

**The influence of media on agricultural policy decisions in Malawi: a political economy
analysis**

**By
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DECLARATION

I, **Doshanie Kadokera**, declare that the dissertation, “*The Influence of the Media on Agricultural Policy Decisions in Malawi: A Political Economy Analysis*”, which I hereby submit for the Degree of MSc. Agric (Agricultural Economics) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and duly acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mum, *Anastasia Tryness Mvula*. Though lacking resources, and through sheer determination, she ensured that I went through school. The dissertation is also dedicated to my late sister, *Rachel*, who also laid the foundation to the person I am today.

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ABSTRACT

The influence of media on agricultural policy decisions in Malawi: a political economy analysis

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Malawi is a predominantly agrarian economy, as the majority of the population is reliant on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. Despite that critical role the sector has to the economy, it has undergone minimal revolution to match its crucial status to the economy. There is need to understand the factors that have influenced agricultural policy decisions overtime. The quality of policy decisions taken over the last decade implies that, apart from economic motives, government has another agenda that it aims to achieve through some policy decisions. The government has manipulated the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) through populist pricing and implementation to uphold its popularity and legitimacy. Stakeholders and the citizenry need to ensure that their interests are included in agricultural policies. Mass media can play a crucial role in agricultural policy decisions. The media's precise role in policymaking, however, has received little attention.

This study aimed at establishing the influence of the media on agricultural policy decisions in Malawi, with a focus on the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP). The study catalogued 853 articles, selected from two newspapers over a ten-year period (2005–2015). Malawi has implemented the subsidy programme for over a decade now to ensure food sufficiency. However, it is argued that the programme lacks direction and that it has been branded as a political tool for the ruling elites. The policy-makers have been criticised to the effect that the fertiliser policy is not motivated or driven by the technical efficiency required, but rather by the political incentives that are associated with the programme. The study adopted a political economy approach in establishing the role that the media has on agricultural policy.

The results reveal that FISP has been given great coverage and visibility by the media during the course of its implementation. The study also found that the media scrutinises the challenges that hinder implementation in order for policymakers to make improvements to the programme. The analysis also shows that even though the media is accused of sensationalised reporting, the media actually reports mostly with a positive tone on government's actions, rather than being more critical. Without claiming causality, the study also established several media and government interactions that have resulted in policy changes and hence improvement of the fertiliser policy. The political economy analysis presents indicators that the media is a key policy driver in the agricultural sector.

The study recommends that members of the media should be effective in carrying out their watchdog role to identify better policies that address the societal welfare and economic growth. It is also evident that a multi-stakeholder approach to policy formulation ensures that the needs and interests of other players are included in public policies. In addition, the local political landscape of the country is vital for attaining better policies.

Key words: media, FISP, political economy, agricultural policy, Malawi

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ACRONYMS

ADMARC	Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation
DFID	Department for International Development
FISP	Farm Input Subsidy Programme
FILP	Farm Input Loan Programme
GoM	Government of Malawi
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MoAFS	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
MoAIWD	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development
MoF	Ministry of Finance
SFFRFM	Smallholder Farmers Fertilizer Revolving Fund of Malawi
US	United States of America

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Malawi has over the last 10 years been producing surplus maize, above its national requirements. This has been attributed to the introduction of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP), a programme that supports the implementation of the fertiliser policy aimed at providing inputs to smallholder farmers. The success of the programme has been so striking that the programme has been used as reference point in promoting smart subsidies as the viable way to revive African agriculture and as a mechanism for achieving economic growth, as well as sustainable poverty reduction. However, it is worth reviewing the policy-making processes, as well as the policy drivers in the agriculture sector that play pivotal roles in ensuring that better policy choices are made. One such driver is the media, which is entrusted with fostering policy awareness, as well as its dissemination to the public in the agricultural sector, beside the other roles that the media performs.

The agricultural sector is mainly influenced by the political system, governance structures, and the macroeconomic and agricultural policies of a particular country. The policy decision-making process within government is quite often influenced by public opinion, which finds its expression in the media. As a result, the media – especially in highlighting particular crises and public fears, and the converse – typically has a bearing on how government officials change or introduce policies.

The media shapes and influences public opinion, while it also mirrors public opinion by reflecting the society values and characteristics unique to a particular group. It is through these specific processes that the media plays an important role in the policy-making process. Policy makers and government responsiveness are influenced by media news, as they perceive it as a reflection of public opinion (Yuksel, Karantininis & Hess, 2013).

Over time, the role of mass media in development has become significant as a key driver of the citizenry opinion. Even political leaders have realised how core mass media is to their reign, such that they recognise its impact on policy. McCluskey and Swinnen (2013) rightly

underscore the point that previously, government's devoted companions were either the police or military, but the trend has now shifted to the government being a partner with the media. For instance, the prime target in a coup nowadays is the media, and not military bases or the police (McCluskey and Swinnen, 2013). Despite that important role, the media has been labelled as sensationalistic and biased in their coverage. In addition, others have doubted the effects of the media by arguing that they follow politics, rather than lead politics.

It is worth noting that Malawi's media, like those of many other African countries, draws its roots from the colonial past. In the case of Malawi, its media system had been directly or indirectly connected to the colonial regime's objectives of the British Empire (Banda, 2007). The laws controlling the media during the colonial regime were retained post-independence. The government then was of the view that a pluralistic media, just like a pluralistic political landscape, was a threat to progress and a source of resentment. However, upon adoption of the multiparty dispensation, the media ownership structure changed completely and that opened up the propagation of media establishments across the country.

The Malawi media landscape has also been significantly impacted on to a larger extent by globalisation and technology advances. This has seen the pluralisation of media players that have entered the print media, as well as radio broadcasting. It would not be a far-fetched conclusion to say there is a political will that allows free establishment of media in Malawi. Currently, the Malawian media is a product of the policies and legislation put in place due to the adoption of the multiparty system of government. It is apparent that these policies and items of legislation have encouraged the rise of newspapers in Malawi.

Nevertheless, the media in Malawi has to strive for its survival owing to the limited advertising industry, with the government mostly being the main source of lucrative contracts for the media industry. The very same policies and items of legislation that have promoted the establishment of newspapers have also played a key role in the establishment of the broadcasting field. Malawi is mainly an agro-based economy in which about 85 % of the population rely on the agricultural sector for their livelihood (Chirwa, Kydd & Dorward, 2006). It is estimated that the agricultural sector caters for about 90 % of Malawi's export earnings, while 85 % of the population is employed in the sector. This translates to about 40 % of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) being contributed by the agricultural sector (GoM, 2007).

Malawi underwent political transformation in 1994 by adopting the democratic governance system. The adoption of multiparty democracy in most countries brings with it the expectations that will change the political landscape, as well as enticements to enlighten and guide policy processes. In line with this principle, the electorate in a democratic dispensation anticipate utilising their voting rights for securing policies that serve their interests (Chinsinga, 2010). It is therefore against such background that, in a country such as Malawi with an agrarian economy, the political leadership would prioritise agricultural policies, as the majority of the population is dependent on the agriculture sector for their livelihoods.

According to Chirwa and Matita (2012), the smallholder sector in Malawi consists of over 2 million farm families. This group of farmers is also regarded as being the most vulnerable to shocks. Regardless of the prevailing governance structures, the collective action of interest groups is the best alternative for rendering effective influence on policy choices. The interest groups ought to be active as organisations with common interests being aligned to reach their goals. The combined efforts of these organisations, such as smallholder farmers, provide those interest groups with greater political power to influence their preferences in policy choices by the policy makers. The provision of the relevant information to such interest groups ensures effectiveness in their demands being incorporated in policy formulation. However, the media is supposed to be the link for interest groups by monitoring the politicians on behalf of the citizens, yet they mostly depend on the very same politicians for much of their information (Strömberg, 2001).

The concept of group size dynamics suggests that where a large group holds greater political influence, a shock to that particular group will expedite government's responsiveness. According to Besley and Burgess (2001), analysis of the political agency problem has noted that a government's responsiveness depends on the active participation of the citizenry in political activities so as to enable them get rid of underperforming political leaders, as well as on the citizenry being well informed about what the leaders in power are doing. This can only be achieved through proper information dissemination. Hence, this brings in the importance of the role that media has in ensuring the accountability of leaders.

Despite the media being responsible for the provision of information, the packaging and choice of the information being provided also affects its utilisation by the masses. Anderson *et al.* (2013) have stated that information is important in policy design. He argues that the notion of

rationally ignorant voters arises when the costs of obtaining information offset the benefits of being informed. This affects the way in which policy information may be relevant to the citizenry at large.

Strömberg (2001) argues that the mass media plays a pivotal role in policymaking since it creates political competition through it being a medium of conveying campaign manifestos, informing the electorate of politicians' actions, which may not have been noticeable to the ordinary citizen, and setting agendas by stimulating debates on which crucial topics to prioritise in times of elections. The larger the number of informed citizens is, the more positive are the agricultural policies to be implemented (Besley & Burgess, 2000); consequently, the mass media should be one of the main policy drivers as it provides the larger part of the information to the masses.

1.2 Problem Statement

In most African countries, agriculture remains the backbone of economic growth, rural development, and poverty reduction. Nevertheless, the sector has suffered from perennial market and policy failures in playing its role in the economy. One of the reasons attributed for this failure is the neglecting of the core role that the political economy of agricultural policy reforms has in Africa. Some researchers (Gilberg, Eyal, McCombs and Nicholas, 1980; Edwards and Wood, 1999; Cook *et al.*, 1983) have concluded that the media do matter in policy process, while others (Walker, 1977; Wanta and Foote, 1994; Kingdon, 1984; Pritchard and Berkowitz, 1993) are of the view that the media is simply peripheral to the policy process. The differences in these schools of thought on the effects of the media are attributable to the various impacts that the media has on political agendas and the policy sphere. There is little known of the media effects in developing countries, as most studies have concentrated on the United States and other developed countries. It is worth noting that policy processes take place within the confinements of national institutional contexts, and that these contexts vary across countries (Walgrave *et al.*, 2007). For instance, it is expected that the role of the media in most African countries do vary.

One of the core issues in political economy is understanding the mechanisms by which citizens' needs can be reflected in policies. Since the larger parts of the population rely on the media for information, it is inevitable that mass media will affect the type of agricultural policies that

might be implemented. It is necessary to know how effective the media is as a driver of policy and government responsiveness in shaping the policy agenda, so as to gauge whether it is addressing citizens' demands or media hype. In addition, it would be vital to clearly understand how effective the media is in informing policy debates and processes.

The inactivity and lack of technical expertise of the media in agricultural policy issues results in imperfect information being relayed between the policy makers and the citizenry. The media is supposed to be the link for interest groups by monitoring the politicians on behalf of the citizens, yet they mostly depend on the very same politicians for much of their information (Strömberg, 2001). In most low-income countries such as Malawi, the lack of market opportunities entails that the poor population look up to government for their survival. However, because of poor economic, social, and political institutions prevailing in those countries, the social protection service delivery is quite appalling.

This has resulted in government choosing direct methods of policy implementation, such as subsidies and handouts, rather than indirect methods such as exchange rate devaluation and tariff reduction. In this way, it has not enhanced technocratic policy-making, which responds to the needs of the citizenry. The political preference of a direct method of policy implementation, over indirect, confirms that policies are addressing the needs of big masses in the short term, and that highly noticeable policies are currently being championed. Therefore, politicians choose policies that capture quick votes by delivering programmes that promote asymmetric relationships between groups of political actors and the citizenry, rather than development (Chinsinga, 2010).

Moore and Putzel (1999) argue that even though the poor are in the majority in most democratic countries, they are too dispersed and differentiated to advocate for more attention to their interests in public policies as their political solidarity is undermined. However, I believe that political solidarity can be achieved through the dissemination of the right information that could capacitate the masses to demand their rights from those in power, regardless of geographical position.

Increased media access is expected to inspire the population politically, since the more informed and active the population is, the more pressure there is for the policy makers to be responsive (Strömberg, 2001). Therefore, it is tempting to ask if the media really covers the

most intense issues that the rural masses would want to be addressed by policy makers. The media is regarded as being one of policy drivers in a democratic dispensation by representing the voiceless. It is against this backdrop that under the democratic governance, the anticipation of many is that policy-making processes ought to be participatory and multi-disciplinary, with sound policy choices as outcomes. And that entails that the media should be part of that policy-making process.

It is a known fact that in the majority of developing countries, the rural masses rely on the radio as their main source of information. The radio is regarded to be the cheaper technology, as compared with others such as television and newspapers, and also more user-friendly as it does not require literacy skills. Therefore, for a country such as Malawi, it is reasonable to postulate that most studies should focus on the radio broadcasting fraternity rather than other media types. Interestingly, Manyozo (2005) reports that the introduction of radio listener clubs has empowered previously unreachable audiences to ask for services from government, such as the provision of farm inputs. Most development projects opt for radio because it covers a larger audience at the lowest per capita cost, but the fact is that this mode is transient and non-specific in nature, hence the upper hand of the print media. In addition, the majority of farmers in Malawi are rurally based, and mostly are low-income earners who can hardly afford to continuously purchase the batteries required to keep listening to radios.

On top of that, there are higher illiteracy levels, and hence lower reading cultures, in most developing countries. This makes the radio the ideal medium of communication because it reaches out to the illiterate, as well as non-readers, especially with the introduction of community radio programmes which package their messages in local languages (Megwa, 2007). However, their impact is not that large, since the rural areas have lower incomes, and so the radio will become more influential in policymaking and as a developmental tool, but only in the near future.

In summation, it needs to be underscored that newspapers in Malawi ought to receive attention for a number of reasons. Firstly, the print media has been influential in shaping Malawi's politics in the post-dictatorial regime era. It was during the post-dictatorial era, when freedom was granted, that anyone could establish a newspaper and thus political debates gathered impetus. Secondly, unlike radio and television which only offer transitory audio and audio-

visual presence, a newspaper allows time to clearly understand and assimilate a news item. In addition, a newspaper also provides the chance for future reference by the reader.

Malawi's system of governance is on its way to being further strengthened through the rule of law. The change of governance in 1994 through adopting the democratic system led to the adoption of a republican constitution. The constitution clearly states in section 40(1)(c) that every person shall have the right "to participate in peaceful political activity intended to influence the composition and policies of the government". However, despite this constitutional assurance, there still remain some greatly challenging pieces of legislation that restrict the freedom of expression, which hinder citizens' capacity to engage in political activities.

In reality, therefore, the privately-owned media are intimidated whenever they are deemed to be overly analytical of government. It is evident that the government has been reluctant in its attempts to support the putting in place of relevant legislation that would guarantee access to public information. Despite the challenges referred to above, positive strides have been made since the introduction of the multiparty system of governance since 1994, as symbolised with proliferation of more media organisations. In addition, government has taken a better approach in holding more consultations before the adoption of national development policies. Despite some setbacks in upholding media freedom, Malawi's democracy is on the right path to maturity, if the strides made continue to be improved.

1.3 Research Rationale

Malawi offers a valuable political context for exploring the way in which mass media has influenced the policy-making process. Since the end of the one party system in 1994, the introduction of multiparty democracy brought with it the notion of media independence, although it is important to establish the role it is playing.

