organization and facilitation of the community discussion groups was conducted by CISANET member organizations and staff in their respective areas of work following introductory training to the *bwalo* process. A simple random selection of grass-root community members available to discuss the policy matrix issues was made. The groups included gender and generation representation.

A checklist of key policy issues developed out of a policy matrix provided by the food and nutrition security policy drafting team was applied by *bwalo* discussion facilitators to stimulate discussions. The discussion format was as follows:

- Community definition and perception of “food” and “food security”.
- Available diversity of food types
- Community knowledge of food types and nutrition, including food type preparation and consumption
- Community perception of issues affecting food security in their area
- Community coping mechanisms in times of food insecurity
- * Community recommendations to address food and nutrition security at grassroots level

Hired scriptwriters and video documenters captured the proceedings of the *bwalo* group discussions in English and Chewa/Nyanja and Tumbuka vernacular languages respectively. The 17 written scripts and footage of 13 video films were used to compile this report and presentation made at the National Consultative workshop held on 30th April, 2004. The presentation was led by a grass-root community advocacy group from Mnema village - an Action Aid Development Area in Salima. The community group lobbied and advocated for the adoption of recommended people-centred food and nutrition security policy to address the needs of smallholder farmers and the rural community in Malawi.

2.1 Co-ordination and Coverage

Action Aid-Malawi coordinated the project in close collaboration with the CISANET secretariat. Community mobilization and organization was facilitated by Concern Worldwide-Malawi, Malawi Enterprise Zone Association (*MALEZA*), Oxfam, Concern Universal-Malawi, Every Child-Malawi, Association of Smallholder Seed Multipliers Action Group (*ASSMAG*), Action Aid-Malawi and World Vision-Malawi.

A total of 375 men and women participated in 17 community group consultative discussion sessions in Thyolo (*Naphazi and Nkolokosa*), Balaka (*Hambahamba*), Salima (*Kayimngambalame, M'nima*), Lilongwe (*Chatata, Chibade, Chiwamba, Nachiola*), Mzimba (*Kapotavingwe, Kamangadazi*) and Nkhata Bay (*Chinyakula and Chipambo*).

2.2 Limitations

The exercise was constrained by the short time of preparation and implementation. Experience gained from the development and testing of the cross cutting checklist, training of *bwalo* facilitators, script and video documenters required a week of preparation. Targeting of areas and selection of community members to participate in the *bwalo* discussion and facilitation of the discussion but also documentation required more professionalism. *Bwalo* discussions were conducted in vernacular languages using a checklist written in English. Translation and application of English technical terms into vernacular terms proved difficult.

The analysis of the *bwalo* discussions focused more on script documentaries. For comprehensive analysis, it is recommended that area specific video coverage should also be viewed.

Recommendations to address the issues raised in the *bwalo* discussions include those made by community members and the analysts of discussion documentary.

3 Community Perceptions of “Food” and Food Security”

3.1 Community Definition and Perception of “Food”

This was solicited in order to appreciate how communities’ understanding and interpretation influences the food and nutrition security policy issues under discussion.

All the sixteen communities consulted loosely perceived food as *nsima*¹. The only difference was that some perceived *nsima* made from maize was the food while others perceived *nsima* made from cassava to be ‘food’.

Relish which is in vegetable, meat or fish form is an *nsima* supplement and is implied to be part of the food according to community definition of food though not mentioned implicitly.

The community perception influences community practice in addressing their household food security. The peripheral view of relish as a *nsima* supplement is practically translated into marginalised production and access. Traditionally men, leave the responsibility for fetching relish to women.

Nutritionally, relish is of higher value and yet consumed in smallest quantities. If most men knew the importance of nutritive value of relish they might put more effort into producing and accessing relish. Currently men’s emphasis is on maize production, often for cash. Community perception on food should change to include relish so that equal emphasis can be put on production and access of both relish and maize for *nsima*.

Box 1: Selected community definitions of “food”

Chibade II village, T.A. Chitukula, Lilongwe district – “Food is anything that is taken by a human being with the intention of protecting one from diseases, and making blood to move well”.

Naphazi village, T.A. Nchilamwera, Thyolo district – “Food is something that a person eats so that they have life. It also gives one strength, protects one from diseases and gives out nutritive value (‘mavitamini’/thanzi)”.

Chikanda village, Salima district – “Food is something which when eaten makes the body function and sustains life”.

Kaingambalame village, Lilongwe – “anything eaten that gives energy, growth, immunity”

Hambahamba village, Balaka district- “is something which when eaten protects from diseases, builds up the body and gives energy”.

A clearer definition of “food” came after further probing on the understanding of food and its functions in the body (see Box 1). The facilitators also assessed how the communities understood the importance of different food nutrition groups.

The communities defined the term “Food” as:

“Something when eaten gives a person nutritive value, energy. Enables one to grow, protects the body from diseases and sustains life”.

¹ Nsima is a type of food prepared from maize, millet, sorghum or cassava flour, by mixing flour and water and cooking until it forms porridge. At porridge stage, more flour is applied until the porridge sets and it is then eaten in pieces with any kind of relish.

Box 2: Different food types

Nsima-based food types made of finger millet, sorghum, maize, cassava flour are dominant wherever the respective crops are grown. As such they are taken as staple foods. Diversity in food production and processing would improve nutrition.

This is quite similar to the definition used in government policy making: *what we eat and drink to keep us alive and well, to help us grow, develop, work and play* (MoAI, 1998)².

However communities' perceptions of what food is tend to refer to the most commonly and frequently consumed maize-food recipes i.e. **nsima**, the major staple food (see Box 2). *Nsima*, particularly nsima made from maize, has become synonymous to food.

Maize gained dominance over the original staple food types used in Malawi in the early 20th century. The loss of soil fertility and increasing need for inorganic fertilizer in recent years are major contributors to rising maize production costs and maize food prices. This raise concerns for food and nutrition, specifically regarding:

- *Input subsidies and credit*
- Crop diversification

3.2 Community Definition of "Food Security"

The communities defined "food security" as:

"having high yields of different food crops to last the whole year. i.e. from one harvest period to the next, and availability of one or more livestock types and stable income source to support livelihoods."

This compares with the standard FAO World Food Summit 1996 definition:

"Having physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food by all people, at all times, to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".

Box 2 : Selected community definitions of "food security"

Chatata village, T.A. Chitukula, Lilongwe district – "It is a state whereby one has enough food all year round (with emphasis on maize)".

Nkolokosa village, T.A. Nchilamwela, Thyolo district – "It is having enough maize that can be consumed throughout the year till the next harvest, but it also includes other food stuffs e.g. sweet potatoes, cassava and livestock that can be slaughtered for consumption; and can be sold for cash to buy maize".

Chikanda village, Salima district – "It is having high yield of crop, more livestock to sustain life".

Kaingambalame village, Lilongwe – "a state whereby one has enough food (maize) per person to run them for a year round".

The major difference in terms of definitions is that the FAO definition is very generic whereas the community one narrows down to the specifics of crops, livestock and income.

