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The Issue of Food Security in Malawi:

The Study of How and Why one
of the World's Poorest Countries
Attained Food Security

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Abstract

Food security is vital for the further development of a state. The aim of this thesis is to examine how and why Malawi managed to obtain national food security despite being one of the poorest countries in the world. Malawi's economy is predominantly agricultural based and the majority of its population live in rural areas and are employed in agriculture. Therefore, politicians who wish to gain support are to target and improve agricultural policies. This is what the government in Malawi has done and President Bingu wa Mutharika especially did when he was elected President in 2004 by implementing the fertiliser subsidy programme. Subsidising fertilisers for poor farmers consequently made the agricultural production increase so much so that the country now is food secure and is even exporting to neighbouring countries. Political tension exists in the country between the President and his opponent, and in order for the President to increase his support from the people and to maintain his position and power for the upcoming election he needs to satisfy the Malawian people.

Keywords: Food Security, Malawi, Rational Choice, Subsidies, Agriculture

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Executive Summary

This thesis will consider the issue of food security with especially focusing on Malawi. The reason for choosing Malawi as a case study is because it is a landlocked, extremely poor country in Southern Africa, who despite of this, has managed to become food secure in the latest years. The two questions that will be posed are; *How has Malawi managed to become food secure?* and *Why did Malawi attain food security?* It is mainly national food security that will be looked at and the underlying causes to it.

The approach of rational choice will be used in order to explain the behaviour of the politicians in Malawi, especially the behaviour of the current President Bingu wa Mutharika. Rational choice theory posits that politicians implement, support and accept policies in order to gain support from the public so that they (the politicians) can maintain and/or increase their power. Rational choice theory also exclaims that politicians favour more power than less, and also have a preference to stay in office instead of being voted out. Malawi's economy is mainly agriculturally based, the majority of its population live in rural areas and are involved in agriculture, it is therefore necessary for politicians who wish to maintain office and power to address the agricultural sector. This is what President Mutharika and this government has done by implementing the fertiliser subsidy programme which has resulted in an immense increase in the production of food.

The thesis is a case study of Malawi, even though there are certain disadvantages with conducting a case study, such as not being able to generalise as much as when researching many cases, I chose to go through with a case study. This because it gives the researcher, in this case me, the opportunity to go more into depth into the case instead of only touching upon the surface of many different cases.

Food security is a multi faceted concept with no single definition which can be applied to it. The author of this thesis has decided to focus on national food security instead of household food security. There are several components that can be included into the concept and they include; availability of food, accessibility and affordability of food, stability in the national system of food supply and food quality and safety. There are many reasons for a country to experience food insecurity including inadequate employment opportunities, lack of proper infrastructure, policies that disregard the agricultural sector, poverty and HIV/AIDS. The effect of HIV/AIDS on food security will not be discussed in this thesis since it is such a large topic which deserves a thesis of its own.

Malawi is a small, land-locked country in Southern Africa with a population of 12 million. It gained independence in 1964 and has since struggled with food security. The economy of Malawi is moderately small and mainly based on

agriculture, which employs around 85 percent of the population. The majority of the agricultural production is produced by poor smallholder farmers who rely on the rains for good harvests. The reasons for the food insecure environment in Malawi are many and include low agricultural productivity, severe poverty, poor infrastructure, HIV/AIDS, etc. This thesis mainly focuses on how the country solved the problem of low agricultural productivity.

Malawi has experienced several food crises since 2000, the latest occurring in 2005. After this devastating crisis, President Mutharika decided to, despite opposition from donors, to implement a subsidy programme for fertilisers and seeds to poor farmers. Malawi has had fertiliser subsidy programmes for some years such as the Starter Pack and the Targeted Input Programme, however, it wasn't until President Mutharika who came into power in 2004, implemented the Fertiliser Subsidy Programme in the 2005/2006 growing season that agricultural production started to increase significantly to affect the national food security situation. Several donors were at first sceptical towards the programme however, President Mutharika decided to go through with it anyway. The programme uses coupons which poor farmers can exchange for seeds or fertilisers at different locations. The distribution system has been criticised since it employs local chiefs which have been accused of selling coupons to those who are not in need of them. Also, the opposition has accused the government of targeting and favouring the people who are supporters of the ruling party and President Mutharika.

The political situation in Malawi since the last election in 2004 has been rather tense because of the Bingu wa Mutharika leaving the party (the United Democratic Front (UDF)) which helped him to presidency and forming his own party the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Many senior members of the UDF decided to go with Mutharika and joined the DPP. This angered members and the leader of the UDF. The power struggle between the two can be one of the reasons for President Mutharika's eagerness to satisfy the people of Malawi in order to gain and uphold support for his government. This goes in line with what the rational-choice theory posits that people naturally favour more power than less, and to stay in office rather than being defeated in an election. The programme is also one of the main items in the country's national budget, therefore it is also vital for the government that the programme is a success.

Because of the success of the fertiliser subsidy programme implemented by President Mutharika, the country now is an exporter of maize to neighbouring countries. This means that the country finally achieved national food security. Though, the lack of agricultural research and poor infrastructure reduces the programme's effectiveness. These two issues need to be addressed. The transferability of the programme to other countries needs to be taken with caution since every country is unique.

To sum up, the thesis argues that Malawi attained national food security since President Mutharika wants to maintain power therefore he implemented the subsidy programme, in order to attain support.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Subject of the Study

Even though most national plans for development over the past decades have contained nutritional consideration, they have usually been outlined as an outcome of economic growth. This view is now being contested with a vast body of evidence pointing out that even though economic development enhanced nutrition outcomes, it regularly occurs at a slow pace and that direct declines in income poverty does not necessarily mean comparative decreases in malnutrition. To rephrase this into one sentence, economic growth and income security does not always guarantee food security. National food security is very important since having a population that is malnourished can impede the economic development. Therefore governments need to incorporate food security into their policies if they wish to obtain sustainable economic growth (Meerman 2008:1). The issue and concept of food security will be discussed more in detail later on in the thesis.

The latest increases in international fertiliser and food prices have highlighted the vulnerability of the poor households in developing countries, particularly in Africa. The different factors which produced this increase have regenerated the focus of policymakers on the necessity to enhance the productivity of staple food crops. Over the past decade both the positives and negatives of input subsidies have been fiercely debated. The introduction, or re-introduction, of input subsidies is occurring in numerous countries in order to obtain short-term food security at the same time long-term investments are being instigated to increase productivity. However, the price of fertiliser will most likely in the short to medium term continue to be high, and subsidies for fertilisers will unavoidably entail an elevated budgetary load. The challenge for countries wanting to implement input subsidies is how to draw up a so-called 'smart' input subsidy programme. The 'smart' input subsidy programme would have a considerable impact on food availability in the short term, while also for the long term strategy encourage rural development and growth and enhance (or at least not hold back) effective demand for and commercial distribution of inputs (Dorward et al. 2008:1).

Malawi is a small landlocked country in Southern Africa considered a least developed, low-income and food-deficit country, with the majority of the population living below the poverty line, according to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP 2009). It has an estimated population of 12 million. The poverty rate differs within the country but it is extensive and severe with around 65 percent living below the national poverty line and 28 percent in extreme poverty (Menon 2007:1). In the densely populated south, the holdings of land are

small which leads to encroachment on marginal land and enhanced erosion. These circumstances, in addition to the high occurrence of HIV/AIDS (estimated at 12 percent of the total population), makes the poor extremely susceptible to the effects of food insecurity. Roughly half of all children under five are chronically malnourished (WFP, Country overview, 2009). The author of this thesis understands that HIV/AIDS does have an immense impact on the country, but has chosen not to look at the issue in more detail since it would require a thesis of its own on solely that topic.

In 2005 (the latest data available), Malawi was ranked 164th out of 177 on the United Nations Human Development Index, which measures three dimensions of human development (life expectancy, adult literacy and enrolment at primary, secondary and tertiary level and purchasing power parity income), as an alternative to only using the Gross Domestic Product as an indicator (Human Development Report, 2007/2008, Malawi).

According to the Second Integrated Household Survey conducted in 2005 by the National Statistics Office of Malawi, it is the most densely populated country in Southern Africa even if around 88% of its population lives in rural areas. The country has only one rainy and one harvest season. Since Malawi is landlocked and the infrastructure remains underdeveloped, importing food is difficult and costly. Approximately 2.8 million households rely on smallholder farming, who generally only have a small plot of land. Because of extensive poverty not many of these farmers have enough money to invest in agricultural inputs. Some 40-60% of rural households struggle to attain food for about five months each year before the harvest in spring (Africa Research Institute 2007).

Malawi suffered from a devastating drought in 2005 which resulted in almost five million of its 13 million inhabitants requiring emergency food aid. In 2007, the tables had turned and the country was selling the most corn out of all southern countries in Africa to the United Nations World Food Program (New York Times). According to the United Nations, the voucher programme for fertilisers and seeds has assisted Malawi in doubling its agricultural productivity, making the country a net food exporter after having suffered decades of famine as a recurrent food importer. To be self sufficient in food Malawi must have 2.2 million tons of maize per year. In 2005, before the subsidy programme commenced, the harvest fell to 1.2 million tons of maize, though after the National Input Subsidy Programme was put into place, in 2007, the harvest increased to 3.2 million tons of maize, according to the Ministry of Agriculture (UN, 2008)

The occurrence of severe child hunger has also decreased sharply. The success was due to new subsidies for fertilisers. The World Bank and several other highly developed countries that have been sending aid to Malawi have over the last 20 years pushed Malawi to abide by free market policies, which included reducing or abolishing the subsidies for fertilisers, this even though both the United States and

Europe heavily subsidises their own farmers. After the drought in 2005, the newly elected president Bingu wa Mutharika (elected in 2004) chose to do what the west practiced, instead of what they advocated and preached. Both the United Nations and Britain were both unconvinced since the soil in Malawi is critically depleted and most its farmers were too poor to be able to afford fertilisers at market prices. Malawi's success in subsidising fertilisers has added to the reassessment of the vital role of agriculture in reducing poverty, especially in Africa. It has also highlighted the fundamental significance of public investments in the basics of a farm economy, which are improved seed, educating the farmer, fertiliser, agricultural research and credit. The government of Malawi has supported the use of fertiliser subsidies for an extended length of time. However, they unwillingly consented to donor recommendations, which included adhering to private markets and an opposition to government intervention. During the 1980s, and in the 1990s, Malawi was persuaded by the World Bank to fully abolish fertiliser subsidies. The theoretical perspective of this was that the Malawian farmers would then change to grow cash crops for export and then use the foreign exchange earnings for food import (Dugger 2007:1).

1.1 The Purpose and the Problem of the Study

The aim of this thesis is to explore the concept of food security and how a nation state can achieve this, with special focus on Malawi and how it managed to attain national food security. It will examine the fertiliser subsidy programme in Malawi which according to me is the reason for its successful food security situation. The time focus is mainly the years after the latest election which was in 2004 since it is only after this election that the country managed to become food secure. The thesis will further look at why it became food secure and the political motives behind it, which according to me is that the government wants to maintain power, which is clearly in their own interest.

Malawi was chosen for the case study since, as mentioned, it is one of the poorest countries in the world, yet they managed to obtain national food security (see appendix 1 for map).

It was also chosen with the intention of providing evidence that it is possible for countries in Africa, with the help of government intervention become food secure. Though, the motives behind the success are further investigated in the thesis. Hence, the **research question** posed is;

- *How has Malawi managed to become food secure?*
- *Why did Malawi obtain food security?*

The hypothesis for this thesis is that Malawi became food security because of the government's decision to re-introduce subsidies for fertilisers and seeds in order to increase agricultural production. Favourable weather contributed to the success

of the subsidy programme, but cannot be seen as the sole cause; hence subsidies are necessary for poor farmers. The reason why the government chooses to intervene in the agricultural policies and implement the subsidy programme was because they seek to maintain power, and act in their own interest.

This thesis has chosen to focus on national food security rather than household food security since the author found it more interesting to look at how a nation state can provide and guarantee food for its people, because the state has a certain responsibility to its citizens. Without food people are not able to be productive members of a society, hence, they cannot contribute to the further development of the state.

This thesis is an explanatory case study and reviewing literature from a multitude of sources including reports, official government document, news papers and articles. The main focus in the political aspect of the thesis is the post 2004 election period, though, a historical background will be provided in order to understand the problem.

2. Theoretical Overview

2.1 Rational Choice Theory

The rational choice theory was chosen as the main theory for this thesis because I personally believe that it is the most appropriate theory when analysing and describing the acts and behaviours of politicians, especially in this case.

In order for change to occur, politicians have to initiate, support and accept new policies. During the 1980s and 1990s, the support of politicians was crucial to policy advocates and officials of international financial institutions who were profoundly dedicated to change the policies in developing countries. They often discovered that many politicians denied the reform proposals, even if the proposals were better than the existing situation. To understand the motivation of politicians who resist or support policy change, some political economists have turned to economics, and have many times drawn on the rational-choice theory (Grindle 2001:348-351). Rational choice can be divided up into two categories: public choice and social choice. In this thesis it is mainly the public choice rather than the social choice that is considered when the rational choice approach is discussed (Lewin 1988:13).