Although the agricultural sector in Malawi is the backbone of the economy, the agricultural policy landscape has not lived up to the expectations of the citizenry as to how important the sector is to the economic development of the country. With a lack of diversity in sectors that could have meaningful contribution to the economy, the agricultural policy environment is crucial for securing substantial progress. It is important that policy drivers play their roles in

ensuring that policy makers prioritise sound policies, which address the interests of the pro-poor majority.

It is therefore inevitable that vibrant agricultural policies will require the development of key institutions in the country. The media is responsible for setting the agenda of policy debates. An active mass media can thus help make the most for the uninformed citizenry by ensuring that they are accorded better policy attention. The more well informed the citizenry are on policy issues, the more responsive the policy makers are to the needs of the society and in choosing policies that bring social, economic and political development.

In addition, it is of the essence to clearly understand the factors that have hindered the development of the media as policy change drivers. The trend currently indicates that the policy decisions made by government have different motives, apart from attaining the economic goals that the society expects from the various policy reforms that are being championed. If such hindrances are addressed, the media could become part of the policy change drivers. However, it has been observed that there are no records that can be traced which document the extent to which the media might influence agricultural policy decisions in Malawi. The media industry setup, and the type of information disseminated, play a pivotal role in the quantity and quality of information being conveyed to the citizenry.

It is on this basis that this study is aimed at adding knowledge to the political economy context of the media and agricultural policy relationship. Most studies on the interplay between the media and agricultural policy formulation have been done in the context of effective democracies, and mature societies, although mainly in high-income countries. The study of Malawian media thus presents a unique opportunity to establish whether the political economic theory of the media and agricultural policy is indeed relevant to countries in the developing world.

1.4 Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to examine the extent to which the media has influenced agricultural policy decisions in Malawi by specifically referring to the case of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme.

Specific Objectives

In order to clearly establish the influence of the media on agricultural policy, the study will specifically look at the following objectives;

- To measure the coverage, the nature of the coverage, and the extent of the coverage by the different media on FISP.
- To evaluate the coverage in terms of the approach that the media report on FISP.
- To measure the length, column space and position of articles on FISP.
- To establish the link between the media reporting and policy changes on FISP.
- To establish knowledge gaps and limitations that hinder effective reporting on agricultural policy issues.

1.5 Hypotheses

According to Hallin (1986), critical reporting will not emerge on issues that exist within the realm of consensus. However, critical journalism will become apparent when there is difference of opinion within society regarding a particular policy. The media has the potential in such a setting to play a pivotal role in public debate and policy formulation through its coverage by driving at a particular policy angle. Hence, the media play a crucial role in causing policy change through their quest in advocating for a particular policy line. This leads to the first hypothesis of the study, which is *'the media has zero influence on agricultural policy decisions in Malawi'*. This builds upon the fact that government, being a mindful player in responding to incentives, presents that noticeable role to the media when influencing public policy.

Elements of the media in Malawi lack an investigative component in their writing, especially on agricultural issues. The scoping mission from the Feed the Future Food Security Policy Innovation Lab established the need for more informed, analytical reporting on agricultural policy issues. The scoping report established that media pieces are often inaccurate, misleading, superficial, sensation seeking, politically motivated, and reactive to government statements or events with little proactive analysis. This might be attributable to a lack of acquaintance with agricultural issues. Therefore, this emphasises the importance of establishing the impact that tailor-made capacity building initiatives could have in improving the general knowledge of

journalists that are engaged in agricultural issues. Hence, the second hypothesis of the study, which is '*the media lacks familiarity with agricultural policy concepts*'.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

The focus of the study, which is on print media, might leave out other crucial impacts that the media has from using other sources, such as television, radio and the internet. However, due to the limited time and financial constraints, it was only viable for this study to cover one particular section of the media.

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

This dissertation is structured in seven chapters. Hence, Chapter 1 gives the introductory context of the study by presenting an overview of agricultural sector, as well as of the media. Succeeding this introductory chapter is Chapter 2, with a political economy theoretical reflection on the media and agricultural policy choices. Chapter 3 provides a review of the Malawian agricultural policy context and media performance by looking at the politics, media performance and the inception of the farm input subsidy programme. Then, the detailed methodology of the study is explained in Chapter 4. Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings of the study, split by descriptive statistics and political economy analysis, where the key narratives of the study are presented. Finally, Chapter 7 gives a summary of key findings, conclusions, recommendations and potential areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2

THE MEDIA AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY CHOICES: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the broad question of how policy choices are influenced by the media. The chapter reviews how political and economic structures are driven by the media, hence the adoption of the political economy approach as the theoretical basis in this study. It is important in gaining an appreciation of how the media field has had a significant impact in the revolution of politics and economy. It might appear repetitive in referring to the media as being responsible for shaping and framing the processes and discourses not only of political communication, but also of the society in which such communication occurs. However, the recent prominence of the media field and its service to political economy has transformed and has had great impact in instilling the public logic of spectacle, making such attention inevitable.

Hence, it is imperative that in order to clearly appreciate the role of the media in public policies, the economic and political power relations in which the media is actively involved should be reviewed. While the media is acting in accordance with its desires rather than reason or moral duty, it is worth noting too that the media is not simply exhibiting the concerns of political economy, but rather that the media is also consequently having an effect on the agency role by changing the structure and position of the economy. Having outlined the general background to the study, this chapter is then concerned with the media and agricultural policy choices. In order to fully understand the media role in policy choices in political economy analysis, this chapter provides some reflections that have evolved in the political economy realm in relation to public policies. This section will align the context of the background with political economy focus of the study.

2.2 Understanding Public Policies Choices

A policy can be defined as a reasonably even, intended course of action that guides the process of achieving set goals by policymakers or stakeholders. Hence, policymaking intuitively

includes the movement and design of activities done over a certain period of time. The policymakers determine the content and direction that public policies should take to achieve a set of goals.

Public policy such as an agricultural policy may be regarded as a political system's response to demands from its society. The political system is dependent on the demands and support that are prevalent in the society. The acceptability of individuals and groups of decisions and actions undertaken determine the sustainability and legitimacy of the system. However, the practicality of such a system in analysing public policy is hindered by its nonconcrete nature. It leaves out the crucial processes by which decisions are made and policies developed. Nonetheless, this approach is worth pursuing as it provides facets for enquiry into policy formulation and political processes (Anderson, 2003).

Initially, analysts embarked on policy analysis as a solution to understand the policy formulation process as well as the preferred route to discern the trend that agricultural policies would take. However, it transpired that policy analysis alone could not lead the course of agricultural policies in general, hence the blossoming of the political economy approach. This was further underscored by Swinnen and van der Zee (1993) as they pointed out the crucial interaction of economic and political markets, as well as the role of lobbying groups, as being the core political models that play a vital role in the formulation of agricultural policies.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand the complex processes that characterise policy decisions by understanding the influence of stakeholders on those decisions. A policy process can be defined as the way in which policies are determined and executed. The process involves several actors or a diverse group of stakeholders, such as government, donors, researchers, farmers' associations and media organisations (Olomola, 2013). According to Swinnen *et al.* (2011), the theories that determine public choices are imperfect information, efficient redistribution and transactions costs.

The imperfect information theory dwells much on alterations in access to information amongst interest groups and politicians, which may influence their inclination towards particular policies. If citizens lack information, this may present an incentive for leaders or politicians to select less-efficient policy instruments. Next, the efficient redistribution notion argues that

induced competition among pressure groups leads to the choosing of effective policy instruments of redistribution. Therefore, competition between interest groups is crucial in government responsiveness as this might lead to efficient policy instruments that may benefit the larger population (Besley and Burgess, 2001).

The transaction costs approach focuses on the choice of policies to clearly justify the costs that are incurred in the process of implementing and enforcing the chosen policies. According to Coase (1989), not accounting for transaction costs leads to undervaluing the actual costs of government policy, and that would lead into inefficient policies being chosen. However, the transaction costs approach is hindered by the limited empirical measures of transaction costs.

2.3 The Political Economy of Information

The political economy analysis merely looks at the interaction of political and economic processes amongst members of the public. They might mainly tackle the distribution of power and wealth among interest groups, but they might also question the processes that create, sustain and transform such interactions over a period. The political economy approach is concerned with how political forces influence the economy, as well as with the economic outcomes (Drazen, 2008).

Though policy might lead to the flourishing of an economic activity, such prosperity by itself might generate a political population that would exhibit an interest in maintaining the status quo of that particular economic activity so as to continue the accruing of the benefits. Hence, political economy analysis looks into the redistribution of benefits from such an economic activity by unpacking who gains and who loses from a particular policy (Drazen, 2008). This helps to understand the key policy drivers by establishing important clues as to why particular groups or individuals support particular policies.

The political economy of the media has developed hugely since the 1960s and is the result of the 'information age' that we are living in. The political economy of the media is a phenomenon of the information age. Because of the media roles that are now known by the public, the media now has turned to become the focal point of political economy. In the present era, the media's

role in democratic governance is always important, since the media emerged as the fourth pillar of the state (Shafiq and Rehman, 2013).

The pivotal role of media in political markets is emerging as a critical sphere, especially as regards its effect on public policy-making. An active media is a catalyst to a more responsive government as the media is entrusted with the responsibility of informing citizens and demanding better policies from government (Besley and Burgess, 2001). Hence, the media has a large influence on government programmes. In as much as media reporting may sometimes put national interest at risk, there are exceptions that should deny the media from reporting on a government programmes. It has to be emphasised that there is a high likelihood that reports on a government programme may actually create incentives for politicians and so improve their responsiveness.

All the literature on the political economy analysis of the media points to the policy drive that the media has on public policy through their reporting. For instance, a study by Besley and Burgess (2000), in their assessment of food crisis and relief response in India, found that the media was vital in ensuring better governance and reduction of corruption during the crisis.

The media tend to create 'bias' in the way that information is disseminated. This induced bias affects the policy-making process through the deliberate distortion of information or the need to capture a market. The distorted reporting has significant impact on the political agency problem. It affects the agents' behaviour in that agricultural policy issues may be well affected (Swinnen, 2010).

Grindle and Thomas (1991) categorise the policy change in a twofold perspective – society or state centred. Grindle and Thomas outline the point that the society-centred perspective addresses the role of interest groups and collective action in analysing the policy outcomes, while the state-centred perspective tackles the situation where government exerts enormous power over policy decisions, as compared with any interest group. However, the empowerment of the poor should be enshrined in public policy as a poverty alleviation dimension, but this borders on the poor being in a position to develop the collective capacity to defend and build on their achievements.

It is imperative that the media should change the political economy mechanisms of the impacts of interest groups on policies. The political economy sphere recognises the causal effect that group size has on agricultural policy. Group dynamics have tremendous results as they affect the collective action costs of farmers in the economy; consequently, this has some bearing on the political outcomes through costs of information. It is against this background that Olper and Swinnen (2009) argue that government policies will respond to how the media disseminates information to people. They explain further that policies will favour farmers in poor countries since they are in the majority, as compared with the rich countries. It is therefore expected that the media influence in poor countries should be positive upon increased coverage of the agricultural policy.

The media has an immense power and a well-recognised influence in agenda setting of critical issues in the public domain. Agenda-setting theory refers to the notion that media coverage of critical topics drives public opinion to the effect that the topic in question is important. (McCombs, 2007). The public tends to attach importance to issues based on the emphasis that the media places on a particular topic. There are several ways in which newspapers give hints as to how important the issues are to the public, such as a lead story on page one, large headlines, and the space allocated to the story. This gives indications to the media on how crucial they can be in driving public policy (McCombs, 2011). Since the policy makers tend to act in response to media news, as they perceive it to signify the public opinion, this underlines how important the media is as a stakeholder in the policy-making process.

Therefore, the media influences agenda setting by kick starting the first step of directing the public's attention on a specific critical topic. The media is also responsible for the next step in the communication process by creating a common understanding and the perceived correct view on such a topic (McCombs, 2011). However, even though the media agenda setting may be significant, they are not solely the only determinant of the public agenda.

It is of no surprise, then, that Olper and Swinnen (2009), in their analysis of the World Bank dataset, found empirically that the media has significant impact on agricultural and food policies. It is further underscored that the media effect on agricultural policies will promote the interests of the rural masses, rather than the urban population.

Therefore, crucial policy changes occur when organisations express common interest on subject matter. Such stakeholders that may be non-political in nature play important roles by bringing in evidence and so advance the advocacy role, consequently influencing the public opinion and at the same time impacting on the beliefs of the policy makers (Moore & Putzel, 1999). However, participation of other stakeholders, like the media, is dependent on the nature of political institutions that are prevalent in the country.

Despite the fact that most discourses of policymaking present a narrow view of the media's effects, a glimpse of existing work reveals that the media influences the public attention, as articulated above. See, for instance, work by Flickinger (1983) and Mayer (1991), on the importance of the media in the rise of consumer protection as a policy issue, or Pritchard's (1986) analysis on the influence of media coverage on the decision to prosecute murderers. All of this work is tantamount to confirming the impact of the media on policymakers. Therefore, the media can drive policy processes by providing a platform for dialogue of the players by highlighting the particular divisions of roles that each actor be expected to perform. Hence, the media can act as a medium between government and citizens through the provision of information about the policy makers (Soroka *et al.*, 2012).

Assessing all the potential effects that the media can impart to government responsiveness, as far as policy process is concerned, guarantees the pole position that the media has, just outside the political spectrum. As much as the media may influence rather more on the larger scale, the media also has a significant impact on the individual actor's point of view. Political leaders are also concerned with media through its content emphasis that influences the public opinion. However, the weight of the impact is dependent on the complexity of the issue, and the reliability and reputation of the news outlets where the news originates, as well as the coverage of the issue.

This brings in the concept of mediatisation, which enlightens how critical the media field has become for the revolution of politics and the economy. Mediatisation in this sense is aimed at recognising the media as being one of the agents of social circulation and significance in policy processes. The media is responsible for significant transformation of social processes. However, analysis about the media and its role cannot be hypothesised in isolation from the ever-changing political, economic and social dynamics that exist in a society. Therefore, the

mediatisation concept is regarded as being harmonising to the critical political economy of the media (Jutel, 2013). Therefore, the mediatisation has shaped media practice and politics in a unique style.

It is bound to be that the media's role in policymaking does not come on a silver platter. It brings with it many challenges that may jeopardise its impact. However, it is inescapable that modern politics and policymaking cannot be examined without considering the role of the media. Journalists are occasionally accused of not providing their readers with in-depth context to understand the policy options, and individual bias in their reporting, as well as a lack of technical proficiency in policy reporting (Soroka *et al.*, 2012).

Clearly, the ideal setting for assembling a comprehensive picture of the overall spectrum of media effects requires the collection of a very rich set of information, encompassing several dimensions. Indeed, while media reporting may have a greater impact on the political front, the crucial part of it is its effect on citizens' welfare. That it is, if the media effect translates to improvement in the efficiency of policy processes that benefit the society. Hence, it is of great importance to understand the overall impact of the media is reporting on public policy outcomes and to identify the mechanism behind it. It is of key importance to understand the impact of changes in media reporting on the broad economic and political outcomes.