² Khan, B.D., 1998, Community Nutrition Training Manual for Extension Staff, Ministry of Agriculture, Lilongwe.

In the crop aspect of the definition it is evident that in the community definition, more stress is on reliance on maize and the sustainability of the maize economy despite recognition of crop diversity.

The international definition recognizes the need for households to have both physical and economic access to food. However, the community definition emphasizes the need for physical stocks of food to last for a year, because most of the communities do not have good linkages to local markets nor significant alternative sources of income, or 'hedge' facilities such as livestock, to ensure the ability to buy food in the market when crops run out.

The community definition makes no mention of nutritional issues or food safety, and yet these are both crucial issues in rural Malawi. We have already noted the need to diversify nutrition away from maize. Awareness of food safety is important to avoid repetition of experiences in 2002 food crisis when communities were reported to have bought rotten maize from unscrupulous market traders.

As far as we know, this consultation was the first time in Malawi that communities' own perception of 'food security' had been sought. It serves to show that there are some differences between international and community definitions, so policy should be designed to address the specific food security priorities and concerns of communities in Malawi.

3.3 Prevalence of food insecurity in rural Malawi

Communities indicated that they are **food insecure**, since they are facing food production and in other cases food access challenges. However, it was recognized at the community-level not all rural households are faced with food shortage. Examples who do include casual labour [*'ganyu'*] providers, who are from poor classes of society and do casual labour as a coping strategy.

Communities indicated that the period in which they consume their own staple food (i.e. maize stocks) is between March (*start eating green maize ('chitibu'), though some may start eating this maize in February*) and August annually. Coincidentally, most of the major food crops consumed at village level are rain-fed: as such their availability follows the same pattern of consumption. During this period, communities said maize prices go down as low as MK100 per pail, whereas after August when maize stocks in households are getting depleted, average maize prices start rising, reaching as high as MK350 per pail by year end and even MK500 + per pail in January.

3.4 Impact of Food Insecurity & Coping Mechanisms

During times when stocks are being depleted, households resort to markets for their food needs and other off-farm activities, which directly or indirectly provide food sources.

3.4.1 Market sources of food

Based on community consultations, the major source of maize food stocks is ADMARC. Communities expressed that ADMARC is a determinant of the market maize price even though

its supply capacity is not reliable, in terms of having enough stocks for sale.

“The ADMARC market has some stocks during most of the harvest period, but surprisingly when we come to the most lean period in January – February, the market sometimes does not have maize stocks. This is the time when we feel the pinch of buying from private traders at high prices” --- A community member at the district consultation meeting.

Communities expressed that the corruption amongst ADMARC personnel was a matter of concern, as quoted from the one of the consultations, *“we are poor and we want to buy some little maize but we are expected to pay bribes to ADMARC officials to be sold some maize”*. Communities expressed concerns on decision by ADMARC to close markets. Vendors as private traders were called, are alternative market sources.

In terms of selling agricultural produce, communities expressed that ADMARC was preferred since despite buying the crops at lower prices, they sell back to communities at lower prices as compared to private traders; who buy also at lower prices and sell farmers the same maize at high prices.

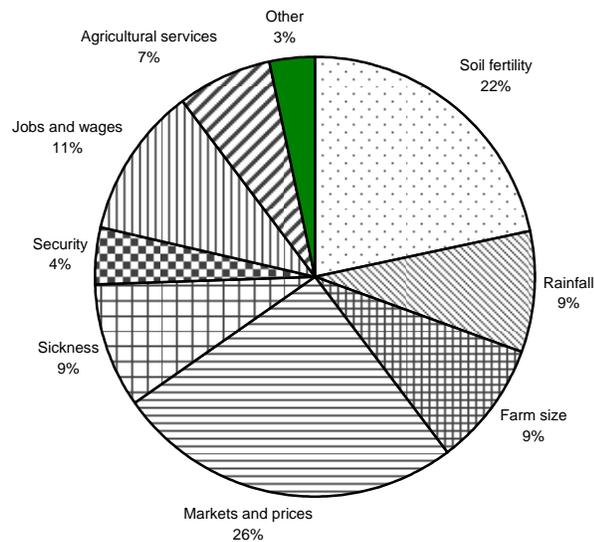
3.4.2 Other coping mechanisms

- (a) Ganyu labour --- This is the most common and most reliable source of cash or food in lean periods, despite being recognized as a disadvantage to agricultural production at household level since most of the times ganyu is done during the cropping season. Thus, labour providing households concentrate on ganyu leaving their gardens unattended. Ganyu types employed are (i) cash-for-work and (ii) food-for-work.
- (b) Petty businesses --- Some of the business involved are selling vegetables, confectionaries etc. It was mentioned that prostitution also thrives as a petty traded business in times of food shortages.
- (c) Reduction of meal frequencies and quantities --- Communities expressed that when the food stocks are getting depleted, frequency of meals is reduced to having one meal a day and even the quantities (*food intake*) are reduced as well.
- (d) Cooking mangoes --- Mangoes are very prevalent in October-December period, and as such play an important coping mechanism. Annex 2 indicates the different ways in which they are consumed.
- (e) Use of pumpkin leaves as a main meal --- pumpkin leaves are overcooked and eaten like nsima (*ie producing morsels*) and others are less cooked and eaten as relish.
- (f) Eating wild yams and banana leaves --- Communities consume these foods when there is literally no other means for conventional foods e.g. no maize from stocks and no assets that can be sole to buy food and no casual labour opportunities. It is during this time that most households have hunger-related diseases in the rural areas. It is said that this is an indicator of famine if there is high prevalence of such diseases.
- (g) Begging/borrowing/sharing food stocks --- Community inter-linkages and social capital allow for community sharing of food stocks and even borrowing as a coping strategy. Examples of sharing relief items received in the previous drought emergency relief operations were sighted as examples of sharing of food items.

“During the period of food shortage, these women do not listen when told to reduce meal quantities, so we just puncture holes on the sides of pots in order for the water not to go beyond these limits” --- Response from one male participant on limiting meal quantities.

4 Community Assessment of Constraints to Food Security

Figure 1: major factors contributing to food security based on community perceptions



4.1 Markets & prices

Problem: Poor prices and lack of competitive markets

Analysis: The liberalisation of markets has brought in some negative consequences to farmers. Private traders when they buy from the communities dictate very low prices. Farmers do not have any say since traders have total control of the market, charging prices at will without justification. Farmers who grow the produce feel cheated that prices paid do not reflect production costs. On this issue, Government (*preferably looking at Government agencies such as ADMARC and National Food Reserve Agency*) was also blamed in that the price at which produce is bought is also low as compared to production costs.

Problem: Lack of reliable cassava and sweet potato market

Analysis: Marketing of cassava and sweet potatoes in the community is dominated by vendors, who dictate the price. As a result farmers are exploited whenever they try to sell their farm produce. Due to their ignorance of the margin the vendors make when they sell at the markets, farmers accept to be exploited. In the case of sweet potato it was learnt that the perishability of the commodity was the cause for the low market price and poor returns being realised by producers in the communities. Cash returns from the crops are not adequate to buy

maize or fertiliser. Local in-kind exchange of cassava and sweet potato with other produce such as maize offers a fairer return to the producer than cash exchange.

