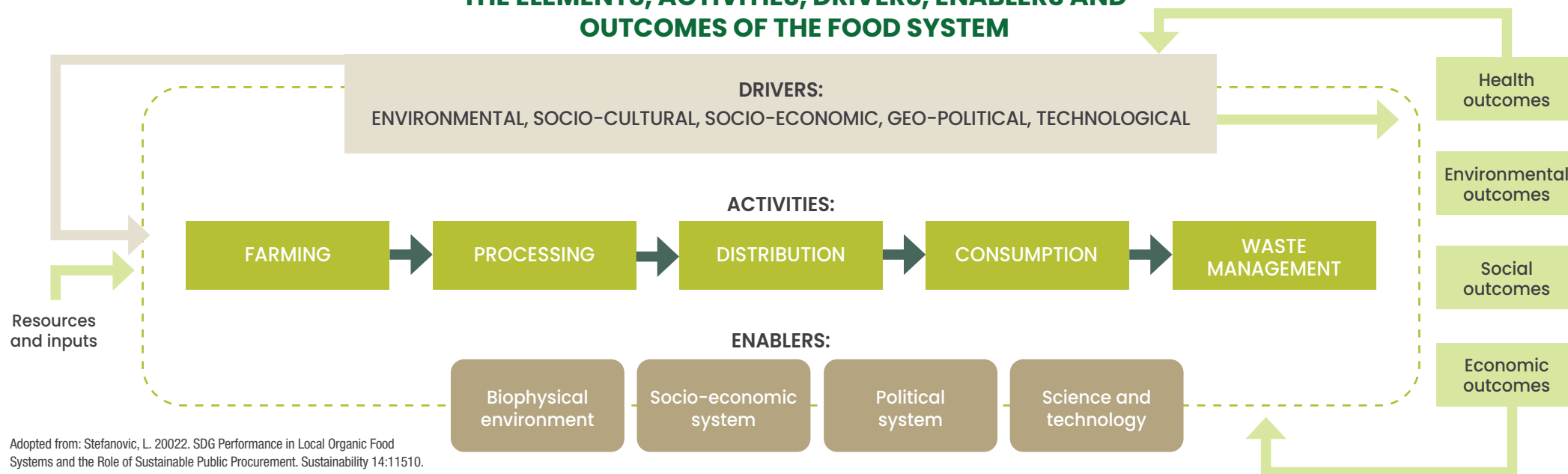


STATUS QUO OF MALAWI'S FOOD AND FARMING SYSTEM



Food sits at the heart of our everyday lives. It is part of our history, our culture, our knowledge base about the natural world. Its production, processing and consumption cannot be separated from our social and economic systems. In the industrial farming system, food is viewed as a commodity – as a product to sell onto external markets to generate revenue to pay for services and goods. This has led to food and food production becoming separated from the idea of care of the environment, of food as nutrition and medicine, of food as part of our cultural identity. Governments often focus just on the production of food and they ignore the rest of the complex food system. This results in challenges in the farming and food system being treated separately, instead of looking at the system as a whole. Some of these challenges are hunger and malnutrition, economic exclusion from markets, food loss and waste, long carbon-emitting transport chains and significant volumes of packaging waste, as examples. The diagram below shows the complexity of the farming and food system.

THE ELEMENTS, ACTIVITIES, DRIVERS, ENABLERS AND OUTCOMES OF THE FOOD SYSTEM



Adopted from: Stefanovic, L. 20022. SDG Performance in Local Organic Food Systems and the Role of Sustainable Public Procurement. Sustainability 14:11510.



Implemented by:



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STATUS QUO OF MALAWI'S FOOD SYSTEM



¹ ETC Group. 2022. Food Barons. Crisis Profiteering, Digitalization and Shifting Power. [Online]<https://www.etcgroup.org/content/food-barons-2022>

OUTCOMES OF THE SYSTEM

- **Negative health outcomes:** High levels of mal- and undernutrition and incidences of non-communicable diseases are rising rapidly in Malawi – obesity, diabetes, etc.
- **Entrenched gender inequality:** Women own less land, have less control of food production choices, earn less and are more food insecure. As of 2020, “less than 42% of the indicators needed to meet gender-related UN Sustainable Development Goals were being met in Malawi”.
- **Deteriorating ecosystem bases:** Contamination of water sources through runoff of agrochemicals is increasing, Malawi is rapidly losing its forests – if deforestation is not stopped now, there will be no more forests by 2070.
- **Vulnerability to climate change:** Malawi is considered the 5th most vulnerable country in the world to climate change impacts because of its degraded natural resource base. Food production will become harder as temperatures increase, rainfall patterns become more unpredictable and extreme events (floods, droughts, etc.) more common.



NATIONAL POLICIES THAT SUPPORT A POSITIVE TRAJECTORY

These policies set out government mandates that could be better exploited to hold government to account to promote sustainable farming and to align programmes with Malawi's commitment to international and national goals. They provide policy space to advocate for support for organic and agroecological farming systems.