Nevertheless, there is a need to explain the contradicting evidence of the media's influence on policy. It is argued that policy uncertainty and elite consensus are intervening variables that reduce or enhance the media's ability to change the course of policymaking (Robinson, 2001). More especially, policy uncertainty is assumed to render political decision makers more susceptible to the pressure of media coverage, especially through sensationalistic reporting that has the potential of mobilise public opinion, up to the point of moral panic (Robinson, 2001).

2.4 Theoretical Concept – The Policy–Media Interaction Model

The dominant discourses surrounding the media and politics relationships dwell much on the point that exposure to the media may have a crucial impact on beliefs and decisions concerning policies. Besley and Burgess (2000) established that government would be more responsive to the society when the government envisages the electoral incentives afforded to the affected

group. It is against this background that it is anticipated that in countries where the media is well developed, the media are more likely to influence government's responsiveness, seemingly through the media's capacity to disseminate information about government actions.

Therefore, in order to clearly establish the influence of the media on policy, it emanates from the point when there is a disagreement on a particular issue (Hallin, 1986). It is believed that when there is consensus over an issue, the news media are unlikely to give coverage that will counter that. The media plays a more pivotal role in policy debates when a window of opportunity arises for the media to take sides. The media will endeavour to promote a particular policy line through the concept of framing. Framing refers to the act of presenting an angle, or viewpoint, to readers that may encourage a particular school of thought that would promote their understanding. Therefore, framing will empower the public to view how the media packages their reports by not just unearthing the reality, but also by bringing in a particular perception of the issue (Soroka *et al.*, 2012).

However, framing on its own may not necessarily induce media coverage that will influence policy processes. The idea of policy certainty comes into play to theorise about the situations that might render policy process to become prone to media influence. The level of policy certainty in a country is an important determinant as regards whether media coverage may influence policy decisions. For instance, Gowing (1994:85-6) states that when governments have a clear policy, the media then has little impact. However, if a government faces a particular issue and there is no policy in the pipeline, then it is in for the media's scourge. This notion points to the fact that the magnitude of the media's influence over public policy is higher when there is policy uncertainty.

Therefore, the conceptualising of the conditions whereby the media influences policy decisions results in journalists being seen as advocates of a particular side of the policy line. For example, in a case of a negatively toned item of media coverage, the state may view that as public opinion being fuelled by negative media coverage, which may cause damage to the government's reputation. In the end, it follows that the more policy uncertainty there is within the state, the more susceptible the policy process is to the influence of negative media coverage (Robinson, 2001).

Past studies have shown how the policy–media interaction model has influenced policy processes across the globe. For instance, Hallin’s analysis of the US policy towards the Vietnam War is a clear indication of what role the media can play. He highlights the point that media coverage of the war initially was supportive and then later changed in tone, which led to a change of policy by the US government for withdrawing from the war. In a nutshell, the Vietnam War scenario presents a clear example of where policy uncertainty and a critically framed media can influence policy (Hallin, 1986).

2.5 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to review the political economy of the media with respect to agricultural policy. The chapter has reviewed how political economy analysis helps to assess the interaction of politics and economic outcomes. The chapter explained the public policy choice by reviewing the policy processes and the forces that influence such decisions. It is apparent that there are complexities in the circumstances in which policy decisions are made to address society needs. The review of the political economy of information in the chapter has given an impression concerning the interaction of the media and politics by giving a picture of the co-existence in economic terms. The literature has shown that the media is a critical and influential agency as a policy driver. The media is a key stakeholder in achieving poverty reduction and economic growth.

CHAPTER 3

THE AGRICULTURAL POLICY CONTEXT AND MEDIA PERFORMANCE IN MALAWI: A REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

Malawi has been reported as being an example for other countries to follow in order to achieve the African Green Revolution. The country through the FISP, although encountered with donor resistance, has led the way in the implementation of the smart subsidy that converted it from being a constant food beggar to becoming a food secure country. This chapter, therefore, scrutinises the political economy of the agricultural policy processes in Malawi by focusing on the subsidy programme.

The programme has encountered debates concerning the sustainability of the programme. The argument has been that subsidies may not be the lasting solution to the dwindling agricultural sector, in particular for Africa. Transparency and accountability deficiencies have been of paramount concern in the governments of most African countries, including that of Malawi. The lack of a clear roadmap for the programme's implementation, outlining the exit strategy, indicates the enormous incentives that the political realm attaches to the existence of the programme.

The media, on the other hand, has provided enough coverage of the programme to ensure that the public is aware of the policy details, on top of the actions that the policymakers have been making to improve the welfare of the society. Therefore, this chapter lays out the politics and agricultural policy context of Malawi by giving a snapshot of the agricultural industry in general. It also teases out some of the key drivers that have shaped the character and development of Malawi's media, and gives a brief background to the inception of the FISP programme and some of the policy actors.

3.2 Politics and Agricultural Policy Context

Malawi boasts a primarily agro-based economy, with the majority of the population being reliant on agriculture as their sole cradle of livelihood. The distinguishing characteristic of the agricultural sector in Malawi is that it consists of two sectors, namely estate and smallholder sectors. Most of the population is involved in the smallholder sector, which relies much on rain-fed agriculture, and is the sector that feeds the nation. The estate sector is mainly involved in cash crop farming such as tea, coffee and tobacco (Chirwa *et al.*, 2006). Since the country's economy is mainly agro-based, the agricultural sector is vital to its economic development. Despite the critical importance of the sector, it has rarely undergone a revolution befitting its importance (Chinsinga, 2002; Chirwa *et al.*, 2006).

Following the demise of the dictatorial one-party regime, Malawi has since the 1990s undergone a remarkable political transformation through the democratisation of the political landscape. The introduction of the democratic type of governance lead to the adoption of a new constitution which is considered to be liberal, since it provides important rights and freedoms, as well as the establishment of institutions that promote such type of governance (Dulani, 2005).

The legacy of the one-party dictatorship, however, has wreaked havoc in terms of the type and structure of post-transition politics. This has been evident in the regionally based politics, which have had huge impacts on the policymaking processes in various fields, including the centralisation of power (Chinsinga, 2012). The country still harbours a one-party political structure at the regional level. Despite the increasing disintegration of political parties, the biggest obstacle for Malawi is the culture of the one-party system that existed in the pre-multiparty era and has continued without modifications. It is not surprising that the adoption of the multiparty political system has largely been shaped by the one-party dictatorial system. The adoption of the multiparty democratic way of governance in 1994 changed the political structures, as well as the incentives that enlighten and influence policy processes. As mentioned earlier, the members of the citizenry in a democratic dispensation trade their voting rights for a set of policies that address their interests (Chinsinga, 2012). The increase in obligations that is brought with democracy to the state results in direct policy choices being implemented, such as subsidies and handouts by politicians. In Malawi, since the dominant source of information

is the media, the citizenry's attitudes towards agricultural policy issues would be enhanced if the media coverage were to be increased. Consequently, this would create the incentive for government to be more responsive.

The political system prevailing at a particular time may determine the level of tolerance that government may exercise during policy debates. However, an active media may help to measure the level of tolerance in a nation. It has to be emphasised, however, that the political system has enormous influence on the particular choice of policy instruments, let alone the agricultural policies for Malawi which has an agro-based economy. Such status quo suggests that democracy may not necessarily be the catalyst for technocratic policy decisions per se, but rather that politicians prefer succinct and noticeable policies due to political incentives (Chinsinga, 2012).

A review of the political system in Malawi demonstrates a clientelist landscape, which is contrary to democratic values. The political environment is not conducive for comprehensive strategies because of the clientelist phenomenon (Chinsinga, 2012). As a result, policy outcomes are attached to individuals rather than policy systems. Consequently, leaders do not give any attention to the technical viability of the policies, but rather concentrate on whether the chosen policies are likely to affect their electoral goals and authority.

3.3 Print Media in Malawi

The print media mainly dominate the media in Malawi, though recently there has been a rise in broadcasting media houses in terms of television channels and radio stations. The print media is mainly stationed in the main cities of Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu. Because Malawi is such a small country, the print media always competes for survival within a constrained advertising industry. The status quo then results in newspapers being established, and then few months or a year later down the line, they are on the brink of extinction.

Hence, it is not surprising that only two media houses have survived the storm, namely Blantyre Newspapers Limited and Nation Publications Limited, which could as well be described as established and credible. The Blantyre Newspapers Limited is responsible for publishing *The Daily Times* as daily paper, and *Malawi News* and *Sunday Times* as weekend papers. The

Nation Publications Limited publishes *The Nation* as daily paper, and *Weekend Nation* and *Nation on Sunday* as weekend papers. It has to be pointed out that the credibility of these papers is based on having the highest circulation across the country.

It is of importance to give a picture of the media freedom that is prevalent in Malawi in executing their mandate in the policy arena. Upon the adoption of the multiparty democracy in 1994, Malawi adopted the republican constitution. This milestone constitution had laid down adequate positive provisions on issues regarding the freedom of expression. For instance, section 35 of the constitution states that “Every person shall have the right to freedom of expression” (Malawi 1999:21). In addition, section 36 provides the right to the media to operate without any obstacles. Section 37 entails that any person has the right to gain access to information held by government, as long as it is “for the exercise of his right”.

In addition to the provisions made in the republican constitution, several institutions have been set up after the adoption of the republican governance system. These are institutions that are mandated to protect and promote human rights; hence, they an impact on the actions of the media. The Malawi Human Rights Commission is one such special institution, which deals with the freedom of expression as being a human right. Another critical institution is The Law Commission, which has the mandate of ensuring that laws are adhered to as the governance system dictates. Therefore, the Law Commission provides the media with an opportunity to have laws that hinder media freedom repealed or amended.

3.4 Fertiliser Input Subsidy Programme (FISP)

The background of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme can be traced back to the 2004 general elections in Malawi, following the hunger crisis that affected the country in 2001/02. Malawi’s Fertiliser Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) is regarded as a model on the international stage, since the start of its implementation in the 2005/06 season. The programme overall implementation has transformed the country from continuous food deficit scenarios to a self-sufficient nation albeit has had a few bad years recently (Chinsinga, 2007).

The fertiliser subsidy programme has been a huge achievement, contrary to the opposing views by some development partners at its initial stage of implementation. The success story changed the mind-set of the opposing stakeholders such as development partners and farmer

organizations who later joined efforts to improve the programme. Programme evaluations all point to government's exploitation of the subsidy programme for political reasons. The country's agricultural policy has concentrated on the fertiliser subsidy programme as being the main strategy to achieving food security (Chinsinga, 2012). Previous study findings on FISP testify that the programme faces rent-seeking behaviours in contractual awards to the elite (Holden and Tostensen, 2011).

The implementation of the FISP as an agricultural policy is a reflection of the majority's belief that low agricultural productivity, especially by smallholder farmers in Malawi, is a result of low input use by local farmers. Poverty and inequality are deep rooted in Malawi, with almost 50.7 % of the population classified as living below the poverty line. The country has had among the worst income inequalities around the globe, with a Gini coefficient of around 65 in 1997, until recently around 2014 when it dropped to 38 (Chinsinga, 2007).

The programme provides an enormous chance to gain clear understandings of the political, economic and social mechanisms that enhance or hinder policy change by looking at the impacts of institutions, power and the policy processes. Among other things, policies are efficient when they are enlightened in the roles that power relations, incentives and change processes might have on such policies. This therefore entails that policy processes are multifaceted, impulsive and more of a political process, than simply a linear path to policy formulation (De Janvry and Sadoulet, 2008).

The comparative similarity of Malawians, both agro-ecologically and socio-economically, reinforced the political incentive for the ruling party to implement the FISP as a social policy that would bring comprehensive benefits to the citizenry, and consequently create its own base of legitimacy and political support. Maize, being core to the attainment of food security, frankly renders the FISP a national programme and a political success (Poulton, 2012). The essential political attractiveness of the FISP has been reflected in the nature of debates by political parties, as well as in the media focus on the programme. As regards the political parties, almost all have had a similar view that it is an important strategy to attain food security, hence it being termed as a pro-poor programme.

The programme has undergone several evaluations that have endeavoured to establish whether the implementation is the best way of using the limited resources that the country possesses. It is not surprising that the fears that many have had have also been echoed by such evaluation reports, which have shown that the government has exploited the fertiliser programme to shore up its popularity and legitimacy (Chinsinga, 2012). The programme has turned out to be the core agricultural policy for attaining food sufficiency at national and household levels.

3.5 FISP Policy Actors

Based on our interpretation of existing policy theories, Malawi's policy landscape processes are a function of the complicated interfaces of interest groups of actors. According to most theories, intricate interactions of multiple groups of actors comprise the policy process. It is believed, therefore, that the actors' power relations and knowledge are the most critical factors in influencing policy outcomes (Aberman *et al.*, 2012).

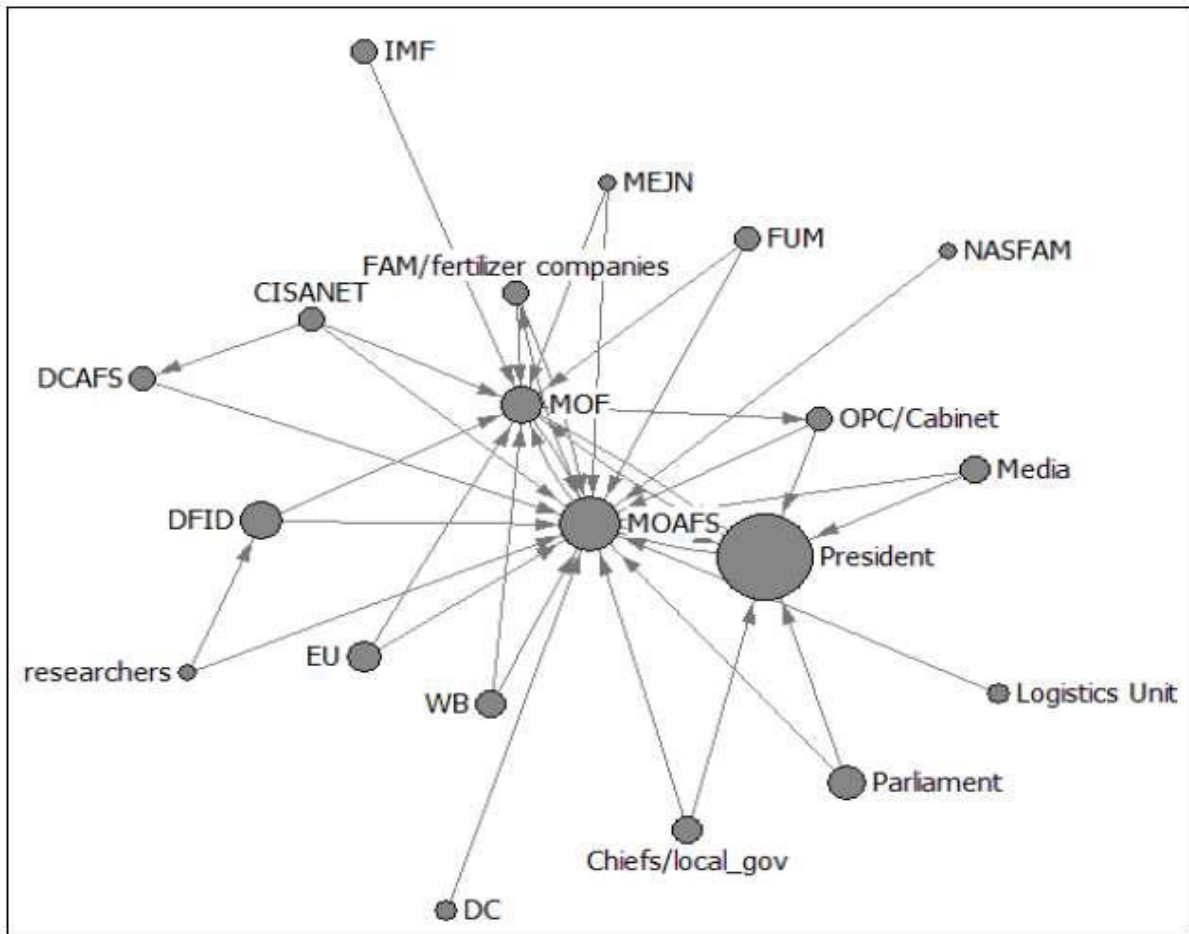


Figure 0.1: Fertiliser Subsidy Programme Network

Notes: Arrows depict provision of policy pressure or advice. Nodes are sized according to the average influence score

Source: Aberman et al. (2012)

Aberman *et al.* (2012) found that the fertiliser policy network revolves around three main actors, namely the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (formerly Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security – MoAFS), Ministry of Finance (MOF), and the President, while the rest of the actors just hover around these three, trying to exert their influence on policy decisions. The study established the MoAFS to be the central hub in the network, although it falls short in being the most influential in the policy landscape as the president has the larger impact when determining the fertiliser policy.