The approach of rational-choice is that political actors act in order to maximise utility, which is generally presumed to mirror their self-interest. Bureaucrats, party officials, voters, lobbyists and politicians are thought to be rational in the sense that they have preferences and want to realise them through action (Grindle 2001:348-351). Though it can be applied to any sphere of life, rational choice, or “the assumption that the social actor, whether the individual or a collectivity, seeks to optimize rational gains within the limits of the objective situation in which the actor finds him, her, or itself” (Delanty and Strydom 2003:372), is especially relevant for politics.

Rational-choice theorists, when trying to explain the behaviour of politicians, usually claim that politicians naturally favour more power than less, prefer to stay in office than to be defeated and to be re-elected rather than lose. Naturally voters favour politicians who present them with benefits that enhance their welfare to those who do not do this. In democratic societies, politicians have to be receptive to the interest of voters or certain constituencies that aid them in attaining their objectives. In a rational-choice political economy, the interests of voters are vital since they confine the available choices and make them take decisions that are characteristically geared so that in elections they will be favoured. The unit of analysis for explaining political behaviour in the rational-choice approach is the individual. However, empirically a lot of political activity includes the behaviour of groups. In the rational-choice approach, when two or more individuals

concurrently try to act on their preferences, and when it is not possible for them to be attained by joint action, there is a conflict (Grindle 2001:348-351). In Malawi, rational-choice theory could be used to explain why politicians finally decided to subsidize fertilizer, as they thought it was the best way to keep themselves in power. This idea will be discussed later on.

Even though rational-choice theory was formulated to describe the actions of individuals in the world of politics, it can also be applied to state level behaviour. Just as an individual chooses the course of action that he or she deems most efficient, so too a government makes decisions based upon pragmatism. In the case of the Malawian government, they demonstrated a rational-choice when they decided to provide fertilizer subsidies for their people in order to ensure their popularity. If the choice had been morally based, there is no question that politicians would have starved themselves before allowing their countrymen to go hungry. Instead, they were calculating and rational individuals who decided to use agricultural policy as a political tool. For these politicians, the costs of the fertilizer subsidies – spending a large percentage of the national budget, angering many international donors who disagreed with the program – did not outweigh the benefits – keeping citizens fed, creating a more content electorate, and exporting food to neighbouring countries.

There are several theoretical reasons, according to Robert H. Bates (1983), for the way governments act and why they choose to intervene in agricultural policies. The three main reasons include governments as agents of the public interest, governments as agents for private interests and governments as agencies that seek to maintain power. Bates (1983) mainly agrees with the last explanation and rejects the two first ones.

2.1.1 Governments as agents of the public interest

This approach, which originates from development economics, views governments as agencies whose assignment is to secure the interest of their societies by choosing public policies which they believe are socially best. The principal public interest of poor societies is fast economic growth, which is reflected in the policy choices of governments in developing countries (Bates 1983:162-163). This approach is the opposite of rational choice, hence will not be used in this thesis, but still briefly outlined here.

According to Bates (1983), the principle that governments act as agents for maximising social welfare is not very effective when it comes to food policy. In order to assure social objectives, governments can decide between many different policy instruments. As an example Bates uses the objective of increasing food supply, which is the intention for numerous African governments. To facilitate this, governments might offer increased prices for food or invest the same sum of resources in food production projects. As maintained by Bates, the former is a

more cost-effective way of securing this objective; however, the project-based policies are the ones mainly preferred by the African governments. To reinforce the inducement for food production, African governments can increase the price of agricultural products or subsidise the costs of farm equipment. Either option would work, though governments usually prefer to go through with the latter, because an increase in agricultural prices would negatively affect poor Malawians purchasing food (Bates 1983:163-165).

2.1.2 Governments as Agents of Private Interest

According to Bates (1983:166-168), there are two approaches that reject the assumptions that governments can employ good judgement and that they act out of a regard for social welfare. The first approach is closely related to dependency theory. The dependency school theorists emphasise that governments in the 'periphery' are 'weak' and that they do not possess autonomy. What they mean is that those governments are not capable to defend local interest since economic and political ties force them to the interests of the 'core', i.e. the rich developed countries.

The second approach, the pluralist approach, considers public policy as the result of political pressures used by members of the domestic economy. For this approach, food policy in Africa seems to denote a form of political settlement intended to produce peaceful relations between the government and urban constituents. Pressure/interest groups are one part of the pluralist model of politics and the second main part is competitive elections. In Africa, and also in the case of Malawi, the majority of its population living in rural areas and being farm families, agricultural policies could not be ignored since parties have to secure votes in order to win power, therefore competitive elections are important (Bates 1983:169-173).

2.1.3 Governments as Agencies that Seek to Retain Power

The third approach which Bates argues can explain government behaviour is when they act in order to maintain their power. This is the approach that Bates supports the most out of the listed. According to me, it is very similar to the rational-choice approach. It explains the low food prices as political pressures. With the pressure for low-priced food, it assists in explaining why when governments desire more food they have a preference to attain it by building more programmes instead of increasing the price. Furthermore, it also explains why governments prefer to offer production subsidies as an alternative to increasing the price of food with the intention of strengthening food production (Bates 1983:173). This approach supports the subsidy programmes implemented by the government in Malawi.

There are three trends which have been pointed out by Bates (1983:174) that occur. Firstly, programme and project-based policies do not endure as much from this liability explained above. This is since officials can be discreet with the location of projects and also with the staff. This in turn lets them present the benefits selectively upon those whose political support they need and want. Therefore politicians are more likely to favour project based policies as a means of rural development.

Secondly, governments and politicians create too many projects, knowing that the budgetary resources available might not be that many. The reason for this is usually that they want to make certain that officials in each administrative district retrieve resources in order to ensure political support. Another trend is to hire a workforce that is too large for the project or not skilled enough, consequently patronizing the viability of the project (Bates 1983:174-175).

The third and last trend is to have projects that are profitable for politicians privately, but socially wasteful. Repeatedly, from an economic stance, agricultural projects do not succeed. This is since they do not create enough revenue to cover their costs. Even so and with that knowledge, public agencies still implement such projects. A key motive for politicians is that they are usually more concerned with political expedience than they are with using public resources efficiently economically. This is because if a project does not produce a sufficient amount of return on the public resources used, but nevertheless benefits and rewards the politician (or those who depend/build on it) privately, support will be given. The project will operate as a source of reward for the followers (Bates 1983:175-177).

3. Method

3.1 Motivation

This thesis will use the explanatory case-study method. Malawi was chosen as the case since it is an exemption of the countries in Africa where so many struggle with food security, which Malawi has managed to obtain. However, this thesis maintains that it is not the case of food security, but rather what lies behind the focus and attainment of becoming food secure which is the larger case. One can ask the question, is Malawi one of the countries where the government and political leaders seek to stay in power, with food security being the bi-product of this in order to attain votes from the people? This will be explored later on in the thesis.

3.2 Case Study

Whenever a researcher explores a single case of a phenomenon within a single setting, it can be described as a case-study. The single case analysis can, if correctly researched and constructed, be used to increase the analytical knowledge of political science (Peters 1998:137-148). The explanatory case study method is generally preferred when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are being posed, and when the researcher does not have much control over events and when the case studied is a modern phenomenon (Yin 2003:1-6), as is the case with this thesis. Evidence for case studies can be derived from six sources: documents, interviews, archival records, participant-observation, physical artefacts and direct observation. Moreover, it is important for the researcher to use a multitude of different sources (ibid. 2003:83). This thesis mainly uses documents and archival records. In order to determine the quality of any empirical research, Yin (2003:33-39), identifies four tests that can be conducted:

1. *Construct validity*: by using many different sources of evidence and determine a chain of events. This test is often criticised as researchers are seen as subjective when collecting data. For this thesis, the different sources of evidence have included books, articles, news papers, official government documents, reports etc.
2. *Internal validity*: conduct explanation-building and deal with rival explanations. This test is only a matter of interest if the researcher is trying to discover if one event led to the other.
3. *External validity*: deals with the difficulty of distinguishing whether the findings of a study are generalisable further than the case study conducted. Critics

often argue that case studies are not generalisable; however, this is not the case since they deal with analytical generalisations instead of statistical generalisation (see further explanation below).

4. *Reliability*: the purpose of this test is to be certain that if a later researcher wished to do the same case study, he/she would achieve the same findings and conclusions. The objective of reliability is to reduce the biases and errors in a study.

There are numerous fundamental methodological issues with case-studies. They include uncertainties and questions about variance. If only a single case is studied, then the experimental variance must be presupposed, instead of observed directly. This is due to limitations of money and time etc. This portends that the ‘comparison’ will be either theoretical standard or with other cases and come later on (Peters 1998:142).

3.2.1 Critique

Sir Geoffrey Vickers (1965:173) presents an incisive critique of case studies when he states that: “Case histories are a laborious approach to understanding. For situations are so varied that even a large number of cases may be a misleading sample, while each is so complex that even a detailed description may be too summary; and none is comprehensible outside the historical sequence on which it grew.” Since the case-study only has the accessibility of only a single case, almost each variable has an equal chance of being a cause. With no comparison (with other cases or over time), there is no recognised cause, as a kind of face validity, that can be utilised to deal with explanations, therefore there is no possibility of rejecting causes (Peters 1998:139).

There are concerns over the fact that case studies are viewed as providing little basis for scientific generalisation. Even though case studies are not generalisable to populations or the universe, they are generalisable to theoretical propositions. In this meaning, the case study does not signify a ‘sample’, and when conducting a case study, the researcher’s goal is to “expand and generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization).” (Yin 2003:10). In analytical generalisation, the researcher attempts to generalise a specific set of results to some broader theory (Yin 2003:37).

Even though there were some ways in which more variables could be included and to evaluate them, any single researcher could only examine a small number of them, which most likely would be the ones in which he or she find the most interesting. This is because most researchers do not choose a random case, rather one that, again, he or she thinks is the most interesting. This preliminary interest

and the subjective possibility that follows it, will most likely form the research outcomes, even though there will be attempts by the researcher at obtaining objectivity (Peters 1998:139).

3.2.2 Advantages

Regardless of the weaknesses of case-study research, there are several advantages also. A good case researcher acknowledges and accepts the complexity and multiple causation as a central characteristic of their research, rather than as a problem that has to be eliminated. A case-study tries to position its finding in its individual historical and cultural environment, instead of presuming that political events are isolated from their surroundings. As a result of this, the case-study can look straight at the series of events that created an outcome, instead of simply the outcome. The concentration of case-studies on processes, however, may not always be the best source for conducting generalisations (Peters 1998:137-148).

Agricultural policies and the process behind them are fundamentally driven by political forces hence one must take the political economy surrounding them into account. The political endurance of governments in primarily agro-based economies mainly relies on whether the agricultural policy process is perceived as successful in obtaining food security at whatever cost. The government of Malawi implemented the fertiliser subsidy programme despite strong donor opposition, who not only maintained that the programme contradicted the ongoing economic liberalisation efforts, but also that it would not be fiscally sustainable for the country in the long-run (Chinsinga 2007:2).

3.3 Delimitations

The influence of HIV/AIDS on food security for the country has been through loss of productivity (Cammack et al. 2003:20), and the epidemic also puts a stress on household labour entitlements through death and by weakening people living with the disease. It also causes a re-division of labour in order to take care of the person who is sick or orphaned. It has been argued that food insecurity and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS are mutually supporting (Charman and Hodge 2007). When living in a food insecure environment, one is more likely to be malnourished. Research has proven that the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission from mothers to children is increased when the mother is malnourished. Hence, this is another reason for why the country needs to obtain food security so that the epidemic does not increase or hamper the future economic growth and productivity of the country (Cammack et al. 2003:20). However, the effects of the epidemic will not further be investigated in this thesis.

The food security question often becomes a question of food production and availability. When the availability issue has been met, then the subject of accessibility and entitlements can be tackled (Cammack et al. 2003:8). This thesis will focus on the national food production and availability, hence national food security, mainly between the years after the latest election (2004 and present) and investigate the underlying behaviour of politicians to gain support.

4. Framework

4.1 Food Security

Food security is a multifaceted concept which includes problems that exist on different levels (global, regional, local, national, household and individual level) and in different dimensions. This is obvious in the many definitions that exist, making assent on a single definition for food security difficult. Thomas Malthus, in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* from 1798, pronounced an early notion of the food security concept: the need to grow enough food to feed the world's increasing population (Bredahl et al. 1999:3-4).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the food security was strongly linked to concepts of increasing production. During the early 1970s, the global production of grain decreased which resulted in an increase in price. Throughout this period, food security was related to the size of grain storages. However, the increase in grain storages that followed could not eliminate the hunger disasters, especially not in Africa, which caused the issue of accessibility to obtain a central role in the understanding of food security. Since the 1980s, the focus has changed from only focusing on the amount of food produced to the issue of food security. This was especially apparent in 1996 during the World Food Summit, when it was decided to halve the number of people starving by 2015 (SOU 2002).

