



MALAWI GOVERNMENT

# AGRICULTURE SECTOR FOOD AND NUTRITION STRATEGY

2020-2024

ABRIDGED VERSION





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## FOREWORD

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The government of Malawi developed the Agriculture Sector Food and Nutrition Strategy (ASFNS) to provide guidance in the implementation of nutrition-sensitive agriculture interventions for improved food and nutrition security that will significantly contribute to sustainable national development. Inadequacy of diversification in agricultural production and food consumption has hampered the progress on addressing malnutrition. Addressing this imbalance between agriculture and nutrition outcomes requires a concerted and multi-sectoral approach that increases and diversifies food production and consumption among the population.

The strategy will ensure that work plans are adequately coordinated, monitored and evaluated for nutrition impact. The strategy will support implementation of nutrition activities within the agriculture sector as outlined in several national development documents such as the National Agriculture Policy (NAP), the National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP), the National Multi-sectoral Nutrition Policy (NMNP) and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) among others. The strategy will further provide a platform to advocate for resource mobilization for Agriculture Nutrition goals, which is currently weak and mainly depends on short-term projects that are donor funded. Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) will coordinate the implementation of the Strategy in collaboration with the Department of Nutrition HIV and AIDS in the Ministry of Health (MoH). Ministry of Agriculture will ensure implementation of the Strategy according to the implementation plan and they will provide policy guidance to sector stakeholders during the implementation process.

Successful implementation of the strategy requires effective coordination and collective actions among the sectors. I therefore appeal to all stakeholders to work together in the implementation of the interventions laid out in this strategy for improved food and nutrition status of the population.

Hon. Lobin C. Lowe, MP

**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE**

## PREFACE

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Food and nutrition security is imperative if Malawi is to achieve its development goals. The 2012 Cost of Hunger survey estimated that the annual cost associated with child undernutrition in Malawi is 10.3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), equivalent to MK147 billion (597 million USD). The agriculture sector is crucial to achieving food and nutrition security as the main provider of food and water which is the primary source of nutrition. Despite this, there is no evidence-based strategy detailing agriculture's role in nutrition, so gains in agriculture productivity are not translating into optimal nutrition outcomes. The Agriculture Sector Food and Nutrition Strategy address this by detailing the agriculture sector's roles, responsibilities and activities with streamlined steps to improve nutrition outcomes. Development of the strategy involved extensive consultations involving about 500 participants at all levels. Literature reviews and consultations with existing policies, strategies and plans related to food and nutrition particularly the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS II), the National Agriculture Policy (NAP) and the National Multi-sector Nutrition Policy (NMNP) constituted the strategy development process.

Agriculture remains the backbone of Malawi's economy and contributes to national and household food and nutrition security. In order to achieve food and nutrition security there must be a diverse food supply of all six-food groups and in adequate proportions to meet people's dietary needs. The 2017 Agriculture Production Estimates (APES) demonstrated adequate production of the food for the Malawi population though it is not clear what proportion of the production is destined for human consumption. The MDHS reports that only 8% of infants and young children aged 6 to 23 months attain minimum acceptable diets and only 25% receive minimum dietary diversity. The Strategy will promote diverse production to include all the food groups needed for increased access to nutritious and safe foods and practices that enhance increased food utilization.

The sector envisions a well-nourished population that effectively contributes to national growth and development. This will be achieved through five strategic objectives which encompass the following: i) To ensure stable availability of food from all the six food groups through sustainable and diversified production, ii) To ensure stable access to safe and nutritious foods from all the six food groups, iii) To promote and strengthen Nutrition Behaviour Change Communication to ensure stable, safe, and diverse food availability, access, and utilization, iv) To promote gender integration, women, youth and community empowerment and participation for improved food and nutrition security, v) To create and strengthen an enabling environment for effective delivery of food and nutrition intervention.

Erica Maganga (Mrs)

**SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I acknowledge various institutions and individuals including the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the New Alliance Policy Acceleration Support (NAPAS), Feed the Future Malawi, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Michigan State University Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy and the Policy Advisory Team (PAT) on Nutrition for their invaluable technical and financial contributions towards the development of the Agriculture Sector Food and Nutrition Strategy.

The Ministry of Agriculture also acknowledges the collaboration and technical contributions from all the government line ministries and departments, academic institutions, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders at national, district and community levels who took part in the development of this strategy.

