TIP 2000-2001

Targeted Inputs Programme

A Qualitative Study of Markets and Livelihood Security in Rural Malawi

Module 2, part 2

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An evaluation study commissioned for the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation of the Government of Malawi by the U.K. Department for International Development

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MARKETS AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITY IN RURAL MALAWI

Module 2 Part 2 of the Evaluation Programme for the 2000-01

Targeted Inputs Programme (TIP)

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Glossary of terms in local languages

Asodzi	Fishing crew
Chaka	Upland farming (see also Mphala)
Chibwaka	Sweet potato leaves
Chigwada	Cassava leaves
Chikumu	Mutual work arrangement (see also Chilimiziga; Vare)
Chilimiziga	Work cooperative (see also Chikumu; Vare)
Chitenje	Wrap-around cloths for wearing or for carrying, e.g. babies
Chitibu	Nsima made of flour from sun dried fresh maize
Chiwira	Work party for beer or food (see also Ndanjira)
Dambo	Waterlogged or swampy land
	Dimba Gardens where moisture is sufficient for dry season farming, e.g. in river beds or dambo land
Ganyu	A broad designation of agreements for temporary labour arrangements
Kachasu	Liquor distilled from grains and tubers, but especially maize and cassava
Kale	Long ago
Kaunjika	Second hand clothes
Khasu	Hoe
Lobola	Bride price
Madeya	Maize seconds
Matola	Informal transport services
Milambala	Plots or pieces of land
Misipu	Young cassava
Mkwawu	Big fishing nets
Mphala	Upland farming (see also Chaka)
Mpiru	Mustard leaves
Mwera	Winds occurring in June and July
Nandolo	Pigeon peas
Ndanjira	Work party for beer or food (see also Chiwira)
Nkhokwe	Grain stores
Nsima	Stiff porridge made from maize or cassava flour
Panga	Large knife
Thawali	Stagnant water for fermentation of cassava tubers
Usipa	Species of fish comparable to sprat
Vare	Work cooperative

List of abbreviations

ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
AGORA	A company trading in agricultural inputs and providing credit
APIP	Agricultural Productivity Improvement Programme
CCAP	Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
ESCOM	Electricity Supply Company of Malawi
FFC	Farmers Finance Company
FIAH	Foundation for Improvement of Animal Health
FINCA	Foundation for International Community Assistance.
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MoAI	Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation
MRFC	Malawi Rural Finance Company
NASFAM	National Association of Smallholder Farmers in Malawi
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PTC	People's Trading Corporation (supermarket chain)
SADP	Smallholder Agribusiness Development Project
SP1	Starter Pack 1998-99
SP1	Starter Pack 1999-2000
SSFRFM	Special Smallholders Fertiliser Revolving Fund Malawi
STA	Smallholder Tea Authority
TAMA	Tobacco Association of Malawi
TIP	Targeted Inputs Programme 2000-01
UDF	United Democratic Front

PART I

General Report

Executive Summary

Introduction and methodology

Module 2 of the TIP 2000-01 evaluation looks at the impact of distributing free inputs on markets and livelihood security. The terms of reference for our study asked for an estimation of the broad impact on farm enterprises. This study pays attention not only to the impact on farm production, but also to the impact on morale. The terms of reference also suggested that specific attention be paid to the role of maize and *ganyu* in rural livelihoods in Malawi. Finally, we were asked to assess the dynamics of poverty in Malawi and how that related to free inputs. This discussion centres on the place of free inputs in a National Safety Net Strategy.

Part 2 of Module 2 distinguishes itself from Part 1 by its methods. Part 1 is based on survey research, whereas the qualitative methods used in Part 2 pay more attention to language. They construct case studies to bring out diversity, rather than looking primarily for generalisations. These methods imply an open approach: a checklist – which they could modify depending on their findings – guided the field researchers. The intention is not, however, merely to state diversity: by uncovering related variables, case studies are meant to clarify wider phenomena than just the particular case. The study covered three sites in each of the three regions of Malawi. The nine sites were selected in order to reflect the diversity of agricultural practices in the country. We also use data obtained in three 'pilot' sites.

The policy environment of TIP

The evaluation is set against the Malawian policy environment. The central issues in recent years have been deregulation and liberalisation, both of which were considered to be pro-poor, as regulation and state control were believed to protect monopoly interests. The question of whether liberalisation has benefited smallholder farmers, especially the poorer ones, is a key theme in the debate on agricultural policy making.

The discourse on poverty alleviation allows for non-market interventions such as distributing free inputs. SP1, SP2 and TIP aimed to increase food security and alleviate poverty. They implied a recognition that market forces alone cannot increase poor farmers' maize production, as input constraints are binding. However, some stakeholders have expressed concern about the market distortions caused by Starter Pack: did the increase in the supply and fall in the price of maize in 2000 create the wrong price incentives for farmers? A key issue here is whether farmers' production decisions are responsive to price signals in the maize markets. Another concern is that free inputs programmes imply continued dependence on external assistance.

The impact of free inputs on agricultural output

The distribution of free inputs can have a positive impact on farm enterprises. Our research supports the conclusion of the quantitative modules of the 1999-2000 Starter Pack evaluation and the 2000-01 TIP evaluation that SP1 and SP2 had an average maize production increase of between three and four 50-kg bags per household. However, we found much variability between – and even within – villages.

The production effects of TIP were negligible. The 2000-01 agricultural season was a particularly wet one and the TIP packs were delivered very late. Additionally, TIP only aimed to reach about half of Malawi's rural households. Communities were expected to target poorer households, but this led to complications and some communities made adaptations to avoid targeting. However, the main reason which farmers gave for the decrease in maize production in 2000-01 was unrelated to TIP: they were unable to afford to buy as much fertiliser as in previous years because prices rose sharply due to the rapid devaluation of the Malawi kwacha.

Free inputs and Malawian cultural values

The distribution of free inputs is popular. This is not surprising, as it is a gift. According to an influential strand of opinion, such interventions create an attitude of 'dependency'. However, we found no evidence to support this view. Prevailing attitudes in rural Malawi place great value on growing one's own food in order to be independent from other people. Increases in food self-sufficiency as a result of free inputs have a dignifying and morale-boosting value for the poor.

Food shortage is seen as the hallmark of poverty. The distribution of free inputs is seen as a particularly effective way to alleviate poverty as it targets one particular essential need, while other forms of support, money, would dissipate immediately. As the case studies in Part II of this report show, the majority of people we interviewed were hard-working. Free inputs motivate people to work, and they create a feeling of self-sufficiency that is the opposite of an attitude of dependency.

The fertiliser component in the packs was also felt to address the most pressing problem faced by farmers: the decline in soil fertility, which appeared to be the major constraint on farming (except in Nkhata Bay and Nsanje).

Maize production and market linkages

The maize component in the pack is highly appreciated in most places. Maize remains by far the most important and preferred staple food in Malawi. However, it is often out of the reach of poorer people who resort to substitutes like cassava. Maize tends not to be cultivated to raise cash, but for home consumption.

People prefer to grow their own maize to avoid the risks and vagaries of the market. Nevertheless, this isolation from market forces is mainly an illusion: the decline in soil fertility necessitates the use of fertiliser, the purchase of which requires the raising of cash. Therefore farmers have strong links with markets for cash crops and with labour markets, and many also engage in crafts and trade.

Linkages with the maize market are generally weak. The decision to sell maize depends upon emergency cash needs and the size of the harvest (normal surplus); it is not primarily motivated by price incentives. With the price of fertiliser in the 2000-01 season, it was not profitable to grow maize, even given no costing for labour and land.

Most poor households in rural Malawi are not food self-sufficient, and have to buy maize. They miss the services of ADMARC, especially as a source for buying maize. The decline of ADMARC has also created a void in input supply and produce buying.

Shortage of capital is extreme in rural Malawi, and this limits entry into trade. Unlike growing maize, trading in maize is lucrative, especially as traders can exploit price swings between the seasons.

Ganyu

We found no clear connection between free inputs and the rural labour market. The word *ganyu* is widely used to describe practices in this market, but a strict definition of *ganyu* implies contracting to do a piece of agricultural labour for a fixed sum, usually in the agricultural season, when it clashes with labour requirements on the person's own or family farm. *Ganyu* is strongly associated with food and the hungry season. Women, who are responsible for food in the household, often work for payment in kind (maize). *Ganyu* is regarded pejoratively – as a poverty trap, a shameful activity – and is sometimes associated with begging. It is usually a desperate coping strategy and not a livelihood as such, except in the Shire Valley, where it is possible to go for *ganyu* all year round.

Although it is difficult to generalise about payment for *ganyu* as the units of measurement differ too much, it is clear that rates of pay are much too low to enable a rise out of poverty. The degree to which people in a household are forced to go for *ganyu* is probably a good indicator of its level of poverty and food insecurity.

Supply of *ganyu* is generally greater than demand for *ganyu*. We found no evidence that the supply of *ganyu* is affected by the distribution of free inputs. While free inputs help to reduce food insecurity, it seems that so many basic needs (including food) remain unsatisfied that it is still necessary for people to go for *ganyu*. There was evidence of a decline in demand for *ganyu* in some areas, but this had nothing to do with Starter Pack or TIP.