Problem: Lack of maize stocks in ADMARC markets

56% of the communities consulted indicated that ADMARC markets in their localities were not stocking adequate food-maize during the critical food lean periods such as December – January. The communities rely on ADMARC as their first choice for provision of maize.

Despite having maize available at ADMARC markets the other constraint becomes corruption by ADMARC officials at the markets. Communities complained that they are expected to bribe the market officials in order to buy the little quantities of maize they ask to be sold to them.

“I am poor and I want to buy just 5 kgs of maize, yet I am expected to palm grease an ADMARC official to be sold the maize or else I will go home without the maize” --- complaints from a man in Balaka.

Analysis: This community picture agrees with what has been discussed in forums and from studies. The subsidized ADMARC maize price creates external demand outside ADMARC, which entices ADMARC officials to be bribed and privately supply subsidized maize to traders and vendors at subsidized price for them to sell outside ADMARC at an exorbitant price. At a macro-level, sales of grain stocks in the Strategic Grain Reserves (*SGR*) is evidence on what communities are saying, coupled with the fact that reports have also indicated that market officials have sold off the maize to private traders in bulk while selling to farmers through a quota system.

On the issue of low stocks, a technical report from Ministry of Agriculture on maize marketing attributed low maize sales in ADMARC depots to high prices coupled with past irregular supply of maize to ADMARC depots (MoAIFS, 2003).

Also in reference to ADMARC, communities complained that ADMARC in other areas just sells the maize without actually buying the maize from the communities.

Problem: Unstable food prices

Market food prices are very unstable and food prices were high. The fact is that soon after harvest farmers sell their maize or food stocks to traders at low prices. The same maize stocks are offered to rural communities during the peak of the food lean period by the same traders at high price. The complaint of the rural communities, being producers of the maize is that they find it unfair to buy the same maize they sold at more than double the price they received 4 to 6 months ago.

Analysis: The forces of demand and supply interplay in reality, but the key issue is that there is uncontrolled pricing mechanism and that there is very little basis for price setting, especially looking at price differentials between farm-gate and retail prices. This is exacerbated by the fact that ADMARC markets sometimes do not have stocks, thus forcing the farmers to buy their food stocks from the *“expensive”* private traders' markets.

In the case of rural communities their economy is highly dependant on agriculture. Therefore, with the poor performance of most of the crops due to climatic changes as noted above and other factors like poor market prices, the income derived from this source is very little and it fails to sustain the family in terms of food purchase. Therefore, such farming families are exposed to food insecurity.

As if low income is not enough, food is very expensive in the markets thus further putting a lot of families that have experienced poor yields to perpetual food shortage.

4.2 Soil fertility

Problem: Low soil fertility

Analysis: The communities indicated that due to continuous cultivation and poor farming techniques, the soil fertility status has been depleted to the extent that where farmers used to harvest more yields in the past, now cannot produce yields unless fertility enhancers such as manure and fertiliser have been applied.

Communities indicated that chemical fertiliser is one of the best alternatives in terms of fertility enhancement, but due to high prices of fertilisers and lower purchasing power in the communities, they cannot afford to buy fertilisers.

On the contrary, it is recognised that organic manure is an alternative to improve soil fertility, but the following constraints were noted:

- a. Unavailability of livestock by majority of communities --- Use of animal excreta is necessary in order to increase nitrogen in manure. As such, the manure used is of weaker strength. However, unavailability of livestock by most community members affects production of high-analysis manure.
- b. Composting is labour intensive --- Compost is bulky and thus it takes a lot of energy to transport to garden and it would require greater quantities to suffice a planting garden. However the high fertiliser prices had forced many farmers to adopt composting and application of manure.

Problem: High fertilizer prices

Analysis: All communities consulted stated that the soils on which they grow their crops has very low fertility and as such if grown without inorganic fertilizer little harvest is realised.

Going through a historical trend line, communities indicated that some time back they used ample quantities of inorganic fertilizer on their gardens because it was cheaper since the government used to subsidize the price. After the removal of subsidies the communities said that it is very difficult to acquire fertilizers.

In a related development, issues of farmers' clubs was mentioned as an input access mechanism, where communities indicated that clubs were used to give the farmers inputs on loan. Under the current set-up, credit access is low according to community findings since other community residents did not know the availability of credit institution personnel in their areas.

Attached to high fertilizer prices was the issue of high [improved/hybrid] yielding crop seeds, as such communities do not afford buying this seed despite being demanded. Communities explained

that high yielding seed also requires chemical fertilizers if it is increase its yields as such there is need to look at these issues *in tandem*.

Problem: Deterioration of the credit system in Malawi

Analysis: Despite its weaknesses, the farmer clubs were very beneficial institutions at a village level. They were used for several functions, such as:

- a. Organised groupings to access farm inputs on credit through Smallholder Agricultural Credit Authority (SACA)
- b. Management of the training and visit extension system.

The communities, however, mentioned that farmer clubs system plus its role in credit provision collapsed with the cessation of Government to provide loans due to high credit default rates. To which politics in the transition stage from single party to political pluralism played a major part in terms of credit non-repayment.

The mere fact that there has been no major alternative to this arrangement, it has meant that credit provision has been limited as compared to past credit coverage through the club system. In terms of credit, communities indicated that credit provision should be directly linked with extension advice since credit alone cannot perform deliver the intended purposes.

In terms of credit, issues that communities complained of in terms of the current credit system wherever it is available are:

- (a) *Prohibitive interest rates* – high interest rates have rendered agribusiness to have unattractive stake from community viewpoint.
- (b) *The need for collaterals* – communities complained that some credit institutions demand collateral terms that most of the community members despite having interest to get loans fail to manage.

4.3 Employment and wages

At Chatata village, near Kanengo, communities expressed dissatisfaction with closure of companies and the issue of privatization, where a lot of people lost their maior source of livelihood – employment.

Problem: Lack of jobs and low wages

Analysis: Communities indicated that the level of job creation in Malawi is low. Particularly in peri-urban areas and for school leavers. Closure of companies renders breadwinners jobless and thus families trek back to the villages, with the following results:

- Reduction on land holding sizes on relatives of the families hosting the 'returnees'.
- Theft, since young people without jobs resort to stealing goods from fellow villagers, especially impacting very much on the livestock sector.
- Increase in corruption cases for people to access jobs, thus affecting equity in job acquisition in favour of wealthy village members.

Everywhere, people mentioned low wage rates that do not reflect economic realities as a major challenge to food security. For example, in 1998 the minimum daily income to fulfill basic needs was estimated at about MK 11, but fully 65% of the population was not achieving this.

Problem: Seasonality of casual labour

Analysis: The critical food shortage periods coincide with times when communities are supposed to be looking at garden preparations for the next planting season. In this regard, the forces of survival interplay against the need for land preparation. It is a known fact that one needs to eat in order to work.