It is apparent from Figure 3.1 that the president and the MoAFS are the prime targets for the actions of actors who wish to advocate for their cause. With all other actors arranged around them, trying to advise or influence them with

regard to their policy decision with many actors not having direct access to the influential pathways of MoAFS and the President, the media has the advantage of accessing both influential actors in fertiliser policy decisions due to the media's role in the political system.

Olper and Swinnen (2009) state that the better policy instrument for understanding the role of the media on policy choice is to look at the agricultural subsidisation policy, and in this case the Malawian fertiliser policy suits the realm. For Malawi, which is stuck with an agro-based economy and where food is a major expenditure item, the significance of the agricultural policy as a public policy cannot be over-emphasised.

The media has a greater role to play in creating an incentive for government to be responsive through the provision of information about policy actions (Besley and Burgess, 2000). The needs of the poor and vulnerable can be addressed through the media, and hence mitigate the political agency problems that characterise the policy-making process. Their analysis suggests that government responsiveness is enhanced through information development.

3.6 Summary

The main aim of this chapter was to review Malawi's agricultural policy context and media. The review shows that Malawi's agricultural sector is characterised as dualistic, in which the sectors are distinguished as smallholder and estate. The chapter also presented the role that the previous dictatorial system has had on the political landscape by mirroring the present status to the one-party era regime. The overall assessment of the media also articulated in the chapter shows the statutes and institutions that are established by law to promote media freedom.

The review shows that the inception of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme reflected a policy aimed to attain food security. Malawi had previously been a food beggar owing to chronic under-production over the years prior to the FISP launch. The review of FISP has revealed some of the transformations that have occurred in the quest to try to improve the implementation of the programme for achieving the intended purpose. However, it has also been argued that the political elites have used FISP as a political tool to gain popularity. The chapter has also described the main actors in the programme that are critical to its design and implementation.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters dealt with the theoretical reflections and country overview that inform the study. However, this chapter is about the methodology employed to generate the data required for the study. It provides a detailed description of the research design and procedures by giving a synopsis of methodological issues such as sampling techniques, classification of variables, coding, data collection methods applied, and the data analysis method.

The main methodology applied in the study involved the cataloguing of newspaper articles into a database and thereafter carrying out the analysis using basic descriptive quantitative and qualitative techniques. Accordingly, the current chapter discusses the methodology followed in establishing the influence of the media in agricultural policy decisions through analysing the news content in *The Daily Times* and *The Nation* newspapers.

4.2 Newspaper Choice

Two daily papers chosen in the study were *The Daily Times* and *The Nation*. These two newspapers are representative of the print media and are highly ranked and reputable across the country with well-established records. Both have online as well as physical archives that date back as far as 1993. Their credibility is mainly attributable to the fact that they have the highest circulation figures of all the newspapers that are currently being published in Malawi. As of 2015, *The Daily Times* had a circulation of about 12 000, while *The Nation* had a circulation of about 14 000, on a daily basis across the country. In addition, the two media houses are currently independent companies and are not owned by government. This means that they may represent public opinion as well as the views from other concerned stakeholders involved in the agricultural policy-making process.

However, one may argue that in this case, the study may create a bias, as the analysis will only be done on the private media perspective. It has to be noted that these papers represent the more reliable and opinionated of the Malawian print media, and have a national coverage, as opposed to others which sprout during campaign periods or simply as propaganda machines to counter these well-established media houses.

The study adopted a case study approach in selecting the two newspapers namely; The Daily Times and The Nation. Wisker (2001) notes that such studies offer a good opportunity to consider a situation, event, group or organisation as an object of study. The case study approach is advantageous in the sense that it provides an in-depth analysis of a situation. It is noted that the choice of case studies is critical and that they should be selected in such a way that they represent a true picture of the whole society or citizenry. In as much as they might not be statistically representative of the total population, they nevertheless reflect the main characteristics of the whole population.

However, it is undoubtedly important to acknowledge a likely source of bias that might emanate from the newspaper selection process. This selection of these papers may not be scientifically sound, but in this case is unavoidable, because it afforded possibilities of gaining access to archives, and facilitated the manageability of the scope of the research, as well as offering the benefit of gaining a representative picture.

4.3 Media Analysis

The basic methodology for analysing the media's coverage of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme involved the cataloguing of press articles into a database and then analysing them through the use of descriptive quantitative and qualitative methods. Where necessary, however, this was complemented with certain key informant interviews to validate the information collected. The important components of the methodology include; *Unit of analysis*: The core unit of analysis is the print press, i.e. newspaper articles (reports, briefs, interviews, opinion columns, features). It can be observed that the above criteria leave out other equally important media sources such as radio, television and the internet at large. However, this choice was arrived at after looking at the viability of the research.

Study period: the research focus covered articles spanning the period from 2005 to 2015, which was the era in which the FISP was implemented in Malawi. The data collection was conducted through the archive for articles published from 2005 to 2015 that covered the fertilizer policy (FISP).

4.4 Classification of Articles

The articles were classified according to whether they mentioned the FISP at least once in their text. The database is comprised of: (i) articles that focus entirely on either of the policy (focused articles); and (ii) articles which do not entirely focus on the two policies, but refer to or mention at least one of the policies (Ordinary Articles). For the ordinary articles, the focus of analysis did not dwell much on them, as the variables to be captured were dates, position in the papers, and the tone in which the policy is mentioned in the article. For the focused articles, the analysis was more comprehensive in looking into the details and the dominant discourses in the articles.

4.5 Classification of Variables

Basic Identification Variables: these variables require that an article be associated with some specific descriptive variables, such as date and year of article, size/weight of article (i.e. length, page position, and visuals), type of article (Focused or Ordinary), and nature of article (reporting, editorial, opinion column, interview, quote, or features).

Valuation Variables: these are crucial in gaining a real perception of the media. Perception variables endeavour to understand the tone of the article (favourable, favourable with some restrictions, opposed, or neutral), but also attempt to compare, between the selected newspapers, the trends of their tones in the period under scrutiny to present the media picture on the programme.

FISP Variables on Design and Implementation: these variables focus on which programme design and implementation characteristics the media puts more emphasis. These are issues such as quality of programme operations (i.e. registration, targeting, coverage, and fraud), coupons, distribution in general, exit strategy, and funding alternatives that the programme may implement.

4.6 Media Tone Variable

This is a challenging scenario for ensuring that the exercise is objective and consistent, as might be portrayed in the media. It can be noted that some levels of biasness may arise in the exercise. To minimise the subjective assessment of the coding, the tone was determined by one person for consistency. In this study, the tone is described as being ‘the take home message the reader will get upon reading the whole article’. This will minimise instances where any particular quote within an article may change the perception of a reader. In this case, it follows that the arguments presented in an article, whether from the journalist or informant, will be taken into account (Lindert and Vincensini, 2010).

Based on this premise, four tone categories were designed, namely no tone, which implies informative articles; positive tone, which portrays the policies as being good; ambiguous tone, which portrays an article presenting positives and negatives (articles that say the policy is good but needs some improvements); and lastly, the critical tone which presents opposing articles to the policies. Tone coding is summarised in Table 4.1 below.

Table 0.1: Media tone coding

Tone	Code
No tone	0
Positive tone	1
Ambiguous tone	2
Critical tone	3

4.7 Article Space and Article Positioning

The space allocated by the media for the policies are weighted as follows; very long articles (coded 10), medium articles (coded 7), and very short articles (coded 1). This is adopted from Walgrave *et al.* (2007) in their study of the media political agenda-setting power, where they analysed the space allocation by the media by attaching weights with respect to each sampled article.

The position of the article will be assessed with a binary choice, where a headline article will be coded one (1), while zero (0) for otherwise. This implies that the front-page articles carry more weight, as compared with the other pages that the media may allocate.

4.8 Agricultural Policy Concepts Knowledge Test

A knowledge test was conducted on some selected journalists to assess the familiarity of the media with food security policy concepts. This was done through a questionnaire that was administered in conjunction with the Feed the Future Food Security Policy Innovation Lab. This is a project aimed at promoting inclusive agricultural productivity growth, better nutritional outcomes, and strengthened livelihood resilience through enhanced policy environments.

The FSP Innovation Lab provides training to strengthen the abilities of both the media personnel and policy analysts to meaningfully communicate agricultural, food security and nutrition policy issues to different interest groups. Consequently, assisting the media to convey technical and policy information on important topics through sound reporting is expected to contribute to leveraging policy change. Therefore, during the training sessions, journalists were administered a pre-test as well as a post-test to assess their familiarity with agricultural concepts.

The pre-test mainly measures a starting point of the amount of pre-existing knowledge of the media on selected agricultural concepts. Such knowledge is core to the content of the capacity-building programme that may be relevant, as well as core to the targeted group. Hence, a post-test helps to paint a picture as to what the instant impact is of such knowledge programmes on the media in terms of their quality of reporting on agricultural issues.

4.9 Summary

This chapter has outlined the research design, procedure and newspaper selection of the study. The chapter has discussed the approach the study adopted in choosing the newspapers to be catalogued. It has also discussed the variables that are of great importance to the study, bearing in mind the methodological approach chosen for the study. The study adopted a case study

approach in choosing the newspapers that were catalogued. The chapter has outlined how coverage, placement, article type and media tone was to be assessed in the study. The subsequent chapter presents and analyses the key findings of the study in relation to the literature review and theoretical framework explained in the previous chapters. The findings are used to establish the role that the media plays in policy decisions.

CHAPTER 5

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents key findings and an analysis that endeavours to establish the influence of the media on agricultural policy. The chapter lays out what the whole research was about as it provides evidence of media coverage, media approach, and tone towards the FISP as an agricultural policy. The findings and analysis focus on the catalogued articles and are informed by the literature and theoretical framework.

5.2 Media Coverage

Media coverage of FISP issues has been significant. In the two selected newspapers, 853 articles were published during the ten-year period that the study focused on. These articles either mentioned the FISP programme or were entirely focused on the programme itself. This outcome was more than what was expected at the start of the study, considering that the programme is seasonal in nature. It is at a peak in the public discourses early in the rainy season (August–December) with issues of targeting, coupon distribution, fertiliser procurement, and distribution at the peak.

Thereafter, not much is written after that until the next growing season, as at that point, FISP issues are not that newsworthy as it is the period when there are many competing news stories, such floods, disasters, and droughts.

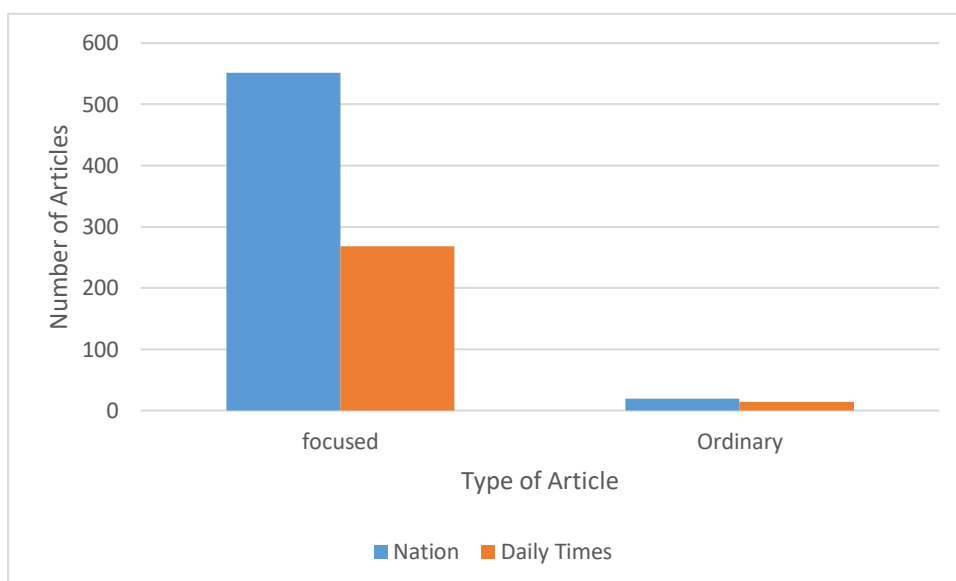


Figure 0.1: Frequency of Focused and Ordinary articles

Figure 5.1 shows that The Nation newspaper published more focused articles as compared to The Daily Times during the period under review. This could be because during the first six years (2005-2011) under review, The Daily Times newspaper which has got its ownership roots linked to the first president of Malawi, Dr. Kamuzu Banda, had one of its board of directors in the ruling government hence some sort of restrained coverage since FISP is a controversial programme. Meanwhile, The Nation newspaper had all the freedom to publish the stories that were concerning the programme. Both newspapers published few stories that ordinarily mentioned the programme. The trend in the focused articles tends to depict a pattern that follows the political landscape in Malawi. The volume of articles increased prior to an election year (in 2009 and 2014 Malawi held elections), and was higher than the volume observed in the other years. The media tend to pay more attention to FISP as elections approach, and then there is a drop in the number of articles that are published thereafter.

Notable in Figure 5.2 are sharp increases between 2012 and 2013, this is because within these years there was a change of government due to the death of the incumbent president Dr Bingu Wa Mutharika. This meant that the in-coming government inherited the already struggling problems created in the implementation of the programme. Therefore, the increase in coverage of the articles in those years was induced by the media trying to put pressure on the new government to improve the implementation of FISP. It has to be noted that even though the

elections years 2009 and 2014 show declining slopes, mainly this is because Malawi follows a July-June calendar year. Hence, the publishing peaks are observed when it is the campaign period, as soon as the elections are done; there is a reduction of articles published by the media as compared to times prior to elections.

