

1. INTRODUCTION

The main priority for the Norwegian development aid is *poverty reduction*. The UN Millennium Goals are seen as essential pathways towards this vision. Despite the obvious link between poverty and rural livelihoods in developing countries, agriculture has until recently received limited attention in the Norwegian aid policy. To correct this imbalance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published in 2004 a plan of action entitled *Agriculture Against Poverty* in which growth in agriculture is seen as a fundamental element in the fight against poverty. As a start, Malawi and Ethiopia were chosen as pilot countries for the renewed focus on aid to promote agricultural growth. This report presents the outcome of a study into opportunities for Norwegian support to agriculture in Malawi. The study was commissioned by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Lilongwe.

Reaching the UN Millennium Development Goals will require making each of them centerpieces in the national poverty reduction policies. Active support to the same policies will also be required by international donors. According to Sanchez and Swaminathan (2005), halving the number of people suffering from hunger within 2015 is “*well within our means*”. However, if the millennium goals on hunger are to be met, “*developed country governments must increase and improve their official development assistance, especially for agriculture and nutrition, and increase attention to capacity building*” (ibid.). Success in poverty reduction appears to be greatest where governments work in partnership with local communities, nongovernmental organizations and private actors.

In line with the Task Force on Hunger (Sanchez and Swaminathan, 2005), this report subscribes to the view that “*it can be done.*” We should not underestimate, however, the efforts needed to succeed. The job is enormous, but not impossible.

Past failures in agricultural development in Africa have left many national and international development workers with a bleak or even pessimistic outlook. Visions appear to have been reduced to one of alleviating abject poverty or maintain status quo. In fact, halting the decline would, in many cases, constitute a major victory. Nevertheless, the rate of progress needed to outpace the decline, will require fresh looks at all possible opportunities.

One sector cannot be developed alone. Investments in agriculture will only reach their full potential if progress is also made in sectors determining the socio-economic environment for farmers; health, education, energy, infrastructure and resource conservation. In addition, socio-cultural emancipation may be needed to free individuals from constraints to economic progress. Although often overlooked, development is largely a *collective change of minds*.

Nevertheless, this report focuses on core agricultural development opportunities for economic growth and poverty reduction rather than attempting to cover all interacting issues relevant for development. Links to health is covered, however.

This report attempts to point towards promising opportunities for Norwegian support to agricultural development in Malawi. It does not propose specific projects, and consequently it does not go into the issues of monitoring and evaluation.

The reader of this report is advised to keep in mind that the report takes a forward-looking approach and does not deal specifically with emergency relief and arrangements for social safety

nets. Emergency efforts must be maintained, however, in parallel with the implementation of long-term development policies.

As a '*pilot programme for agricultural growth*' the planned Norwegian support should be coherent and focused, yet covering a range of interlinked elements. The program obviously needs an actively involved, professional management to ensure relevance, implementation and impact.