Before the World Food conference in 1974, the concept of food security was mainly related with simply alleviating hunger. However, after the conference, the concept became more complex (Bredahl et al. 1999:3-4). Different scholars and organisations have contributed with various definitions of their own. The World Bank stated in 1986 (p.1), that "Food security is access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life".

As mentioned, even though there is no single definition of food security, many of the definitions overlap. The many different definitions of food security allows for the reader of them to interpret them in a flexible, adaptable and open way (Bredahl et al. 1999:4). The exact definition of food security has been disputed over some time, though the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation's (FAO) declaration states that ending world hunger is achieved "when all people, at all times have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (World Food Summit 1996). The main components of food security that have been observed as common in many definitions include (Special Programme for Food Security, FAO, 2009) (Guha-Khasnobis et al 2007):

- i. food availability
- ii. household accessibility to food or affordability
- iii. stability in the national system of food supply
- iv. food quality and safety

The components are all central for food security, but it is important to note that they cannot by themselves ensure food security for a population over time.

The World Food Conference in 1974 was held due to the famines of the period 1972/73 in order to reaffirm the case for increased food production. However, there were more famines during the 1980s and in 1986 the World Bank called for policies to guarantee food security. This has not been met today and the reasons are multiple and complex. Globally, the production of food grain has increased faster than the population despite this increased global food production does not in itself equate or grant food security in the developing countries. According to Barbara Ingham (1995:289), it is not food supply that is of importance, rather the accessibility of the population to food supplies. A lack of food might be the result of natural disasters such as droughts and floods, civil war and other conflicts which can lead to the flow of food being impounded or interrupted and simply not having enough purchasing power due to chronic poverty.

The last point is often regarded as chronic food insecurity. The Report of the South Commission (1990:84) justifies chronic food insecurity as “a persistent lack of economic capacity to grow and buy the minimum essential amounts of food”.

The causes are numerous and may include;

- Inequalities in land ownership and distribution, consequentially leading to landlessness
- Inadequate employment opportunities for both rural and urban poor
- Not enough investment in basic rural infrastructure
- Shortage of capital and credit for smallholders
- Government policies that discriminate against the agricultural sector, especially food production
- Failure of supplying basic social and extension services in rural areas
- Defective systems for food marketing and distribution

According to Ingham (1995), chronic food insecurity will probably only be solved when the agricultural sector is included in the development process and when policies for reducing poverty are implemented. However, acute food insecurity, which can be a result of natural disasters and civil war, is connected to international emergency aid. Though, they may have different causes, chronic and acute food insecurity are interlinked. Long-term planning to decrease chronic food insecurity will enhance people’s capacity to endure short-term shocks, such as droughts and floods (Ingham 1995:289).

The United Nations (UN) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) regard satisfactory nutrition as more than simply obtaining enough food. Even though someone might have a satisfactory diet, health conditions might be inadequate to ensure positive nutrition; for example, intestinal parasites could infect someone, which may hinder the effective consumption of the food consumed. Due to this, there has been an increased focus of the household food security, instead of merely national (and regional) food security. Household food security centres around the needs of the poor, since they are the most affected within a society when acute food insecurity prevails. Government policies that encourage household food security, accentuates the following measures;

- Production of food and non-food crops by smallholders, for own consumption and sale at a profit
- Enhancing post-harvest and slaughter-handling practices to decrease food losses
- To increase incomes and improve the quality of diets, animal husbandry should be expanded
- Reinforcing agricultural research to endorse improved agronomic practices.
- Giving special support for women as the major producers of home-grown food for family consumption
- Establishing micro-enterprises to make rural areas self-sufficient in food (Ingham 1995:290)

Food security can be discussed as both individual and national. The former concerns the individual and the family unit and the main determinant is purchasing power-income altered for the cost of what that income must buy, which means that the rich do not experience food insecurity. It is the poor who spend a large part of the income on food who suffer from it. The utmost frequency of food insecurity is amongst the absolute poor, who are usually situated in the rural areas of developing countries. They are also most commonly small farmers or landless rural labourers. The other group most prone to food insecurity are the urban poor. Becoming food insecure can have several reasons such as loss of income, decrease in crop yields, sharp increase in the price of food etc. (Thompson 1983:228-230)

National food security, as defined by Robert L. Thompson (1983), is guaranteeing enough food supplies to feed the country's population at rational prices, in spite of yearly fluctuations in crop yields. However, objective nutritional criteria for defining national food security are extremely hard to define. Concerning national food security, it is not only individual purchasing power that plays a role but also the national purchasing power, unless the country has sufficient reserve stocks available. Corresponding to the individual case, national purchasing power is the amount of foreign exchange that the country has available in order to pay for food imports (Thompson 1983:230-232). As mentioned, this thesis has decided to focus on national food security and the agricultural policies associated with it.

The responsibility of the state towards its citizens has been discussed for many hundreds of years. As early as in the seventeenth century philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke who both considered the value of politics in their works *Leviathan* and *Second Treatise of Government*, respectively. The two concur that government was originally founded for protection (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Hobbes's Moral and Political Philosophy 2008 and Locke's Political Philosophy 2005), which I would consider also including the protection from starvation due to the lack of food security. However, the view of Hobbes and Locke will not further be discussed in this thesis the point was simply brought up in order for the reader to know that the concept of state responsibility has been discussed for a long period of time.

Some analysts also add the notion of self-sufficiency to the definition of national food security. Self-sufficiency, as maintained by Thompson (1983:230), is when a country can produce enough food itself in order to offer some minimum level of food intake per person, in order to defend itself against the unforeseen event that it might be unable to import food at any cost. There are also less extreme versions of the definition, some which highlight the benefit and desirability of food production being in line with demand. They recognise the country as being food insecure when there is a shortfall between domestic consumption and production.

During the 1970s and 1980s the debate around food security evolved and acknowledged that national food security does not have to entail individual countries becoming self sufficient in food production. Instead, determined by the individual country's factor endowments, a more profitable and maybe safer alternative would be to produce and export manufactured goods or high-value crops, and then to buy, from the world market, a proportion of the national staple food requirements. However, numerous African governments were critical of this since they feared becoming too reliant on the international grain trade, knowing that the most food-insecure people are usually smallholder farmers who would not be able to afford, nor have access to commercially imported food. The governments of these countries maintained a devotion to national self-sufficiency and their policies (before they were modified by the structural adjustment programmes) embodied pricing depending on what season it was, input subsidies, and subsidies for the price of food (Devereux 1997:8).

The development towards food security has not been uniform whatsoever across the world. Thirty-five years ago more than forty percent of East and Southeast Asians did not consume enough calories. From then, about 282 million people have become food secure with not only about 10 percent remaining undernourished. This success is largely due to the progress in China. The same trend has been shown in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, where food security has improved. Of utmost concern are South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In South Asia progress continues, even though it is rather slow. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the amount of food insecure people almost doubled during

the latter third of the twentieth century. According to Graham et al. (2007), this number is expected to continue to rise as the population increases. This would mean that Sub-Saharan Africa would have the highest incidence of undernourishment and more food insecure people than any other region in the world (Graham et al. 2007:169).

According to the Swedish Government Official Investigations (Statens Offentliga Utredningar (SOU)) (2002), there is a close relation between food security and strategies aimed at decreasing poverty and national development. Eliminating poverty is necessary in order for poor households to obtain enough food. It is also necessary to promote economic growth and trade to ensure food security at a national level. This is since poverty causes people to go hungry, but hunger causes poverty as well. Studies conducted have shown that for several countries in Africa, the economic growth could increase with more than one percent per year if malnutrition was eradicated (SOU 2002:16).

The majority of people in developing countries are employed in or living from agriculture. However, agriculture's contribution to employment is usually larger than its contribution to national output, which is an indication of the low productivity of the traditional agriculture that exists in developing countries. Traditional agriculture means that production systems are mainly directed towards own consumption by farming households, or by those in the surrounding area. It is also characteristic for traditional agriculture that yields (output per hectare) and returns of labour are commonly lower than in commercialised agriculture. The production level can also be undependable, which means food shortages and starvation can be caused by a poor harvest. This kind of agriculture (traditional) is still very important in especially Africa. The low productivity as mentioned can be understood as a crucial underlying factor of rural poverty in developing countries, according to Ingham (1995:275).

4.2 Malawi

In 1964 Malawi gained independence from Britain. The country was then led by President Hastings Kamuzu Banda for almost three decades, employing dictatorial power through the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). Confronted with an economic crisis and resilient international and domestic pressure, Banda agreed to a referendum consenting multiparty rule in 1993 (Freedom House 2007).

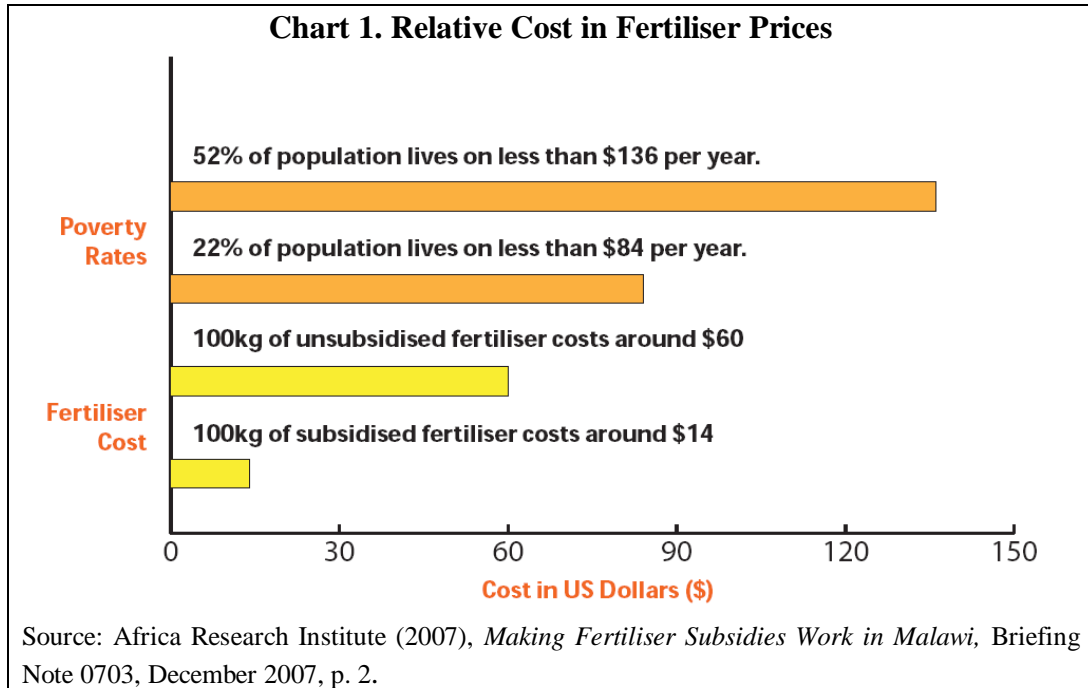
According to O&M Development Consulting (2003), the majority of studies completed in the beginning of the 1990s recognise that Malawi's government's policy goals for food security were focusing on national self-sufficiency in the production of food. This would be achieved by enhancing the maize production. Even though the growing of maize occurred all through Malawi, the production of it did not keep up with the population growth for numerous reasons, which resulted in food shortages and forcing the country to import food. The factors that affect food insecurity are plentiful depending on the group being contemplated, though poverty is constantly recognised as the main underlying factor. Other factors acknowledged as affecting food security in Malawi are low levels of income, low agricultural productivity and high population growth (O&M Development Consulting 2003:26).

In order to fully understand the execution and impacts of the 2006/7 agricultural input subsidy programme, it has to be regarded in the context of extensive rural poverty and food insecurity, low and uneven agricultural productivity, susceptible agriculture-based livelihoods, extreme credit restraints to fertilisers use and an established history of smallholder agricultural input subsidies (Dorward et al. 2008).

For instance, in 2003/4, to be able to purchase a 50kg bag of fertiliser, a poor farmer had to pay up to around 10% of his mean per capita annual rural expenditure. It is therefore not unforeseen that agricultural input subsidies have politically and economically been a part of Malawi for many years. During the 1970s and 1980s, there were general price subsidies on smallholder fertilisers and maize seed, together with subsidised credit, a key ingredient of the agricultural development policy. The subsidies were removed, but reintroduced again as a reaction to shortages of maize, alternating political pressures, low productivity of maize and increasing domestic fertiliser prices (Dorward et al. 2008:2).