Impoverishment, poverty alleviation and targeting

Impoverishment is accelerating in rural Malawi. Exhausted soils, expensive inputs and poor integration into produce markets are contributory factors. Free inputs are key to poverty alleviation in rural Malawi because food is the most basic of basic needs, and rural households have big food deficits. Free inputs help to increase food self-sufficiency and also increase supply of maize, depressing prices so that those still with a food deficit can afford to buy more food.

Targeting in TIP 2000-01 was unsuccessful and unpopular. Targeting of certain households (and exclusion of others) for free inputs programmes generates resistance. The weakest members of society may not be the most appropriate beneficiaries for this sort of programme. Also, it is often difficult to identify the poorest. Social safety nets – the network of supportive social relationships – should be taken into account, as they may protect the vulnerable from severe poverty. However, they are often highly informal, so poverty criteria may not be able to capture them. Thus, scaling down TIP based on attempts to target the poorest will be fraught with difficulty.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The study of markets and rural livelihoods covers many aspects of rural life, and therefore the brief for this module of the 2000-01 Targeted Inputs Programme (TIP) evaluation was wide and broad. The rationale for this is clear: an ultimate test of a programme to distribute free inputs is the extent to which rural well-being is affected by it, and in order to assess this we need to understand people's livelihood strategies and their relationship with the markets.

The brief can, however, also tempt one to do too much – for example, to include an elaborate discussion on tobacco. TIP is not aimed at tobacco, but tobacco plays a major part in Malawian rural livelihoods. Such issues will be mentioned, but we have tried to delineate our study by focusing our attention to specific questions raised in the Terms of Reference (see Appendix 1).

Several themes guided us in our research and the structure of this report:

1. Our Terms of Reference expected an answer to the question: '*What has been the net impact of the Starter Pack campaigns and the TIP on farm enterprises?*' The focus of our study is on the farm enterprise as a productive unit, rather than the household in isolation. The assumption was that although a farm may be designated by the name of a particular household, more that one household may be connected to the farm. A focus on the household alone may not bring out linkages between poorer and richer households. From this perspective, we consider the impact of SP1, SP2 and TIP on the **agricultural output** of the farm enterprise (Chapter 4). Our approach should also give insight in the question: '*What impact has Starter Pack and TIP had on economic and social relationships within the community, particularly in relation to coping strategies?*'

2. The impact of free agricultural inputs on farm enterprises must be seen within the context Malawian **cultural values** (Chapter 5). The theme of cultural values arose in preparatory discussions with policy makers and donors:

   - Firstly, there was a desire to get an insight into the less tangible effects of distributing free inputs: Do such programmes produce a 'feel-good factor' raising farmers' morale?
   - Secondly, some stakeholders assumed that programmes like Starter Pack and TIP would create a mentality of dependency.

   Through discussion of a number of statements designed to understand farmers' attitudes, our study found a remarkably consistent set of values which show why the Starter Pack campaigns have had a positive impact in rural Malawi.

3. Our Terms of Reference asked us to gain insight into relationship between livelihoods and markets in rural Malawi: '*The study will need to identify whether particular categories of TIP recipient and non-recipient have been affected by the changes in market conditions and the move from a universal to a targeted free inputs programme. Therefore, it will present cases of households in different categories, including poverty level, gender of household head, household size and access to land*'. Food and especially maize were the central concerns of the study,

since maize is the most common and preferred staple food in rural Malawi and the contents of the SP1, SP2 and TIP packs were intended to promote maize cultivation. The **role of maize in rural livelihoods**[1] was thus an obvious focus for our research (Chapter 6). However, farmers' quest for food is intimately related to other markets as so many rural Malawians have to buy food. Therefore we also pay attention to markets for other crops and also to labour markets.

4. Our Terms of Reference asked us to pay particular attention to **labour markets** and especially those practices of contracting labour designated by the term ***ganyu*** (Chapter 7). When people in rural Malawi run out of food, they resort to *ganyu*. *Ganyu* is associated with impoverishment of rural households, especially as the demand for *ganyu* clashes with the peak labour requirement on their own farm. *Ganyu* is thus particularly associated with food shortages, the hungry season and the descent into destitution.

5. Finally, an encompassing theme of our study was **poverty** (Chapter 8). We were asked to situate the distribution of free inputs in a broad view on poverty in rural Malawi: '*Any evidence of changes in the poverty status of groups of farmers, in particular owing to the Starter Pack or TIP interventions, should be presented*'.

   It is under this theme also that we will discuss the salient difference between the universal Starter Pack programmes of 1998-99 and 1999-2000 and the 2000-01 targeted free inputs programme, and the question: Is poverty targeting desirable and possible? During the research we have tried to distinguish between TIP recipients and non-recipients and between poor and non-poor. Whether or not it is possible to make such distinctions in practice is crucial to the major issue that we were asked to consider: '*the implications of the findings for future TIP interventions, including the implications for scaling down the provision of free agricultural inputs within the scope of the National Safety Net Strategy*'.

Before addressing the themes outlines above, we examine the **policy environment** for Starter Pack and TIP (Chapter 3). The issues discussed were researched in a series of stakeholder interviews and review of secondary sources carried out in March 2001. We aim at a debate on the appreciative system in which policy is set: the whole of interrelated perceptions and values from which policy springs (Vickers, 1965).

The report as a whole aims to present a snapshot of rural Malawi in 2001 – especially the impoverishment taking place – and to examine the role of distributing free inputs within this context. Subsequent chapters in the report differ in terms of approach. Those dealing with agricultural output, markets, *ganyu* and poverty contain much economic information, while the chapter on the impact of cultural values is sociological in nature. However, the whole report is suffused by a sociological concern for the meaning in social behaviour, for example the high value placed on food and the low esteem in which *ganyu* is held. The aim is to give a view from within of economic life and society in rural Malawi and the role of free inputs.

[1] Livelihood is interpreted here in the narrow sense of the way people make a living. The DFID sustainable livelihoods guidance sheets distinguish capabilities, assets and activities as aspects of livelihoods (DFID, 1999). The importance of cultural preferences and values – e.g., related to maize – appeared to be an important additional aspect of livelihoods in this evaluation.

Chapter 2 presents the methodology used in our study. This is based on qualitative approaches, which lend themselves particularly to case study research. The image we present in the **General Report** is primarily built upon the description of farm enterprises in the nine villages visited during the main phase of our study, three in each region of Malawi. We also use data from Kachuli in Dedza, Mtanila in Dowa and Alick Chisi and Mskaba in Mzimba, where we conducted pilot studies.

The second half of this report – the **Village Studies** – contains reports on our nine sites. The sites were chosen with the intention of capturing a diversity of settings.

Northern Region

Marko Mwenechilanga in Karonga

The village received Starter Pack in 1998-99 and 1999-2000 and TIP. It is a poor village with an emerging cash economy. The village is half-way between Karonga and Chitipa. The 133 farming families live dispersed in small clusters over a large area – half a day's walk from one end to the other. Farms are also dispersed and are set amidst large tracts of vegetation. Topsoil is thin on the steep slopes and people have only recently moved from shifting cultivation (slash and burn/*chitemene*) to settled farming. People have migrated into the area since the 1980s and their disparate origin shows in the number of languages spoken: Nkhonde, Tumbuka, Lambiya, Kamanga and others. Near the road is Wiliro trading centre where there is a school, rural hospital and a field assistant of the MoAI. The nearest ADMARC market is in Karonga, 75 km away on a bad dirt road.

Msilamoyo in Nkhata Bay

The village received SP1, SP2 and TIP. Wealth is difficult to gauge in this village, but it does not give the impression of being a poor village. The village is situated on the shores of Lake Malawi and is close to the tarred lakeshore road. The district capital is about 75 km away along this road. The village is close to Chintheche Trading Centre, which contains large stores. In the village is a Farm Training Centre as well as a large primary school. The 71 farming households live dispersed over the three parts of the village: the part on the lakeshore, the part along the lakeshore road and an upland part in the hills. Soils are a mixture of clay and sand, which become more sandy the more one goes up to the hills. The closer to the lake, the more there are *dambos* and rivers. Also, the closer to the lake, the more dense and scattered the settlement pattern. Farms are dispersed among the houses. Fishing is important in the village and cassava is the staple crop. People identify themselves strongly as Tonga.

Tombolombo in Mzimba

The village received SP1 and SP2, but not TIP. Compared to the other sites, it is relatively wealthy and inequalities are not extreme. The village is situated off the tarred road: about 23 km from Mzimba district headquarters and about 5km from Manyamala trading centre. Although there is no land shortage, there is little original vegetation. The area is flat and soils are very sandy. Tobacco is the most important cash crop here, but more important to the farmers are the relatively large maize farms. These are cultivated with ox-drawn implements. The 106 farm families live in small

clusters among farmland. These clusters identify themselves by particular clan names. The village is overwhelmingly Tumbuka, of which there are seven clans present. The integration into the market is striking in the village: in no other site did we find as much use of credit as here. Nearby Manyamala is a relatively large trading centre that contains branches of Farmers World (input supply) and the Farmers Finance Company (FFC). At Manyamala there is also an agency of the Malawi Rural Finance Company (MRFC). The busy weekly market includes an area where maize is traded. Manyamala has a big primary school and several agricultural extension officers.