Jerome Chim'gonda Nkhoma, PhD.

**DIRECTOR OF AGRICULTURE EXTENSION SERVICES**



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Attainment of food and nutrition security is indispensable to human capital development, which ultimately affects national growth and development. The Cost of Hunger in Malawi study showed that in 2012, 10.3% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), equivalent to USD 597million, was lost because of childhood-related undernutrition. 90% of the cost occurred due to losses in productivity as a result of undernutrition-related low human productivity and mortality in the workforce. As an agro-based economy, these economic losses are very likely to be contributed by, and hampering the agriculture sector, hence sluggish national growth and development.

Agriculture provides access to diverse and nutritious food through food systems, which is foundational to nutrition and income security. As a result, governments and development partners are now opting to invest in nutrition-sensitive agricultural programmes and interventions, and reflecting the same in national policies and strategies. The agriculture sector therefore addresses some of the underlying determinants of nutrition, including access to safe sufficient quality food, adequate care, and a healthy and hygienic environment.

In realization of the synergy between agriculture and nutrition, this strategy provide in detail the agriculture sector's national, district and community level roles, responsibilities, and activities with streamlined steps to improve nutrition outcomes. The strategy aims to strengthen coordination and collaboration among key agriculture and nutrition stakeholders and foster efficient use of resources to complement each other's activities. Further, the strategy provides justification for additional nutrition resources and lists specific activities that need support to enable the agriculture sector to contribute to the national aspiration of a well-nourished population..

## 1.1 State of Agriculture in Malawi

Agriculture is the leading income earner and source of livelihoods for Malawi, contributing 28% of GDP, generating over 80% of export earnings, and employing 64% of the country's workforce. The 2017 Integrated Household Survey showed that 83% of households in Malawi are engaged in agricultural activities, more so among rural (93%) than urban (40%) households. Crop production is largely rain-dependent, with less than 10% of the potentially irrigable land under irrigation.

Availability of cultivatable land is limited, with the average cultivated area per household being only about 0.61 hectare. Gender-imbalances are evident, with male-headed households cultivating more acres (0.68 hectare) than female-headed households (0.49 hectare). Nearly half (46%) of households cultivate less than 0.40 hectare. In addition to limited availability of cultivable land, soil losses are overwhelming, presently estimated at 29 tonnes/hectare/year, up from 20 tonnes/hectare/year in 1992. The net effect of small land ownerships, loss of agricultural productivity, increased expenditure on fertilizers, and a general decline in profitability of production, is slow growth of the agriculture sector as source of food and livelihoods.

For a long time, there has been lack of diversification in food production because much emphasis was put on maize than any other crop thereby hampering the food basket. In addition, unsteady food production was also experienced due to weather factors leading to fluctuation of yield in both quality and quantity. Furthermore, food availability is also hampered by losses before, during and after harvest. According to the 2016 African Post-Harvest Losses Information System, Malawi's post-harvest maize losses are estimated at 17.2%. Another threat to attainment of food and nutrition security, which the agriculture sector has leveraged on, is food safety. One of the food safety concerns in Malawi is the level of aflatoxins contamination in agricultural produce, particularly in cereals and legumes. Markets are also still underdeveloped, which limits the availability of a variety of foods, as well as increasing the cost of food.

In attempts to address the aforementioned challenges, the Ministry of Agriculture, since 2000, started promoting dietary diversity by advocating for the six food groups (staples, fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts, foods from animals, and fats and oils). The agriculture sector is making effort to assist communities in the prevention of micronutrient deficiencies by encouraging consumption of diverse micronutrient-rich diets through the Integrated Homestead Farming (IHF) approach. Through the National Agriculture Policy, the government already committed itself to minimise post-harvest losses through the development and promotion of improved technologies for storage, preservation, food processing and other means that ensure national and household food security.

## 1.2 State of Nutrition in Malawi

In recent years, Integrated Household-survey data has shown that between 2009/10 and 2015/16, Malawi made significant strides in reducing prevalence of stunting (47.1 to 37.1%); wasting (4 to 2.7%); underweight (12.8 to 11.7%); vitamin A deficiency (22 to 3.6%); iron deficiency (50.9 to 22%); and anaemia (54.8 to 28%) among children under the age of 5 years. For the first time, it was also shown in 2015/16 that zinc deficiency is widespread, ranging from 60% in children below the age 5 years to 66% in men. While undernutrition has dominated the national public health nutrition agenda, overweight/obesity increased from 17.1% in 2010 to 20.7% among 15–49 year-old women. Consequently, non-communicable disease indicators are high in Malawi, evident through prevalence of raised blood sugar (5.6%), high blood pressure (32.9%) and high cholesterol in blood (8.76%).