According to the National Statistics Office of Malawi, poverty is persistent and primarily rural with a national poverty head count of 52% in 2004/5, with 94% of these people living in the rural areas (National Statistics Office 2005). As can be seen from chart 1 on the following page, in 2007 the poverty rate had not declined with a stagnant figure of 52% of the population living on less than \$136 per year and 22% of the population living on less than \$84 per year. This means that 74%

of the total population would find it extremely difficult to purchase a 100 kg bag of fertiliser, which is what they usually come in, for a cost at around \$60. However, with the subsidies provided by the government, the price of the 100 kg bag of fertiliser decreased to only \$14 (Africa Research Institute 2007). The chart was included to illustrate for the reader how much a poor farmer in Malawi spends on fertilisers, with and without subsidies, in comparison to his annual income.



Since there are not many alternative livelihoods to farming, and in combination with the small area of land that farmers use, they are forced to cultivate maize on the same plot each year. This over-cultivation has caused the fertility of the soil to decrease, which consequently leads to poor harvests (Africa Research Institute 2007). Long-term strategies to enhance the fertility of the soil include land reform and improved agricultural management. However, the most effective and fast strategy is to use fertilisers. In 2007, the commercial price of fertiliser was \$30 for 50 kg, which is impossible for a poor farm household to pay. Being able to retrieve fertilisers has become one of the most vital political issues in Malawi. Even though the subsidies are costly and might discourage farmers to diversify, there are, according to the Africa Research Institute, no other viable options to achieve short-term food security in Malawi. There have been several efforts to reduce subsidies in the past, which have often coincided with unfortunate harvest and increased food insecurity. In 1987, the Structural Adjustment and stabilisation programmes phased out the agricultural subsidies, which then were linked to the food crisis. Food shortages in 1997/98 were also linked to the abolishment of subsidies in 1996. When, in 2002, the Starter Pack programme was scaled down, the country was hit by a severe famine (Africa Research Institute 2007). The Starter Pack programme will be explained more in detail later on in the thesis.

According to O&M Development Consulting (2003), there is a strong agreement that because the economy of Malawi relies so much on agriculture, the cornerstone of Malawi's development policy should be agricultural policy. The main drive of the agricultural policy should, as maintained by O&M Development Consulting (2003:22), entail development and growth of agricultural production to improve the domestic consumption for the rising population and exports.

Since the 1990s, Malawi has experienced immense political changes. In 1994, the country reinstated multiparty democracy after having been one of the most repressive one party regimes in the southern region of Africa since independence in 1964. It was anticipated that with this transition the country would recover economically and social development would be enhanced. However, no matter if one measures poverty in terms of gross national product, the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) or its Human Poverty Index, the country still remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The Integrated Household Survey (IHS) from 2005 estimates that 6.7 million (that is approximately 52.4 percent) out of the total population of 12 million live below the poverty line and out of these, 2.2 million cannot afford to meet the daily recommended food requirements (Chinsinga 2007:3).

4.3 Food Security in Malawi

Since independence, Malawi's approach towards food security has been the production of the country's staple, maize (Cammack et al. 2003). Food security policy has been prepared for many years by numerous different government institutions in Malawi. An assortment of various programmes has been executed that are linked with access to food, food agricultural productivity, and related issues, though with varying degrees of success (Cammack et al. 2003).

The former Minister of Agriculture stated that "A nation that cannot feed itself cannot be a sovereign and independent state. We, in Malawi, must therefore be able to feed ourselves by whatever means" (Chinsinga, 2007:15, from *ADMARC only buying Maize*, The Nation, 17th August 2005). This statement was included in the thesis to make the reader aware of the standpoint which politicians in Malawi have, which according to me, is strongly towards promoting national food security.

There are many factors that contribute to the insecure food situation in Malawi. They include low agricultural productivity, chronic poverty, badly chosen economic policies, poor infrastructure, limited arable land, ecological constraints and other social and demographic factors. These factors are not isolated but instead are all interrelated. Still, it is broadly accepted that the main cause of food insecurity and malnutrition in Malawi is chronic poverty. This means the absence of economic opportunities to produce enough safe and nutritious food or to

exchange labour for the income to buy sufficient, nutritious and safe food. The Food Security Policy's long term goal is to considerably improve food security of the population by increasing agricultural productivity, diversity of agricultural output and sustainability (Food Security Policy, August 2006).

Contributors to the food crisis debate characterise the food crisis to primarily two proceedings in the mid 1990s. Firstly, the breakdown of smallholder farmer credit clubs and secondly to the liberalisation of the agricultural markets. The breakdown of smallholder farmer credit clubs, together with the abolition of fertiliser and hybrid maize seed subsidies, caused farm inputs to become almost unaffordable to the poor farmers. To deal with this, the government launched the Starter Pack (SP) programme in 1998/9 and the Targeted Input Programme (TIP) in 2000/1. However, both the SP and the TIP failed did not live up to the expectations of its stakeholders (Chinsinga 2007:5). Both the SP programme and the TIP will be discussed more comprehensively later on in the thesis.

One of the worst food security crises in current time occurred in the growing seasons of 2000/1 and 2001/2, and was due to unfavourable weather conditions and mismanagement of grain reserves. It forced around 30 percent of the population (3.3 million people) to require emergency support and on 27th of February 2002, former President Dr. Bakili Muluzi announced a national food crisis (Cammack et al. 2003:vii). In Malawi, the preferred staple is maize, hence a lack of maize is regarded as an indicator of serious food insecurity. After the summer harvests in 2001 and 2002, the degree of the food insecurity crisis became obvious with domestic requirements not being met (Charman and Hodge 2007).

As late as in 2003, Cammack et al. stated that Malawi was clearly in the group of nations who were food insecure (Cammack et al. 2003:4).

The problem of food insecurity is extensive, with maize production per capita decreasing progressively from 163 kg in the early 1990s to less than 150 kg in the late 1990s. In the 2001/2 and the 2004/5 growing seasons, the country experienced severe hunger with more than 3.2 million people being affected in the season and 4 million in the latter season (Chinsinga 2007:4). These two severe crises made the issue of food security an even more politically charged. Especially since 2001/2 food security has, as Sahely et al. (2005:17) noted, "appeared in the platforms of politicians, on the agendas of policy makers, in the programmes of public bureaucracies, among the duties of village chiefs, and on the pages of national newspapers (...) and is thoroughly researched and debated".

4.4 Malawi's (agricultural based) economy

In 1994 Malawi suffered a decline in GDP due to fiscal slippages which were attributed to large drought-related expenditures and deferral of inflow from donors as a reaction to governance concerns. However, the decline was followed by a recovery in 1995 when real GDP rose by 14.3%, mostly due to favourable weather conditions that strengthened the performance of the small-scale agriculture sub-sector. The favourable weather conditions continued to maintain economic activity in 1996 with smallholder agriculture continue to grow strong. Besides favourable weather conditions, the good effects of agricultural liberalisation began to show. After 1996, the economy slowed down recording only a 3.7% growth in 1997, 3.3% in 1998 and rising slightly to 4.2% in 1999. The reasons are numerous and include the drought experienced in the 1996/7 growing season, which was compounded by high input costs, in particular fertilisers after the removal of subsidies (O&M Development Consulting 2003:5).

The annual GDP growth rate declined between the years 1990-2000 and only accomplished a mean growth rate at around 4% per annum. The macro-economic performance of the country during the last decade was influenced by numerous factors such as political transformation and climatic conditions. The country then experienced episodes of droughts and deteriorating terms of trade (O&M Development Consulting 2003:5).

The agricultural sector was the main source of economic growth during the past decade. In 1992 and in 1994, the sector declined but came back in 1993 and 1995 which can be attributed to favourable weather conditions during the 1992/3 and 1994/5 growing season. Major reforms took place during the last decade which included removing fertiliser subsidies, decreasing the role of the public sector in agricultural marketing etc. (O&M Development Consulting 2003:6).

The Malawian economy is moderately small with a gross domestic product of US\$3.6 billion. The average per capita income of the 12.9 million population is about US\$160. The 2007 Welfare Monitoring Survey, which was released in August 2008, measured the poverty headcount at 40 percent. Even though the agricultural sector only comprises 35 percent of GDP it is an extremely important sector since it makes up more than 80 percent of export earnings and supports around 85 percent of the population. Three quarters of the agricultural production is produced by smallholders who mainly rely on rain-fed maize production. More than 40 percent of the smallholder households cultivate land less than 0.5 hectares, which means that the distribution of land in the country is rather unequal. The main export is tobacco, cotton, sugar, coffee and tea. Since the country has produced surplus food during the last three years, the increased international food price has not yet affected the country much. Restrictions on maize exports have been tightened even more and price controls on the staple

have been put in place, though the government claimed that these were only temporary (Country overview, World Bank).

Agriculture comprises 39 percent of Malawi's gross domestic product (GDP), 83 percent of the foreign exchange earnings and 85 percent of the labour force, which evidently shows that the country depends heavily on agriculture and therefore has an agro-based economy. Malawi also relies on support from donors, who contribute to 80 percent of the development budget, with official development assistance accounting for around 27 percent of GDP. Clearly, the Malawian government would not cope that well without support from donors, which consequently brings up the question whether it is the government or donors that are determining the policy making process and the policies decided (Chinsinga 2007:3). However, even though this issue is interesting, it will unfortunately not be investigated further in this thesis.

The main donors in Malawi are the Department for International Development (DFID), World Bank, European Union, Norway, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the African Development Bank. They contribute to around 40 percent of Malawi's annual budget and 90 percent of development assistance. Other donors are the United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, World Health Organisation and the World Food Programme. Still, the government has taken an active role in defining its own development agenda which can be viewed in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). The strategy draws out the priorities policies for the years between 2006/7 and 2010/11 and identifies that sustainable and strong economic growth is the basis for reducing poverty. In order to achieve economic growth, six areas of agriculture and food security in the MGDS are emphasised (Country overview, World Bank):

- (1) irrigation and water development
- (2) transport infrastructure development
- (3) energy generation and supply
- (4) integrated rural development
- (5) prevention and management of nutrition disorders
- (6) HIV/AIDS prevention

The market-oriented approach blamed the food insecurity in Malawi on too much government intervention in the agricultural sector. Market liberalisation in Malawi (in the agricultural sector) was represented by the removal of subsidies for inputs like seeds and fertiliser (Devereux 1997:23). However, the government's decision to provide subsidies to poor farmers has made Malawi into a major regional exporter of food (Anonymous, African Business 2009).

5. Case Study: Malawi

5.1 Subsidies

Agricultural input subsidies were usual in rural economies that were poor during the 1960s and 1970s. They were also a key factor in the Asian green revolution. In the 1980s and 1990s, conservative policy analysts regarded subsidies as inefficient and ineffective as a policy tool in Africa which would only add to macro-economic problems and overspending by the government. However, in latest years, there has been a revival in the interest of subsidies, especially in Africa. The implementation of the large-scale fertiliser and seed subsidy in Malawi has gained substantial international attention (Dorward et al. 2008:2).

The Malawian state has preserved a strong influence in cereal market with a state marketing board (agency) being predominantly responsible for grain imports. Together with Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Swaziland, Malawi has retained a centralised grain marketing structure, which means that the government has the control, in order to influence price, ensure farmgate sales, consent to pan-territorial distribution and guarantee household access to affordable staples. Tariffs are used with the intention of preventing dumping and protecting local production. Malawi has employed more steep tariffs on sorghum, rice and wheat flour (Charman and Hodge 2007).

The immense majority of the poor are food deficit small-scale farmers because of restricted land availability and poverty. They heavily rely on the low-input production of maize on small land plots with deteriorating soil fertility for their real income and food security. Their real incomes and capability to buy food are thus very vulnerable to maize prices, which alternate radically within and between seasons. Over the last ten years, the country has suffered from national food shortages because of poor production seasons and dependence on expensive and late donor and government funded food staple imports. Consequently, poor farmers have been confronted with acute and chronic food insecurity. The potential and possibilities with fertilisers and hybrid seeds in order to enhance maize production have not escaped the poor farmers; however, acquiring both is restricted by supply and affordability constrictions. Since the price of fertiliser is high and the price of maize varies a lot, it might lead to a restricted profitability of fertiliser use on maize. What this means is that in households where the use of fertilisers on maize is the most rewarding, are also confronted with extreme 'affordability' problems. Since these households are usually poor, they do not have much cash to purchase the fertilisers, and credit is thought of as risky and hard to attain, which is a problem since most bags of fertilisers do not come in bags less than 50 kg (Dorward et al. 2008:3). Therefore, I believe that subsidies for fertilisers were necessary in this situation.