FISP is an impact tool used during election periods, if well-articulated, to woo more voters as regards the programme’s implementation. The number of articles over time has been increasing since the programme was launched in 2005, with more media scrutiny being observed in the years prior to an election. A critical look at the media’s reporting on issues of FISP justifies the basic neoclassical and new institutional economics assumption that there is a public interest in FISP, hence the need for it to be clearly defined and the need for the policy to be promoted. Such an interest is linked to economic growth, poverty reduction, and the general welfare of the citizenry. However, such an interest may be generated by the notion of the private interest state. The private interest state singles out certain individuals and groups seeking to capture power, or to influence the decisions of those in power, to generate benefit streams for themselves, rather than for the whole population. Hence, these interests need to be viewed with reservations, as the media is also a profit-seeking institution in the market realm.

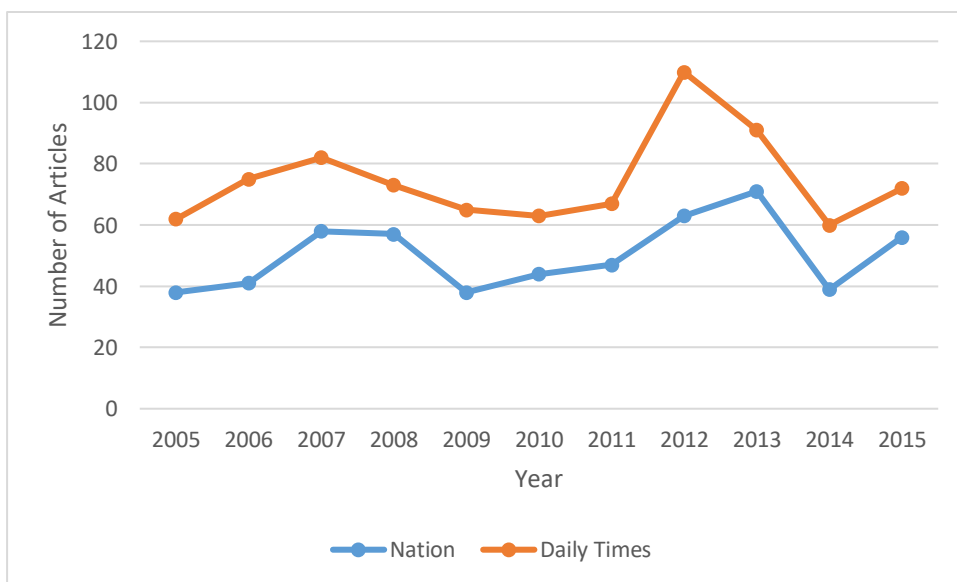


Figure 0.2: Comparison of focused articles across the selected papers

Interestingly, despite the difference in the volume of articles emanating from the two selected media houses that had focused on FISP, it is apparent that their coverage presents similar

approaches that had been taken by the print media on the programme. Both *The Nation* and *The Daily Times* covered the FISP stories frequently, thus playing a role in the checks and balances in the implementation of the policy itself.

5.3 Programme Expansion and Media Coverage

Another prominent point is that the bigger the programme coverage was, the greater the media coverage was. Thus, without assuming causality in either direction, Figure 5.3 shows some significant relation regarding the expansion of the programme, as against the media coverage. As the media interest grew in the programmes, so did the expansion of the FISP programme as observed in the articles that were published in the selected newspapers.

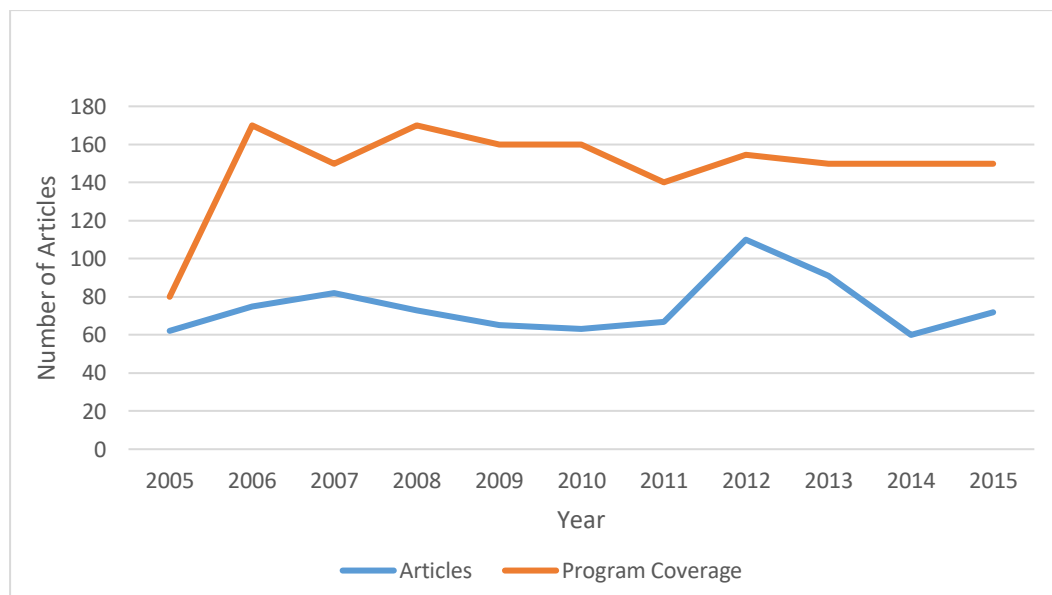


Figure 0.3: Media reporting trend and programme expansion

The scaling up of the programme spiked more interest from the public and consequently the media had to pick it up as the audience’s topic of interest. Politicians usually regard the media focus on a particular subject to be the mirror of public opinion. Hence, the media is responsible for agenda setting in a literal analysis. The media determines which issues are newsworthy and then endeavours to increase exposure of such issues, which are categorised as important. Such an approach by the media not only impacts on the public as to how to categorise which issues are important, but also as to how the public should see these issues.

The agenda setting theory states that media coverage of a particular subject prompts people to consider that such issue is important. This mechanism has also been christened as the “CNN factor” (Hawkins, 2002). This dwells on the media’s role in policy by appealing for reactions from their readers through focused and sensitive coverage, which consequently exerts pressure on government to react. It is apparent that such coverage in articles on FISP certainly shows how important the programme is, since the media sees it as being necessary to allocate more space to it.

5.4 Media Visibility

A newspaper headline tries to catch the reader’s attention on a particular subject to give the specific take-home message being passed on by the media. Headlines always come out as catchy, whether in good times or in a crisis. However, most FISP headlines are critical of the programme and endeavour to communicate to the policy makers as to how the programme implementation could be improved. In the period under review, about 21 % of the articles, on average, were featured as headline articles. The only years in which very few FISP headlines were published by the media were 2011 (7 %) and 2012 (9 %).

Table 0.1: Media visibility of articles on FISP

Year	Number of Articles on FISP	Percentage of Articles Published	
		On front Page (%)	Other pages (%)
2005	64	30	70
2006	79	30	70
2007	86	34	66
2008	80	33	68
2009	67	13	87
2010	64	13	88
2011	69	7	93
2012	114	9	91
2013	92	11	89
2014	60	18	82
2015	78	31	69
Total Number	853	175	678

Source: author’s calculations from FISP media database

The reduction of articles in 2011 can be attributed to the fact that at that material time, exit strategies of the programme were being explored as stakeholders were of the view that it was costly to implement the programme. Hence, proposals were being put forward so that the funds could easily be channelled to other intervention that would have significant impacts such as irrigation development or targeting commercial farmers. While in 2012, the introduction of a parallel fertilizer loan programme known as Farm Input Loan Programme (FILP) resulted in the increase of the media focus in publishing stories on FISP. This brought the percentage increase that is observed in Table 5.1, as the new government led by Dr. Joyce Banda tried to bring a successor programme to the FISP that had been implemented with consumption production being the main goal for the previous government.

The percentage of front-page headlines in the media presents cues to the reader as regards the salience of FISP as a programme that supports the implementation of the fertilizer policy being championed by government. Hence, these cues, repeated now and then, effectively communicate the importance of FISP as a programme. The media in the course of publishing such stories indirectly seeks reactions from both the public and the government. As noted earlier, the media is regarded as a mirror of public opinion in the eyes of the state and policy makers; hence, the responsiveness of government is never doubted in most circumstances.

This school of thought was drawn out by Walter Lippmann in “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads.” In his public opinion analysis, he noted that the media are a key source of the images in our heads as regards worldwide public affairs, which would be out of reach for many without the media. It was noted that what we become acquainted with concerning world affairs is mainly a function of what the media decides to tell us. In instances where an article under consideration did not focus on FISP, the ordinary articles about the programme used to attract the attention of the reader. Thus, this was all based on the simple premise that the public held the policy in high reverence in the newspapers.

5.5 Article Placement

In the course of conveying a message, the section that an article is published in plays a pivotal role in grasping the interest of the newspaper readers. The position of the article, whether it is

on the front page, or in the national news, politics, features or opinion sections, initiates the public opinion of FISP in general. As can be observed in Table 5.2 below, most of the FISP articles were covered under national news, with other sections such as politics and opinion being allocated a smaller share of the published articles.

Table 0.2: Newspaper sections article published

Year		Number of Articles	Percentage of Articles Published in each section			
			National News (%)	Politics (%)	Opinions (%)	Other (%)
2005		64	89	5	2	5
2006		79	91	1	3	5
2007		86	80	15	5	0
2008		80	83	16	1	0
2009		67	94	3	3	0
2010		64	88	3	6	3
2011		69	91	3	6	0
2012		114	89	1	11	0
2013		92	95	2	3	0
2014		60	92	7	2	0
2015		78	96	0	3	1
Total Number		853	764	43	36	10

Source: author's calculations from FISP media database

The order of a newspaper, starting from the front page, typically has the next 2–3 pages covering national news, and then politics and business follow, and so on. It is of significant importance that the majority of FISP articles were placed in national news sections, and then followed by the subsequent sections, and this confirms that the policy is given utmost priority by the media. These sections are the very first to receive the readers' undivided concentration, and accordingly the relevant message is well conveyed to the intended group.

Therefore, this signifies that coverage of the FISP public discourses was encompassed in an analytical approach by the media, rather than being portrayed exclusively through objective

reporting by the media, or through mere passive reporting which may not always have influence on policy choices.

5.6 Article Type Published

The type of article that is published shows what the media specifically focuses on, as far as FISP is concerned. The types were categorised as news reports, opinions, briefs, editorials, and interviews and other. The majority of articles published comprised news reports, followed by briefs, and a few other opinions and editorials.

Table 0.3: Media article type published over the period

Year	Number of Articles	Percentage of Type of Articles Published			
		News Report (%)	Opinion (%)	Briefs (%)	Editorial (%)
2005	64	73	2	25	0
2006	79	85	6	6	3
2007	86	79	3	16	1
2008	80	79	0	20	1
2009	67	73	0	25	1
2010	64	61	5	30	5
2011	69	70	6	25	0
2012	114	72	6	18	4
2013	92	80	4	13	2
2014	60	93	2	2	3
2015	78	87	1	10	1
Total Number	853	661	29	145	18

Source: author's calculations from FISP media database

From these results, it is clearly evident that the media sought the views of various key informants when publishing news reports on FISP, unlike a situation where the majority of the articles were opinions or editorials which might merely have been the views of the media houses or the authors of such articles. In terms of weights, news reports are usually considered to have more weight, as they collect the official views from different key informants who

balance up the story, as compared with opinion articles, which might create bias, depending on the reporter or alignment of the media house itself.

5.7 Article Size

The size of an article signifies the importance the subject matter has in attracting the attention of the readers. The majority of FISP articles are large sized (>7 paragraphs). This is most prevalent at the start of the programme, at around July–October every year. During this period, the programme is often plagued with several implementation irregularities that attract media attention, hence the coverage and space allocated is large, compared with other months. However, article space considerably reduces over time to medium sized and then briefs, especially after the coupon and fertiliser distribution to farmers has been done.

Table 0.4: The size of articles published by the media on a yearly basis

Year	Number of Articles	Percentage of Size of Articles on FISP Published		
		Large [>7 paragraphs] (%)	Medium [3-7 paragraphs] (%)	Small [1-2 paragraphs] (%)
2005	64	47	28	25
2006	79	48	46	6
2007	86	57	27	16
2008	80	43	38	20
2009	67	30	45	25
2010	64	30	41	30
2011	69	46	29	25
2012	114	42	40	18
2013	92	47	40	13
2014	60	63	35	2
2015	78	77	13	10
Total Number	853	411	297	145

Source: author's calculations from FISP media database

Interestingly, the programme started on a high note, as on its launch in 2005 the media had published large articles on FISP. There was excitement across the country on the prospects of

the programme for achieving food security upon its successful implementation. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 2005 about 47 % of the articles were large. This trend has been observed across the years, with a few exceptions in 2009 and 2010.

5.8 Media Reporting Quality

The media’s quality of reporting was assessed by looking at the stories that the media published on FISP. These were categorised as either media hype, government policy, scandals, or political in nature. The media can only be effective in informing policy debate by improving on their quality of reporting through stories that appeal to or charm public opinion. Usually, this involvement of the media is at the implementation stage. Mostly, reporters try to unearth how effective the policies are, as well as the community’s awareness. The media tend to uncover scandals related to the policy, but also propose some administrative or operational changes.

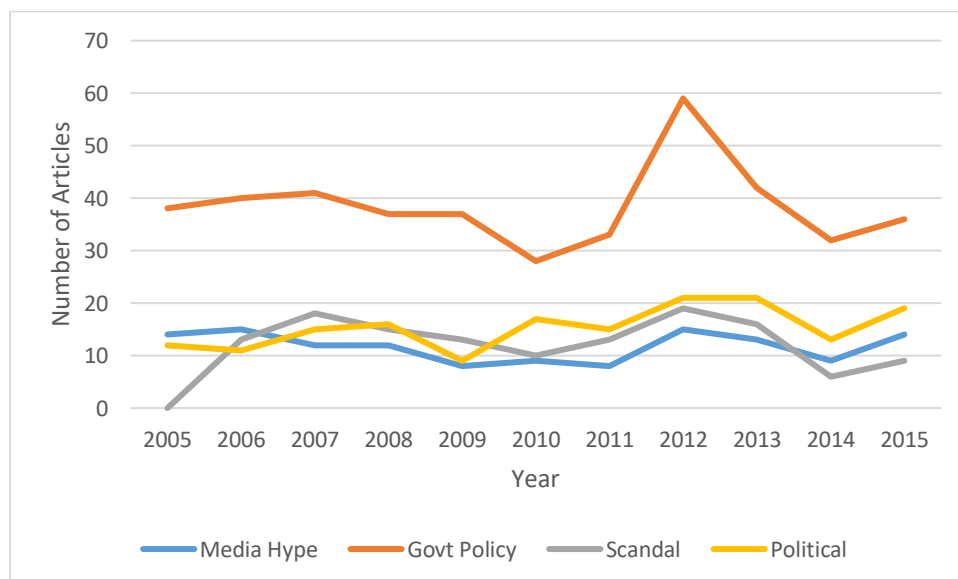


Figure 0.4: Media reporting quality

The media is occasionally accused of being sensational in most of their coverage of issues of national interest. Politicians who deem that a particular media house has a political alignment to particular party mostly proclaim this, and as such, it is branded as being a mouthpiece for that party. However, most critics do not take such criticism with a thoughtful frame of mind, especially if it is not in their favour. Therefore, the assessment of the media’s quality of reporting requires a restrained approach to avoid biasness that may be brought about by political affiliations.