Central Region

Kamange in Nkhotakota

This village received SP1, SP2 and TIP. This is the most urban site we visited. There was much diversity in livelihoods and we found dire poverty besides considerable wealth. This diversity reflects the peri-urban character of the village. Despite the fact that it looks like part of Nkhotakota district headquarters, it identifies itself strongly as a Chewa village. However, large numbers of immigrants, mostly Yao, live among the original Chewa population. It is difficult to say how many people live in Kamange as it has a shifting population. There is very little land for cultivation left in the village and land for building is at a premium. The immigrant population depends mostly on trade and there are some fishermen. Contacts with relatives outside the area appear to be important, especially among the original population. Farming is significant, but is mostly done some distance from the village in river estuaries. The tarred lakeshore road runs though the village and service provision is good.

Katsukunya in Dowa

This village received SP1, SP2 and TIP. Extreme poverty and wealth can be found in this village. It is situated in the heart of a major tobacco growing plain, about 3km off the main tarred road near Madisi trading centre. Around 50 farming households live concentrated in one village and the farms lie around it. When entering the village one sees many sheds to cure tobacco and no grain stores. Tobacco is seen as the way to wealth. For some people, especially traders, it is. Most people have however to sell their tobacco at low prices when it is still standing in the field in order to buy food. Wage labour on a nearby estate is essential in many livelihoods. Service provision is poor and centres on Madisi training centre (about 15km away).

Kankodola in Dedza

The village received SP1 and SP2, but did not receive TIP. The village is extremely poor, and this is exacerbated by a recent split away from the village of the wealthier sections. Kankodola is about 40 km to the northwest of Dedza district headquarters. After 20 km of tarred road, one has to travel another 20 km along bad dirt roads. Land is short in Kankodola and there is no fallow land to be seen. Maize is the most important crop. People grow some tobacco for cash, but this is in rapid decline since they defaulted on loan repayments. Some try to flee from poverty by migration to tobacco estates. Kankodola is a Chewa village and the 87 farming households live closely together. There is no school and no health centre near to the village. Services

are concentrated in trading centres: the nearest one, Chidewe, is 5 km away and the most important one, Thete, is 10 km from the village.

Southern Region

Mkalo in Machinga

The village received SP1, SP2 and TIP. Poverty in the village is concentrated among those who are real villagers as distinct from the people who live there because they work nearby or have retired there. This village lies in between Zomba and Machinga on the M2 – one of the busiest roads in Malawi. A secondary school, a major hospital and a trading centre are close to the village. Many people who work in these places live in Mkalo. It is therefore a village characterised by urban livelihoods in a rural setting. Its quasi-urban character makes it a popular place to retire. It is difficult to say who actually belongs to the village, but there are less than 50 farming households. Farming is difficult in Mkalo. Plots are very small and intensively cultivated through intercropping. Farming does not provide a surplus to sell.

Thopina in Mulanje

Thopina received SP1, SP2 and TIP. It is a poor village which lies high on the slopes of Mount Mulanje and is reached by driving a few kilometres on dirt roads after turning off from the tarred road leading from Mulanje district headquarters to the Mozambican border. Land shortage is extreme and the soils are very poor as they have leached badly due to intensive rainfall on the bare, steep slopes. The 37 farm households live scattered amidst the fields. Only one crop does well in Thopina: pineapples. Wage labour on the tea estates in the flat land at the bottom of the mountain is essential for many livelihoods. Migration to tobacco estates in the Central and Northern Regions is common. The inhabitants identify themselves as Lomwe, who have immigrated from Mozambique over the past century. Trading links with Mozambique are strong. There is a school nearby, but there is little interest in education. The scaling down of ADMARC has hit the community hard. In 1998 ADMARC ran out of maize and there was no maize coming from Mozambique.

Chisi in Nsanje

The village received SP1, SP2 and TIP. Economic inequality was extreme in this site. Chisi is in the Lower Shire Valley, about half-way along a bad road between Nsanje and Bangula. The village lies on the Shire River where it forms the border with Mozambique. It is a huge village (335 households) spread out over a large area. There are, however, no fields near the houses. These are either upland or near the river. When the river recedes the latter are suitable for dry season cultivation. Farming is important for many people in Chisi, but its rewards are few. Many people are dependent upon working for others, and this takes place the whole year round. Transport and trade are the avenues to wealth, and wealth shows itself in ownership of cattle: the most successful people have large herds of cattle. The village and its neighbours contain a full range of government services, including schools, hospitals, police and courts. Although the road is bad and although it is a long distance to other parts of Malawi, the area is well integrated in the national economy.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In the evaluation of TIP 2000-01, Module 2 Part 2 is distinguished by the methods used. Whereas the complementary part of this module (Module 2 Part 1) uses survey research, we have used qualitative methods. A common understanding of qualitative methods as compared to quantitative methods stresses a concentration on the **language** in which people talk about social practices instead of attempting to capture reality in **figures**. That may be overstating the distinction: survey research can deal with attitudes and lifeworlds while qualitative research can use figures on income, prices etc. A more important difference between the two methods may be between searching for findings that can be generalised over broad populations – **survey research** – as compared to building up an image of society on the basis of diversity – **case study research**. Whereas survey research requires careful identification of variables to be operationalised in questionnaires, qualitative research aims to generate the relevant variables in the course of interviewing and observation.

We approached our subject in the open manner characteristic of qualitative methods. However, this openness does not imply an absence of design in the research. Some essential comparisons, such as those between people who received TIP and those who did not and between the poor and the non-poor followed from the nature of the questions asked. A checklist of possible variables was constructed by the principal researcher to support interviewing by the field researchers (see Appendix 2). In general, the checklist allowed much latitude to the researchers. However, the part on feelings, points of view and attitudes had to be strictly administered in the form given to test key policy assumptions.

The initial phase in our field research, in the second half of March, consisted of pilot studies by the four field researchers (all graduates). They selected villages with which they were familiar for ease of entry. The idea was to see whether our checklist functioned well and to have an idea of the length of time required for the interviews.

The results of the initial phase were discussed in a workshop in Lilongwe. We had expected to hire secondary school leavers as research facilitators in addition to our graduate researchers. However, it appeared that this type of research required a high level of insight and two more researchers, both university students, were recruited. We also found that we could not apply comparisons between TIP and non-TIP recipients as strictly as we had hoped, partly because of late delivery and partly because in some villages there no TIP packs were received while in others the packs were informally redivided among the whole village. Moreover, since TIP had failed to target the poor (Lawson *et al*, 2001), it was difficult to see significant distinctions in poverty levels between TIP and non-TIP recipients. Nevertheless, a separate checklist for relatively successful people proved remarkably useful for examining changes in poverty status and the constraints in expanding farm enterprises.

In the main phase of the field research (April-May), three teams of two researchers visited one site each in the Northern, Central and Southern Regions, spending around two weeks in each site. On arrival, the researchers first carried out some introductory PRA exercises (see Appendix 3) and then selected people to be interviewed. Where possible, they selected an equal number of TIP recipients and non-recipients. They attempted to include some poor non-recipients. The researchers were required to aim

a minimum of ten case studies of farm enterprises/farming households and more if time allowed. This aim was not always reached: the interviews to construct the cases could be very lengthy and in other cases the researchers ran out of steam – for example if the village was small or if economic life was very simple then interviews became repetitive. They were also asked interview two relatively successful people.

We tried to build an image of empirical realities by continuous confrontation of our preconceived ideas – which became richer during the research – with the data we obtained. Such **thinking with data** (Wuyts, 1993; Mukherjee and Wuyts, 1998) is common to all research, but is central in qualitative research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research allows much more freedom to the researcher than quantitative research, but it does not mean that findings are merely arbitrary. Firstly, in the field two researchers had to corroborate their findings. Secondly, these findings were presented to the principal researcher visiting the research site. Thirdly, these findings were written up in a draft report by the field researchers. Fourthly, these draft reports were reworked by the principal researcher and checked with the field researchers.

Chapter 3: The policy environment of TIP 2000-01

3.1 Economic reform and liberalisation

The distribution of free inputs is controversial among policy makers in Malawi, as it goes against the major drift in agricultural policy making in the past decade. The change in the political system provides the backdrop for this. The three decades of rule by the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) saw considerable economic growth and expansion in the agricultural sector. This success has, however, been qualified in an influential article by Kydd and Christensen (1982)[2]. According to them, the growth in the Malawian economy was inequitable. The major push came from tobacco grown on large-scale farms (estates), but this growth was, in their view, achieved at the expense of peasant agriculture, with the smallholder section being drained of finance, labour and land. Large economic conglomerates, especially the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) and the Press group of companies, were used as vehicles to push this growth through.