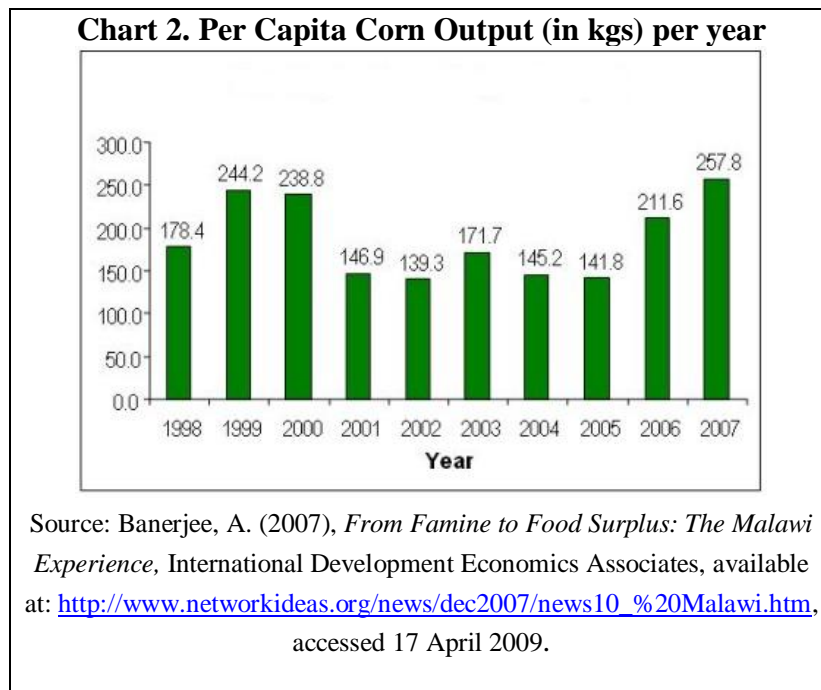
5.1.1 Subsidies in the 1990s

In 1992, the Smallholder Agricultural Credit Association (SACA) collapsed and in 1995, the Fertilisers Subsidy Removal Programme (FSRP) was completed. Subsequently, the smallholders in Malawi were confronted with increased prices for fertilisers and relentless restricted access to input credit. Many farmers created clubs in order to be able to obtain hybrid maize and fertilisers, but many of them failed to repay their loans and broke up. The costs of agricultural inputs have persistently increased to more than most farmers could afford after devaluations of the Malawian kwacha since the 1990s (Devereux et al. 2007).

In Malawi, Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) were put into practice which damaged and in some cases ended commercial farmers and state productivity support programmes to smallholders. Further, the SAPs required the country to lower the credit and input subsidies, while a smaller amount of resources (financial and human) were dedicated to extension, research and technical services (Charman and Hodge 2007). With the aim of reducing the impact of the SAPs, the Malawian government, with the help of donors, implemented the Starter Pack Scheme (SPS) in 1998/9. The underlying idea of it was to provide free farm inputs to targeted families, allowing them to conquer their main entitlement constraint (input). The targeted families were the resource-poor households which included 2.8 million people (Mangisoni et al. 2007:14-15). The programme provided enough inputs for 0.1ha of hybrid maize inter-planted with a legume crop. Consequently, household food availability was increased. This success made the Malawian government consider widening the SPS approach to include all smallholder farm families as medium-term food security strategy. Though major multi- and bilateral donors contested this, and the World Bank/IMF did not consider the SPS as a favourable medium-term strategy. This because they acknowledge the necessity of short-term safety net measures, centred particularly on individuals and groups in the margin (Charman and Hodge 2007). Two years after the start, the SPS was altered to the Targeted Input Programme (TIP), which was implemented until the agricultural season of 2004/2005 (Mangisoni et al. 2007:15).

Since 1993, when the SAP was introduced in agriculture, controversy has existed between the IMF and the Malawian government surrounding fertiliser subsidies. The agricultural sector in Malawi can be separated into two categories: small farm agriculture and large commercial estates, with the former producing around 80 % of the food consumed. In the past, the people involved in politics and the Malawian population equated food security with corn production. Despite this, the SAP aimed at diversifying the agriculture and transforming farmers so that they would become more price-responsive. Consequently, the production of food grains steadily decreased. Smallholder farmers have for a decade been troubled by declining fertility in the soil and not been able to get access to fertilisers. This also

caused the maize yields to decrease which meant that many farmers were not capable of producing enough to even feed their families. In order to revitalise the production of food grains, the government decided to implement the Starter Pack scheme in 1999. Two Starter Pack Schemes were conducted in 1998-1999 and in 1999-2000, in which farmers were provided with free packs of fertiliser and seeds (maize and legume). Both Starter Packs were universally distributing to all rural smallholder households, approximating around 3 million. However, due to pressure from the IMF and the World Bank, the government had to reduce the programme and in 2001 the Targeted Input Programme was introduced. The number of people targeted decreased to 1.5 million in 2001 and continued to fall to 1 million in 2002. The discontinuation of the Starter Pack programme and the unsuccessful targeting under the deluding guidance from donor agencies caused severe famines in the coming years. As can be seen from the chart below, there was an increase in corn production during the years of the Starter Pack programme. In 2000, the high corn production (of 2.5 million metric tonnes), meant that the country had a surplus of 350,000 tonnes of maize. After 2001, the production of corn decreased sharply. The enduring low productivity over the coming three years after 2001 caused extreme hunger and food shortages, with the price of maize increasing, which left millions of people without daily adequate meals (Banerjee 2007).



5.1.2 Fertiliser Programme post 2004

The current fertiliser subsidy programme can be tracked to the electoral campaign in 2004, which was characterised by a strong national consensus for fertiliser subsidies (Chinsinga 2007:6). This would, according to the author of this thesis

signify that all the politicians knew that the agricultural sector needed to be targeted and the production of food increased in order for them to gain support. Therefore there was a national consensus for fertiliser subsidies. In early 2005 after the low agricultural productivity and extreme drought the government, with Bingu wa Mutharika as president, decided to reintroduce a more extensive input subsidy programme in the 2005/6 growing season, which would target resource poor but productive maize farmers (this was later changed to also include tobacco farmers). The general purpose of the programme was to provide fertilisers to those who had the resources (land), but would have difficulty acquiring it, and not as a safety net (Chinsinga 2007:10-12). The programme used a system where vouchers (coupons) were handed out to entitled poor farmers, which then purchased seeds or fertilisers (for maize or tobacco) in exchange for the coupons. This way it included the private sector since the vouchers were valid at eligible shops (Mangisoni et al. 2007: 16). The goal was to ultimately achieve food security, which is equated to the availability of its main staple maize. The programme was later changed to a universal one (Chinsinga 2007:10-12). As mentioned, politicians naturally favour more power than less and know that they need to please the masses in order for themselves to maintain power. I believe that by making the fertiliser subsidy programme a universal instead of a targeted programme, President Mutharika and his government were hoping to gain more support, to ultimately gain more power and stay in office.

Around 130,000 tonnes of fertiliser were given out to poor farm households through a coupon system. The next year, around 1.5 million poor farm households were given coupons in order to purchase fertilisers and two million were given coupons for free maize seeds. More than 50% of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security's budget is assigned to pay the costs of the programme, though funds from donors do pay a lot of the costs of the seed subsidy and some administrative costs. Combined with favourable weather and good rains, the fertiliser subsidy programme has played an enormous role in increase in maize production in 2006 and 2007. According to the World Bank, during the most recent harvest, 3.4 million metric tonnes were produced, creating a surplus of 1.2 million metric tonnes over the national requirement. The surplus was then exported to Zimbabwe (400,000 tonnes), Swaziland and Lesotho (80,000 tonnes) (World Bank, Malawi, Fertilizer subsidies and the World Bank).

The fertiliser subsidy programme was then launched in the 2005/6 growing season and was strongly opposed by certain donors, technical experts and private sector leaders. Previous programmes such as the Starter Pack and the Targeted Input Programme were not successful in ending the problem of the widespread food insecurity (Chinsinga 2007:1). As mentioned, donors were initially sturdily against the fertiliser subsidy programme, but their opinions later deviated into three categories, those still totally against it, those sceptical but prepared to be engaged and those supportive. The two main donors who were totally against the fertiliser subsidy programme were the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and US Agency for International Development (USAID). Their main contention was that

the programme would cause distortions in the market that would make private sector development almost impossible. They believed that the most effective way to improve agricultural growth was to endorse a market-based approach to input provision (Chinsinga 2007:16). Some of the donors that were willing to engage even though they were sceptical were the European Union (EU), the World Bank and the DFID. These donors are suspicious about the capacity of the government and highlight the challenges of targeting. Still, they admit that some sort of subsidy might be possible, developed from the lessons learned from the targeted input programme. They believe that the subsidies should be appropriately targeted at productive and economically active beneficiaries. They too, as the donors who were totally opposed to the subsidies, argue in favour of private sector development, but agree to subsidies if they do not crowd out private sector development (Chinsinga 2007:17).

The ones that were supportive included UN agencies such as the WFP and the FAO, as well as local and international NGO's. They argued that fertilisers were necessary for increasing production and ensuring food security and that agriculture in Malawi would not manage without subsidies. They also maintained that the subsidies would not distort the private sector since there hardly was one (Chinsinga 2007:18). As the FAO office in Malawi stated; "it is much cheaper and cost effective to provide an input subsidy than food aid in the face of crisis. At least, the people could plant and produce the food that they require. This is much more dignified than to perpetually receive food handouts" (IRIN 2007:1). As mentioned, the government of Malawi, decided to go through with the subsidy programme in spite of what donors thought, which shows that President Mutharika and his government wanted to please the citizens of Malawi, and of course themselves, instead of solely listening and adhering to donors. With a pleased population, they will gain more support and interest from voters, which is in line with how the rational choice theory views the behaviour of politicians. Maintained by members of the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, the programme is mistreated by politicians with only members of the ruling party the DPP benefiting from it in certain areas. For example, some members of Parliament have been accused of writing letters to the Ministry of Agriculture instructing them to hand out coupons to people whose names he had suggested (Mtawanga 2008).

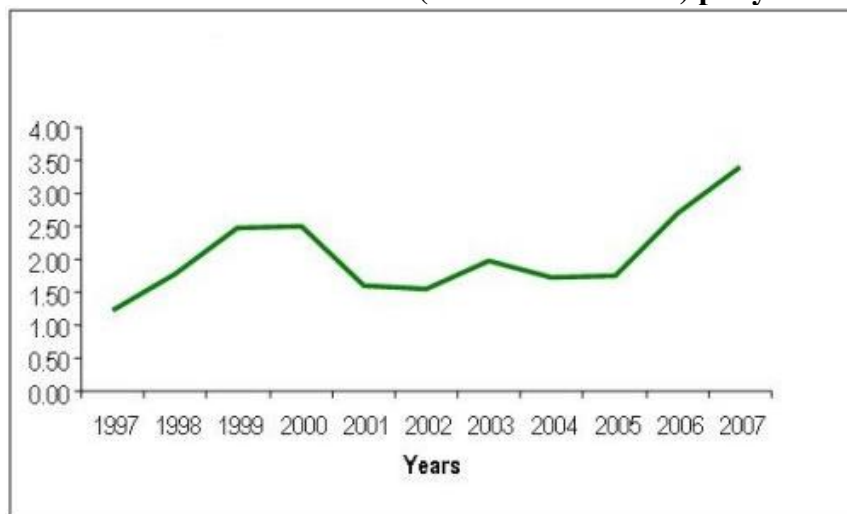
This group of supporters consent with what Chinsinga (2007:19) calls Sachs-Bono position (after economist Jeffery Sachs and artist Bono), which considers subsidies as the only way to achieve food security. This is because once farmers are able to retrieve fertilisers, good water management and improved seeds, developing countries such as Malawi can become food secure.

Even though there were a few shortfalls in the fertiliser subsidy programme, Chinsinga (2007:21) considers it reasonably successful. The shortfalls included, as criticised by many stakeholders, the use of chiefs and local leaders as keepers of the coupons with the argument that it caused prevalent corruption. The chiefs

were accused of selling coupons to those who did not necessarily need them. Accusations were also made towards the government by the opposition, claiming that the government was controlling the coupon system by aiming specifically at those areas that were followers to the ruling party. This is a good example of how the government behaves for political motives rather than humanitarian. Regardless, the effect on the maize yields due to the subsidy programme was exceptional. As a result of the programme, Malawi in 2006 had a record maize harvest of 2.6 million metric tonnes, which is more than half a million tonnes than its yearly requisite of two million metric tonnes (Chinsinga 2007:21).

The subsidy programme was again implemented in 2006/7 growing season, though this time with the financial aid of donors, increased participation of the private sector in sales of subsidised inputs, and also more alternatives for farmer of subsidised maize seed. Several million coupons for fertiliser and seeds were budgeted for the 2006/7 programme and then distributed to different districts. Farmers purchased fertilisers for around 28% of the full cost, with the government chipping in for the rest. In total, 175,000 tonnes of subsidised fertilisers for tobacco and maize were sold in exchange for 3.5 million coupons. Barely under 50,000 tonnes were sold by private companies. The direct costs for the 2006/7 programme to donors and the government was just below US\$91 million, with the Malawian government funding 87% of it. Because of the distribution of extra coupons, fertiliser sales were 17% over budget, which made the government expenditure 25% over their budget. It also has to be taken into account that the over-expenditure was already 40% of the Ministry of Agriculture budget and more than 5% of the national budget. Since the harvest in 2007 was very good, the government determined to export 400,000 tonnes of maize to its neighbour Zimbabwe (Dorward et al 2008:4). As can be seen in the chart, in 2006, the production started to increase, which can be dedicated to the implementation by the government of the Fertiliser subsidy programme.

