

MALAWI

Strategy Support Program



RESEARCH CAPACITY FOR OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE MALAWI AGRICULTURAL SECTOR WIDE APPROACH (ASWAp)

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The Agricultural Sector-Wide Approach (ASWAp) aims to support priority activities in the agricultural sector in Malawi that would increase agricultural productivity, reduce hunger, enable people access to nutritious foods, and increase the contribution of agro-processing to economic growth.ⁱ ASWAp directly supports the objective of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) of reducing poverty and transforming the economy from an importing and consuming to a manufacturing and exporting one. Agricultural research plays a vital role in making the ASWAp programme a success; yet, to date there has been no effort to explicitly link the research strategies of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) institutions to the ASWAp research agenda. Thus, as a first step toward facilitating the development of an “ASWAp-responsive” research strategy for NARS institutions, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), under the auspices of its Malawi Strategy Support Program (MaSSP), conducted an assessment of the strategic research and planning capacity within NARS institutions and the general readiness of NARS institutions to respond to ASWAp research needs. Findings show, first, that research funding is unevenly distributed in the NARS. Collaborative research within the NARS is therefore essential – this is because institutions that have greater research funds cannot on their own fully respond to the ASWAp research agenda. Second, our findings show that not all NARS institutions communicate their research findings to policy makers. This threatens the successful implementation of ASWAp as its success hinges on the full participation of all stakeholders in the sector. Hence there is need to strengthen research communication channels between the NARS and policy makers, as well as other actors in the agricultural sector, to ensure successful implementation of ASWAp.

INTRODUCTION TO THE NARS REVIEW

Data for the review of the research capacity for operationalization of the ASWAp was collected from a total of 23 different research institutions within the Malawi NARS, including both private and public research institutions – the Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS), selected Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) research centers, private seed companies and seed industry associations that utilize research outputs, farmer’s organizations, and academic institutions that conduct agricultural research, as well as other types of research institutions. Different sections or units in DARS were interviewed as separate research entities for the study, since each has different mandates.

Each NARS institution was asked to respond to a semi-structured questionnaire covering different aspects pertaining to strategic plans under ASWAp, knowledge and information sharing, capacity, institutional rating, and performance. Responses from the questionnaire were analyzed to identify any structural differences in the way sampled institutions responded to specific questions.

CAPACITY FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

Not all agricultural research institutions in Malawi have strategic plans. This is potentially problematic for the implementation of ASWAp, as the ability of the NARS to respond to national development strategies depends on the ability of the institutions in the research system to review their own structures and inter-linkages;

management systems; staff competencies and skills; and capacity gaps and performance needs and resources, and then to adapt their strategic orientation based on such assessments. Hence there is a need to build capacity for strategic planning in the NARS in Malawi in order to ensure effective operationalization of the ASWAp.

Of those institutions with strategic plans, a majority (65.2 percent) perceive their organizational strategic plans to be relevant or very relevant to ASWAp implementation. Slightly more than one-third perceive their organizational strategic plans as not being relevant to the ASWAp research focal areas or they are uncertain. This can be attributed to a number of reasons. First, there is a lack of knowledge of the ASWAp research focal areas among the individuals that responded to the questionnaire. This lack of knowledge stems in part from the newness of ASWAp, with the 2011/12 fiscal year being the first year in which the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security was aligned with the ASWAp Monitoring and Evaluation results framework, as stipulated in the GOM/MoAFS document.ⁱⁱ Secondly, the majority of agricultural stakeholders have not reviewed their strategic plans in the last 3.5 years. Hence, ASWAp research areas have not yet been incorporated into the plans.

