

“Strengthening the Linkages: Policy and Programmes”

How **NGO/Civil Society Organizations (policies and programmes)**, foster nutrition- and health-friendly growth

Edson Musopole: edson.musopole@gmail.com

1.0 Introduction:

1.1 Strengthening Linkages of Actors:

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Governmental agencies policy and program linkages strengthen complementarities of community and local government development efforts and generate synergies for effectiveness and efficiency in fostering nutrition and health friendly growth. The lack of linkages causes duplication of efforts, resource use resulting in inefficiencies and confusion among development agencies, targeted beneficiaries and the government. The linkages enhance synergies, effectiveness of resource use and coordination in fostering nutrition and health-friendly growth which is of prime importance in Malawi.

1.2. Policy and Program Linkage:

The United Nations (UN) linkages with the Africa Union(AU) strengthen policy and program synergies through representation in member states. Bilateral and multilateral agencies foster nutrition and health-friendly growth policy linkages through such development frame works as the Millenium Development Goals and NEPAD respectively.

2.0 Stakeholder Partnerships and Roles :

The government recognizes the NGO/CSO contributions to development and has forged partnership programmes in agriculture and health in fostering national nutrition and health-friendly growth. Development Agencies encourage the Governments to restrict its role to coordination of regulatory services in its courtship with development partnerships. The Core Function Analysis processes meant to delineate partnership roles stalled and is yet to be completed. Mutually agreed and clearly outlined roles reached by stakeholder groups will strengthen accountability and stakeholder participation.

Strengthened linkages with pluralistic agriculture extension delivery structure and nutrition specialists will enhance outreach capacity through community leaders, to foster national nutrition and health-friendly growth. Strengthening linkages with rural education institutions, church establishments and community based institutions will strengthen such programs. Strengthening of radio/TV and print/media group linkages with nutrition/health education institutions will facilitate message development, dissemination and listening.

NGO linkages with stakeholders will also be strengthened through sharing of best practices and processes of influencing alternative vision of development out of their experience of working with the poor. The process facilitates lessons to be drawn about the new skills, the new tasks to be undertaken, the new priorities for planning and management and new partnership to be forged.

3.0 NGOs Policies and programmes on nutrition and health:

NGO policies and programmes are informed by community needs and aligned to national and international Policies and Programs of such organizations as the United Nations General Assembly Global Development Framework-the Millenium Development Goal(MDG) of September,2000; and the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy(MPRS)/Malawi Growth and Development Strategy(MGDS) national development frame work respectively.

4.0 Linkages of Agriculture, Nutrition and Health:

The linkage of agriculture to nutrition and health originates from the understanding that agriculture is the source of nutrition which enhances health. Agriculture produces food variety in abundance to be available and accessible and meet the minimum requirement of all levels of consumers in accordance with the definition of the Right to food for a healthy life. Life is dependent on food consumed in balanced combinations for a healthy life. The food variety for combined consumption has to be made available and accessible to all levels of consumers. The practice of agriculture requires a healthy farmer to produce food variety. Consumption of a variety of foods is required to realize the range of food nutrients for a healthy life. Hunger results in the deprivation of the intake of food nutrients, malnutrition and ill health.

Linkages of Humanitarian Response Policy and Program to Agriculture, Nutrition and Health

Vulnerability interventions by NGOs are commonly exacerbated by drought, flood situations and disease outbreaks such as cholera and HIV/AIDS. The interventions foster national nutrition and health-friendly growth. The interventions include vulnerability assessment, distribution of relief seed, household utensils including mosquito nets and blankets, food supplements to expectant mothers and children, Mid upper arm(MUAC)growth and nutrition monitoring, health education, relief seed, among other factors. Child growth monitoring standards and instruments are used among NGOs. NGOs through the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) and Malawi Health Equity Network(MHEN), the government ministries and departments and UN Agencies such as World Food Program(WFP); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and multilateral and bilateral agencies, as well as academic institutions facilitated the policy and program work of NGOs.

The role of NGO/CSOs in Agriculture:

The role and objectives of CISANET in agriculture is to alleviate and eradicate poverty and hunger at household level through increased crop, livestock production, productivity and income. CISANET aims to achieve the objectives through advocacy to influence change of government and development partners policies, practice and attitude. Through the promotion of livelihoods i.e. crop and livestock diversification in agriculture but also food types NGOs have promoted risk mitigation from drought, floods, pests and diseases and have enhanced nutrition. They have supported micro-irrigation through facilitation and construction of canal irrigation, provision of treadle pumps and drip kits for winter crop production for all season availability of vegetables, income and household nutrition. Crop productivity and production has been enhanced by community based improved seed multiplication to enhance availability and accessibility to smallholder farmers. Promotion of livestock management, ownership, manure making and its use for crop production. NGOs have enhanced good soil management best practices and made crop production and household food security affordable to poor smallholder

farmers. Through farmer organization NGOs have empowered community leadership, facilitated contract farming and enhanced community bargaining power through joint supply of commodities at more competitive prices (again, give examples of NGO/CSOs). Agriculture Extension services have been provided to facilitate smallholder farmer access to technical information to support production. Farmer to Farmer extension services have reduced the ration of farmer to extension agent in some areas from 1 to 3500. NGOs have facilitated research and advocacy to influence government and development partners' policies in favour of poor smallholder farmers particularly women farmers. Awareness raising on the Right to Food has been conducted and a bill to enhance the protection of the right to food of the vulnerable has been drafted. NGOs through community managed micro-credit village revolving fund provide agriculture production loan facilities to smallholder farmers.

NGO policies and programmes can unleash agriculture's potential to enhance the agriculture-nutrition-health linkages and better improve nutrition and health by influencing policy change including facilitation of the legislation of the right to food and nutrition, change of "business as usual attitude or complacency" but also advocating for the engagement of all sectors to support agricultural production.