The first major policy document of the United Democratic Front (UDF), which came to power in 1994, saw monopolistic practices and market regulation as the cause of stagnation in the smallholder sector. They pleaded for dismantling of the economic conglomerates and deregulation of economic life: in their view the free market is a liberating force for Malawi's smallholders (Rotberg *et al*, 1994)[3]. The attempts to erode the economic power base of the past regime, in combination with donor pressure, have led to a considerable liberalisation of agricultural marketing in Malawi. Whereas the cultivation of burley tobacco used to be a preserve of estate agriculture, it was now opened up to everybody. Marketing channels were liberalised. The expectation was that this would lead to massive increases in smallholder income. ADMARC's activities shrank, and it retained only a reserve function in maize marketing: buying when prices seemed likely to drop below a certain level and selling when prices rose above a certain level. These price bands were abandoned in 2000 when the supply of maize was so great that prices fell and a massive intervention by ADMARC would have been needed to maintain the lowest band. The subsidies on inputs and credit disappeared as well.

The overall evaluation of these changes is still considered pro-poor by the Malawi government: the outline for a poverty reduction strategy in this decade mentions "Gradual removal of several restrictions on smallholder agriculture" and "allowing for the participation of private traders' as pro-poor policies" (NEC, 2000a). Access to the production of burley tobacco "was the first explicitly pro-poor operation in Malawi".

[2] There is an elaborate literature about governing the market versus full-scale liberalisation of the market in pre-1994 Malawi. See Harrigan (1991) for the most complete overview of the negotiations with the international financial institutions. Illuminating insights on the implementation of liberalisation can be found in Kydd and Hewitt (1986), Christiansen and Stackhouse (1989) and Lele (1990). Livingstone (1988) agrees broadly with Kydd and Christiansen, but depicts a more complicated situation: 'One positive feature of pricing policy has been the cross-subsidisation from tobacco to maize, since tobacco is grown by the richer farmers' (p.18). For a vigorous defence of that economic order, see: Kadyampakeni (1988). It is regrettable that these debates have been ignored after 1994 in discussions on liberalisation in Malawi.

[3] This report was prepared by the Harvard Institute for International Development: 'In response to a request from the Government of Malawi'.

There are also influential actors outside the Malawian government who believe that access to the market is the main vehicle for the expansion of smallholder farming. The USAID-sponsored Smallholder Agribusiness Development Project (SADP) organises farmers in clubs under the umbrella of the National Smallholders Farming Association of Malawi (NASFAM). They think that marketing is the major constraint facing smallholder farms and that this can be overcome by organising farmers as an effective interest group. They claim that this is effective and that there is a growing group of prosperous smallholder farms in Malawi. They are concerned with commercially sustainable input provision for smallholders, and free inputs are considered to distort incentives. They consider that distribution of free inputs may make sense to help smallholder farmers to recover from a disaster, but in other situations it gives a perverse incentive.

3.2 Incentives and constraints

From a market-oriented perspective, intervention in prices encourages inefficient practices. In such a view, it is logical to expose the smallholder sector as much as possible to international competition, while allowing some intervention in the market in the event of market failure. For example, ADMARC could intervene in the maize market by selling if the local maize price rises above export parity and by buying if the local maize price drops below import parity (O+M Associates, 1999).

Such reasoning assumes a maize market in which price signals determine production. However, this is probably an over-simplification for all but a small group of more prosperous smallholder farmers. We know little about the actual working of agricultural markets in Malawi and the maize market is an especially neglected subject. But according to Peters and Herrera (1989), quoted in Smale (1995), "Chimanga ndi moyo (maize is life)", and the ideal of producing enough maize to meet household food needs "informs everyone's actions and rationales for their actions before, during and after the maize harvest." Our study provides evidence that for most poor farmers the decision about how much maize to produce is not governed by price but by efforts to maximise production. Output – assuming favourable weather conditions – is primarily by constrained by poverty (a lack of resources).

It is probable that the Starter Pack campaigns did contribute to distorting the market by driving down maize prices, since they allowed resource-poor smallholder farmers to overcome a major production constraint: lack of resources to buy inputs. However, for most farmers the price at which they sold maize in 2000 (if they sold maize at all[4]) had little to do with production decisions for the 2000-01 season (see Chapter 6).

3.3 Poverty alleviation and targeting

Poverty alleviation provided another major impulse in Malawian policy making in the past decade, and non-market interventions were often looked at more positively from this point of view. Free inputs, in this perspective, are often seen as a major mechanism to raise the food security of poor households. Even a non-targeted supply

[4] See figures on percentages of farmers selling maize in the report for TIP Evaluation Module 2 Part 1 (Nyirongo *et al*, 2001).

of inputs will reach many of the poor, as poverty is massive: according to the 1998 Integrated Household Survey, 65% of the population is under the poverty line. Poverty is also more severe in rural than in urban areas. Moreover:

> "More than half the cash value of all food consumed by rural households comes from their own fields. Subsistence production remains critical for rural households". (NEC, 2000b: no.6; NEC, 2000c: Table 38)

The provision of free inputs under the Starter Pack scheme and TIP was intended to raise the productivity of food production and thus to have a direct impact on household food security and poverty alleviation.

The major argument against this perspective is that the distribution of free inputs is unsustainable. This stands in contrast to increasing benefits through incorporation in the market or interventions that aim more directly at raising the sustainability of Malawian agriculture. In the earlier programmes to distribute free inputs, SP1 and SP2, there was a wide spectrum of goals that included sustainability. Tsoka (1999) mentions the following expectations from Starter Pack:

- Increase the number of resource-poor farmers adopting improved techniques.
- Increase cereal yields and output from resource poor farmers through the use of improved seeds of various crops and applications of fertiliser.
- Improve soil fertility on account of 230,000 hectares to be under legumes.
- Reduce household food insecurity due to increased cereal production.
- Increase private sector participation in inputs market by limiting the role of government agencies like SSFRFM.
- Increase demand and utilisation of improved seeds and fertiliser.

The recognition that free input provision implies continued dependence on outside assistance has led to disillusionment. This is voiced, for example, by Carr (2001: 21):

> "A useful contribution has been made by the donors, but for how long will they maintain policies involving large-scale free handouts and heavily subsidised credit. Remove these two props and what is then the situation? It is very grave. The majority of the population are not using any low cost method of maintaining soil fertility and cannot afford to buy fertiliser at current prices to replace lost nutrients".

In 2000, the rationale for free distribution of inputs shifted from aiming at a transformation of smallholder agriculture to poverty alleviation, as is obvious from the major difference between the Starter Pack campaigns and TIP. SP1 and SP2 aimed to cover rural Malawi comprehensively, while TIP was specifically targeted at the poor. However, this led to widespread resentment by those who were excluded, as documented by Lawson *et al* (2001). In this study, we also found that community targeting under TIP had been very divisive. There were accusations of favouritism ("I got TIP because I help the chief so much", Mkalo village) or even blatant nepotism ("the chief's family are the ones who got the packs", Kamange village). Communities sometimes redivided the packs, as in Marko Mwenechilanga, to avoid such problems.

The policy discourse about smallholder farming is part of wider shift in the parameters for judging smallholder farming. Bryceson (2000) sees a shift in the ways peasantries are viewed in the past decades. Whereas peasants were seen as a major historical force in the 1960s, they are now considered marginal in the world economic order. They are treated again derogatorily as inefficient producers. A recent World Bank (2000) publication declared openly that African peasant agriculture is not competitive internationally. Agricultural policy making in Malawi is deeply enmeshed in debates about the merits of peasant production.

Conclusions:

- The debate on the distribution of free inputs takes place in the context of a policy discourse that is attempting to reform the economic structure of Malawi as it has developed in the first thirty years since independence.
- There is a widespread belief among policymakers and donors that liberalisation and freeing market forces are essentially pro-poor policies.
- However, free inputs programmes imply a recognition that market forces alone cannot increase poor farmers' maize production, as input constraints are binding.
- At the centre of policy debates about Malawian agriculture is the question of whether smallholder agriculture should be exposed to international competition or whether it should be sheltered in order not to be marginalised.
- A key issue is whether farmers' production decisions are responsive to price signals in the maize markets.
- SP1, SP2 and TIP aimed to increase food security and alleviate poverty, but free inputs programmes imply continued dependence on external assistance.
- The focus on poverty alleviation led to efforts to target the poor in 2000-01, but the targeted approach to free input provision has proved socially divisive.

Chapter 4: The impact of free inputs on agricultural output

4.1 Starter Pack and maize production

According to surveys carried out for the 1999-2000 Starter Pack Evaluation and the 2000-01 TIP Evaluation, SP1 and SP2 contributed around 3 ½ extra 50-kg bags of maize to smallholder farmers' output (National Statistical Office, 2000; Sibale *et al*, 2001). This should be seen in the context of climatic variations – with SP1 being a good year and SP2 being a moderately good year – but even with favourable weather conditions, agricultural production would have been much lower without the contribution from Starter Pack. TIP, on the other hand, is expected to have made a negligible contribution to maize production owing to late delivery and to heavy rains washing away fertiliser in some areas (Sibale *et al*, 2001).