- **National Land Resources Management Policy and Strategy (2000):** This policy aims to improve and sustain productivity of land for farming and other land uses. It mandates the government to promote appropriate soil and water conservation practices, encourage the formation of local conservation committees to regenerate degraded areas, and provide incentives for successful rehabilitation and conservation, among others. It notes government's intention to raise awareness through regular campaigns focused on sound land resources management practices and to strengthen education curricula in this regard in schools, colleges and relevant institutions.
- **Gender Policy (2015):** The policy aims to mainstream gender into national development processes. It notes that women are the most affected by environmental mismanagement and aims to enhance women's participation in environmental decision making and in other areas that affect them significantly. Agriculture and food and nutritional security are highlighted as key priority areas as women carry out 70% of agricultural work and produce 80% of food for home consumption. The policy states that it will ensure that women and other vulnerable groups have access to and control over agricultural productive resources, technologies and markets.
- **Waste Management Strategy (2019-2023):** Malawi's Waste Management highlights composting as a way of reducing organic waste going to landfill. There is an opportunity to create a circular economy through the recycling of organic waste into compost to feed the soil and boost food production – without the use of synthetic chemicals. The mandate for promoting this lies with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.
- **Youth Policy (2013):** The policy aims to address the significant challenges faced by youth in contributing to national development. It notes that agriculture with its diverse value chains offers significant opportunities for youth job creation and mandates the support of technical, vocational and entrepreneurship training facilities for youth, the establishment of community-based skills training programmes, the establishing and supporting of agricultural youth clubs and cooperatives and the provision of incentives to attract youth to agricultural, among others. The policy also sets out the intention to revive the National Youth Service, with a particular focus on agriculture under core activities.
- **National Resilience Strategy (2018-2030):** This strategy aims to coordinate multi-sectoral responses to challenges such as weather-related shocks, climate change, multidimensional poverty and food and nutrition insecurity. It will act as a programming framework to guide programme development and implementation as well as investments to reduce chronic vulnerability and risks. To this end, it sets out several reforms, including the addition of organic fertilisers and legumes to the Farm Input Subsidy Programme offering. Expected outcomes of all reforms are crop diversification to support nutrition security and reduce dependence on maize and diversification of on- and off-farm activities for more resilient livelihoods and increased adoption of improved nutrition-specific and -sensitive practices.
- **Catalogue of Malawi Standards (2021):** MS 815:2010 Organic Products - General Standard provides general requirements for organic agricultural products. It covers standards related to care for the environment, plant and livestock production, beekeeping, collection of wild organic products and the processing, labelling and verification (inspection and certification) of products. The standards are not publicly available but can be bought on request from the Malawi Bureau of Standards: mbs@mbsmw.org.



NATIONAL POLICIES THAT SUPPORT A NEGATIVE TRAJECTORY

These policies, among others, guide regulatory agencies, government departments and other state organs as regards planning, budgeting and implementation in the agricultural sector. They serve to entrench the conventional model, despite the known negative human and ecological health consequences. They do not have sight of organic or agroecological farming, thereby marginalising this as a sustainable approach to ending hunger and poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability.

- **Pesticides Act (2002):** The Pesticide Control Board has a mandate to “monitor and control the import, export, manufacture, distribution, sale, storage, use and disposal of pesticides in Malawi.” There is possibly a lack of capacity – financial and human – to ensure that pesticides are properly regulated, used and disposed. Pesticide use is growing rapidly in Malawi – about 2 000 tons more are being used each year. There are challenges around the illegal importation and trade of pesticides, many of which are banned in Malawi and elsewhere in the world.² Malawi condones the use of high-risk pesticides with a population that has limited understanding of the human and ecological risks related to improper or unsafe use, storage and disposal of them.³ There is limited uptake of integrated pest management in the country, and no mention in the Pesticides Act of biopesticides.
- **National Agricultural Policy (2018-2030):** The policy remains focused on commercial agriculture and does not give consideration to sustainable agricultural production approaches such as organics, agroecology and permaculture. The exclusion of these from such a significant government policy means that they are marginalised in terms of support (budgetary and extension).
- **Draft Crops Bill (2021-2022):** This bill aims to regulate the production, trade and marketing of selected key crops, including staple crops such as maize and wheat, but also common small-scale farmer crops such as ground nuts and pigeon peas. It would effectively set market prices and require the registration of small-scale growers at institutions to which they would sell their crops. This is an important bill, but it makes no mention of sustainable practices to support production.
- **Seed Bill (2022):** The Seed Bill further entrenches the interests of commercial seed breeders and agrochemical companies over those of small-holder farmers whose rights to freely save, share, exchange and use seed (known as Farmers’ Rights) are curtailed. An equitable and sustainable seed system should act to ensure Farmers’ Rights and protect in-situ seed saving and use as a climate change adaptation strategy.
- **National Agriculture Extension and Advisory Services Strategy (2020-2025):** This strategy does extend beyond a conventional approach to agricultural extension and advisory services to take a broader view of how extension can support climate change adaptation, enhanced nutrition outcomes and ecosystem regeneration. There is, however, no mention of organic agriculture in the strategy, which encompasses these outcomes and more, in its principles and production practices.
- **Agricultures Input Programme (Previously the Farm Input Subsidy Programme):** In this programme, government provides a significant subsidy on fertilisers to selected and registered small-scale farmers. As with these programmes elsewhere in Africa, there is much debate about their effectiveness in alleviating food insecurity and poverty. The subsidies tend to go to better-off farmers,⁴ farmers come to rely on subsidised fertiliser – making them vulnerable to crop losses if the subsidy arrives late or not at all, and the cost to the treasury is significant – particularly as synthetic fertilisers are sourced from a volatile global market.



² Soki, J.J. 2018. Agricultural pesticide use in Malawi. *Journal of Health Pollution* 8(20):181201. [Online] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6285677/>.

³ Soki, J.J. 2018. Agricultural pesticide use in Malawi. *Journal of Health Pollution* 8(20):181201. [Online] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6285677/>.

⁴ Lunduka, R., Ricker-Gilbert, J. & Fisher, M. 2013. What are the farm-level impacts of Malawi's farm input subsidy program? A critical review. [Online] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/agec.12074>.