

## Context

In support of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, the UN Special Envoy invited all sectors of society to share their perspectives and solutions via a global dialogue process. Dialogues were conducted around the world both before and after the Summit, effectively crowdsourcing sustainable solutions to strengthen local and global food systems. CARE country offices engaged in the dialogue process by connecting marginalized communities in food systems to program and policy conversations happening locally, nationally, and globally. This document serves to report on the findings from the dialogues held in Malawi and highlight the key policy takeaways for Country Offices to advocate to their governments to achieve food systems transformation. The convened dialogues found four main themes for action: ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all, achieve sustainable and just food production, tackle food waste, and build capacity at the grassroots. Malawi must rebuild and strengthen food systems by adopting radical thinking, smart partnerships, and strong political will and courage to advance food systems transformation.

Families around the country are struggling to access nutritious, affordable, and reliable diets. Illiteracy about nutrition and proper food preparation is reinforcing high rates of malnutrition for children under the age of five. Erratic weather patterns, an over-reliance on non-nutritious food aids, and economic pressures that force small and medium sized farmers to sell fresh produce instead of consuming are all contributing to the growing rates of malnutrition across the country. Food systems must prioritize healthy diets and affordable nutrition that is inclusive, efficient, resilient, culturally appropriate, and sustainable.

The agricultural productivity of the country is being impacted by the limitations of outdated and inaccessible agriculture extension services; increased pest and disease outbreaks; limited access to and high prices of agricultural inputs at local markets; low adoption of modern technology; and communication gaps between the government, agro-dealers, and civil society. The overreliance of fishing in Lake Malawi and other water systems has diminished the biodiversity of fish and plant species. Arable land is disappearing due to the growing population, unsustainable agricultural practices, and increasing deforestation. Increasing amounts of imported produce is detrimental to the bargaining power of local produce in markets. The government is failing to protect the rights of small and medium-sized producers, which is allowing companies and multinational buyers to take advantage of farmers by purchasing products for unreasonably low prices through cooperatives. The lack of social protection mechanisms is discouraging youth from pursuing agriculture as a viable career and threatening the future of Malawi's food systems. The government has historically been too focused on short-term solutions that have failed to address the systemic inequities preventing sustainable food production and equitable livelihoods.



## Dialogue Background

In 2021, championed by the Ministry of Agriculture; CSONA, CISANET, GMT, Concern Worldwide, Welthungerhilfe Malawi, CARE Malawi, FAO, and WFP hosted a series of independent dialogues to garner inclusive participation in the UN Food Systems Summit and support the creation of Malawi's National Pathway. Dialogues held in Zomba and Mangochi Districts focused on transforming food systems to deliver on the SDGs. Dialogues in Nkhosha and Balaka districts focused on transforming food systems to achieve zero hunger and improved nutrition.

Malawi is suffering from vast amounts of food waste which can be attributed to insufficient food systems infrastructure and a lack of preservation methods used across the country. This is particularly concerning considering the rising levels of hunger and malnutrition occurring concurrently. Adopting preservation techniques aimed at saving food at risk of being wasted is not only an opportunity to combat hunger but can also reduce the impacts of climate change and serve as an income generating activity for marginalized groups. Targeting trainings through already established farming cooperatives will both increase the economic opportunities for small and medium sized producers and increase the amount of healthy produce available in local markets.

Farming cooperatives are routinely recognized for their important role in implementing sustainable development in the country, yet cooperatives struggle to be formally recognized and registered with the government. This lack of formal recognition is impacting their ability to function as a grassroots capacity building mechanism. The government must focus on devolving power to district level cooperatives and trainers who are best equipped to address the needs of local communities. Agriculture extension services also play a key role in transforming food systems, but many small and medium sized producers still lack access to these services. Through improved extension services and cooperatives, farmers can be trained on adequate marketing skills, so they are able to fetch a fair price for their goods and protect their livelihoods. In conjunction with an expansion of services, the government must enact policies that protect vulnerable producers from unequal bargaining powers and the impact of low-priced imported produce. Government agencies, civil society, extension services, and local cooperatives must work as one in order to strengthen the capacity of Malawi's most marginalized food systems workers and ensure that historically overlooked voices guide policy and advocacy in the country.

## Policy Actions



### Sustainable and Just Food Production

- Strategically target productive farmers based on lead farmer input to increase access to the Agricultural Input Program (AIP)
- Increase the establishment and access to district-based seed systems
- Require agricultural buyers to have a license to protect the prices received by small and medium scale farmers and ensure producers receive at least farm gate prices in local markets
- Establish a variety of fish farming systems in regions along the lake and other water systems to reduce over-fishing
- Increase investment into agricultural focused entrepreneurship training via the Technical, Entrepreneurial and Vocational Education and Training Program (TEVET)
- Enact policies that protect the prices of horticultural crops, ensuring prices reflect the high value of these crops in the market
- Increase investments into irrigation technology for horticultural production
- Mainstream indigenous knowledge and responses to natural disasters into climate change and agricultural policy
- Increase investments into the infrastructure networks that support food systems.
- Increase local tree production schemes to protect soil and water health by increasing investments into district branches of the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources Management Committees (NRMCM)

## Policy Actions



### Improving Nutrition

- Enact policies that protect the prices and affordability of nutritious food so that producers have a financial incentive to grow nutritious foods while prices ensure consumers can access that nutritious food
- Enact public awareness campaigns and locally led food preparation demonstrations that challenge harmful cultural beliefs and champion diverse diets
- Conduct gender focused campaigns that challenge the belief that food preparation is exclusively the women's job



### Tackling Food Waste

- Cut in half per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level and reduce food losses along production and supply chains (including post-harvest losses) by 2030.
- Invest into community level food preservation methods, training, and infrastructure
- Invest into local farming cooperatives as a means to share knowledge and training on preservation methods
- Increase investments into Civil Society and the Government to increase trainings and public awareness campaigns about preservation
- Enact public awareness campaigns addressing the vast amount of food waste that occurs during cultural festivals



### Grassroots Capacity Building

- The Land Act must enact a focus on building the capacity of Traditional Authorities and Land Tribunals
- Devolve the Department of Trade and build the capacity of cooperative trainers that support district level cooperatives
- Enact a locally led approach to the realization of the Pillar 1: Agricultural Productivity and Commercialization of the 2063 Strategy and the Greenbelt Initiative
- Invest resources into local CSO's advocacy and outreach capacity to better bridge gaps between farmers and the government
- Increase the establishment of farmer cooperatives and agricultural extension services to help boost small and medium sized commercial farming, improve access to financial resources, and increase information and technology sharing platforms
- Increase investments into NRMC to improve the management of forest reserves and ensure local communities are the primary beneficiaries of the resources
- Increase investments into bee keeping amongst NRMC members to both serve as forest protection and provide income generating opportunities
- Increase the access of TEVET trainings for rural community farming cooperative groups