A qualitative study needs to be modest when drawing conclusions on agricultural production. The results are not representative of whole populations as in survey research. Reported results may be distorted by boasting or a bad memory. Despite these reservations, our findings may add to the results these other methods obtain. Although we found that free inputs were not relevant to farming practices in some areas (Msilamoyo in Nkhata Bay and Thopina in Mulanje), and in other areas (Tombolombo in Mzimba) they were marginal to the size of farm enterprises, as a rule farmers claimed to have produced more maize with SP1 and SP2. TIP was perceived to have had less impact because of late delivery. Also, fertiliser was often washed away by heavy rain and produce rotted in the fields. People also reported more illness than in other years, and the incessant rains may have contributed to this.

We will limit our discussion to maize, although it is only one element of the packs distributed in SP1, SP2 and TIP. Like Starter Packs, TIP packs contained improved maize seed, fertiliser and legume seeds. The legume seeds were, in conjunction with the fertiliser, meant to address the problem of soil fertility, while at the same time promoting crop diversification. In our experience, however, the legume seeds were not mentioned when farmers talked about free inputs and agricultural output. The subject would crop up only negatively: many farmers did not know what to do with soybeans. Only in some areas – for example Mzimba and Dedza – were soybeans known. Particular legumes, groundnuts, beans, guar beans and soybeans appeared also to be preferred in certain ecologies. The contents of the pack did not take this into account, and therefore the uptake of the legume component was relatively weak[5].

We found that improved maize varieties were appreciated among the poor, as they mature early and thus shorten the hungry season before the new crop comes in. In two sites (Marco Mwenechilanga in Karonga and Chisi in Nsanje), these seeds facilitated a transition to maize from other staples (millet, sorghum, cassava).

In most sites, improved maize seeds were considered far less important than fertiliser. The use of fertiliser was directly associated with high maize yields and food security. Chisi was a notable exception, as people do not consider soil fertility a major problem in the Lower Shire Valley.

[5] See report of Module 4 of the 1999-2000 Starter Pack Evaluation (Cromwell *et al*, 2000); and report of Module 1 of the 2000-01 TIP Evaluation (Sibale *et al*, 2001).

4.2 TIP and production decline

Our study found evidence of a downward trend in maize production since 1998-99, and especially a rapid decline in 2000-01. This pattern was common to most of our sites. The question is whether the distribution of free inputs played any role, especially as the sharp decline in 2000-01 coincides with the introduction of TIP.

The pattern can be illustrated with some figures from Kachuli village in Dedza. Maize production is important there, and farm enterprises are varied in size. Below are the yields of two big and two small maize producers in Kachuli.

Table I
Maize production (50kg bags)* on four farms in Kachuli village (Dedza)

	Farm 1		Farm 2		Farm 3		Farm 4	
	Bags	Index†	Bags	Index†	Bags	Index†	Bags	Index†
1997-98	70	(100)	70	(100)	5	(100)	12	(100)
1998-99	81	(116)	74	(106)	7	(140)	11	(92)
1999-00	67	(96)	74	(106)	4	(80)	9	(75)
2000-01⊗	18	(26)	14	(20)	1	(20)	4	(30)

* Calculated from oxcarts. † Base year 1997-98. ⊗ Expected harvest.

Note: Farmer 1 got only SP2 and no TIP; Farmer 2 got SP1, SP2, and two TIP packs from elderly ladies he looked after; Farmer 3 got SP1, SP2 and TIP; Farmer 4 got SP2 and TIP.

The manner of distributing free inputs definitely affected their impact. We were told that in SP1 quite a number of households got more than one pack, as spouses and children had registered separately. There seemed to have been fewer cases of this in SP2[6]. However, in the latter case, late delivery was regularly mentioned as a problem. Inputs were sometimes kept for the next season or used in dry season gardens (*dimba*). Seeds were also eaten and fertiliser was sometimes sold as it arrived too late. Inefficient and late delivery was an even more common complaint about TIP (Lawson *et al*, 2001: 33). This inefficiency exacerbated the effects of adverse weather conditions and the reduced size of the programme, which aimed to reach only 1.5 million households in 2000-01 compared with 2.9 million in 1999-2000. The TIP packs also contained less fertiliser than the SP1 and SP2 Starter Packs.

The nature of TIP made it more difficult to detect clear links between free inputs and agricultural output. Targeting was considered a painful operation everywhere (Lawson *et al*, 2001: 51) and we found that communities often made unforeseen adaptations. In areas where poorer and wealthier enterprises were interlocked, we found that packs were passed on to bigger farmers whose farm enterprise was integrated with a smaller enterprise. A farmer in Kachuli said that he used TIP but did not get TIP. Two old ladies, eating from his grain store, were entitled to it but passed on the inputs to him. We found another type of informal redistribution in Msilamoyo village in Nkhata Bay. The village headmen had a neat list of TIP recipients, but in practice we found that each household visited had received inputs from TIP. In Marko

[6] See also report of Module 5 of the 1999-2000 Starter Pack Evaluation (Wingfield Digby, 2000).

Mwenechilanga, Karonga, and Mskaba, Mzimba, we found that the contents of all packs were collected and redistributed plate by plate among all villagers. And two villages that we visited (Tombolombo and Kankodola) received no TIP packs at all.

There were many complaints about the distribution of TIP, and 2000-01 was a bad season, but the common explanation for the decline in maize output was different. It was most often explained by the increased prices of inputs due to the major devaluations of the Malawi kwacha in 2000. In some cases (Kachuli in Dedza and Tombolombo in Mzimba), there was substantial use of inputs on rather large farms. Free inputs are marginal in such areas compared with the amount of inputs used. The complaint that the prices of inputs, notably fertiliser, had become prohibitive was not confined to these villages, however, but was aired virtually everywhere.

Conclusions:

- Free distribution of inputs in SP1 and SP2 had a positive impact on maize production, although there was much variation between farms.
- TIP had much less impact on production than SP1 and SP2.
- Farmers were generally not interested in the legume component of the packs.
- In Karonga and Nsanje we found that free maize seeds had facilitated a transition to maize from other staples (millet, sorghum, cassava).
- Fertiliser was the most highly valued component of the pack, except in the Nsanje.
- 2000-01 was difficult for agriculture, as it was too wet.
- In 2000-01, some communities made adaptations to avoid targeting, making it hard to distinguish between TIP recipients and non-recipients.
- Farmers said that the biggest reason for the decline in output of maize in 2000-01 was the rise in prices of inputs, especially fertiliser.

Chapter 5: Free inputs and Malawian cultural values

5.1 Do free inputs promote dependency?

A qualitative approach lends itself to probing the mental maps of people: their feelings, thoughts and interpretations of the world.[7] These dimensions demand space in this evaluation, if only because the words 'Starter Pack' arouse often quite emotional responses. There is a tendency on the part of donors and some Malawian policy makers to belittle the programme, while the opposite is the case among the beneficiaries.

To the sceptical eye, Starter Pack/TIP is a free gift that is not properly costed in the farm enterprise. It is argued that free gifts lead to dependency by creating a passive attitude of waiting for the necessities to be provided rather than a proactive attitude towards obtaining inputs. And such programmes are not sustainable as they are supported by donor funds and do not promote commercially sustainable practices. Such attitudes portray recipients of free inputs as short-term opportunists. However, the question is whether the feel-good factor associated with SP is as simple as that.

5.2 Growing one's own food

There are certain beliefs associated with the distribution of free inputs. From the Malawian farmers' point of view, a high value is placed on growing one's own food. Donors and policymakers believe that growing more food is an effective means of alleviating poverty and that this approach has advantages over other methods, such as distributing relief food or food-for-work programmes.

We asked respondents their opinion about fifteen statements based on these assumptions (see Appendix 2). Five of these statements related to pride in growing one's own food; five related to the relationships between poverty and food; and five related to the Starter Pack/Targeted Inputs Programme. The statements were meant to have contrary meanings in order to avoid leading to particular answers. For example, the first two were: "Not growing one's own food is a reason for shame" and "*Ganyu* or business is a better way to get food than working on one's own land". We asked respondents to indicate their degree of agreement with these statements and to comment on them. We elicited a lively response at all sites, and it appeared that the statements dealt with real issues in the communities studied. The responses showed a remarkably consistent and widely held set of sentiments.[8]

Pride in growing one's own food was the most widely shared value, and it was usually seen as a reason for shame if a household did not grow its own food:

[7] This has to be distinguished from controlled research into attitudes. We present here no statistically validated set of statements that represent an interpretation of the world resulting in a readiness for particular social action.

[8] In this chapter we only produce majority opinions. These majorities were usually overwhelming, although there were of course dissenting views which gave important insights. The answers were so stereotypical that, after researching in seven sites (pilot sites and those in the northern region), we decided to discuss the statements in focus groups. Minority opinions were then followed up individually to minimise bias through group pressure.