Chart 3. Corn Production (mn Metric Tonnes) per year



Source: Banerjee, A. (2007), *From Famine to Food Surplus: The Malawi Experience*, International Development Economics Associates, available at: http://www.networkideas.org/news/dec2007/news10_%20Malawi.htm, accessed 17 April 2009.

In 2007, the population of Malawi was 13 million, and with this the country required the production to be more than 2 million metric tons of grain per year in order to be self-sufficient in food. In each of the last two years, this goal was attained. As can be seen in chart 2, Malawi was able to go back to being self-sufficient in per capita corn production (Banerjee 2007).

Official evaluation of the 2006/7 programme recognised several benefits. The maize output was increased with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS), which approximated the total maize production to 2.7 million tonnes in 2005/6 and to 3.4 million tonnes in 2006/7. Both of these harvests broke new records and were significantly larger than the 2004/5 growing season when the production was estimated at 1.2 million tonnes. The price of maize, as is assumed after a large harvest, was low following the 2005/6 growing season; however, after the 2006/7 prices were considerably higher which insinuates that the production of maize was overrated. However, the favourable weather with good rains in both years indicated that not all the production increase can be credited to the subsidy programme. There was an 8% increase in the economic wellbeing of the rural households' in May/June 2007 compared to 2004, according to their own subjective rankings. In the 2006/7 programme the participation of the private sector in fertiliser and seed retail sales was enhanced. This increased the optimism and also permitted partial financial recovery (Dorward et al. 2008:4). According to me it is important that the people involved in the private sector are also satisfied with the government's strategy to becoming food secure, since even though they might be a minority, their votes and support is important for the government.

A cost-benefit analysis of the programme in 2006/7 demonstrated that effects are greatly sensitive to external conditions and management. Thus the programme could generate positive economic returns together with good management. The programme could not be validated only on its involvement in decreasing government spending on food imports in the years where the production has been poor. This is because there are alternative ways to secure and obtain price stabilisation and grain supplies that might be more effective and efficient than implementing a subsidy programme. Execution of the programme does not seem to have had undesirable impacts on budgetary distributions to other sectors and the macroeconomic stability; however, the demands for staff on both local governments and on the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security have impinged on the provision of other services. The influences on the social protection (the welfare and pliability) on the poor households consisted of an increased level of food self-sufficiency amongst deficit producers, increase quantities of marketed maize made the price decrease which was to benefit of food purchasers, increased employment (both farm and non-farm) and increased wages. All these benefits and advantages are crucial for the rural people in Malawi in the context of alleviating extreme poverty, dependence on low-productivity maize production,

vulnerability and food insecurity. Though it must be mentioned that such benefits from the 2006/7 programme were sadly weakened and challenged by the high maize prices in 2007/8, as a consequence of exports encouraged by overestimates of the production and stock of maize (Dorward et al 2008:4).

5.1.3 Discussion for improvement

Knowledge from the programmes in 2005/6 and 2006/7 imply that there are significant possibilities for Malawi to make the outcomes of the programme better. However, considerable dangers exist if action to develop the programme's effectiveness and control its costs does not occur, dangers that include the programme becoming an indefensible and unsustainable strain on resources. These risks and dangers would then probably be aggravated by the increases in international prices of fertilisers (Dorward et al. 2008:5). This could also then have repercussions for domestic politics.

There are several key issues within the programme that need attention though. An inclusive and coherent framework of objectives is essential in order to determine possibly contradictory purposes, and to permit suitable targets and budgets to be appointed for both short and long term strategies. More attention is required on putting the programme within broader national and agricultural development strategies. Problems come up with price and maize market policies, social protection programmes and policies, in agricultural research and in investments in rural roads. If the interferences in the maize market result in increased domestic prices (as happened with the export of maize in 2007/8), it could significantly weaken and damage the positive impacts such as food security, rural economic growth and social protection of the subsidy programme. The lack of agricultural research and poor infrastructure reduces the effectiveness of the programme; therefore sufficient resources need to be allocated to these areas so that the programme can become more cost-effective so that it does not take resources from other investments needed. In 2006/7, household and national-level approximates propose that between 30-40% of the subsidised fertilisers bought displaced commercial procurements instead of adding to total purchases. Displacements like that weaken the viability of the private sector and shifts sparse government funds to less poor farmers with only moderate developmental benefits from the programme. However, by more effectively targeting the subsidies to poor farmers, and helping them plan their commercial purchases, there could be a positive correlation between household wealth, land holding and displacement. Each year both the prices of inputs and the scale of the programme has increased and resulted in growing fiscal outlays and costs (Dorward et al. 2008:5).

The programme is one of the key items in the country's national budget and therefore it is vital to ensure that it does not override the budget too much. Since it is one of the key items, the government relies much on the outcome of the programme for its support. However, in all three years that the programme has

been executed, it has exceeded the budget, due to physical input distributions and price overruns. Increases in the scale of the programme will most probably cause enhanced displacement and thus also cause diminishing returns along with rising costs, especially in the circumstances that now exist with rising international prices of fertilisers. Therefore the cost and scale of the programme has to be regulated. There are vital gaps in the information that thwart effective management and planning of the programme, including different estimates between the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and the National Statistical Office. Therefore, reliable information on smallholder production and of national stocks, consumption and flows of staples are crucial for food security policy. The private sector's involvement has increased, though it has the ability to supply greater quantities in the future if the government would allow it to. This would also increase its feasibility and permit the government to decrease the costs of the programme (Dorward et al. 2008:5).

5.1.4 Reasons for success

The debate over whether the success is truly due to the success of the programme or should be ascribed to favourable weather conditions remains. According to Chinsinga (2007:21), the prevalent view is that the success of the maize harvest was due to the fertiliser subsidy programme implementation, and not to favourable weather conditions. This has been strongly propagated by the government and donors who were supportive of the programme and subsidies in general in order to find a viable mean to revitalise agriculture in Africa.

Dorward, et al. (2007:5), tried to present a pilot analysis of the effects of the 2005/6 fertiliser subsidy programme. The analysis maintained that the incremental use of fertilisers on maize as a consequence of the subsidy in 2005/2006 was approximated to 45,000 tonnes. This, together with good weather conditions, made the record maize harvest possible. An association and contrast was made with the 1999/2000 growing season when the Starter Pack was in use and Malawi produced a 2.5 million metric tonne harvest. This again was also accompanied with favourable weather (good rains). The conclusion made by this analysis was that the maize production was positively affected by the subsidy programme, as was the livelihoods of the people. According to the author of this thesis after having researched the issue it is a successful mixture of both.

With the maize production in 2005 being 1.7 million metric tonnes, records were broken in the following years with maize productions in 2006 with 2.7 million metric tonnes and in 2007 with 2.3 million metric tonnes, increased output turned around Malawi's food deficit. Until very recently the country was depending on the United Nations World Food Programme to feed its population. Because of record maize production, Malawi was able to supply the World Food Programme with 400,000 tonnes of maize, aiding their neighbour Zimbabwe. Arindam

Banerjee (2007) claims that this is a lesson for all policy makers in Africa who deal with the issue of food security, since he credits the turnaround to the government policy intervention, by reintroducing the subsidies for fertilisers as part of the 2005 Fertiliser Subsidy Programme. The programme started in 2006, though expanded in 2007, with the government handing out coupons to farmers with low incomes in order to make it able for them to buy fertilisers at approximately one-fifth of the market price. Coupons for seeds, sufficient for planting on half an acre, were also made available for low-income farmers. Consequently, the mean yield of farmers increased from 0.8 tonnes per hectare to two tonnes. The programme has, according to Banerjee (2007) cost the government \$62 million, which is about 6.5% of its whole budget. The implementation of the programme was systematically contested by economists and donors, who maintained that reintroducing subsidies for fertilisers would make the budget deficit worse, create distortions in the market, and would not make the economy any more efficient. However, their arguments did not hold tight when there evidently was an increase in the corn production, which made the country save \$120 million, money which it had spent of importing food aid in 2005. By selling maize to neighbouring countries, Malawi earned another \$120 million. The brave decision taken by the government of Malawi to go against donor opinion and break away from the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) for agriculture by the IMF has proven, according to Banerjee (2007), that here is no one model to tackle the issue of food security that fits everyone.

However, some economists and donors do not acknowledge that the increase of food grains is due to the fertilizer subsidies, but simply accredit it to favourable weather conditions. The United States ambassador in Malawi claimed in an interview that, “The plain fact is that Malawi got lucky last year... they got fertilizer out while it was needed. The lucky part was that they got the rains” (Celia W. Dugger, The NY Times, Dec. 2 2007).

Banerjee (2007) maintains that this view on the situation is naive and it cannot be credited to good rains. The argument is strengthened by the claim that the yearly rainfall data (see table 1 below) shows that during 2001 Malawi in fact received the most rain in almost a decade, though this was the year that the food shortage first occurred. He maintains that the severe decrease in corn production in 2001 (see chart 3) concurred with the dismantling of the Starter Pack programme. However, in 2000 when there was a production surplus of corn, there rains were poor, and in the next three years (the first three years of the so called hungry period), Malawi experienced more rains than in 2000. The modest rains that occurred in 2004 and 2005 made the famine even worse in the countryside, adding to the disastrous consequences of bad policies. According to Banerjee, without the government implementing the fertiliser subsidy programme, the last few years of rain would have gone to waste.

Table 1: Annual Rainfall: Malawi								
Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Rainfall (mm)	37,523	39,104	28,322	42,705	33,910	33,950	26,440	25,427
<i>Source: Department of Meteorological Services, Malawi</i>								

After the evident success of the subsidies for fertilisers the World Bank still claimed that the Malawian government did not have a plan for how and when they eventually would abolish the subsidies. But for policymakers, civil society groups and the general population of Malawi, it has hard to understand why they should abolish one of the most successful economic programmes ever (Banerjee 2007). According to the author of this thesis, the government wants the success story to continue in order to maintain its power, because with the programme being a success and the public benefiting from it, credit will be given to the government in the form of support and re-election in the upcoming elections. This behaviour demonstrates and strengthens the argument of politicians acting according to the rational-choice theory pointed out earlier.

It must be noted that maize production is concentrated to a few districts in the country, with a few districts being food-insecure due to smaller harvests (Devereux et al. 2007).

The Agricultural Input Subsidy Programme (AISP) utilises coupons to supply a partial subsidy and to target its beneficiaries. The beneficiaries are poor farmers who have the land and human resources to utilise the fertilisers in an efficient way. However, the interpretation of who can be a beneficiary is rather open to local traditional authorities. The role of the local traditional authorities was reduced by the government for the 2007/8 growing season, in order to make the programme more transparent (Africa Research Institute 2007).

5.1.5 Climate

As mentioned, many sources have attributed the success of the fertiliser subsidy programme to favourable weather conditions. Therefore I find it necessary to give the reader an overview of the climatic situation in Malawi.

Bad and unfavourable weather conditions can be extremely damaging when the levels of poverty are high, making it hard for producers to protect themselves against risks through means such as irrigating land or insuring against losses. Though weather conditions can have an impact on all sectors of an economy, the influence on agriculture is often comparatively larger (Thomas 2006:42). Even though the country has a big body of water in the form of Lake Malawi, the agricultural sector still depends on rain-fed agricultural production. Therefore the climatic conditions have a major influence on agricultural production, hence also

economic growth since, as mentioned, the majority of people and the economy relies on the agricultural sector (O&M Development Consulting 2003).

Malawi's climate is sub-tropical with one rainy season from November to May and the dry season being from May to November (SADC, Malawi 2008).

During the rainy season in 2007/8, the government put the fertiliser subsidy programme into action again, which was directed at 1,8 million smallholder farmers. The fertiliser subsidy programme, together with favourable weather, triggered record maize harvests in 2006 and 2007 (with a surplus of over 1 million tons in 2007). Out of the surplus, 90,000 tons were bought by the WFP at a cost of more than US\$20 million, which used the record amount of food obtained within the country as well as for other operations in southern Africa. The 2008 harvest was not predicted by the WFP to be as large, which could intensify the pressure on the poorest and most vulnerable, who always struggle to access adequate food. (<http://www.wfp.org/countries/malawi>).

Rural households almost fully depend on rainfall for their livelihoods. Since the rainfall in the country is unpredictable and inconsistent, it puts farmers, especially poor ones, every year at the risk of flooding or drought within each growing season. The inconsistency in maize production, according to Devereux et al. (2007), is mainly due to erratic rainfall. Even though maize production is generally increasing, the coefficient of variation has risen since the early 1990s. Food security is therefore threatened by the unpredictable rains and harvests (Devereux et al. 2007:24).