Such being the case, communities contract casual labour, mostly in form of preparing gardens for the wealthy community members thus neglecting their own gardens. This, however, brings in complications in terms of their own food production in that by the time they finish this casual labour, they are left with very little or no time to prepare their gardens. This affects their crop production and the time lost affects crop growth and development causing low yields and its associated problems.

Even where villagers/communities are employed, labour peaks coincide with peak agricultural times such as labour demands in companies rises in October to December while as labour troughs are available in February – March when labour needs are lower agriculturally and while as these times have high vulnerability prevalence, and these families had been affected production-wise due to concentration on work/ganyu.

4.4 Sickness

Problem: Widespread ill-health and disease

Analysis: Communities outlined diseases as a major factor affecting food security. Time taken by relatives to cater for patients diverts family attention from the garden to household nursing services.

Some of the illnesses that are prominent within rural communities are:

- HIV/AIDS --- This is one of the most disastrous diseases in terms of food security, due to its effects on labour dynamics in farming. The increasing number of orphans is putting pressure on food availability at the household level. Communities also indicated that loss of breadwinners has forced some family members (*especially female ones*) into prostitution in order to fend for food for the other family members, thus increasing the pandemic.
- Cholera & malaria --- Communities indicated that these diseases are very prevalent in the rainy season, which coincidentally is the labour peak time so illnesses at this time affect families' ability to work effectively in their gardens and thus their food production capacities. Cholera is caused by declining environmental health standards due to lack of extension personnel that could train farmers in improved health standards and also by drinking unsafe water. In peri-urban areas, low resource power makes communities fail to buy piped water: water pricing does not take into account the vulnerability status of communities. This is compounded by the fact that unemployment rates and migration rates to towns has grown high and its subsequent pressure on land resource, thus communities being unable to produce enough crops to support their livelihoods.

Communities understand that diseases seem to thrive where there is poor nutrition status. In most cases, these diseases have posed food security challenges based on their effects on agricultural labour activities.

Communities also indicated that death of community members due to these diseases is increasing. The reasons given for this increased death toll to cholera and malaria are not only direct factors such as declining environmental health standards but also indirect factors such as hospitals being far away. Hence, patients die on the way to the hospital, especially from cholera.

4.5 Farm size

Problem: Low land holding sizes

Analysis: Communities indicated that one of the major problems causing food insecurity is that of low land holding sizes put under cultivation and inadequate grazing land. Some of the causes of this problem are:

- Low land holding sizes due to expansion of estates. As such local villagers are persistently evicted from their farm lands, thus reducing their land sizes.
- In other cases, despite having more land, poverty makes (i) farmers rent out and seek *ganyu* from those who have rented or others who are well to do. This affects labour provision for their gardens thus making households susceptible to production shortages, (ii) farmers cultivate less pieces of land and since the land on which they are cultivating has low soil fertility, this results in low production.
- HIV/AIDS pandemic is exerting pressure on villagers since relatives from cities or orphan numbers are increasing pressure on the inelastic land resource. This brings in the challenge of having more mouths to feed but having lower production yields and thus food amounts.

Problem Population boom

Analysis: In the communities that were consulted, the main demographic factor that was noted to have a bearing on food insecurity was over population. This posed a constraint on land and other factors of production. In most of the areas, it was reported that there had been a rapid growth of the population that had a negative impact on the size of inelastic land size for cultivation.

The community could not undermine the positive impact of the family planning methods. However, they also outlined some of the negative aspects that have affected adoption of family planning methods:

- Some men refuse to accept family planning methods
- The issue of family planning has been introduced very late in time
- Some women develop side-effects from other family planning techniques
- Inadequate extension outreach on family planning

In other cases, family planning education has been provided but high ignorance rates have rendered such efforts futile. In their own understanding, communities felt that low education standards i.e. lack of teachers and presence of lower primary school classes only in some parts of country has affected education levels of people in the short and long-term. Since children read some instructions for their illiterate parents.

High population has affected the size of land available for grazing of livestock. Holding other factors constant, this has reduced the number and the sizes of the livestock being kept since food for these livestock is not easy to find. Therefore, for those households that used to having cattle as a beast

of burden, their efforts are then constrained in terms of the reduced labour force that has got a direct bearing on farming and consequently on availability of food to a particular household.

4.6 Rainfall

Problem: Erratic rainfall

Analysis: There has been a fluctuation of the rains over the years. In some of the years, crops have experienced heavy rain down falls that have made them to rot. Yet in other years, like the case of the current year, there has been very little rain that most of the planted crops could just wilt. The unfortunate thing has been that the rains could not fall in a regular way during the time of tasselling like in the case of maize when water was heavily required in the cob formation stage.

The 'popular' factor causing rainfall changes which is environmental degradation was registered during the community consultations. Where the most notable factor was indiscriminate felling of trees without regard for replacement on a national scale. On probing, communities know that trees need replacement but the dilemma is on unavailability of tree seedlings. The general comment on lack of extension personnel was raised as the hindrance for not being able to strengthen afforestation programmes in the absence of frontline extension staff.

Communities mentioned also the use of early maturing and high yielding seeds to combat the problem, but also expressed that pricing of the seed would be another hindrance.

Problem: Lack of irrigation materials

Analysis: Irregular rainfall requires irrigation that could supplement production that has failed due to the inadequate rains. However, this has not been the case. During the consulted a number of the communities reported that they do not have irrigation materials and also due to lack/ inadequate extension services of agriculture, the communities do not have adequate knowledge/ information regarding irrigation in view of irregularities in the rainfall pattern.

4.7 Agricultural extension services

Problem: Few Extension Agents

Analysis: Communities indicated that currently there are few extension agents in the villages. Where these extension agents are prevalent, they rarely visit the communities due to mobility difficulties. Communities also indicated that in the absence of extension agents, they listen to such instructions through the radio but without demonstrations, the benefits are limited.

However, communities indicated that nutrition training stopped as a result and home craft extension staff was transferred out of extension stations, rendering nutrition education non-existent. Not only has nutrition education, which is very vital during the current times with the light of the HIV/AIDS epidemic impact on the communities; but also the low replenishment of the extension staff that have died, retired or changed jobs from public to private services is a major problem.

In some of the areas where there are agricultural extension officers, the communities reported that they do not play an active extension service provision role as done previously. Their work in some instances is being affected by lack of transport to go and do their workstations e.g. they might have a motorcycle that works but they do not have fuel to travel to their workstations. This situation prompts a farmer, who needs any agricultural advice, to be told to provide fuel if the extension agent is to visit them. Communities complained that they are financial resource constrained to manage this proposed system.

Problem: Pest and diseases reduce food and income

Analysis: Pest and disease attacks have resulted in lower crop stands and yields. In Salima for example, armyworm and locust attacks plus other pests and diseases have affected household food security.