- “It is shameful when you do not have your own food because whenever you go around looking for maize to buy, people perceive you as a beggar who is totally desperate and stranded for food. This is unlike when you have your own food whenever you have need of it”. (Dedza)
- “If a household does not have its own food, it wears a very poor image which people would not want to be associated with. For example, the children from that household have at times to go around eating in other people’s homes, hence tarnishing the image of the household”. (Dowa)
- “It is shameful when visitors come around and you do not have ready food for them. If there is no food, or not enough variety of food in the house, the children go begging. Parents become ashamed of their lack of responsibility when people go around begging”. (Nsanje)

A household that does not grow its own food is often associated with laziness and even theft in a throng of sentiments:

- “Without your own food production, you buy every food item, hence people start to point fingers at you. Some say that you are lazy, others say that you are rich”. (Dowa)
- “You can be forced to steal from other people’s gardens. You loose self respect as you are all the time admiring others who have food and comparing yourself negatively. There is no free maize for children to roast, hence they begin to beg and this is a very shameful thing”. (Karonga)
- “Not growing one’s own food results in loss of trust in rural areas because the reliable source of livelihood is farming”. (Karonga)
- “People suspect you to be a thief because they do not know how you make a living”. (Zomba).
- “Unless one is mad or lazy there is no reason for not growing one’s own food. Such characters should not be tolerated in the village because they can easily turn into beggars and thieves”. (Mzimba)

Having no food is also associated with the need to do g*anyu* and is seen in a similar, negative light: begging and going for *ganyu* are closely associated.

- “Sometimes people go around begging or living on *ganyu*. This makes one feel ashamed as it is not regarded a normal way of living”. (Mzimba)
- “Without growing your own food you are looked down on, because you always beg or do *ganyu* in order to survive”. (Dowa)

Food and hunger have great emotive meaning in rural Malawi. Food is equated with life.

- “The household which does not grow its own food is considered to be ‘dead’”. (Nkhotakota)

- "A house that does not have food is like a house which has lost one of its members" or, more loosely translated, "A house without food is a house in mourning". [9] (Nkhata Bay)

This response is surprising, as so many households in Malawi do not manage to grow their own food. Yet most of them supported these sentiments. A more compassionate view was expressed at the site where land shortage was the most severe:

- "While it is true that a person who does not grow his own food brings shame, you cannot find such a person in our village. Everyone tries to cultivate his own food, but the problem is that land is leached and tired. As a result we get very little food". (Mulanje)

5.3 Food and poverty

Lack of food was seen as the hallmark of poverty, which showed most clearly in responses to our statement that: "People who do not grow their own food are not necessarily poor".

- "This is not true because, in a village set up, most of the people that are poor are also those who do not grow their own food". (Dedza)
- "Poverty in villages is mostly associated with people who do not grow their own food or those that do not grow enough of the food crops". (Mzimba)
- "In the village one who is considered rich is the one who has food". (Dedza)
- "Food is the major expenditure in a poor households. In poor households you find as well many children and therefore they spend a lot on food. There is no problem putting on rags if your belly is full". (Mulanje)
- "Kulemera *ndi kudya*", meaning: "Richness lies in eating". (Mulanje)

Food was considered the most basic need and therefore fundamental to alleviate poverty:

- "Those who do not grow their own food are very poor, because they will have to buy everything including food". (Nkhata Bay)
- "Someone who has food is in control of the money because those who have nice clothes do not then have to exchange their clothes into food. In fact, 'for someone to put on trousers' means his belly is full. Without food, the trousers will fall down". (Nkhotakota)

5.4 Cash benefits

Food, particularly food grown on one's own farm, is clearly crucial to well-being. It is therefore not surprising that the distribution of free inputs was considered a particularly effective way of alleviating poverty. The responses to our statement: "Poor people are only really helped by money instead of free maize or more food on the farm" showed this particularly well. Some responses were derogatory to the poor,

[9] "*Pakhomo apo palije vakula pakuwa ngate pafwa munthu*" in the original (Tonga).

e.g. suggestions they would spend money only on Fanta and beer; but most reactions showed considerable empathy with their plight:

- "Poor people are not really helped by money because they have unlimited needs which need money". (Karonga).
- "Poor people are not really helped by money because they can easily spend the money on unintended purposes though justifiable". (Dowa).
- "'Money makes a person restless'. It can make someone go to South Africa, Blantyre and other places because at first it looks too much. By the time one will think of buying inputs, the money is gone". (Nkhotakota)
- "When money is provided, one may be tempted to mismanage it". (Nsanje)
- "Money is so sweet (*inakometsa*) that one will end up buying almost each and everything. Hence the whole amount can finish within one day". (Mulanje)

An interesting sub-theme in these replies was the dependency created by gifts of money as distinct from free inputs:

- "How long will this be provided and how much?" (Mzimba)
- "Money will not be a sustainable way – how much and how many times will the money be supplied to us?" (Dedza)

5.5 Laziness

Free inputs were primarily perceived as activating the poor – encouraging them to grow more food – and not as leading to unsustainable dependency. Virtually nobody agreed with the statement that "Free inputs make people lazy". Vociferous condemnation was the usual response:

- "It is only lazy people who think that Starter Pack makes people lazy. When people get the inputs, they make sure that they have put them into use. In fact, we add to the little that we have. We do not just wait for free inputs". (Zomba)
- "Actually, laziness comes when somebody does not have anything at all to apply to the crop". (Mzimba)
- "Free inputs make people work harder as their morale is boosted". (Dedza)
- "If people become used to free food or money, after the donation they will perish because in the process they will develop laziness. They have to work themselves to get their own food. Hence fertiliser and seeds are the best handout". (Dowa)

The idea that free inputs create dependency assumes a natural tendency towards laziness among the poor. That was strongly denied in the responses. People generally felt that if the poor are inactive then it is because they do not have the resources to be active with. Indeed, staying alive is a struggle; you are likely to die if you are lazy. We found little evidence of inactivity during our field work. As our case studies show, the majority of interviewees were hard-working people who struggle to survive, often in highly adverse conditions (see Village Studies).

5.6 Soil fertility

Thus, a coherent set of perceptions and values emerged from our interviews and discussions. These were closely linked to our statements eliciting opinions of the present in the light of the past: "Life was better in the past because it was easier to get enough food from the land" and "When I was a child, food was no problem as people were more interested in farming". These statements seemed not directly related to the distribution of free inputs, but in fact they were. People perceived the loss of fertility as the major problem facing agriculture in Malawi, and the fertiliser in the packs was therefore especially highly valued:

- "Very true, because the soils were inherently rich in fertility and fertiliser was cheaper". (Dedza)
- "In the past, people used to produce enough food because the soils are not as good as in the past. These days, it is hard to produce big cassava. It is in this case that TIP came as a relief". (Zomba)
- Life was better in the past "because the land was fertile. These days people are also interested in farming, but you need fertiliser to have enough food". (Mzimba)
- "In the past, people lived better lives because they produced sufficient food. However, this time there is a lot of pressure on land due to overpopulation. Consequently, it has been eroded of its valuable fertility. People are still committed to farming, but they are let down by shortage of land and loss of soil fertility". (Mulanje)
- "Very true, land is limited and soil exhausted now, which means a low yield and a hard life". (Dowa)
- "People in the past liked farming and the soil was fertile. Hence they were more keen on farming than now". (Dowa).
- "It was easier to get food from the land in the past than now, because the soils were fertile. Now people are also interested in farming, only that their major drawback is lack of fertiliser and hybrid seed since the soil is exhausted". (Karonga)

These quotations show the repetitive nature of the responses. In individual conversations, soil fertility was not mentioned as a major problem in only two research sites: Msilamoyo in Nkhata Bay and Chisi in Nsanje. Soil fertility is not yet as big a problem there as elsewhere, but in focus group discussions people saw the problem looming.[10]

<u>Conclusions</u>:

- Programmes like Starter Pack and TIP appeal to strongly held values. High value is placed on growing one's own food. Increases in food security as a result of free inputs have therefore a great morale-boosting and dignifying value for the poor.

[10] See also the experience in Thyolo where a pest control management project found that soil fertility and not pest management as assumed was the fundamental constraint in agriculture. (Orr *et al*, 2000)

- Farmers see food shortages as the hallmark of poverty. They see distribution of free inputs as a particularly effective way of alleviating poverty, as it targets this one particular, essential need, while money would dissipate immediately.
- Free inputs motivate people to work and create a feeling of self-sufficiency that is opposite to an attitude of dependency.
- With the exception of Nkhata Bay and Nsanje, the decline in soil fertility appears to be the major constraint on farming, and therefore the fertiliser component in the packs addresses the most basic problem faced by farmers.