The situation with respect to diet quality, particularly for complementary foods, also looks oblique. The 2010 MDHS showed that 29, 54 and 19% of children aged 6–23 months met their Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD), Minimum Meal Frequency (MMF) and Minimum Acceptable Diet (MAD), respectively. The 2015/16 MDHS however,

showed receding progress in that 25%, 29% and 8% of the children met their MDD, MMF and MAD, respectively. The agriculture sector has a pivotal role to play in enhancing dietary quality and minimise the risks of undernutrition, overnutrition and their associated ills among all population groups, of which this Strategy is important.

### **1.3 State of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Malawi**

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Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is an indispensable nutrition-sensitive pathway to attainment of nutrition targets. If properly done, a comprehensive WASH intervention would help to reduce environmental microbe load and reduce faecal transmission of microbes via hands. It will also improve drinking water quality, hygiene during exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding.

Malawi has made positive strides in WASH services, but there remain several areas for improvement. According to the 2015/16 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS), the majority of households in Malawi (87%) obtained drinking water from improved water sources, up from 80% in 2010. In terms of sanitation, 52% of households had improved toilets/latrines, the most common type being pit latrines with slabs. While 83% of households had a place for washing hands, only 11% of those places had soap and water..

### **1.4 Development of the Strategy**

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This Strategy has been developed in the context of several government policies, plans and strategies, which together aim to achieve adequate nutrition among all population groups. Development of this strategy was a multi-stakeholder consultative process, which involved national, district and community level personnel. The following are some of the key policies, and strategies: Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS), National Agriculture Policy (NAP) and National Multi-Sector Nutrition Policy (NMNP).

## 2.0 GOAL, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

### 2.1 Goal

To achieve a well-nourished population that effectively contributes to national growth and development through sustainable and diverse food systems.

### 2.2 Strategic Objectives

This strategy intends to achieve five strategic objectives. Each objective consists of strategies and each strategy comprises of several activities. The strategic objectives are as follows:

1. To ensure stable availability of food from all the six food groups through sustainable and diversified production.
2. To ensure stable access to safe and nutritious foods.
3. To promote Social Behaviour Change for improved dietary practices.
4. To promote gender integration, women and community empowerment and participation for improved food and nutrition security.
5. To create and strengthen an enabling environment for effective delivery of food and nutrition programs..

#### 2.2.1 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: To ensure stable availability of food from all the six food groups through sustainable and diversified production.

**Strategy 1: Promote diversified production of nutritious and safe foods.**

#### Activities:

1. Advocate for availability and access of high-quality inputs for crops, fish, and livestock breeds,
2. Advocate for production of diversified crops, animal foods and underutilized food species at household and institutions like school.
3. Facilitate planting of fruit trees.

**Strategy 2: Scale up community seed banks for diverse foods.****Activities:**

1. Advocate for setting up and scaling up of community seed banks.
2. Advocate for propagation of seed for underutilized nutritious foods, e.g. black jack, moringa, tamarind, finger millet, cat whiskers etc.
3. Promote multiplication of nutrient dense indigenous foods and biofortified crop seeds by smallholder farmers.
4. Promote pass-on programmes for seeds and small stock.

**Strategy 3: Promote technologies that reduce post-harvest losses in production, storage, preservation and food processing.****Activities:**

1. Scale up effective technologies for food storage, food preservation and food processing, e.g. use of hermetic sealed bags for storage.
2. Promote food budgeting, meal planning and meal preparation to reduce food waste and nutrient loss.