Not only are crop pests and diseases affecting food security attainment at village level, but also pests and diseases of livestock such as chicken new castle diseases '*chitopa*' and other epidemic diseases '*chigodola*'. The problems highlighted included not only prevalence of pests and diseases but also high costs of pesticides, where for example communities mentioned the use of ash as a pesticide in maize storage, which has limited results.

Another case was mentioned in Nkhata Bay, where yields of cassava have been dwindling due to pests and diseases, where as an alternative would be maize but equally high price of inputs renders diversity not to be a solution in this case.

4.8 Minor factors

Problem: Disincentive effect of food aid

Analysis: Assistance of vulnerable community members through emergency relief operations is important, but the practice has made beneficiary households abuse such safety nets in the sense that they do not want to graduate from the system even in the years when production has not been affected by climatic problems such as persistent dry spells or heavy rains. They have liked to stay thus so that they continue receiving that type of food assistance which should not have been the case - they are supposed to graduate from the safety net once the problems that made them to be food insecure are over, which in most cases the communities reported to have been due to changes in the climate. Failure to improve their agricultural situations, through unyielding efforts in growing crops on unfertile soils have rendered the communities hopeless. Which can be contrasted with 1998/99 season, where the country produced higher yields through universal starter pack programme.

Problem: Laziness

Analysis: The case of laziness mentioned is drunkenness of some of the male members of the households, who are supposed to provide labour for agricultural activities. Such acts have deprived households of self-reliance in terms of food provision, families have been heavily affected by malnutrition and are perpetually dependent on food aid.

In another context, communities indicated that laziness in terms of farming is becoming a problem and is causing pressure on food resources. This is because communities are inter-dependent on each other, such that those families with low food resources would push their dependency on relatives causing household food security to be low. In addition this causes social conflicts within households or between households leading to instances of theft, witchcraft and increased levels of poverty and vulnerability of households.

4.9 Food processing & utilisation

Communities did not mention food processing and utilization as major constraints to food security. They were knowledgeable about both indigenous and exotic processing and preparation methods, though not all had practical experience. The communities cited as relatively new practices food recipes which benefited from adding highly nutritive processed pulses, such as groundnut and soybean flour, to sweet potatoes and to porridge made from maize flour.

There is evidence of community knowledge and practice in food processing and nutrition cited by communities, for example:

- a) Some community consultations did outline that soda is used in food preparation with full knowledge that it destroys vitamins but preferred it in order to improve palatability of the relish in other cases, it was mentioned that vegetables are not supposed to be overcooked in order not to dilute nutritive value.
- b) Communities were able to mention that *nsima* made from *mgaiwa* (maize flour from entire grain) is more nutritious than that from white maize flour (*highly processed maize flour*) and had more advantages as well since it can be eaten with any type of relish. However, community members also indicated that *mgaiwa* has abdominal effects to some people hence the preference of white maize flour by others. Some communities attributed the abdominal pains to undercooking of the *nsima* made from *mgaiwa* due to lack of firewood (*apparently mgaiwa nsima needs a lot of firewood as compared to nsima from 'ufa oyera'*). Most victims of such pains were said to be children as opposed to adults.
- c) The linkages between processing and utilization have in other cases suggested that presence of several crops has been advantageous, for example, preparation of '*futali*' in which sweet potatoes are cooked and fortified with groundnut flour to make a highly nutritious foodstuff.
- d) Some communities mentioned that addition of groundnut flour provides some oil to the food.
- e) With regard to the importance of salt in food communities were only able to say that salt adds taste to food. They were not aware of the bodily function of salt.

Diversity of food preparation, processing and utilization though not universally practiced is a positive development. Because it shows that there is increasingly more technology transfer over the years either through family lines, friends or through Government or civil society organizations extension efforts. Such developments are important in the improvement of national and community nutrition status.

However, the increasing prevalence of malnutrition indicators and high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates suggests this notion to be wrong. Since if such were the case, nutrition status of Malawians would have been depicting better indicators. The major question is that if communities have such knowledge, then why do we have malnutrition cases rising in Malawi? Communities attributed the prevalent malnutrition problem to:

- Low income level to access such food additives as cooking oil to improve nutrition in the food. Most community members indicated that they do not have enough money to buy cooking oil and that amidst competing household needs cooking oil was not perceived to be a priority.
- Instability in supply and availability of alternative foods when maize is in short supply.
- The extent of knowledge base on food utilization is not as wide due to lack of home economics extension workers.
- Food storage techniques for alternative foods are not very prevalent as shown by seasonal calendar span of available supplement foods.

The food processing and utilization issues in Malawi are thus related to availability (*food equity*) – the more food crop diversity is practiced, the more the availability and access of alternative food types to a household. The situation improves prospects of alternative food utilization e.g. for ‘futali’ to be prepared, groundnuts have to be available and accessible.

4.10 Governance and Decentralisation

Problem: Poor economic governance

Analysis: Communities, specifically two villages, were able to articulate the issue of rise in input prices as well as its subsequent increase in other producer prices. In that they indicated that poor economic governance has led to currency depreciation and devaluation, which have caused prices of essential farming commodities such as fertiliser to rise due to low purchasing power of the Kwacha to foreign currencies. They singled out transport costs and import duties as some areas where if subsidy could be applied, fertiliser prices would be affordable

In course of the *bwalo* group discussions, communities raised a couple of governance issues. The peri-urban communities complained of lack of political will on agriculture development and management of food security in the country. They particularly gave examples of the impact of privatization and commercialisation of government institutions such as massive staff redundancies and loss of income. They also complained of the closure of ADMARC markets and the lack of a reliable produce marketing agency to offer meaningful prices for their farm produce and inputs.

On the issue of popular action in redressing some of the concerned issues, communities indicated that there is a missing link between legislators and district assembly structures with the communities, since most of these community members do not know how these structures function so that they can seek redress actions. Communities indicated that feedback mechanisms are poor in terms of policy knowledge or over what decisions are made in assembly meetings or in parliamentary sessions. Such being the case, most of the problems have not been effectively tackled and as such problem resolution has been government-driven as opposed to being community driven.

In a related case, communities lack knowledge on what policies are and its importance since there is no proper forums where communities are explained what policy means and how important it is to their lives. As such, it was a surprise to hear of the food and nutritional security policy development.

In this regard, communities recommended that Government should improve communications channels with rural communities on policy and practical issues. Therefore, there is a strong need for Governmental and non-governmental agencies to enlighten communities on decentralization, especially on how they could use to seek redress on food and nutritional security issues.

4.11 Recommendations

Policies should be put in place to support increased crop yields, acquisition of food to last the whole year, livestock acquisition and household cash income. Communities have clear and convincing explanations of the policies that would most help them deal with these problems: these policy priorities are listed in order of importance in Table 1 and explained below.