Taking a closer look, it can be observed that the most prominent reporting by the media has been focused on government policy, followed by political stories, then scandals, and lastly media hype of the programme. Accordingly, the media has been at the forefront in communicating to the citizenry what the government policy outline is that has been put in place. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that even though investigative journalism is not at its prime in Malawi, the media has not merely been publishing press releases as raw as they come from the state’s mouth, but rather the media has endeavoured to applaud where the policy has been well articulated, and has pointed out the flaws where these exist.

Therefore, the media has played its watchdog role on policy by taking government to task in order to make improvements to the implementation of the programme. The matters raised by the media include suggesting coupon security features to avoid the influx of fake coupons, exposing political interference by ministers and members of parliament who use their positions to disturb the targeting of beneficiaries, and exposing corruption, especially on contract awards.

5.9 Media Tone

The media tone was measured by looking at the overall take-home message that the reader received upon reading an article. From the period under study, 27 % of the articles had no tone (informative articles), 28 % had a positive tone, 6 % had an ambiguous tone, and 39 % were critical.

Table 0.5: Media tone of all focused articles on FISP

Tone	Number of Focused Articles	Percentage (%)
No Tone	225	27
Positive	231	28
Ambiguous	47	6
Critical	317	39
Total	820	100

Source: author’s calculations from FISP media database

From the results in Table 5.5, it is evident that the media is very critical of the programme especially with the irregularities that are associated with its implementation. Regardless of the

criticism that the media pours on the programme, the press has published a good number of articles that paint a positive picture of the programme especially on food security and the impact on poverty reduction. The media has also published many articles that have been informative to the citizenry about the programme. Even though about 39 % of focused articles on FISP had a critical tone of the programme, the Malawian media, in general, is supportive of the FISP as an agricultural policy for helping to attain food security. Most of the critical articles were endeavouring to uncover fraud and implementation irregularities, so that government could look into ways of improving the programme by addressing such issues that had been exposed by the media. This, therefore, implies that despite its support for the policy, the quality of the implementation of the programme is of paramount importance to the media.

The political landscape at the inception of the programme made it impossible for government to resist calls for a subsidy programme by the opposition parties. The opposition members were in majority in parliament; hence, government needed their support in making most of the decisions.

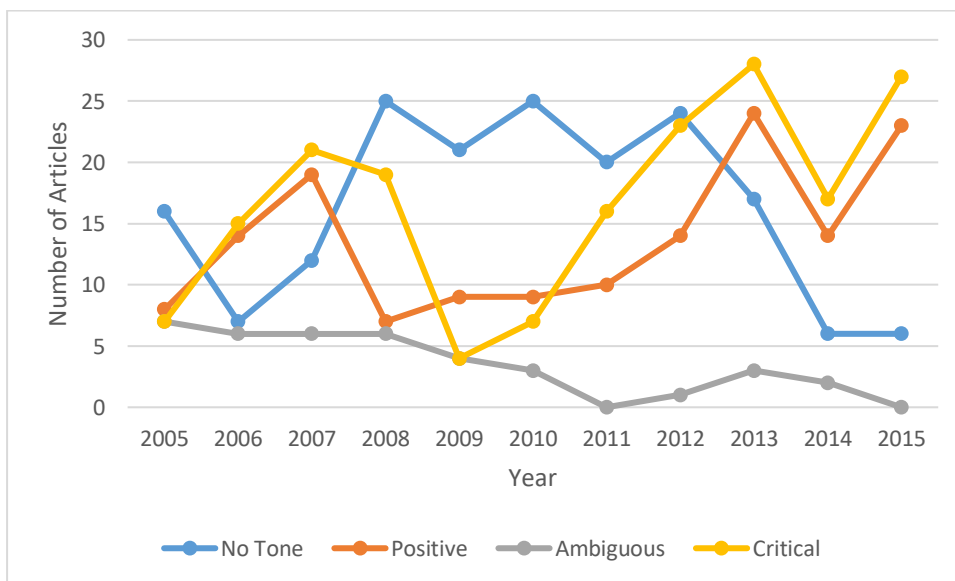


Figure 0.5: Nation media tone trend for the period

The trend of the critical tone shows a huge fall in 2008-2009, this was due to the successes that the programme recorded prior to those years; hence, the media adopted an informative role in the articles that were being published. Hence, the increase in the no tone category as the production surpluses that were achieved by the programme made criticism not that feasible by

the media. however, the continued increase in costs of implementing the programme turned the tables in 2010-2013, as the budget allocations was more than the subsequent returns. During this period, stakeholders including the media were advocating for exit strategies as it was viewed that such resources could best be utilized with other sustainable programmes such as targeting the productive farmers rather than the usual resource poor smallholder farmers targeted by FISP and irrigation development

The media tone trend shows similar reflections of the timelines during which the programme had faced criticism over the budget allocations. For instance, a World Bank (2011) review in 2010 showed that the overall programme efficiency and effectiveness was highly affected due to flouting of procurement procedures in the awarding of both fertiliser and transport contracts. Since the inception of the programme, the actual costs of the programme have always exceeded the initial budgets. Analysts have accused the politicians of inflating prices by favouring rent-seeking contractors instead of applying competitive prices. This has drawn media scrutiny, which is critical of the corruption tendencies that politicians have been involved in, thereby affecting the implementation of the programme. The presidents and ruling parties in almost all regimes have been accused of favouring certain contractors, who also are suspected of bankrolling the political elites in power. Malawi's fiscal budget is dependent on development partners, and threats have been uttered by partners to effect changes that would see improvements in the implementation of FISP.

From the trend observed in figure 5.5, it is evident that the Malawian media confirms the bad news hypothesis. Overall, the media tone reporting on FISP portrays the attraction to the reporting of negative news, as 39% of the articles had a critical tone towards the programme. More striking is the fact that when all the operational activities have been completed, the media rarely reports issues relating to the programme, such as the status of crops in the fields or the bumper harvests that are attained in those years when the programme is well implemented. Thus, the good news is always overshadowed by the negative stories that the media covers. Therefore, although it is hard to prove this empirically, it is evident that the media has a strong bias towards negative news, rather than for positive news coverage. This creates a bias in media reporting by focusing on a particular policy angle. Intuitively, the media news bias will translate into a bias in public policy, hence influencing what types of policies are put in place.

Sometimes, the manner in which the media reports is a function of the prevailing political alignment that the media houses adhere to at that particular time. The status quo in Malawi has been that the public media (state media) always paints a glittering picture of the situation, while the private media highlights the shortfalls that the programme is experiencing. Since all the newspapers selected in this study were from the private media, it is not surprising that more of the articles conveyed the critical tone.

Interestingly, it can be noted from the media’s coverage that, three years into the implementation of the fertiliser policy, the media tone became milder upon the success of the programme. In those years (2008–2011), the media chose rather to be neutral, without showing a particular tone in most of the articles, as the country had achieved food security. Accordingly, there was a positive, gradual shift in media tone regarding the coverage of FISP after the success stories were recorded.

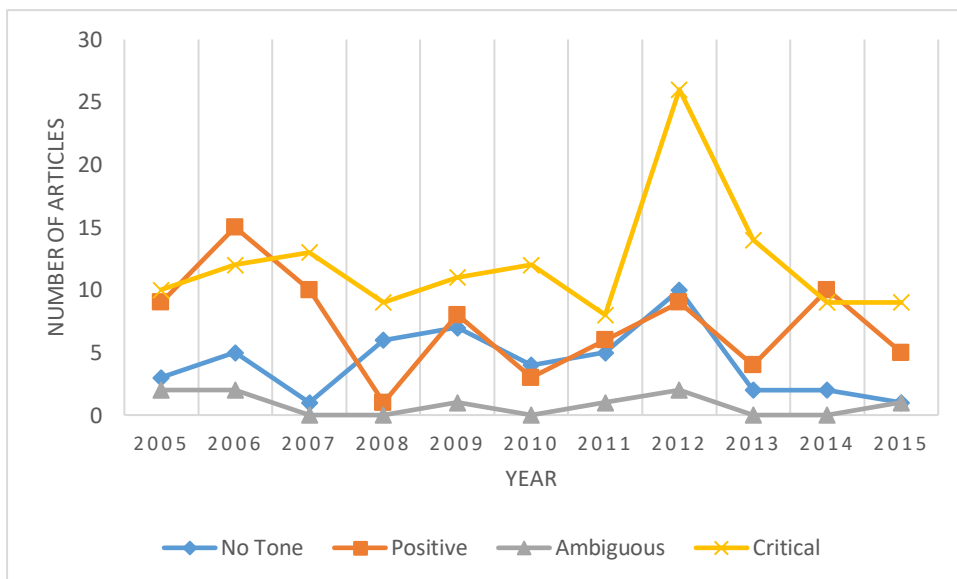


Figure 0.6: Media tone trend per year in *The Daily Times* newspaper

The figure 5.6 show that the media reported more in a critical tone or with no tone at all. The introduction of the parallel fertilizer loan programme in 2012 increased the coverage of articles by the media as each time the media was reporting on the new programme, reference had to be made to the previous programme for the readers to differentiate. This comparison resulted in higher volumes of critical articles being recorded. This entails that the media preferred to drive public opinion by taking a critical stance, and if the public did not pick that up, the media would

then simply publish the stories without putting forward a clear tone for the readers. This confirms Soroka's (2006) work, which argues that public responses to negative economic information are much greater than are public responses towards positive information. There is one school of thought in journalism that contends that news media should simply report the news of both sides, without making their own conclusions or taking sides. However, while reporting uncritically mostly minimises bias, it also denies the public an independent source of information regarding the soundness of a policy.

There is undoubted evidence that the two media houses exhibit a similar trend on the coverage of FISP stories, as observed in figures 5.5 and 5.6. The trend is consistent with the notion that media houses tend to fight for an audience in the media fraternity, and in so doing these forces tend to attract the media to what the audience would be expecting, and this then drops as the demand from the readers for those stories reduces.

On the other hand, the media tend to select political or particular coverage to maximise profits. It is most likely that a newspaper with a FISP headline would experience a boost in sales, as FISP is regarded as an important public policy that attracts a reader's attention. Some news may simply be meant for entertainment; however, news such as that covering FISP draws the attention of the public because it touches on individuals' private actions and welfare in general. However, the prevailing tones in those articles catalogued might suggest that there could be an economic-related reasoning behind the choice of news headlines, especially those related to FISP. There is growing competition and declining newspaper circulations currently affecting media houses that have hit the media market structure. This has resulted in the media competing for the same 'general public'. This requires a more active media to be vibrant in both economic sustainability and as a policy driver. Effects of tone are not limited to attitudes and opinions about political leaders.

In an economic sense, the negative newspaper headlines about FISP affect the economic perceptions of the public. The media's reporting consequently influences the public's perceptions about the health of the economy. As a result, such personal opinions regarding the economy become self-fulfilling prophecies, as members of the public aim at adjusting their economic behaviours to suit their beliefs. The supply of information by the media might help improve the performance of the economic system. For instance, the improvements in political

and economic markets attributable to flow of information and an informed society prompt the government to become more effective, thus reducing the chances of harming the citizenry economically.

The media has not only determined that FISP is newsworthy, but has also covered the implementation of the programme by exposing the challenges that were hindering the success of the programme itself. For instance, the *Nation Newspaper* carried a headline “*Chiefs Reject Subsidy Coupons: Query subsidy system, numbers*”. Consequently, the public adopted the media’s perspective about the nature of the programme. The media’s sensationalisation of the programme resulted in a reaction by government to improve on the programme’s implementation design.

5.10 FISP Topics Focused by the Media

Looking solely at the tone would not give a full picture as to what exactly the media’s message was that was being conveyed to the public. Therefore, the study looked at the focus of the articles that the media published on FISP. This allowed for an in-depth understanding of the public discourses that were prominent, as these attracted more media attention than other topics did.

Table 0.6: Media subject of focus on FISP published articles

Year	Percentage of Subject Matter that Received Media Coverage								
	Program Implementation	Targeting	Fraud / Theft	Coupons	Distribution	Exit Strategy	Payments /Funds	Procurement	Others
2005	27	8	16	8	11	0	3	19	6
2006	21	0	13	23	13	0	5	21	3
2007	29	6	16	30	5	4	1	9	0
2008	18	5	30	29	7	1	4	5	0
2009	38	3	23	20	9	0	0	6	0
2010	40	5	33	10	10	3	0	0	0
2011	46	10	16	4	1	4	3	13	0
2012	33	10	24	4	8	7	4	11	0
2013	46	10	25	2	4	3	4	4	0
2014	60	2	13	3	0	5	10	7	0
2015	47	10	13	6	8	3	11	3	0
Average %	36	7	20	12	7	3	4	9	1

Source: Author's calculations from FISP media database

The media devoted much of their attention to programme implementation, with an average of 36 % of the articles. These articles looked at programme coverage, sustainability, political interference, and programme design. These are the very same areas where changes have been made, now and then, to the FISP programme in Malawi. The other topics frequently covered by the media are fraud, coupons, distribution, and the procurement of the fertiliser itself.

In the earlier years, the discussion on programme implementation mainly dealt with the coverage of the programme. There was then a tug of war between the government and the opposition, in which the former supported targeted input distribution, while the latter wanted a universal subsidy.

The fraud issues ranged from fake coupons, sand fertiliser being supplied, and theft by officers, of cash as well as inputs. The fraud also covered corruption, which is rampant in the programme, especially by those in decision-making positions. The exit strategy of the

programme was also an issue, as the policy was deemed to promote a dependency syndrome from those who benefit from it, year in, year out.

This emanates from poor public sector management that consequently also affects policy design and implementation. Such public service management might also be associated with corruption, as certain civil servant staff members do not perceive their professional careers as depending solely on the excellent performance of their job. Rather, they believe that they will keep their posts for as long as they maintain their alignment to a particular political patron. These staff members are more likely to participate in corruption than those whose conduct is monitored closely by their superiors.

The awarding of contracts for procurement is beleaguered with political interference, which brings in the clientelist behaviour of suppliers towards government. This has brought the programme into disrepute, as corruption takes its toll when it comes to tendering for input supplies and transportation every year. This is a result of a patrimonial system of governance in which political office-holders use public funds or their power to build a personal following. It is imperative to note that neopatrimonialism is prevalent in Malawi's agricultural policy context.