**Strategy 4: Promote Integrated Homestead Farming****Activities:**

1. .Scale up IHF initiative.
2. Develop models for aquaculture production at household and community level

**Strategy 5: Promote environmentally friendly, labour-saving technologies for improved food security and nutrition.****Activities:**

1. Advocate for the use of climate smart agriculture (CSA) for nutrient-rich soil and diverse, stable food supplies.
2. Promote use of fuel-efficient stoves, solar dryers, solar cookers and other fuel-efficient food preparation and preservation technologies

## **2.2.2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: To ensure stable access to safe and nutritious foods.**

**Strategy 1: Foster adequate market supply and access of diverse and nutritious foods.**

**Activities:**

1. Promote income generating activities in vulnerable households to increase access to diversified foods.
2. Promote Village Savings and Loans (VSLs) and off-farm income generating activities for women and youth to obtain sufficient income for their food and nutrition requirements.
3. Promote linkages to markets for the urban and rural poor supported groups.
4. Strengthen food markets to deliver affordable, sufficient, high quality, and nutritious foods..

## **2.2.3 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: To promote Social Behaviour Change for improved dietary practices.**

**Strategy 1: Strengthen social and behaviour change communication for improved diets.**

**Activities:**

1. Develop and disseminate food and nutrition training materials
2. Develop key food and nutrition messages (including bio-fortified foods and underutilized foods) in various local languages and disseminate using different channels e.g. radio, newspapers, mobile vans, social media, television, among others; including messages to counteract negative food and nutrition messages and taboos. .

**Strategy 2: Promote food safety.**

**Activities:**

1. Promote food hygiene and safety (including aflatoxin) hygienic food handling and preparation.
2. Promote water, sanitation and hygiene at household level.

## **2.2.4 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: To promote gender integration, women and community empowerment and participation for improved food and nutrition security.**

**Strategy 1: Promote integration of gender and social-cultural issues within food and nutrition topics.**

### **Activities:**

1. Develop guidelines for integration of gender and food and nutrition.
2. Promote involvement of male, youth and local leaders on gender, food and nutrition issues.

**Strategy 2: Empower women and communities to demand for food and nutrition services.**

### **Activities**

1. Promote women engagement in decision making on food and nutrition issues.
2. Advocate for economic empowerment for communities and women (e.g. through seed and livestock pass on programmes, VSLs, agribusiness, etc).
3. Sensitize communities to formulate, use and enforce community-based by-laws on food and nutrition.

## **2.2.5 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5: To create and strengthen an enabling environment for effective delivery of food and nutrition programs.**

**Strategy 1: Strengthen institutional capacity to effectively implement food and nutrition interventions at all levels.**

### **Activities**

1. Advocate for availability of Food and Nutrition Assistants (FNAs) at EPA level.
2. Advocate for capacity building for Food and Nutrition Officers (FNOs), Farm Nutrition Assistants (FNAs), Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs), School Health Nutrition

(SHN) facilitators and other relevant frontline workers on planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of food and nutrition programs.

3. Motivate best-performing staff in the food and nutrition programmes at all levels.
4. Advocate for integration of food and nutrition in agricultural extension curriculum.
5. Advocate for capacity building for community structures (farmer groups, care groups, farmer organization, youth groups, Village Agriculture Committee (VAC) etc.) on food and nutrition.

## **Strategy 2: Strengthen coordination of food and nutrition implementation structures at all levels.**

### **Activities:**

1. Support integration of food and nutrition in the District Agricultural Extension Services System (DAESS) structures at all levels for effective delivery of food and nutrition interventions.
2. Advocate for integration of food and nutrition issues in emergency responses at all levels. .

## **Strategy 3: Strengthen Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for healthy food systems**

### **Activities:**

1. Advocate for nutrition-sensitive value chains with the private sector. Scale up nutrition-sensitive value addition initiatives in communities (e.g. by linking the communities to already existing initiatives like Community Savings and Investment Promotion (COMSIP).
2. Advocate for development of value chains for underutilized and bio fortified foods.

## **Strategy 4: Strengthen food and nutrition monitoring, evaluation, research, and surveillance system for effective implementation of the food and nutrition strategy**

### **Activities:**

1. Review the monitoring and evaluation framework for food and nutrition within the agriculture sector.
2. Build capacity of food and nutrition service providers on food and nutrition surveillance systems
3. Support research on underutilized foods (crops and livestock) and development of bio fortified crop seeds.
4. Facilitate development of food availability calendars at district and community level.
5. Conduct regular food and nutrition research for evidence-based programming and disseminate findings.
6. Advocate for inclusion of all the six food groups into the agriculture and food data system.
7. Strengthen joint planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and documentation of food and nutrition activities.