In 2009, the majority of the country has had persistently good and well-distributed rains to maintain the development of crops. Yet the amount of rainfall overall decreased in comparison to past months. The rains in February also allowed for the planting for tubers that are planted after the other crops. Periods of sunshine in between the rains in February were advantageous for the growth and development of maize and other crops. Because of good weather conditions until now during this season, together with the enhanced use of hybrid seeds and fertilisers, the production of crops this season are predicted to be more than the previous season, given that the favourable weather conditions continued through to late March. However, the prospects are not good in all districts. In three of the country's districts the poor performance of the rains will most likely result in bad harvests. Except for these three districts, the country overall, as mentioned, has had good rains, even though there have been dry spells which have not affected the production predictions. It was even predicted in February 2009, by USAID, that farmers in the central and northern areas would probably even receive harvests that would exceed last year's production (FEWS, Feb. 2009). However, as stated in the report on Malawi's food security by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network and USAID, "Rainfall performance will be critical for a favorable production outcome" (FEWS, Feb. 2009, p.3).

5.2 Malawi's Political Situation

This section will illustrate how the government, politicians and opposing parties act, events that have occurred and the policies that they implement in order to obtain food security, focusing on the years after the latest election in 2004. Some of the events illustrated might not directly be connected to agricultural policies however, I think that it is important to convey for the reader what the politicians are like. It is to show the reader the underlying motives of their behaviour, which in my opinion is a mixture of wanting to maintain power and acting in their own interest, which connects back to what I was writing about earlier in the theoretical part of the thesis. In addition to this, it reflects why the government chooses to implement certain policies, which would in the case of Malawi be agricultural policies, since they are the most important because it is an agricultural based country. When reading this section, one shall note that the political culture in Africa is different from the political culture which is known to the people from countries of long democratic rule.

In 1994, President Hastings Kamuzu Banda was succeeded by Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in an election that was by and large perceived to be fair and free. In 1999, he was re-elected. Instead of amending the constitution and candidate again for presidency, Bingu wa Mutharika was specially selected as his successor for the presidential elections in 2004, which he won with 35 percent of the vote with the aid of his anticorruption campaign. In the beginning of 2005, a disagreement between Mutharika and former president Muluzi, who was the chairman of the UDF, escalated. The main reason was the arrest of numerous influential UDF individuals who were a part of Mutharika's anticorruption election campaign. This caused Mutharika to leave the UDF and formed the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Soon after, accusations that public funds had been utilised to draft legislators to the DPP were made and the members who had changed parties after the election would lose their seats because it was against the constitution to do so (Freedom House 2007).

In June 2005, the newly formed government, with the Ministry of Agriculture, decided to pass the 'Food and Nutrition Security Policy'. The overall goal of the policy was to considerably enhance the food and nutrition security of the population. It stated, as many other documents have done, that the food insecurity situation in Malawi was due to many factors including poor infrastructure, chronic poverty, low agricultural growth, bad economic policies etc. It was also recognised that these factors were all interrelated and all contributed to food insecurity, though the main cause was the chronic poverty in the country. Chronic poverty in Malawi is due to the deficiency of economic opportunities to either produce enough nutritious and safe food or to trade labour for income to be able to purchase enough food. The policy further recommends good governance as a key factor in guaranteeing that public systems and institutions benefit and protect everyone. The good governance clause states that a "strong political leadership

and commitment is necessary for development interventions to have an impact on wealth creation leading to poverty reduction.” (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, ‘Food and Nutrition Security Policy’, June 2005, p.3). With passing this policy, the government is safeguarding itself for re-election since as stated a strong political leadership and commitment is necessary, and obviously Mutharika and his government show that they are committed by simply passing such a policy.

In the policy, the government further states that it is dedicated to make sure that no actions of the government or private traders would decrease the access to safe nutritious food for any Malawian, and that there should be no discrimination in the purchasing or selling of food (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, ‘Food and Nutrition Security Policy’, June 2005). The main objective of food security is to “guarantee that all men, women, boys and girls, especially under-fives in Malawi have, at all times, physical and economic access to sufficient nutritious food required to lead a healthy and active life.” (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, ‘Food and Nutrition Security Policy’, June 2005, p.7).

The policy further goes on to describe the detailed strategies on how Malawi would ensure sustainable food availability, sustainable access to food, proper food utilisation, stability in food and nutrition, food and nutrition information systems, monitoring and evaluation.

According to the United Nations Development Programme, Malawi is an emerging democracy which has made many strides. It has a strong constitution, a remarkable set of constitutional bodies, such as the Parliament, the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Human Rights Commission, etc. All the Presidential and Parliamentary elections (in 1994, 1999, 2004 and local government elections in 2000) have been concluded as fair and free; however, they exposed several weaknesses in the electoral regime that will have to be mended if elections are to benefit the general populace. According to me this is not a good sign for a rather new democracy, especially if it is the case that the government and president Mutharika wants to stay in power since, with a weak democracy, elections can more easily become flawed. As maintained by the UNDP and which I agree with, good governance is critical for national development (UNDP 2009), which should be the ultimate goal for a poverty stricken country.

The country is an electoral multi-party democracy, with the president being directly elected to five year terms. According to the Freedom House (2007) and in accordance the UNDP, elections are in general free from obvious manipulation; however, recent elections have been characterised by irregularities. In January 2007 the government decided to delay the local elections to 2009, which initially had been planned for 2005. For me this should be taken very seriously since in a free and fair democracy, elections should not be delayed for this long. As indicated by the Freedom House, political division are most commonly founded on personality and ethnoregional loyalties, instead of policy (Freedom House 2007). In Staffan I. Lindberg’s *The Power of Elections* (2004), it is mentioned that

the more agrarian a society is, the more likely it is that people vote for the representatives that they believe are good 'patrons' of their constituency or community. He also highlights that there is much more emphasis on the person instead of the party, which in my view can be the case with Malawi's president Mutharika who most likely has gained many votes with the success of the fertiliser subsidy programme and his anticorruption campaign. These issues are something that one has to have in mind when looking at politics in Africa. (Lindberg 2004). Sporadic political violence by party thugs or policy has occurred during election periods. Two UDF officials were arrested and charged in January 2007 with agitation after the recording in which president Mutharika supposedly called for undetermined action against the former president Bakili Muluzi. The same year in April, a UDF rally was interrupted by military forces sent out by the government (Freedom House 2007).

As mentioned before, Malawi's development budget is supported by donors with up to 80 percent, and therefore a good relationship with them is necessary. Since Mutharika became president, the relation with donors has improved, even if donors at first were opposed to the government reintroducing subsidies for fertilisers. Because of impressive improvements in agricultural output the country attained growth rates of an estimated 7.9 percent in 2006 and 5.7 percent in 2007. Therefore the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank decided to offer Malawi a \$3.1 billion in total nominal debt relief (Freedom House 2007).

Fighting corruption is one of Mutharika's main priorities (apart from also increasing the agricultural production in the country). The opposition has accused the effort of being specifically targeted at them however people within the government have also been affected and convicted, which demonstrates that it's not solely the opposition which is targeted. Even though both the IMF and the World Bank approved of debt relief in 2006, they maintained that the country had not succeeded in making substantial progress on corruption (Freedom House 2008). This of course weakens Mutharika's government since his campaign and much of his staying in power has been focused on fighting corruption and increasing agricultural production. In the Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index, Malawi ranked 119 out of 180 countries (Global Corruption Report 2008).

According to Africa Research Bulletin (2008 Vol.45), the public in Malawi has become used to talks of assassinations and treasons against President Mutharika, whose leadership is seen as volatile and unpredictable. Several events such as arrests of UDF officials and sympathisers in April 2006 before the visit of Zimbabwe's President Mugabe, and the arrest and charge of Vice-President Cassum Chilumpha for attempted murder and treason, have made the public scepticism increase. The President's former party, the UDF, has been the government's key target for a long time. All of the UDF's senior members have either broken away from the UDF to join Mutharika's DPP, or been accused of corruption or disloyalty. Former President and current UDF Chairman Muluzi was

surrounded in his own home by heavily armed police for four days without any charges. This, according to me, shows that the government both acts in their own private interest and in order to remain in power, which illustrates that the rational-choice theory is applicable here.

As maintained by the Africa Research Bulletin (2008 Vol.45), the current government, and many of the donors, act as if the economy is their only responsibility. Over the past three years the country has done this well with maize surpluses, decreased public debt etc. However, what the government and donors must not forget is that development and food security is not only about increasing the food production, but also enhancing the availability and accessibility for the poor people. The success has to trickle down to the whole population.

In agreement with many others, the Africa Research Bulletin (2008 Vol.45), indicates that the parliamentary democracy in Malawi is unstable and fragile. In June 2008, because of the government's inability to negotiate in good faith with the leaders of the opposition, the National Assembly was deadlocked. The May 2009 general elections were put into jeopardy in 2008 when the presidential candidate Muluzi was arrested and detained without any charges. The Africa Research Bulletin further maintains that Mutharika's government gradually utilises soldiers and the armed forces more and more against demonstrations that are peaceful. Furthermore, they uphold that Mutharika has never had much time for Parliament and that he thinks that serious debate is not possible because he considers the majority incapable and against him and his visionary plans for development. It seems as though he presumes that promises can be made and broken in the Parliament in order to obtain approval of his appointments and budget (Africa Research Bulletin June 2008 Vol.45).

In February the former President and Mutharika's main opponent in the upcoming presidential elections appeared in court on February 26th, 2009. He has been accused by the country's Anti-Corruption Bureau of taking \$11 million from donor money, but maintains that he is innocent. The authorities claim that there are no political motives behind the case. However, Muluzi was forced to relinquish his passport in order to receive bail (Africa Research Bulletin, 2009 Vol. 46). Through his defence, Muluzi is reported to have informed the court that the corruption case against him should be dropped since he believes that it is only a political interference by the government. However, the judge ruled out what Muluzi claimed. The former president also received bad news from Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) that he could not stand in the coming presidential elections in May 2009. The Constitutional Court also ruled out Muluzi's application for re-election as President, stating that he already had served the two five-year terms allowed. Media reports in Malawi sustained that in the beginning of April 2009, Muluzi joined forces with Malawi Congress Party (MCP), led by John Tembo (Banda Jr. 2009).

Freedom of the press is legally ensured, even though there are sporadic restrictions, and the newspapers in Malawi present an assortment of different opinions. The state owns the bulk of all broadcast media, and its pro-government partiality decreased after Mutharika became president. However, in 2007, problems with the freedom of press appeared after threats of disciplinary action by the broadcasting regulator towards a private radio station who had aired an unfavourable recording of the president (Freedom House 2007). The conversation was apparently between Kaliwo, the former Director of the Anti-Corruption Bureau who was discharged, and President Bingu wa Mutharika, the day before the arrest of Muluzi in July 2006. One voice which could have been Mutharika's proposes to the second voice, perhaps Kaliwo's, that Muluzi, who was not named but unmistakably identified ought to be "shaken up" and taken to court. The recording could have been regarded by the government as an incident created by the opposition party UDF. However, the seriousness with which the government took it suggests, according to African Research Bulletin (2007 Vol.44), that Mutharika is moody and supersedes the autonomy of the law-enforcement agencies (Africa Research Bulletin 2007 Vol.44). After this incident, the information minister ordered the regulator to ban all live airing private radio stations unless it has been approved by the government. The action was aimed at three stations that had been dealing with the rallies that were pro-Muluzi. Later the same year, a private TV station owned by the former president was ordered of the air as they were accused of broadcasting propaganda, though the parliament, which is controlled by the opposition, denied that they provided state-owned outlets with financial support (Freedom House 2007). Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are two vital instruments of a well-functioning democracy, therefore the actions by the government towards the press is worrying.

5.2.1 Agricultural and Food Policies

After having described the general political situation, which can be considered rather tense, I want to further highlight what the government specifically has done with the agricultural sector and what, if anything, the tense political situation means for food policy.

A lot of people expected that in 1994 when the one-party rule ended in Malawi, it would lead to social development and economic recovery. However, the process of democratisation concurred with the intensifying crisis in the agricultural sector. The country went from producing an agricultural surplus in the 1970s to being food deficient in the 1990s with per capita maize production falling considerably. Food insecurity therefore then became widespread. Around 70-80 percent of households in the rural areas are without self-produced staple foods for about four to five month per year. The severity of the crisis was emphasised by two occurrences of severe hunger during the growing seasons of 2001/2 and 2004/5, which made food security a highly charged political issue (Future Agricultures, Feb. 2008).

In May 2009, the fourth Parliamentary multiparty and Presidential election will take place. The current President Bingu wa Mutharika will represent the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which was formed in 2005 after the President separated from the United Democratic Front (UDF) despite the fact that he gained his presidency with the UDF in 2004. Even though Malawi has a challenging political environment, Mutharika's administration has managed to establish policies and strategies that are generally seen as helping turn around the economy (The World Bank, Country overview).