The FISP programme has been used for corrupt purposes, as the powerful politicians and their clientelist networks make decisions about resources. Those in power base clientelism on the extensive use of state resources for political purposes. Interestingly, this leads to neopatrimonialism where the legal state apparatus co-exists with an informal patrimonial system of governance in which only those with connections to politicians benefit through patronage networks, in this case the award of fertiliser and transportation contracts. It is a well-known fact that politics in less-developed countries are far more concerned with corruptly rewarding supporters in return for the consolidation of power.

Needless to say, policy change may not be solely effected by the influence of interest groups such as the media. In some uncharacteristic landscape, policy change can often be linked to the interests of the small elites who try to alter the course of affairs in order to advance their clientelist networks. Such clientelist behaviours lead to highly interventionist agricultural policies being put in place, such as FISP. In short, the form of policy improvement, or the lack

of it, may mirror the efforts of leaders trying to protect their power in the face of a critical media, or a non-existent media, in the country.

One of the key challenges in Malawi's policy-making process depends on the notion that patronage drives policy, and not vice versa. This promotes rent-seeking behaviours, which entice policy makers to choose policies that provide individual benefits, rather than benefits to the larger population. FISP is one such policy programme that politicians use for cementing their grip on power.

It is apparent, therefore, that apart from the media influencing the understanding and perspectives of the public, the media also influences the next step in the communication channel. Hence, the Malawian media has followed the FISP programme with keen interest by looking at diverse subjects that are crucial to the improvement of the programme itself. The media has been floating questions regarding the political manifestations of FISP through undeviating articles, or indirectly through opinion articles.

In summary, under the assumption of perfect competition, it is plausible to underscore the point that the choice of a typical media company will be to publish news reports that contain stories demanded by its readers, thereby allowing it to cope with market forces as well as its social responsibility in the policymaking process.

5.11 Agricultural Policy Knowledge Test

This involved the measurement of the learning received by journalists as a result of a capacity building initiative. This was done by quantifying the data of a pre-test and post-test during the course of a training programme.

Table 0.7: Journalists' knowledge of agricultural policy concepts

Theme	Respondents	Proportional Percentage (%)	
		Pre-test	Post-test
Policy	20	40	80
Strategy	20	70	95
Food security	20	50	70
Malnutrition	20	60	90
Social Protection	20	45	75
Average		53	82

Source: Author's calculations from training evaluation

The results show that knowledge amongst the reporters is different, before and after a training programme. Prior to the course, about 40 % of the journalists had knowledge of the policies, as compared with 80 % after the training, which is double. The trend is similar to the other themes that were noted for all journalists.

The responses obtained from the journalists show a rather serious lack of knowledge on agricultural policy concepts. The knowledge base is appalling, considering that the public depends on the media for reliable information, while the media itself fails to distinguish what the difference is between a policy and a strategy, let alone not knowing whether or not malnutrition is a disease. Such knowledge gaps may present serious flaws in the role that media could play in the policy-making process. The media is a key stakeholder in policy formulation; however, that vital role might not have much impact on agricultural policies where the media is lacking on the expertise front.

Nevertheless, turning a blind eye to the limitation of such a test would be absurd to take impact in wholesomely. Therefore, the pre-test and post-test come with one limitation, as these tests will not tell you what the participants will remember what they have learned in a week or a year after the training, nor whether they will apply what they have learned in their work. Regardless of that, it is still vital in the course of improving the quality of reporting on agricultural issues that such modules should continue being administered in the media.

Table 0.8: Anova single factor analysis

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value
Between Groups	84.1	1	84.1	16.65347	0.00353
Within Groups	40.4	8	5.05		
Total	124.5	9			

Source: Author's calculations from training evaluation

Conducting an ANOVA test on the responses from the pre-tests and post-tests indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in the agricultural policy knowledge concepts of journalists, before and after the tailor-made course was administered. The p-value was set at 5 % (alpha 0.05), and the above p-value of 0.00353 entails that it is plausible to reject the hypothesis that the media is familiar with agricultural concepts. The results show that journalists lack familiarity with agricultural concepts, as shown by their responses to the policy questions that were posed. This also constitutes important evidence that tailor-made initiatives to improve the agricultural knowledge of the media would yield positive results in their quality of reporting.

5.12 Emerging Media Issues

There were some emerging issues noted by the media representatives, as they were probed on whether there were any further issues related to agriculture. Mainly, the issues ranged from priority policies to media's role in policymaking, as well as their expectations. Their responses, though, painted a gloomy picture of what might be expected of the media's role in policy process.

Table 0.9: Summary of journalists' perspectives of priority issues and challenges

Policies	Role of Media	Government Role	Challenges
Irrigation Policy	enhance policy implementation	strategy development	not relevant info provided
Agricultural Policy	public awareness	Diversification of programmes	no legal framework (ATI)
Land Policy	link policymakers with the public	information provision	secretive with information
Nutrition policy	more coverage	put in place policies	Bureaucracy
Livestock Policy	policy dissemination	regulation of policy implementation	
HIV/AIDS Policy	Watchdog	promote production	
	Agenda setting	policy formulation	
		input provision	

Source: Author's own compilation

Most journalists were not forthcoming as to what policies are critical to food security; moreover, some were not aware of the media's role in policymaking. Although the media has a significant role bestowed on them as policy drivers, the journalists demonstrated a lack of knowledge of what is expected of them for influencing agricultural policies, except for a few who were cognisant of their roles.

According to their responses, the majority singled out irrigation, nutrition, land, food security, and HIV/AIDS policies as being of core importance to the attainment of food security in Malawi. However, as mentioned earlier, some responses showed deficits in knowledge of the prevailing policy concepts, thus compromising the quality of agricultural policy stories that are published by the media.

In addition, the journalists confided that the role of the media in the policy process mainly focused on fostering public awareness, agenda setting, keeping watch, and linking policymakers with the public, as well as policy dissemination. The government's role was perceived to entail the regulation of policies, provision of inputs, and provision of policy information, as well as promoting production to achieve food security. There were instances of confusion by the media as to the specific roles for the media and government, with an overlapping of tasks meant for the other.

The biggest challenge encountered by the media in accessing information from policy makers was the secretive nature of those entrusted with the dissemination of information. Most journalists related that they were frequently in contact with policymakers, although the quality of information given left much to be desired. Those with politically cautious minds, so much, so that the media would usually have to engage in unethical ways to obtain concrete information, always reluctantly gave the accessibility to information. This was attributed to the bureaucracy that is ubiquitous in government, where the information to be divulged has to be endorsed by the superiors, who are usually political figures.

5.13 Summary

This chapter has discussed the descriptive statistics of the study. The chapter has established that the FISP programme had received significant coverage during the period under review. The results have also shown that most articles were in the nature of news reports, and not opinion articles. This implies that most of the coverage had sought views from various key informants, ranging from policymakers to farmers, and did not simply relay the journalists' perspectives.

The media allocated larger spaces to articles focusing on the fertiliser policy, with an average of 21 % being featured as headlines on the front page. This increased the visibility of the programme, as well as signified how important the public rated the programme for society welfare. The chapter also explained the impact that capacity-building programmes might have on journalists' knowledge. The results showed that upon administering a training programme, the journalists' knowledge improved significantly, as compared with their previous knowledge.

This would have a positive impact in the long run for improving reporting quality on agricultural issues and in improving policy formulation processes.

The results also revealed that, overall, the media tone was more critical of the programme, although the tone was milder on the positive issues that government was attending to correctly. The presence of the more critical articles, as shown by the results, confirms the ‘bad news hypothesis’ theory as being prevalent in the Malawian media. It has also shown that the media had focused more on programme implementation as being an area that drew greater attention, consequently requiring responses from government over the years. In addition, and contrary to the accusations that the media is sensational in their reporting, the results show that the majority of the articles that the media published on FISP were focused more on government policy actions.

CHAPTER 6

POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

The political economy analysis approach helps to understand why countries perform in the particular ways that they do. It opens up the interaction of political and economic processes within a society by examining how policy-makers acquire power, and the implications that this has on subsequent policy-making (Collinson, 2003). Therefore, this chapter presents the political economy analysis of the media and policymaking. The chapter helps to identify the key policy drivers of the policy outcomes in the agricultural sector settings through the establishment of the linkage of media reporting and public policy in the political economy lenses. The chapter also lays down the media trust and public opinion as evidence of the political economy interaction.

6.2 The Political Economy and Media Reporting Linkage

Strömberg's (2004a) theory predicts that information provided by media reveals the media's motivations for providing news to the different groups in society, thus affecting the groups' influence in policymaking. As a result, media competition will prompt a policy bias towards large groups, as the media targets them.

Therefore, applying that theory to agricultural policy, it implies that the impact of media on agricultural policy will be reliant on the level of development of the country under review. This would follow the old-fashioned way of implementing policy changes, whereby in the case of agricultural policy, the shift is from taxation to subsidisation in the presence of a vibrant media presence. Suffice it to say, a greater role of private media in a country is concomitant with policies, which benefit the majority such as FISP, *ceteris paribus*. Therefore, this is also in line with the notion that a vibrant private media reduces the allocations to distinct interest groups and consequently contributes public policies that are more efficient and holds government accountable. The distinction and linkage of media reporting and policy changes is illustrated in Table 6.1 below, with changes made and the media focus is on reporting.

Table 0.1: Summary of government policy changes and media reporting per year

Year	Policy Changes			Media Focus
	FISP Beneficiaries	Fertiliser Suppliers and Design Changes	Fertiliser Price/Bag	
2005	800 000	ADMARC & SFFRFM, fertiliser only input		Targeting, Fertiliser distribution
2006	1 700 000	ADMARC/SFFRFM plus Agro-Dealers, Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed free), MoAFS printed vouchers.	K950	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, crops prioritised
2007	1 500 000	ADMARC/SFFRFM, Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed by topping up K90) In addition cotton chemicals, Fertiliser and maize Vouchers but also flexi vouchers for other seeds MOAFS	K900	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, crops prioritised, procurement and fraud
2008	1 700 000	ADMARC/SFFRFM, Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed free without cash top-up) In addition cotton chemicals, Fertiliser and maize Vouchers but also flexi vouchers for other seeds such cotton, beans etc. MoAFS printed vouchers	K800	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, crops prioritised and fraud
2009	1 600 000	ADMARC/SFFRFM, Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed with cash top-up of K100) - In addition legume seed, Fertiliser and maize Vouchers but also flexi vouchers were replaced with legume vouchers - MoAFS printed vouchers	K500	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, crops prioritised and fraud
2010	1 600 000	ADMARC/SFFRFM, Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed with cash top-up of K100) -In addition legume seed, Fertiliser and maize Vouchers but also flexi vouchers were replaced with legume vouchers - MoAFS printed vouchers.	K500	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, crops prioritised, procurement and fraud

2011	1 400 000	ADMARC/SFFRFM, Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed with cash top-up of K100) In addition legume seed, Fertiliser and maize Vouchers but also flexi vouchers were replaced with legume vouchers - MoAIWD and DFID printed vouchers	K500	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, crop diversification, fraud and exit strategy
2012	1 544 400	ADMARC/SFFRFM (1 200 outlets), Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed with cash top-up of K150) - In addition legume seed, Fertiliser and maize Vouchers but also flexi vouchers were replaced with legume vouchers - MoAIWD and DFID printed vouchers	K500	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, nutrition, fraud and exit strategy
2013	1 500 000	ADMARC/SFFRFM (1 200 outlets), Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed with cash top-up of K150) -In addition legume seed, Fertiliser and maize Vouchers but also flexi vouchers were replaced with legume vouchers, -Piloting of E-voucher scheme in 6 EPAs, -MoAIWD and DFID printed vouchers	K500	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, nutrition, fraud and exit strategy
2014	1 500 000	-ADMARC/SFFRFM (1 200 outlets), Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed with cash top-up of K150) - In addition legume seed, Fertiliser and maize Vouchers but also flexi vouchers were replaced with legume vouchers, -Piloting of E-voucher scheme in 18 EPAs, - MoAIWD and DFID printed vouchers	K500	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, crops prioritised, fraud and exit strategy
2015	1 500 000	ADMARC/SFFRFM (1 200 outlets), Fertiliser & Maize seed (farmer got maize seed with cash top-up of K150) - In addition legume seed, Fertiliser and maize Vouchers, - MoAIWD and DFID printed vouchers	K500	Targeting, fertiliser distribution, crops diversification, nutrition, fraud and exit strategy

Source: author's own compilation from FISP media database

A comparison of the media reporting in the years preceding the policy changes that government made shows significant evidence of the role that the media played in the policy process. Government responses closely reflected the pattern of news coverage during the previous year in the mix of newspapers.

The media after the year 2006 had been relentless in reporting the influx of fake coupons, used by unscrupulous people who had taken advantage of the weak security features of the coupon vouchers. It was then not surprising that in 2011 the government collaborated with DFID to enhance the security features of coupons to minimise the use of fake coupons for accessing the inputs. The review of such policy decisions supports the notion that policy makers do indeed incorporate signals from the public, as well as the media, into their decision-making.

When reviewing the debates, the issues regarding the responsibility of the media appear to have been prominent. Judging by the nature of the debates in the newspapers, it would be irrational to attribute the media's focus on fertiliser policy as being primarily concerned with competition and economic survival. The quality of the media content and diversity has had plausible effects for the public. The media's performance in policy debates over time has proliferated, mainly because of the coverage of issues of national interest, such as the FISP.

It has to be underscored that Malawian politics have been described as the "Politics of Maize". Literally, what is implied in that is that food security, especially maize, is core to the success of a political party in Malawi. Through the same argument, it is implied that agricultural policies are at the heart of every government that is in power, thus the media's coverage of agricultural policies invites unanimous reactions from those in the policymaking realm.

Accordingly, it is not surprising that when the media is being critical of policy makers, the politicians characterise the media as having to be mistrusted for failing to adhere to their social responsibility and in not serving the public interest. There is growing criticism that the media is biased, too powerful and sensationalistic, and as such, politicians have increasingly demanded accountability measures for the media. All this is a result of the media being a watchdog and playing its role in the policymaking process. However, the media finds it difficult to properly carry out their watchdog role because government does not provide them with the necessary information. Broertjes (2006) clearly states that "it is the duty of the media to expose

facts especially when they should have remained secret and that whoever messes up with that notion infringes the basic principles of media freedom”.

Media reports may spur an economic activity on to prosper. The success generates a political constituency resulting from an interest in sustaining the economic activity. From a political economy view, it is hard in the policymakers and media relationship to categorically single out one party as the loser and vice versa. Despite that, from the economics perspective, it is believed that both agents in this case are self-seeking and rational. Therefore, as rational agents, they use the resources available to them to maximise some utility function. In this case, the media would use their resource platform to maximise profits, while the policymakers would use theirs to consolidate power. The media thus use the resources at their disposal and in so doing, they might use these to influence political processes so as to generate policy outcomes that will benefit society, while also generating rents from politicians in the form of advertisements. However, the media’s role is sometimes less effective because in Malawi, government is the source of most lucrative contracts, thus their impact is compromised.