RESEARCH PROGRAM SETTING AND FUNDING

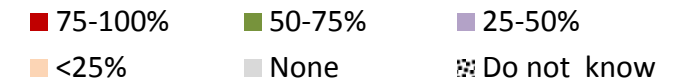
Funding mechanisms differ between different research institutions in the NARS. We distinguish six categories: (1) DARS with its different units and sections; (2) CGIAR centers; (3) private seed companies; (4) farmer organization; (5) academia and (6) other national public research centers and organizations that receive full or partial-funding from different sources. A key finding is that the funding mechanism determines how research agendas are set because the donor of the funds participates in designing the research program. Institutions within NARS are diversified in terms of role and research capacity. The funding mechanisms reflect this diversity. This entails that networking and partnerships are important to the delivery of ASWAp research results. For example, organizations that have greater access to donor funding, such as CGIAR centers, may not be able to satisfactorily deliver on the entire ASWAp research agenda on their own, but will require support from public sector research institutions that are able to amass grassroots support and engage more closely with policymakers. Vice versa, institutions like the DARS that receive funding from the public sector side, funding which in total is considered to be insufficient¹, will have to rely on NARS partners to generate research outputs.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of research programs within the NARS institutions that are funded by different mechanisms – by Malawi’s development partners donors (Panel a), through the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (Panel b), and through special Presidential initiatives (Panel c). It is apparent that some organizations have a larger proportion of their research programs being funded by donors than others. Further analysis shows that the availability of donor funding in the NARS is concentrated in some types of organizations, with statistically significant differences in the level of donor funding obtained. Donor funding clearly is biased towards some types of organizations within the NARS in Malawi, neglecting others.

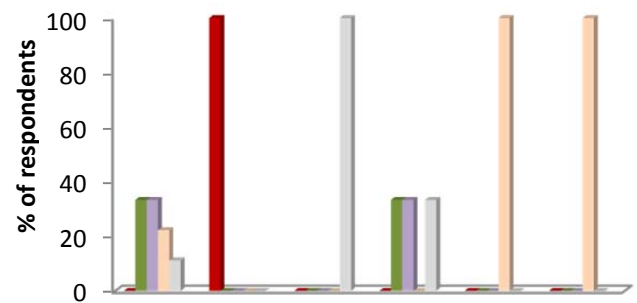
Donor funding is most readily available for CGIAR centers, with the CGIAR research centers being the only institutions in the NARS that have between 75-100 percent of their research programs being funded by donors. The research programs within DARS vary quite widely in the level of financial support which they obtain from donors.

In terms of funding through the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security or through Presidential initiatives, we found no statistically significant evidence that ministerial or presidential funds are biased towards funding one type of research organization as compared to others. However, not unexpectedly, the international CGIAR centers receive no funding from these government of Malawi sources.

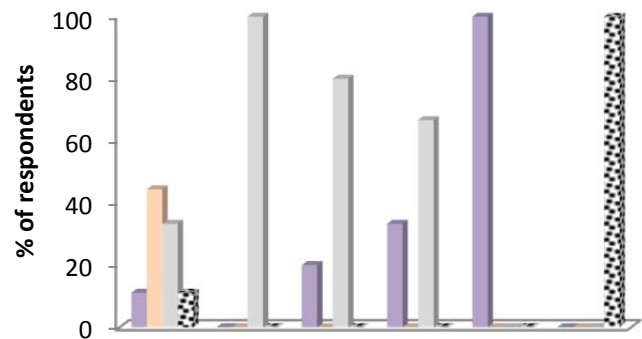
Proportion of research program funded by a) Collaborating partners, b) Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and c) Presidential initiatives



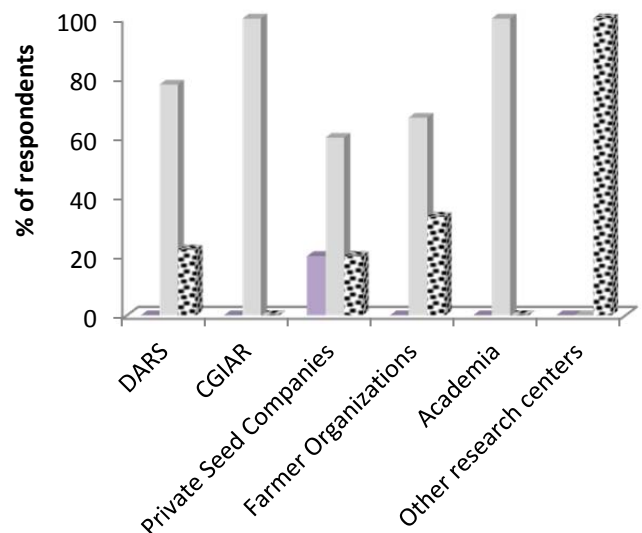
a) Collaborating partners



b) Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security



c) Presidential initiatives



CAPACITY FOR KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION SHARING

Not all research institutions in the NARS as categorized above share research information with policymakers. This threatens the successful implementation of ASWAp, since it is a sector-wide strategy, the success of which hinges on the full participation of all stakeholders in the sector.