Chapter 6: Maize production and market linkages

6.1 Maize and other crops

Maize appeared to be prominent in most Malawian livelihoods, and its significance is on the increase. This seems to contradict a recorded growth in other staple crops, sweet potatoes, rice and especially cassava, but our findings support both statements. Sweet potatoes are, almost everywhere, increasing in importance, but primarily as a source of cash. The growth in the crop is probably driven by a demand for it in urban and semi-urban areas as snack food. In the villages, sweet potatoes are not considered a proper staple: if one has to skip a meal, then one can eat them to keep hunger at bay, but this is not considered a meal as such. Similarly, the output of rice is on the increase, but from our findings it is grown primarily for sale.

Cassava is a another crop on the increase, and it was an important crop at five of our research sites. However, it was only in Msilamoyo village in Nkhata Bay district that we found that cassava was preferred as a staple. It was a crop of long standing there, while in other places it had only recently become important. In Marko Mwenechilanga in Karonga, Kamange in Nkhotakota, Mkalo in Machinga and Thopina in Mulanje, cassava was either seen as a necessary crop to stave off hunger or simply disliked. Eating cassava was a negative choice: maize was the preferred food. In Marko Mwenechilanga, people were actually shifting from millet/cassava to maize, while in Chisi in Nsanje they were shifting from millet/sorghum to maize. Cassava may be of increasing importance in Malawi[11], but growing maize is almost everywhere an essential element of a desirable livelihood: it is part of the good life. In rural Malawi, it is normal to equate maize with food, and one slips easily into that habit when writing on the subject.

6.2 Non-commercial attitudes to maize

Maize is not felt to be a commodity like others. It is seldom grown with the purpose of raising cash. We found only one example of maize grown for cash – in Kachuli village in Dedza (see below). In other places, maize was sold only if the crop was very good or if cash was urgently needed. The way in which people dissociate maize from money is often difficult to grasp. For example, in Marko Mwenechilanga we were told: "you may have money from business or *ganyu*, but the problem is that you may have nowhere to buy food, people in the village are reluctant to sell their food, especially maize". People often preferred to be paid in maize for *ganyu,* even when the cash equivalent of the payment in maize was less than the cash payment.

We asked for reactions to some statements probing a commercial attitude to maize growing in our research into feelings, points of view and attitudes. Our provocative statements included:

- "*ganyu* or business is a better way to get food than working on one's own land"; and

[11] Nevertheless, cassava is still much less important than maize (see Nyirongo *et al*, 2001).

- "food is not the most important crop as one can get money from other crops to buy food".

The responses to these opinions were overwhelmingly negative, and food was seen in a different economic sphere than getting cash through *ganyu*, business or cash crops. The rationales for rejecting these statements displayed a common distrust of the world outside the farming enterprise:

Firstly, the outside world of earning cash is considered to be ***closed***:

- "Such an idea is for one who is business-oriented, not subsistence as the majority of farmers are". (Nsanje)
- "You cannot do business if you do not have food. There is no way one can ignore farming unless if he is working. But as a villager there is no option. One cannot depend upon *ganyu* because it is seasonal, that is, it is found during the growing season. Business is not viable in the area because of lack of capital. There are no lending institutions in our village". (Zomba)

Secondly, the world of cash is seen as ***risky***:

- 'Business would not be reliable. In the first place capital for business is very hard to raise. Sometimes there is no *ganyu* on the market, especially after lean months. *Ganyu* is hard labour and one has to feel strong all the time'. (Tombolombo, Mzimba).
- 'Neither *ganyu* nor business can be relied upon as they have risks, hence there is need to rely on working on land to get one's own food. *Ganyu* is not always available and business requires discipline in expenditure, not diverting so much to consumption.' (Dedza)

Cash is seen as necessary for other basic needs items, but (ideally) not for food:

- "Those who have food are considered better off. Those who do not grow their own food are very poor, because they have to buy everything, including food. If a family has enough food, it has more energy to engage in other income-generating activities". (Nkhata Bay)
- "Own food production is the most important, because then you can save enough money for other needs". (Dowa)

6.3 Relations with the cash economy

This idea that you can be independent of the outside world by growing your own food is as strongly held as the belief that you need to buy inputs, notably fertiliser, to grow food. One needs first to make money – by engaging in the cash economy of the outside world – in order to buy fertiliser so that one can feel more independent of the outside world. This is not felt as a contradiction.

In order to buy inputs, food and other basic needs goods, farmers supply labour, engage in crafts or in trade, or sell cash crops. In Tombolombo, Mzimba, farmers grew tobacco, despite the fact that they did not like the crop, in order to raise money for inputs to grow maize. In Katsukunya, Dowa, the poor sold their tobacco at low

prices before harvesting and worked on a neighbouring estate to get money to buy maize in the hungry period. In Thopina, Mulanje, people resorted to a diversity of strategies to raise the money needed to buy maize: working on tea estates, trading in bananas coming from Mozambique, and growing pineapples. The role of crafts – for example basket making in Marko Mwenechilanga or tinsmithing in Tombolombo and Mkalo (Zomba) – was also important. The variety of occupations to raise cash ranged from specialised crafts such as traditional healing to trades that are open to those with very few resources such as collecting grass for thatching. Thus the money needed to buy inputs with which to grow maize or to make up the shortfall in maize production is mostly generated *not by selling maize but through linkages with other markets*.

6.4 Incentives for maize production

It was rare to hear a farmer reason about maize farming in terms of price signals or profit margins. Therefore, farmers did not feel that they experienced a 'scissors crisis' due to low prices of maize and high prices of inputs in 2000, because that calculation was not made. As pointed out in Chapter 4, the price of fertiliser was seen as the main threat to farming in Malawi, but only one farmer we met calculated how many more bags of maize had to be grown in order to recoup the costs of inputs. He reckoned he had to sell ten bags (50 kg each) of maize to pay for one bag of fertiliser, and a bag of maize seed cost him four bags (50 kg each). This exception was in Kachuli, the only site we visited where people grew maize with the explicit purpose of raising cash.

This result confirms the view that farmers will grow as much maize as they can manage using as many inputs as they can afford.[12] The amount of maize harvested in a particular year depends on the particular circumstances in individual households – availability of cash and labour opportunities – and on the weather. The following example shows how irregular the pattern of crop yields can be in one village:

Table II
Comparison: bags (50kg) of maize harvested and bags of fertiliser used on four farms in Tombolombo village (Mzimba)

	Farm 1			Farm 2			Farm 3			Farm 4		
	Maize	**Index†**	**Fert**	**Maize**	**Index†**	**Fert**	**Maize**	**Index†**	**Fert**	**Maize**	**Index†**	**Fert**
1998-99	188	(100)	*20*	32	(100)	*3*	11	(100)	*3*	11	(100)	*3*
1999-00	88	(47)	*16*	11	(34)	*4*	14	(127)	*3.5*	3.5	(32)	*3*
2000-01⊗	56	(30)	*12*	28	(87)	*3*	7	(64)	*3*	7	(64)	*1*

† Bags of maize: base year 1998-99. ⊗ Expected harvest.

The 2000-01 season was better than the 1999-2000 season in two of the four cases presented here, despite the fact that the village got SP2 but no TIP. The farmers used less fertiliser in 2000-01 than before. All four farmers, including the two who had relatively high output in 2000-01, produced less than in 1998-99. The farmers who expected a comparatively better harvest than in 1999-2000 said that the pattern of rainfall had been better for the crop in 2000-01 than in the year before. They did not explain the larger harvest in 2000-01 by price incentives. The fact that the maize price was low after the 1999-2000 season played no role in their decision to plant. Nor did

[12] This model of agricultural decision making was formulated in rural Zambia in the 1930s. (Allan, 1965: 38-48).

it play any role in their decision about how much fertiliser to use. The amount of fertiliser they could afford was more likely to have been affected by the price of tobacco or other cash crops which these farmers sell to fund the purchase of inputs.

It seems likely that these farms in Mzimba make big losses on maize production. In order to ascertain this, it would be necessary to make a comparison between actual yield and the yield necessary to recoup costs of fertiliser. For heuristic purposes, we will use the ratio of ten bags of maize for one bag of fertiliser mentioned above by the farmer in Kachuli (see Table III).

Table III
Actual maize yields and maize yields required to recoup expenditure on fertiliser (2000-01 prices) on four farms in Tombolombo, Mzimba

	Farm 1		Farm 2		Farm 3		Farm 4	
	Actual	Req'd	Actual	Req'd	Actual	Req'd	Actual	Req'd
1988-99	188	200	32	30	11	30	11	30
1999-00	88	160	11	40	14	35	3.5	30
2000-01	56	120	28	30	7	30	7	10

6.5 ADMARC and private traders

It is not surprising that we found nostalgia in Tombolombo and other places for the time when ADMARC, agricultural extension and input provision on credit were tightly locked in one structure. At that time, farmers could afford many more inputs. They yearned for the days when ADMARC announced pre-planting prices and they would have a market nearby to sell their produce and buy inputs at the same time.