The media’s interests in agricultural policy prompt them to utilise their ability to influence policy in such a way that they also further their economic interests. Since the media’s reporting brings with it repercussions for the policymakers, which might reflect negative economic outcomes of the policy, this could ignite a response from them against their own private economic interests. Usually, policymakers have political interests, which are mostly to retain their positions of power. This is in line with economic approach, since the actors’ interests and objectives can be expressed in terms of utility function. For the political leaders’ part, this implies that their focus would dwell on general societal welfare, ideological preferences, and private interests. Of course, their primary interests take top priority, which are the acquisition or retention of power.

Since politicians are also human beings, it is inevitable that most of them would attach more weight to their own private interests, at the expense of societal welfare. The exposition of challenges in the policy through media reporting brings in a paradigm shift in the weightings of their interests. Hence, it is expected that policymakers who attach greater weight to the pursuit of societal welfare, and less to their own private interests, would generate better policy outcomes for the citizenry. As to what drives the policy outcomes, it then makes it plausible to

say that the aggregate preferences of the society generate policy priorities and designs through media coverage.

As the media is such an important interest group in the policy arena, it is imperative that it has to be visible as being involved in such an important policy. The agricultural sector is vital to economic growth and the development of an agro-based economy, like that of Malawi. Considering that the agricultural sector is such a prominent sector in the national economy, it is inevitable that influential interest groups, such as the media, would exert a particular influence on the choice of policies through their ability to influence behaviours.

From the above picture, clues are clear that both parties support the continuation of the policy, although with different motives. The policymakers have their own private interests, which comprise sustaining their political power, while the media might take into consideration the economic rewards of publishing such stories, apart from their social responsibility.

However, it is worth noting that the trajectory from media reporting to agricultural policy is not as linear as might be assumed. Despite that, it is clear that the relationships between public opinion and government policy decisions exist, with the media acting as the moderating factor in that policy relationship.

6.3 Media Trust and Public Opinion

In the democratisation era, the debate concerning the role of media over the citizenry points to the trust that the public has in the media, even though the picture comes with mixed reactions. Despite that mixed signal, media trust and performance are some of the challenges currently being experienced. The increasing criticism of the media, especially by politicians, is continuously challenging the trust that the media has held. Most common of all, the media is losing the trust of members of the political elite who accuse them of distorting information and inciting public mistrust. However, the public generally still regards the media as being the sole, reliable source of information.

Trust in this case is related to the connections between the citizenry, media and policy makers (Jones, 2004). It is undoubtedly a fact that trust is the backbone for social order and social

cohesion in a country. According to Putnam’s (1995) theory of social capital, it is considered that when people connect more, the more likely it is that they will trust each other, while the opposite also applies. Such a notion also portrays the economic transactions theory through the principal–agent transaction relationship. Bovens (2005) argues that such relationships present the parties a contractual obligation based on hierarchical relations. Hence, in such a scenario, the principal takes the risk in trusting the agent to act, not only out of self-interest, but also in the interest of the principal as part of a contractual commitment. For the fulfilment of the relationship goals, teamwork and trust by the parties is of paramount importance for an effective result.

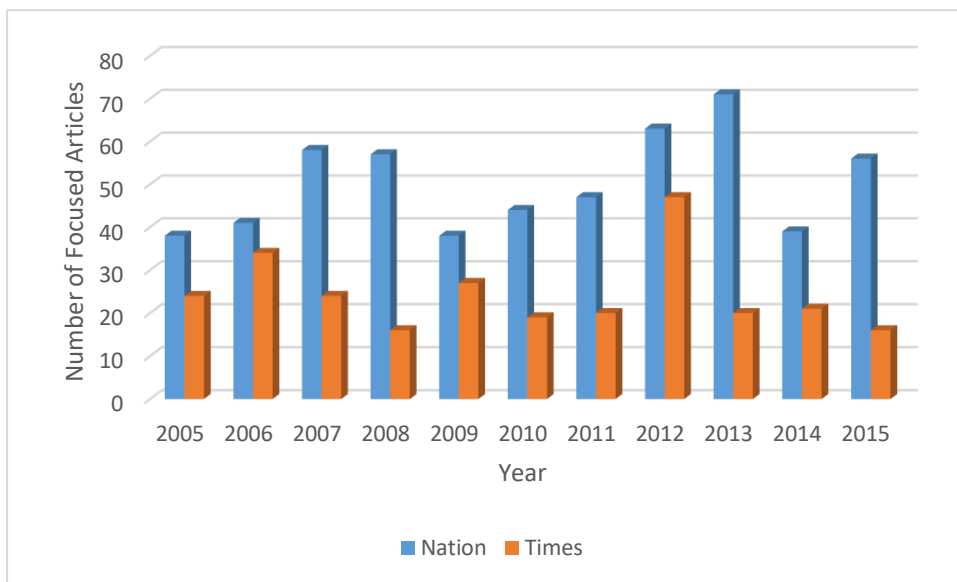


Figure 0.1: Frequency of focused articles covered by the media

Therefore, in media theory, trust is also based on a relationship between two actors: the media and their public. It does not matter if those are considered as being information receivers or providers, such as politicians. This bond is well nourished by the provision of what the public anticipates to get from the media. The frequency of focused newspaper articles on FISP is testament to the media is fulfilling their obligation in the relationship. The assumption of the theory is that a breach of that contractual obligation might result in the public turning away from the media, which may result in societal disorder. Hence, the media has been honouring what the public anticipates to get through their coverage of the fertiliser policy. This is increasing the vital role of the media in the policymaking process, as well as the political process in a democratic society.

The media, as an institution, is accused of not performing its role in a democratic dispensation of providing information to the public, performing a watchdog role and constituting a forum for debate. The media needs to ensure that those in power achieve policy accountability. This involves providing communication between two parties, where the one needs to be accountable to the other, which in this case are the government and the public. In reality, this resembles the economic agency theory, which states that economic relations are asymmetrical, such that one party has to validate their actions to the other. The media constitutes a mechanism that provides that a platform for such a relationship (Bovens, 2005). It is safe to say, from the articles that have been sampled, that the media has played well a catalyst to that role, as it has had access to information from diverse key informants, ranging from the beneficiary to the top policy makers, for use in the articles that were published.

6.4 Summary

This chapter presented the linkage between the media's reporting and the policy changes that were subsequently made to the FISP programme. The chapter explained the media reports in the year before, linking the policy changes that were made to the programme in the year following. The role of the media and the politics that led to economic outcomes were explained in line with political economy theory. The analysis shows that policymakers consider the media reports when making any alterations to existing policies.

The chapter also explained the agency role of the media as they provide information to the public. The results showed that the media has played a critical role as an agent of the public by providing relevant information that helps the citizenry to make well-informed decisions that will improve their welfare in general.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This is the final and concluding chapter, which sums up the key issues that emerged from the study which sought to establish the influence of the media on agricultural policy. It provides a summary of the main findings, the consequent implications of such findings, and recommendations. Lastly, the chapter suggests areas for future possible research in the field of political economy and the media in Malawi.

7.2 Summary of main findings

The results of the study have revealed that FISP issues were accorded significant coverage by the media houses that were selected. The study established that about 820 articles were fully focused on the programme during the period under review. In addition, the results also showed that most of these articles were news reports, which indicates that the coverage amounted to diverse analyses of issues, rather than merely being reporters' opinions. The study results indicate that the FISP programme articles enjoyed huge visibility in the media. There were many headlines that covered the programme, thereby capturing the attention of the public concerning the programme. On top of that, the media allocated enormous space to articles that covered the fertiliser policy. This shows how importantly the media regarded news concerning the programme, and how much interest the public had on the programme.

The results also showed that the media tone was more critical in most of the articles published. It was evident that the media chose to align themselves with a tone that would ignite a reaction from government, which consequently made changes to improve the programme. Despite the critical tone being apparent in the majority of reports, the media also reported positively on government actions. The study moreover revealed that the media had carried out its watchdog role well in reporting about the FISP programme. The media scrutinised the programme by pinpointing the challenges and weaknesses in the design and implementation strategy. The media also lauded the government on the strengths and changes that were made to the policy

in order to achieve the intended purpose. Contrary to the opinion that politicians accuse the media of being sensationalistic in their coverage of the programme, the study revealed that the media mostly reported on government actions.

Another key finding from the study shows that the media's familiarity with agricultural concepts could be enhanced through specialised media training short courses. The results show that journalists' knowledge was improved through attending capacity building training aimed at familiarising the journalists with agricultural issues to improve their reporting. These tailor-made training courses could capacitate journalists in analysing agricultural reports. This would result in improved coverage of agricultural matters and might consequently better inform policymakers and the citizenry.

It also emerged that policymakers take into consideration the suggestions that are put forward in newspaper articles. The political economy analysis of the media and policymakers showed evidence that policymakers incorporate media reports into their policy decisions to improve the policy for the benefit of society. This was observed through the various changes that were made to the design, as well as the implementation strategy, of the programme.

The study also revealed the agency role of the media in policy processes. The media acts as an agent of the public through the dissemination of public opinion to policymakers by publishing the policy interests of the citizenry. Subsequently, the results show that the media carried out their agency role perfectly, as indicated by the changes that policymakers made to the programme. Interestingly, the media also plays a similar agency role through imparting an awareness to the public by reporting on the actions taken by policymakers.

7.3 Conclusions

Overall, the picture, which emerges, is that policy decisions are shaped by complex interactions among policy makers (government), the media and the public. It is a known fact that political actors, more often than not, accuse the media of distorting facts, creating media hype, diluting public trust in politicians, and instigating challenges where there is none, rather than providing relevant information. However, it is an undoubted fact that media freedom is paramount in Malawi; as such, media independence has had an enormous impact on the policy front. From

this study's viewpoint, the media is a core policy driver in agenda setting and policy debate. Thus, the media is an integral proponent of policy debate by reflecting and influencing public opinion.

Nevertheless, the study does not endeavour to conclude that the media is the main driver of public opinion, or that the media is merely a mirror of the public discourses of the citizenry. As observed in the findings, news reports often relied on several key informants who provided various angles that were different from the media's own policy angles. The policymakers are most inclined to incorporate public opinion into their policy decision-making when the issues are salient, and the media report that saliency of issues.

In addition, the study finds some instances that might suggest that the media is the main driver of FISP policy, especially on programme design and implementation. However, the study does not attempt to conclude a causality to conclude that the media comprise the main proponents of policy agenda setting. It is not possible to account for all possible external influences. Even though the media clearly might not define the course of policy change, it is inevitable that the media does direct attention towards a particular policy realm, over other actors. Thus, the media, rather than generating policy options, focuses attention on practical facets of policy implementation and in that way influences the public's evaluation and acceptance of policy decisions. The media focus chosen can spur a reaction from government, depending on the policy angle being pursued through the reporting.

The tone of the media articles shows that the majority of the criticism was published. Somehow, the media's influence differs across the stage of the policy process, as observed. Media impact is stronger during agenda formation and implementation, since it is at these times that the watchdog role played by the media inspires condemnation and the search for potential policy catastrophes. This media approach confirms the presence of the 'bad news hypothesis'.

It is apparent that the state was also at the core of the policy debates and was responsive to policy demands, as observed through the changes that the programme has undergone since its inception. The media tone of the articles that were catalogued clearly shows that the media had balanced its coverage by pointing out weaknesses, strengths and challenges, as well as the improvements that government's responsiveness has brought to the programme. This suggests

that policymakers do pay attention to media coverage on salient issues, such as the FISP, as they consider media coverage as being mirror of public opinion.

Therefore, and without claiming causality, there is evidence that there is a strong relationship between the media actively influencing debate and the state's responsiveness in achieving the successes that the programme has recorded so far. Over time, there seems to be a progressive change in the debate between the media and government, as the tone has now changed from being predominantly defensive on the side of the state to a much more solution-oriented policy approach.

Looking at the interaction of the media and policymakers, it would not be a far-fetched characterisation to say that most leaders are purely self-interested when making policy choices. They will make better policy choices to show that they care about social welfare, but only to the extent that is perceived as maximising social welfare, which serves their ends of retaining power. Accordingly, the media influences the policymakers' decisions to prioritise social welfare through their reporting.

Therefore, it is concluded that the interpretation of the evidence in this study identifies the influence of the media on agricultural policy, and that this seems to be more plausible than alternative explanations. The media has been effective in playing their role in the policy process. The effectiveness of the media demonstrates their capability in attaining their objective of influencing the attitude of public opinion towards policy lines. Furthermore, the median voter model of political behaviour also states that democratisation in a country favours policies that focus on redistribution towards the majority. The evidence from the study concerning the prioritisation of FISP supports that notion of redistribution towards the majority by government.

7.4 Recommendations

The media plays an important role in the policy arena by altering the political economy mechanisms that might otherwise bring about distortions in the sector. The rent seeking and clientelism behaviours of other actors are well dealt with by a vibrant media, which uncovers

such behaviours. Therefore, the media should be effective in carrying out their watchdog role for advocating better policies that address societal welfare and economic growth.

In addition, the domestic political economy context is important in any agricultural policy process. The specific conditions for each particular country are vital in that policy process. This context ensures that policies will address the problems at hand, more than does a one-size-fits-all policy, which might not incorporate the needs of the citizenry.

A participatory policy formulation presents the ideal way for achieving better agricultural policy choices. There is a need to consider a wide range of stakeholders and their interests, views and demands in policy issues. The multi-disciplinary approach for analysing policy issues helps to strike a balance in the policy process. A presumptuous mindset, which considers that best policies emerge simply from technical reasoning and a first-principles approach to economic theory, will bring about policy failure.

In most developing countries, including Malawi, the presidency has the larger say when it comes to issues dealing with policy choices. This centralisation of power in the hands of very small elite diminishes the roles of other stakeholders in the policy process. This type of governance induces distortions in the normal workings of government, thus affecting policy and economic outcomes. Therefore, a reduction of the power mandates bestowed on the small elite in the political spectrum would present a window of opportunity for other policy drivers, such as the media, to exert more influence than the current status quo allows.

Malawi's political system, like those in most countries in Africa, is convoluted, with a concentration of power in the presidency, who determines how policies are to be made. That is to say, the executive has the final say on policy. Therefore, regardless of the media's influence, political tolerance is vital for attaining improved agricultural policy decisions in Malawi.

The way that the bargaining between the media and government is done helps to indicate how each party would accept changes made to a policy. A participatory policy formulation process ensures the synchronisation of ideas from relevant stakeholders and reduces the blame game upon policy implementation.

7.5 Areas for Further Research

This study has focused on an exploratory analysis into the influence of the media on agricultural policy in Malawi. Thus, the explanations presented here represent only the commencement of a critical area of study, one that is worth pursuing. Several questions remain about the role of the media in a democratic Malawi concerning the provision of public goods. Moreover, holistic research might be profitable in covering the entire media spectrum, including broadcasting, internet and social media, as well as the language in which the information is communicated to the public.

While this study has provided a glimpse into understanding the political economy of the media and agricultural policy, it was narrow in scope. It is imperative to note that the field is ripe for further academic research. A broader enquiry could be pursued that would target all media forms, rather than the print media that has been covered in this study. This would provide an opportunity to carry out an empirical study that would determine the causality of the findings.

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