Table 1: community policy priorities for reducing hunger in Malawi

Food security constraint	Priority policies – community views
Weak markets & prices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better regulation of private traders. ▪ Place farmer representatives in markets to assist on price negotiation. ▪ ADMARC buy as well as sell crops, and ensure year-round availability. ▪ Government set minimum producer prices. ▪ More regulation and public education on food safety.
Poor soil fertility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Subsidies on transport costs and import duties of inputs; monitoring private trader input prices. ▪ More appropriate credit criteria (not tin roofs and animals); extend credit repayment periods; re-introduce credit clubs. ▪ Increase size and number of Starter Packs.
Lack of jobs & low wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide supportive environment for job creation in petty business, commercial agriculture and agro-processing, esp. in Jan-March hungry season.
Human sickness (malaria, cholera, HIV/AIDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase density of health centres. ▪ More health and environmental health education. ▪ Intensify provision of clean water, and better regulation of water pricing in peri-urban areas.
Small farms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fast-track land redistribution. ▪ More civic education on benefits of family planning. ▪ Stem reverse migration through job creation and health services.
Erratic rainfall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make treadle pumps and tree seedlings more available.
Failing agric. extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Place extension agents at community level. ▪ Use re-introduced credit clubs for extension delivery. ▪ Focus on crop diversification, irrigation, multiplication of planting material, family planning, nutrition education. ▪ Ensure appropriate extension advice and access to effective treatments for crops and livestock.
Poor security in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify effective means of reducing theft by unemployed youth and destitute families.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop safety nets programme that is effectively targeted, increases demand for goods and services, and allows the needy to engage in economic activities where possible.

Weak markets and prices

1. Free market policies i.e. market liberalization framework, should be regulated to take into account the interest of sellers (*communities*) and buyers, which currently empowers traders at the expense of the farmers.
2. Communities recommended the introduction of farmers representatives in markets, who would assist farmers negotiate prices to reduce the powers of private traders who are exploitative.

3. On ADMARC, communities recommended that ADMARC should not only be selling agricultural produce but also be buying. But the communities complained of low prices setting by Government thus the issue being suggested in reverting to the former system before market liberalisation where Government operated price bands i.e. minimum guaranteed prices and such prices be used as price trendsetters since private trader's prices are exploitative in nature.
4. Food stocks to be available at ADMARC markets year-round as opposed to seasonal availability.

Soil fertility

1. Subsidy on the price of agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and seed. Where as subsidy is vital and a prerequisite, communities felt that monitoring of input prices would be yet another vital service to avoid unscrupulous behaviour of traders over such subsidized goods.
2. Credit access conditions to be eased to fit into community settings e.g. not asking for tin-roofed houses and livestock when most of the clientele cannot afford these things and credit institutions to intensify on civic education to the communities in terms of loan conditions. The credit repayment periods should be extended to fit in with the financial conditions at community level.
3. Re-introduction of farmer club system, due to the need for linkages of credit access (*through group lending*) and associated linkage to extension advice from extension agents and input use.
4. The number of beneficiaries and size of the starter packs for inputs safety nets programmes should be increased, so that more people are able to afford to boost their food crop production.

Jobs and wages

- Improve economic management to avoid closure of companies through privatization
- Focus on job creation in petty business, commercial agriculture and agro-processing

Human sickness

1. Provision of health centers within closer distances so that patients should not travel long distances to hospitals in cases of critical illnesses.
2. Government to intensify on the provision of clean water services e.g. boreholes in order to reduce prevalence of water-borne diseases.
3. HIV/AIDS counseling services to be available to the community level to influence behavioural change of community members.

Small farms

1. The need for land redistribution to be fast-tracked especially in areas with acute land shortage, in order to reduce tensions between large-scale landowners and smallholders. On the issue, communities e.g. in Thyolo wanted Government to consider re-distributing the unused land locally known as '*mikwalala*' i.e. fallow lands.
2. Increase civic education on family planning issues in order to break the cycle of beliefs especially from men on family planning methods, which would assist to ease the land pressure.

Erratic rainfall

1. Intensify irrigation as a way of combating effects of erratic rainfall and steady availability of treadle pumps to communities. This brought in the need for extension agents to be readily available to train farmers on use of such technologies.
2. Irrigation development support was recommended to enable the communities become less dependent on rain-fed agriculture and produce supplementary food crops e.g. vegetables and pulses throughout the year for income, protein and vitamin supply.
3. The Government could provide tree seedlings to afforest deforested areas.

Agricultural extension

1. Redeploy extension staff to the communities, since communities felt that absence of these people affects productivity and production since there is poor management of crop and livestock enterprises as well as ineffective extension service delivery over such important issues such as family planning methods and nutrition education.
2. Communities complained that seed and planting material availability and accessibility remains one of the main constraints to diversification of food crops and food type. They recommended agriculture extension support on seed and planting material multiplication and conservation.
3. Agricultural extension should increase efforts on alternative crops for balanced nutrition and diversified incomes.

Food aid and safety nets

1. Government should be considerate of impact of food aid on access to food from markets.
2. The targeting system for safety nets i.e. starter packs and supplementary feeding programmes; to be targeted towards HIV/AIDS affected households.

Food utilisation

1. Publication of nutrition information and use of the literature through adult literacy, Reflect, stepping stone and HIV/AIDS support groups to be supported and facilitated.
2. Campaign on public awareness of nutrition knowledge through various means to be launched.
3. The slow diversification of food crops and diets has been attributed to lack of knowledge in preparation of alternated food types and recipes. Communities recommended the redeployment of Community Home Economics Extension workers. Nutrition education through community-based home economics training should be re introduced and intensified.

In addition, the communities made the following general points:

- Improved **economic governance** – Government to arrest currency depreciations and reduce interest rates so that loans should be manageable. Government to improve governance economically so that it should stop the closure of public and private companies and boost employment in the country. Government policies for development of liberalized and privatized market economy to be considerate of its impact on community access to food from the market
- Ending hunger will require strong **linkages with other overarching policies** such as the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (*MPRS*), which have programmes and strategies already in place.

5 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Throughout the consultations, one clear indication is that a greater majority of the people consulted are food and nutritionally insecure and use of coping mechanisms is very common. This presents an unpleasant food security picture, which necessitates the need for a concise food and nutritional road map, which should be looking at how to reduce such proportions of communities in terms of [food] coping mechanisms so that the citizens have to depend on own production and the stability of access to food with greater degree of dignity. This can be achieved through creation of conditions under which a large proportion of the population is able to gain access to productive resources. In addition, the State has the obligation to look after those who, in spite of favourable conditions, cannot provide for themselves. This does not mean that people should rely more on their Government than on themselves. It means that the State should respect, protect and promote the freedom and self-reliance of Malawians. Only once their efforts have proved insufficient should the Government offer direct help.

The major factor to reckon with in terms of food insecurity at household level is the inter-linkages of both causative factors as well as effects of the food insecurity. The cause-effect relationship has tended to form a cyclical relationship.

Poverty as a single common factor in the food production equation, has rendered efforts of the communities ineffective to push themselves out of the food production safety valve. The presence of other opportunistic factors such as HIV/AIDS have even pushed the equation further off balance. *The challenge however, is for the policy to likewise address the issues in an inter-linking manner* since singular efforts would not manage to address the community issues since any effort should break the cycle holistically.