Since independence, the Malawian government has associated the production of maize with national food security (Devereux 1997:8). In 1990, the Malawian government acknowledged the importance of food security for the overall development of the country and formulated the 'Food Security and Nutrition Policy Statement' as a supplement to the DEVPOL ('Statement of Development Policies 1987-1996'). The main goal of the 'Food Security and Nutrition Policy Statement' was to enhance the food security and nutritional status of all households in the country by attaining growth through poverty reduction (O&M Development Consulting 2003:13).

In 1995, the government created the Agricultural and Livestock Sector Development Strategy and Action Plan. The main aim of the plan was to provide a comprehensive statement of aspirations for the agricultural sector. The action plan and strategy was based on alleviating rural poverty with participation as a principle. The strategy suggested a policy, institutional, legislative and investment framework that would create a competitive, secure, stable and rewarding milieu for enhanced and sustainable agricultural production and improved food security. However, a follow up review was carried out in 1999 which investigated the strategies and policies set out in the document from 1995, which recognised numerous limitations to the implementation of the strategies. The review found that food security was a cross-cutting issue with respect to the agricultural sector since it relates to a decreasing agricultural productivity, increasing population and intensified poverty (O&M Development Consulting 2003:22-23).

Since the agricultural sector continued to have problems, the government, through the Malawi Agricultural Sector Investment Programme, prepared the agricultural sector priority policies and strategies framework in 2001. The framework, by analysing the issues and limitations, recognised ten major/priority public expenditure intervention areas that would bring about a more productive agricultural sector, as well as reduce poverty. These were: access to inputs, land management and soil fertility management, management of disease and insect pests outbreaks, development of research technologies for smallholder farmers, provision of basic agricultural infrastructure, extension services, agricultural diversification, capacity building for agricultural related institutions, strengthening linkages, and mainstreaming of gender, HIV/AIDS and decentralisation issues (O&M Development Consulting 2003:24).

The Malawian government viewed the food crisis and famine as a message to sustain farmer support programmes. Subsidies were reintroduced for resource-poor smallholders by applying the targeted inputs approach. The subsidy programme allowed Malawi to recover fast from the famine by lengthening the cropping season (by supplying inputs for winter cropping) (Charman and Hodge 2007).

As mentioned, in the May 2004 elections the UDF won and formed a government. The general expectation after the election was that the government would directly reduce the price on fertilisers as they assured that they would during their campaign. Yet this did not occur and the government took a long time to formulate a concrete and clear fertiliser policy. Instead of implementing a universal fertiliser subsidy programme which was expected, the government decided in August 2005 to continue with the TIP but on a larger scale. The expanded version of TIP (ETIP), reached out to 2.1 million farmer households, which was a major increase from the 1.5 million who were targeted in the TIP. The uncertainty of the farmers who were not targeted further increased when the government told them to wait until the government had set the definite price of fertilisers. The ambiguity surrounding the government's decision whether to employ a universal fertiliser subsidy programme or not had two major consequences for the 2004/5 growing season. First, the private sector did not know when to order fertilisers, which led to scarcity on the market for the farmers who could afford to purchase them at market price. Second, the inputs from the ETIP arrived late because of the lengthy time it takes to import the fertilisers. As a consequence the distribution was postponed and in many cases completed when the maize had developed beyond the critical stage for the application of fertilisers. Together with the brutal drought in the 2004/5 growing season a serious hunger crisis developed which affected around 4 million people in Malawi. It was contended that the government might have hesitated to instigate a universal fertiliser subsidy programme because they were afraid that they would not reach the completion point for debt relief of the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The 2004/5 hunger crisis strengthened the debate about the reintroduction of a fertiliser subsidy programme. The government was criticised by advocacy groups and opposition parties for not keeping the promise that they made during the 2004 campaign. The president left the UDF and formed his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and since the DPP did not have much representation in parliament and leaving the UDF which had helped him to presidency significantly made the political situation very tense in Malawi (Chinsinga 2007).

The conflict and power struggle, which began in February 2005 between Malawi's two prime leaders, President Bingu wa Mutharika and his forerunner Bakili Muluzi, has been damaging to the poverty-stricken people of Malawi. The political tension in the country has increased remarkably. The government is accusing the Vice President Cassim Chilumpha and Yusuf Matumula of conspiracy to assassinate Mutharika and commit treason. Just before the arrest,

Mutharika proclaimed that Chilumpha had resigned from his position because he had not attended numerous cabinet meetings; in addition to this, he was also accused of running a parallel government. This led to a long court battle, but ultimately Chiumpha was reinstated as Vice President of Malawi. The general public in Malawi believe that the continuous political court battles are a factor in the accumulation of court cases causing overcrowding in the prisons. According to the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation, the court disputes between the two leaders and its supporters are costing the country a lot of money which is payed by the tax payers. The conflict between the two leaders and their parties does not bode well for the democracy in the country. In his new year's speech, Mutharika let loose his rage on journalists and members of the judiciary, accusing them of scheming with the opposition in order to take down his government. Furthermore, Mutharika advised that he would execute unspecified action against Muluzi in order to silence him. Noel Mbowela, a political analyst, asserts that the political tension and conflict between the two are detrimental for the country's democracy and development agenda. Mbowela also suggests that instead of uniting the population of the country, its population is being divided because of the two leaders (Semu-Banda 2007). With the government focused on in-fighting and endless court cases, critical programs like fertilizer subsidies and other agricultural development measures get less funding and less attention. Thus, the continued battle for power places an additional strain on Malawi's food security.

In the 2004 presidential elections all the most important candidates made policy commitments to subsidise fertilisers. In 2005, the national maize production was low due to the late distribution and restricted scope of the targeted input programme for the 2004/5 growing season, which was exacerbated by unfavourable weather (poor rains). Together with sluggish emergency response and official importation measures, the low production resulted in high maize prices and critical food shortages in 2005/6. Subsequently in the 2005/6 growing season the government initiated an all-encompassing input subsidy. The objectives of the subsidy were to improve the access to and use of fertilisers in both maize and tobacco production, and in that way enhance food security and agricultural production. Because of the lack of trust between the government and the private sector relating to the 2004/5 input subsidy programme, the distribution was now conducted solely by parastatals (corporations that are partly or wholly owned and controlled by the government). The subsidy was executed by the allocation of coupons for four different types of fertilisers, which the beneficiaries could exchange at parastatal outlets at around one-third of the normal price. The criteria for the selection of recipients of coupons varied locally and so did the amount of people who were given coupons, and the number of coupons given to each household. The two parastatals sold 131,000 tonnes of the subsidies fertilisers. The direct costs of the programme, funded by the government, (without the overhead costs), was stated to be MK7.2 billion (Malawian Kwacha), even though the budget was MK5.1 billion. The private sector reported in 2005/6 that sales of fertilisers were substantially inferior to the sales in the previous years due to their exclusion from the programme and lower commercial sales. Numerous

chains of the main private sector fertiliser distribution also stated that they had experienced financial shortfalls as a consequence of the same cause as noted above. These problems were especially grave for a substantial part of the small-scale independent agro-dealer network. A gradual increase in use of fertilisers on maize as a consequence of the subsidy was assessed to be just over 100,000 tonnes, which together with good rains brought about a record harvest (Dorward et al. 2008:3).

5.2.2 National Fertiliser Strategy

In October 2007, the government and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security passed the 'National Fertiliser Strategy', which acknowledged that there was no complete fertiliser policy which points out detailed national objectives and goals. This of course makes it more difficult for both the private and the public sector. The idea for the strategy was to attain high levels of agricultural productivity, which would be achieved by increasing and improving the availability, affordability and utilisation of fertiliser. This will be done by continuing the fertiliser subsidy programme however, this is seen as a short-term measure. The National Fertiliser Strategy presents the government with ways to intervene in the level of prices paid for fertilisers in the fertiliser market by farmers. A pan-territorial fertiliser retail price will ensure that farmers purchase fertilisers at the same price no matter what social status, season or location they are at. Consequently, the accessibility and affordability of fertiliser for poor farmers would increase. However, the country's infrastructure, such as the road network, needs to be improved in order for the programme to work at its maximum capacity. Improving the physical flow of fertilisers would enhance the agricultural production even more. According to the National Fertiliser Strategy, the main role of the government would be to focus its resources and efforts on targeting beneficiaries and regulation of the fertiliser act. In areas where the market has completely failed, the transportation and distribution of fertiliser would be the responsibility of the government as well, through state run delivery system (National Fertiliser Strategy, 2007).

5.2.3 Agricola Medal

In November 2008, Malawi's president Bingu wa Mutharika received the Agricola medal from the Food and Agriculture (FAO). The Agricola medal is given to leaders who carry out measures to eliminate hunger and is the highest distinction of the FAO to distinguish personal determination and support to encourage agriculture (FAO Newsroom 28 Nov. 2008). Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the FAO, stated that it was because of Mutharika that Malawi has become known as a success story even though there are immense challenges of increasing food and energy crisis. Diouf further pointed out that the medal to Mutharika should be considered as a direction and support for other countries

facing alike obstacles to food security and development. Mutharika contended that it was a common effort by Malawians to take control over the situation (Malawi News 30 Nov. 2008). At the 2003 Maputo African Heads of State and Government Conference, the attending Ministers decided that a minimum of 10 percent of budget allocations should be to the agricultural sector. As Diouf pointed out, Malawi was one of the few countries which managed and ever surpassed this agreement, allocating a great 16 percent to the agricultural sector (FAO Newsroom 28 Nov. 2008).

5.2.4 Transferability to other countries

Implementing subsidy programmes similar to Malawi's in other countries can be risky and they have to comprehensively recognize the benefits and objectives. They also have to establish if it is possible to achieve the stated objectives given the degree and nature of household vulnerability, poverty, available food and input markets. Possible benefits then have to be considered in comparison with the opportunity costs of resources assigned to the programme, especially investments in long-term food staple productivity growth. The risks of failure involving issues such as high international fertiliser costs and bad or uncertain weather conditions due to the global climate change also need to be taken into account. However, it is crucial to note that input subsidies should not be considered as a fast fix for coping with high food prices. Vital and superseding principles in their implementation and design ought to be that they result in increased access to and productive utilisation of inputs by smallholder farmers (Dorward et al. 2008:6).

6. Conclusion

The issue of food security has been discussed in this thesis, with emphasis on the case of Malawi, a landlocked and extremely poor country in southern Africa. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world and in spite of that they managed to obtain national food security.

By implementing subsidy programmes for fertilisers and seeds, the government of Malawi managed to increase the agricultural production output which meant that they obtained national food security, and also had a surplus of food which they exported to neighbouring countries. Donors were at first very skeptical of the subsidies, but the Malawian government decided to go through with them anyway. The subsidy programmes were targeted at the poorest farmers, and the handouts were given out by local chiefs. This has been criticised since local chiefs might favour people, and therefore this needs to be improved in later programmes. Bingu wa Mutharika was elected President in 2004 and was handpicked by the former President, who is now one of Mutharika's opponents due to Mutharika's leaving the party which helped him to win the presidency. This caused a lot of political tension to flare up at the same time that the political battle between the two heated up, Mutharika implemented the subsidy programme. According to me, this was in order to gain support to be re-elected in the upcoming elections in 2009. Since the majority of the people live in rural areas, it is important that these people are satisfied with their situation. This is what, according to me, Mutharika is doing, satisfying their needs, in order to gain their support.

The subsidy programme is far from perfect and the country has many issues that it has to further deal with including the bad infrastructure which decreases the effectiveness of the programme. Transferring the programme to other countries who are food insecure might work, but one has to keep in mind that every country is unique and there is not any 'one-fits all' model. It also has to be mentioned that the sustainability of the programme can be questioned.

The research question put forward in this thesis was; How and Why did Malawi manage to become food secure. After gathering a multitude of literature and analysing it, the author would conclude that Malawi obtained national food security because of the successful subsidy programme that was implemented after the latest election in 2004 when Bingu wa Mutharika was elected President.

What the author of this thesis has tried to convey to the reader is that Malawi managed to become food secure with the government deciding to reintroduce fertiliser subsidies however, food security has become a positive bi-product of the government's and the presidents will to maintain power and act in their own private interest, which is in accordance with what the rational choice theory argues. However, one must also be critical and ask the question whether it is

sustainable to subsidise fertilisers and seeds for poor farmers. Further research could of course be conducted into the issue, which would give more insight into it and also how other countries could also become food secure by adopting similar policies to Malawi's.

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8. Appendix 1

Map over Malawi



Source: Malawi Map, Experience Malawi, accessed 18 May 2009, available at <http://www.experiencemalawi.com/map.htm>



Source: Owl & Mouse Educational Software, Malawi, accessed 18 May 2009, available at <http://www.yourchildlearns.com/online-atlas/africa/malawi-map.htm>