The study also found that differences in information sharing with various other actors in the agricultural sector exist in the NARS. However, the differences between NARS member institutions in their patterns of information sharing with NGOs, university staff and students, other research institutions, the private sector, and the general public, were found to be statistically insignificant at the 5 percent level of confidence (all Kruskal-Wallis statistics > 0.05) (Table 1). However, there were noticeable differences across the institutions making up the Malawi NARS in information sharing with policy makers. A post hoc statistical test shows that farmer organizations, different DARS sections and units, and the CGIAR centers sampled were found to share information with policy makers to a greater extent than do private seed companies. This is not unexpected, as private seed companies are commercial and competitive in their orientation. Nonetheless, this fact has implications for ASWAp implementation, since the private sector has a critical function in agricultural development. The ASWAp was set up specifically to increase collaboration and enhance coordination across the entire sector. Thus, our research results emphasize the need to strengthen information sharing processes between MoAFS and private sector companies.

Differences in information sharing with different stakeholders by institutions making up the Malawi NARS

Stakeholder	Kruskal-Wallis statistic
Other research institutions	0.129
NGO's	0.120
Policy makers	0.021*
University staff	0.354
Private sector	0.098
General public	0.065
University students	0.670

*Significant at the 5% level of confidence

CONCLUSION

The findings support the notion that strategic planning is essential for aligning the research agendas of the institutions

making up the NARS in Malawi with the ASWAp research focus and agenda. Efforts to improve capacity for strategic planning should be geared towards all organizations in the NARS, including the private sector, government research units/sections, the CGIAR, academia, farmer organizations and other research centers. Within each research institute capacity building efforts need to target not only senior management but also researchers at both senior and junior levels. This will ensure that their research work plans will become responsive to the ASWAp.

In order to build sustainable research capacity that responds to the information needs of the ASWAp focal areas, a comprehensive, joint agricultural research strategic plan should also be developed. The process for developing this strategic plan for agricultural research should engage all stakeholders in a consultative process. This should include not only the stakeholders involved in the capacity assessment study but also others that play a role in agricultural research in the country that were not included in this study. The resultant collective strategic plan should guide organizational and departmental level plans; it should fully identify and understand the external environment; and it should be flexible so that it can be updated and adapted to evolving research needs. In addition the plan should integrate an information and communication strategy for agricultural research in the country. This strategy should specifically focus both on improving communication and information sharing amongst institutions in the sector and on strengthening their capacity to communicate effectively with policymakers.

To ensure that institutions in the NARS develop ASWAp relevant strategic plans it is necessary that there be greater communication of the key intervention areas under ASWAp and the focal research areas that must be implemented to support these interventions. This will facilitate the incorporation of ASWAp prioritized research areas into the research plans of the constituent institutions of the NARS in Malawi, as these research organizations review their strategic plans and as they develop a collective strategic plan.

Finally both the CGIAR and public research departments have greater access to donor funding for their research. Consequently, there is a need for improved collaboration between Malawian and international research organizations in order to meet the research needs of ASWAp. In addition, efforts are needed to fully incorporate all actors in the NARS in collaborative research to ensure a sector-wide approach. In this regard the potential benefit from increased interaction between public sector policy makers and private sectors research institutions should be tapped.

References

ⁱ MoAFS (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security) (2011) Malawi Agriculture Sector Wide Approach: A Prioritised and Harmonised Development Agenda: 2011-2015. Lilongwe: MOAFS.

ⁱⁱ GOM/MoAFS (Government of Malawi/Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security) 2011. Alignment of annual work plans and budgets to the Agriculture Sector Wide Approach (ASWAp). April. Lilongwe: Malawi.

This Policy Note has been prepared by Mariam ATJ Mapila, Jason Yauney, Klaus Droppelmann and Paul Thangata as an output for the Malawi Strategy Support Program. The capacity assessment of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) in Malawi was conducted in order to facilitate the development of a strategic plan for the Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS) that responds to the Agricultural Sector Wide Approach (ASWAp). The note is intended to promote discussion and has not been peer reviewed. Any opinions stated herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the policies or opinions of IFPRI.

The Malawi Strategy Support Program of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) works closely with the government of Malawi and other development partners to provide information relevant for the design and implementation of Malawi's agricultural and rural development strategies.

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