## 3.0 IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

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### 3.1 Stakeholders

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The Government of Malawi through Ministry of Agriculture recognises the importance of stakeholders and partnerships in the implementation of this strategy. All stakeholders involved in agriculture and nutrition-related activities at national, district and community level will implement the Strategy and these include:

- Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)
- The Department of Nutrition, HIV and AIDS (DNHA)
- Ministry of Health (MoH)
- Ministry of Local Government (MoLG)
- Ministry of Education (MoE)
- Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW)
- Ministry of Civic Education and National Unity (MoCENU)
- Ministry of Labour (MoL)
- Ministry of Information (Mol)
- Ministry of Industry (Mol)
- Ministry of Finance (MoF)
- Ministry of Forestry and Natural Resources (MoFNR)
- Academic Institutions and Research Organizations
- Development Partners
- Private Sector Agencies
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)
- Agriculture Multi-Sector Technical Working Group
- District Nutrition Coordinating Committees (DNCC)

## 4.0 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation is important for tracking progress in the implementation of the strategy and measuring impact. The monitoring and evaluation indicators for this strategy are linked to the National Multi-sector Nutrition Monitoring and Evaluation Framework as well as the National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP). The following are the indicators for each strategic objective;

### 4.1 Priority Area 1: Sustained availability of food

**Objective: To ensure stable availability of food from all the six food groups through sustainable and diversified production**

- i. Percentage of children under five years of age who are stunted reduced from 37% to 28% by 2024
- ii. Percentage of children under five years of age who are wasted reduced from 2.7% to 1.2% by 2024
- iii. Percentage of households practising Integrated Homestead Farming (IHF) increased from 0.6% to 20% by 2024
- iv. Percentage of primary schools operating home grown school meals increased from 15% to 34% by 2024
- v. Percentage of households owning livestock increased from 37% to 45% by 2024
- vi. Percentage of Children 6-23 months receiving minimum acceptable diet increased from 8% to 37% by 2024
- vii. Percentage of population at risk for food and livelihoods insecurity reduced from 17% to 11% by 2024
- viii. Percentage of household food insecure reduced from 31% to 5% by 2024
- ix. Percentage of population with food consumption below minimum dietary requirement reduced from 21% to 12% by 2024
- x. Prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity based on Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) reduced from 22% to 10% by 2024

## 4.2 Priority Area 2: Access to Safe and Nutritious Food

**Objective: To ensure stable access to safe and nutritious foods.**

- i. Percentage of children 6–23 months of age who consume iron-rich foods during the previous day increased from 45% to 57% by 2024
- ii. Percentage of children 6–23 months of age who consume Vitamin-A rich food during the previous day increased from 69% to 74% by 2024
- iii. Percentage of population consuming bio-fortified foods increased from 5% to 30% by 2024
- iv. Percentage of children under five with diarrhoea reduced from 22% to 17% by 2024

## 4.3 Priority Area 3: Social behaviour change

**Objective: To promote Social Behaviour Change for improved dietary practices**

- i. Percentage of children age 6–23 months who receive foods from 4 or more food groups during the previous day increased from 25% to 55% by 2024
- ii. Percentage of children age 6–23 months who receive minimum meal frequency increased from 29% to 59% by 2024
- iii. Percentage of population using improved sources of drinking water increased from 87% to 97% by 2024
- iv. Percentage of population using improved sanitation facilities increased from 52% to 62% by 2024

## 4.4 Priority Area 4: Gender integration, women and community empowerment and participation

**Objective: Promote gender integration, women and community empowerment and participation for improved food and nutrition security.**

- i. Percentage of women of reproductive age 15–49 years consuming 4 or more food groups (MDD-W) increased from 27% to 40% by 2024

## 4.5 Priority Area 5: Enabling environment

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### **Objective: To create and strengthen an enabling environment for effective delivery of food and nutrition programs**

- i. Percentage of budget allocation for Nutrition by Agriculture sector increased from 3% to 6% by 2024
- ii. Number of districts integrating nutrition sensitive agriculture activities in their plans increased from 0 to 15 by 2024
- iii. Percentage of care groups practising nutrition sensitive agriculture activities increased from 0% to 30% by 2024.





Designed and printed by  
Agriculture Communication Branch  
P.O. Box 594  
Lilongwe

2020