However, it is recognized that the Malawi Government is a signatory to the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which guarantees the **human right to food**. Thus, the Malawi Government has the obligation to protect, respect and facilitate the realization of the right to food of its citizens. As such, the Government has to do everything in its power and within bound of its resources and that of its citizens to guarantee this right.

It is in this regard that community aspirations are high towards what the Government would do to directly or indirectly facilitate the process of creating favourable conditions for the development of the agricultural sector through a well-coordinated food and nutritional security policy. These are listed in Table 2 below, which follows the layout of the National Food and Nutrition Security policy analysis matrix produced by the Drafting team.

Table 2 : community recommendations on National Food & Nutrition Security Policy

Broader Policy Issues	Specific Issues	Community Policy Recommendation
Trade and marketing policies	Protection of the vulnerable	Regulate free market policy to take into account both the interests of buyers and sellers
		Regulate marketing to also protect interests of sellers (<i>communities</i>)
		Social marketing services to be established
		Maize to be made available in all markets
	Pricing – farm gate/retail & domestic marketing	Introduction of offices of farmer representatives in markets
		Establish reliable marketing outlets for other crops like sweet potatoes and cassava
		Re-introduction of minimum guaranteed prices (<i>looking at production costs</i>)
		ADMARC should be buying produce from farmers as opposed to just produce selling outlet.
	Credit and financial services	Credit lending institutions to increase civic education to farmers before providing credit to reduce defaults
		Easing credit access [prohibitive] conditionalities e.g. collaterals
Increase the repayment periods for agricultural loans		
Re-introduction of farmer clubs		
Livestock production	Promote livestock acquisition programmes	
Health & Nutritional policies	Water and Sanitation	Provision of safe water facilities
	Disease Treatment	Establishment of health services closer to communities
	HIV/AIDS Prevalence	HIV/AIDS Counseling services to be readily available to encourage behavior change
HIV/AIDS affected households to be targeted for starter pack campaigns and safety nets e.g. supplementary feeding etc.		

	Nutritional knowledge/food processing and storage	Publication of nutrition information and use of literature through adult literacy, Reflect, stepping stones and HIV/AIDS support groups
		Intensify on public awareness campaign on nutrition knowledge by Government and civil society
		Re-deployment of Home craft extension staff
		Nutrition education on food and dietary diversification, and it should target both <u>men</u> and women.
	Dietary diversification & modification	Government support through extension services on seed and planting materials multiplication and conservation
		Intensify irrigation for communities to increase production of supplementary foods such as vegetables, pulses and fruits
Fiscal policies	Interest rates	Reduction of interest rates
	Forex/exchange rate	Stop government over expenditure and currency depreciation i.e. improved economic governance
Employment & income policies	Employment	Improve economic management to avoid closure of companies through privatization Focus on job creation in petty business, commercial agriculture and agro-processing
	Social protection	Scaling up the number of beneficiaries of the Targeted Inputs Programme Quantities of inputs in TIP packs should be increased
Input policies	Land	Unused land to be re-distributed
		Promote family planning techniques to communities
	Pricing	Reduction of input pricing through subsidization Monitoring of input prices for compliance
	Agricultural Extension & Research	Employment of adequate extension service agents

		Development of early maturing varieties which are low priced as well
	Irrigation	Intensify irrigation to combat effects of erratic rainfall through distribution of treadle pumps
		Government to make tree seedlings readily available for afforestation programmes
Transport & Infrastructure policies	Security	Identify means of reducing theft by unemployed youth and destitute families.
Education policies	Literacy & Numeracy/Teacher education	Government to build more classrooms for students
		Increase the number of teachers in schools
Disaster & emergency management	Food aid	Develop a targeted safety nets system with an exit strategy
	Governance	Improvement on economic management
		Increased civic education on decentralization
		Development of efficient and workable local decentralization structures

6 Annexes

Annex 1 Matrix of Food Types by Food Groups

Community consultation site	Food types			
	Carbohydrates	Proteins	Vitamins	
			Vegetables	Fruits
Salima – Chikanda village	Maize, cassava, sweet potatoes	Beans, cowpeas, fish, meat, mice, eggs	Pumpkin leaves, kolakola, chamwamba, cabbage, mustard	Guavas, mangoes, pawpaws, boabab fruits (<i>malambe</i>)
Salima – Nkhangayawala village	Maize, sweet potatoes, cassava	Groundnuts, cowpeas, beans, fish, eggs, mice	Pumpkin leaves, cabbage, mustard	Bananas, mangoes, pawpaws, boabab fruits
Lilongwe – Nselu village	Maize, sweet potatoes, cassava	Groundnuts, beans, fish, meat	Mustard, pumpkin leaves	Guavas, oranges, mangoes
Thyolo – Nkolokosa village	Maize, dried cassava, sweet potatoes	Pigeon peas, haricot beans, fish	Pumpkin leaves, cassava leaves, Amaranthus	Avocado pear, bananas, mangoes
Thyolo – Naphazi village	Maize, dried cassava, sweet potatoes	Pigeon peas, beans, haricot beans	Amaranthus, pumpkin leaves, cassava leaves	Mangoes, bananas
Balaka –Hambahamba village	Maize, rice, sweet potatoes, cassava	Fish, beans, pigeon peas	Mustard, pumpkin leaves, cassava leaves	Mangoes, boabab fruits
Mzimba – Matuli village	Maize, cassava, sweet potatoes, irish potatoes, pumpkins	Beans, meat, groundnuts	Vegetables	
Mzimba – Kamangadazi village	Maize, cassava, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, millet	Groundnuts, soy beans, ground beans		Mangoes, bananas, oranges
Mzimba – Kapotavingwe village	Maize, cassava, sweet potatoes, irish potatoes, millet	Groundnuts, beans, meat		Mangoes

Nkhata Bay – Chipambo village	Maize, cassava, sweet potatoes, millet	Beans, groundnuts	Mushrooms	Bananas
Nkhata Bay – Chinyakula village	Cassava, maize, rice, sweet potatoes, pumpkins	beans		Oranges, mangoes
Lilongwe – Kanengo village	Maize, sweet potatoes, cassava, rice, pumpkins	Soy beans, beans, fish, eggs	Pumpkin leaves, mustard, sweet potato leaves, tomatoes	Paw-paw, mangoes, guavas, oranges
Lilongwe – Chatata village	Maize, sweet potatoes, cassava, rice	Groundnuts, beans	Pumpkin leaves, amaranthus, mustard	Mangoes, oranges, guavas
Salima – M'nima village	Maize, pumpkins, cassava, rice, sweet potatoes	Eggs, milk, meat, fish, haricot beans	Ntambe, cabbage, sweet potato leaves, chamwamba	Mango, water melons, paw-paws, orange, cucumbers
Lilongwe – Nachiola village	Nsima, Cassava, Sweet potato, Irish potato	Ground beans, Cowpeas, Beans, Groundnuts, Eggs, Chicken meat, Goat meat, Fish, Milk	Pumpkin leaves, Jews marrow (thelele), Amaranthus, Sweet potato leaves, Mustard, Cabbage, Indeginous Vegetables (Chewe, luni)	Bananas, Mangoes (seasonal), Oranges, Pumpkins (seasonal), Paw paw, Guavas, Pears
Lilongwe – Chibade village	Maize, sweet potatoes, cassava, rice, pumpkins	Meat, beans, fish, eggs, soybeans	Tomatoes, vegetables	Mangoes, paw-paw, guavas, oranges,

Community adaptation to alternative food types and knowledge of diversity in recipes of the food types was assessed. Our assumption was that the food types mentioned were those preferred and frequently consumed.

The situation varied with the cultural conservatism of community groups. The food diversity inferred in the community definition of food was exemplified by the food types listed in Table A.1 above. These food types were also classified into nutritional functional groups, from which it is clear that Malawi's typical staple foods (most commonly mentioned in all consultation sites) are carbohydrates. Our assumption that "Maize-Nsima is the main food while relish (ndiwo) is a supplement food" appears to be validated by the community consultations.

Carbohydrates (*staples*) are very prominent in the community food equation whereas other food types that fall into the protein and vitamin side only come up after probing, which indicates their level of significance as a proportion of the total food consumed. Some of the most prominent types of relish, which are frequently consumed by the community members, were found to be pumpkin leaves and beans.

There were other food types that were not obviously mentioned during consultative discussions, even under immense probing. These were mostly animal-based food sources, although some communities mentioned fish because they are either closer to rivers and fish on their own or buy from local markets.

This low frequency can be explained by the fact that most Malawian families do not have access to meat-based foods: the communities perceived consumption of animal protein food sources to be mostly a *‘luxury’* in spite of its strategic nutritional value. Inadequate knowledge of the nutritional value and function was thought to be only partly responsible for the low consumption. In other words, even if nutritional knowledge was there, availability of the livestock could have been a hindrance. The major problem with animal-based protein food sources is the issue of availability and access at village level due to higher pricing of animal based food products as compared to crop-based food products.

Box A.1: Prominent Food Types by Food Group

Carbohydrates (staples)	Proteins	Vitamins
Maize (<i>Malawi's staple food crop</i>), cassava, sweet potatoes, rice	Beans (<i>major relish for Malawi community</i>), mice (<i>very prevalent in Central Region</i>), cowpeas, ground beans, groundnuts.	Pumpkin leaves, mangoes,

The analysis explains the diversity of food types commonly consumed at household level and prevalent in villages covered (listed in Box A.1). Though the various food types are available and accessible, the period of availability is only at certain times of the year. Hence the market supply is erratic and prices fluctuate from time to time thus affecting food accessibility and consumption levels.

At the peak of the agricultural fieldwork season, consumption of energy foods is below the minimum calorific value. The list in Table A.1 above, suggests diverse food types exist but these food types are inequitably distributed and utilized. The situation analysis suggests the need for effective food market to facilitate food distribution, availability and accessibility from high rainfall areas, like Thyolo, enjoying a wider diversity in food types to food deficient and un diversified areas. The consumption of alternative food types remains low.

Contributing factors to the situation include the following:

- (a) Most of the food crops listed are rain-fed, thus only available soon after the rains and during the same time (*see seasonal food availability calendar*). The average span of harvested food availability is 4-6 months.
- (b) Most of the communities had little knowledge on appropriate storage systems for these food crops, as such the food stuffs are immediately used in order to avoid rotting. Communities having knowledge of processing cassava in the lakeshore areas and Mulanje extend the shelf life of cassava products and increase the proportion of household consumable cassava products.
- (c) Poverty accounts for most families not having livestock and for the same factor rarely have meat intake on their diet.
- (d) Availability and consumption of these foodstuffs is not equitably distributed in the communities.

Annex 2 Matrix for Food Processing & Utilisation

Food Type	Processing Mode	Utilisation Mode
Maize	Roasting	Roasted maize
	Pounding, soaking and milling into flour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-processed 'mgaiwa' • Whole processed 'ufa woyera' 	Cooked as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nsima, with white flour (yoyera) or high-energy mgaiwa. • Porridge • Opaque beer or gruel (thobwa)
	Cooking dried grain 'chingowi'	Eaten as chingowi
	Cooking pounded grain 'mitama'	Eaten as mitama
	Frying whole maize grain	
Sweet potatoes	Boiling – peeled or unpeeled	Eaten boiled
	Roasted – on fire or hot soil	Eaten as "futali"
		Eaten as mashed potatoes
	Eaten raw	
Rice	Boiling/steaming	Thendo
	Milling	Porridge
	Pounding	Soaked whole grain (<i>with or without sugar</i>)
		Chigode
Cassava	Boiling with additives	Eaten 'futali'
	Roasting	Eaten as nsima
	Milling into flour	Produce gruel/thobwa
	Sun drying	Eaten raw or as dried cassava 'makaka'
	Soaking	Cooking and eaten as a snack
	Frying	
Vegetables	Boiling	Cooked fresh and eaten as relish
	Frying	Cooked while dried
	Sun drying 'mfutso'	Cooked fresh or dried adding salt and other additives such as groundnut flour
Groundnuts	Boiling	Cooked and eaten as a snack
	Roasting	Peanut butter
	Pounding	Produce flour which is applied to relish
	Fried	Whole roasted grain
Beans	Cooking unpodded beans	Eaten in mashed form
	Boiling and mashing the beans 'chipere'	Cooked beans
	Mixing milled beans & soybean flour plus maize and groundnut flour	Porridge with bean flour (<i>especially in supplementary feeding</i>)

Food Type	Processing Mode	Utilisation Mode
Fish	Fried or smoked	Cooked fresh or dried with or without oil or other additives such as tomatoes
	Sun drying	
Meat	Roasting	Cooked and eaten as relish
	Smoking	Fried and eaten as relish
		Fried and eaten as a snack
Boabab fruit	Soak seeds in water with or without sugar	Chewing the seeds/removing flour surrounding the seeds
		Drinking the juice from the seeds
Soybeans	Milled into flour	Cook porridge from flour
	Roasted	Fried and eaten as a snack
Pumpkins	Boiling	Eaten as a snack
	Mashing with pigeon peas	Relish --- cooked pumpkin leaves
Bananas	Peeled & boiled	Eaten cooked
	Stored to ripe	Banana flitters
	Cooked and mashed	Eaten as a fruit
	Pounded and mixed with flour – mkate	Mashed banana cake
Eggs	Roasting	Eaten as roasted eggs
	Boiled eggs	Eaten as boiled snack
		Eaten as relish (<i>fried/boiled</i>) with or without sauce
Mangoes	Boiling mangoes	Eaten boiled
	Juice extraction through pounding	Eaten as a fruit (raw)
		Taken as mango juice
		Applied to porridge
Pigeon peas	Boiling with dried cassava	Cooked and eaten as relish
	Cooking	Boiled with pods and eaten as a snack
Ground beans	Cooked /boiled	Cooked and eaten as a snack 'makata'
		Cooked and eaten as relish