The decline of ADMARC was widely regretted. A statement such as: "It is actually hard to find any area that private traders do not reach during the dry season" (O+M Associates, 1999) is over-optimistic in our experience. Even if it were true, marketing has become much more problematic for farmers because, if a trader comes, farmers are often forced to take very low prices: they cannot move their goods themselves and they are not sure whether another trader will come. The decline of ADMARC has led to the disappearance of some cash crops – for example groundnuts – as there is no guaranteed buyer. Availability of a marketing channel in a particular area can now dictate which crops will be grown. In Mzimba, for example, a lot of oriental tobacco is grown, as Limbe Leaf Tobacco Company provides a guaranteed market.

However, it is the sale rather than the purchase of maize by ADMARC that makes it important for rural livelihoods, since *most poor farmers have a deficit of maize* (i.e. they do not produce enough on their own farms to feed their families) and so they have to buy or work for maize during the hungry months.

Maize at ADMARC has probably been cheaper than on the free market. According to NEC (2000d), "Right from 1990 when the current CPI series started the price of maize observed from producer markets has been higher than that from ADMARC". Access to cheap maize has been curtailed since liberalisation. Adaptation to new supply channels has been, and continues to be, difficult. The year 1998 (before the Starter Pack scheme began) was remembered in Mulanje as particularly hard as ADMARC had no maize and none was coming from Mozambique. Now, there is a

regular supply of maize from Mozambique. We also found a lively, informal cross-border trade in Nsanje, and that is probably the case throughout Southern Malawi.

Trading in maize is probably much more profitable than growing maize. Big profits can be made, probably because there are few entrants into trade, as capital is desperately short in rural Malawi. At every site, we set out to interview two people who had done well and were relatively prosperous. In those cases, agriculture was often the source of starting capital, provided by an exceptionally good yield at good prices of a crop like rice, beans or sweet potatoes. Once they had their starting capital however, these entrepreneurs moved quickly into trade, transport or grinding mills.

The profitability of trade as compared to farming was nowhere as obvious as in Chisi, Nsanje district. Farming and trading are quite separate spheres there, with younger and wealthier people being in trade. One successful young trader ventured into agriculture and quit when he found that he was making only losses:

Table IV
A young trader's financial rewards from farming in Chisi

Season	Maize (50kg bags)	Sweet potatoes (oxcarts)	Cost of inputs (including labour)	Revenue
1997-98	9	1	MK2,325	MK 900
1998-99	0	0.5	MK1,800	MK1,550
1999-00	12	0.5	MK2,100	MK 750

He may simply have been a bad farmer, but his experience fits with our general impression that agriculture is often not profitable, i.e. a loss is made if inputs and outputs are converted into their cash values. However, the price differentials between maize just after the harvest and in the lean months after December can be significant, and the example of Chisi is again illustrative:

Table V
Price of maize from 1996-97 to 2000-01

	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
After harvest price (MK/pail)	24	30	40	40
Lean months price (MK/pail)	50	60	80	110

Such price differentials offer rewarding opportunities for those who have the capital to stock up in June and wait half a year before selling. Another young trader from Katsukunya village (Dowa) is an example of success in exploiting these price differentials (see case study of Stafiel Kathawa, Village Studies: Katsukunya).

Conclusions:

- Maize remains by far the most important and also the preferred staple. Cassava is more and more used as staple food, but is usually eaten out of necessity.
- There is a large potential market for maize if consumer preferences could be realised, since large numbers of poor farmers cannot grow enough maize on their own farms to feed their families.

- Maize tends not to be cultivated to raise cash, but for home consumption. People prefer to grow their own maize to avoid the risks and vagaries of the market.
- Soil fertility has declined almost everywhere, and cash is needed to buy fertiliser and basic needs goods. Therefore farmers have strong links with markets for cash crops and with labour markets, and many also engage in crafts and trade. But linkages with the maize market are generally weak.
- Patterns of maize production in Malawi can better be explained by the theory of the normal surplus than as reactions to price incentives. It is questionable whether growing maize with fertiliser is profitable – even given no costing for labour and land – under present patterns of management.
- The decline of ADMARC has hit rural livelihoods hard, partly because of its role as a source of inputs and buyer of produce, but above all because of its role a seller of maize, since large numbers of Malawian smallholders are food deficient.
- Trading in maize is probably much more profitable than growing maize, but shortage of capital allows only a limited number of people to enter this trade.

Chapter 7: Ganyu

7.1 The meaning of *ganyu*

Ganyu is a word associated with a large number of labour practices, but its distinctive meaning is usually piecework rather than working fixed hours for a particular period (wage labour). If people go for *ganyu*, then they offer as a rule to complete a designated piece of work – e.g. planting or weeding a plot of land – for an agreed payment. In Chapter 5, we stressed the great cultural value attached to maize, and it is appropriate to stress here the cultural significance attached to the word *ganyu*[13]: while maize has a positive value, *ganyu* has a negative connotation. We have already mentioned that *ganyu* is associated with begging and theft as a response to running short of food, and this is reinforced by the perception that *ganyu* is a poverty trap.

We asked people to respond to the statement "*Ganyu* or business is a better way to get food than working on one's own land". We have already mentioned the general negative reaction to this statement: working on one's own land is felt necessary, especially as business is too risky and hazardous to depend upon. The reactions to this statement, however, separated business and *ganyu*. Business was not seen as shameful, while it was not unusual to hear: "We do not go for *ganyu* because it is shameful, since everybody knows that you either have no food or no money". *Ganyu* was seen as an indication that someone is trapped in extreme poverty. As a focus group in Mzimba said: "Depending on *ganyu* shows lack of direction". Feelings of despondency and gloom were implied in the remarks on *ganyu*:

- "*Ganyu* is a tough work associated with little payment and much suffering. Not many people would voluntarily choose to do *ganyu.* One cannot depend upon *ganyu* for the rest of his or her life to get food, let alone for the family. *Ganyu* labour is not always available as it has specific seasons, notably lean months. Hence, what will happen in the off-season?" (Dedza)
- "If one is dependent upon *ganyu*, the problem comes when you fall sick. Even Europeans at the estates do not employ sick people, hence you cannot have *ganyu* as a major means to make a living". (Mulanje)
- "*Ganyu* involves hard work in return for a small package of food; hence it is not easy to go always for *ganyu*. One cannot get, through *ganyu*, food that will be utilised a long time". (Mzimba)
- "*Ganyu* is hard work which one may rely on for survival as a way of obtaining food. It should only be used in case of food insecurity during lean months". (Dedza)
- "Food from *ganyu* is very unreliable, as the payment is very small. They pay you only a small plate and yet you have a family to feed. For *ganyu* you

[13] Whiteside (2000) also notes the variety of practices covered by the term *ganyu*. His definition: 'a range of short-term rural labour relationships, the most common of which is piecework weeding or ridging on the fields of other smallholders or on agricultural estates'. Our findings corroborate to a large degree what Whiteside found, but we place more stress on the cultural meaning of *ganyu*. The more it has characteristics seen to undermine rural livelihoods – that is the crucial element in the quotations from respondents – the more it comes to the heart of the meaning of *ganyu*.

cultivate a very big acre and they pay you food that lasts only for a short period, unlike if you cultivate the same area yourself, then you can harvest a lot". (Karonga)

The word *ganyu* can be used in a narrow or in a broad sense. It is used in a large variety of contexts referring to temporary work. The word has been applied to unloading bricks, drawing water for building sites, crewing a fishing boat and sharecropping a piece of land, but it has also a much more narrow meaning, which has as its components:

> *An agreement to do a spatially delimited piece of farm work for an agreed compensation. The essential thing is that there is no payment unless the work is completed and the employees may to a large extent organise their own time.*

As it is work done on farms, *ganyu* is usually done at the height of the agricultural season – just before and during the rains – between November and April. These are the months when food stocks run low or are exhausted. However, it is also the time when one should work on one's own fields to get a good harvest in the coming year – hence its nature as a poverty trap.

7.2 *Ganyu* and other forms of labour

From the employer's point of view, *ganyu* is usually required to overcome a labour constraint. But employing *ganyu* is not the only way to cope with labour shortages. In Karonga and Nkhata Bay workgroups mutually supporting their members were common. *Ganyu* labour was thus less important there[14].

Ganyu in a narrow sense is different from work such as carrying bricks, sand or water for building, which can be done in the dry season when there is little work on the land. There has, however, to be money in the community before this kind of investment in building can be made, and therefore we found examples of this type of work mostly in peri-urban areas. Such work is not seen as constituting a poverty trap; on the contrary, it offers additional income when there is not much work in agriculture. Being part of a fishing crew – as in Kamange village – is similar to sharecropping. Sharing the risks and rewards of an enterprise between worker and the owner of capital is essential in both sharecropping and fishing. The working conditions can be exploitative, but are not necessarily so. This type of work is not necessarily undertaken at the expense of the employees' own economic concerns.

The same applies to wage labour on estates or other forms of wage labour, from which it is sometimes possible to make a relatively decent living. For instance, we found a household in Kamange which usually runs out of food from their own garden between September and December. However, they do not have to go for *ganyu*, but buy from ADMARC. The reason is that the male head of the household is employed

[14] Whiteside (2000) includes working on estates in his definition. That makes sense if it involves seasonal piecework and it is not wage labour or share cropping. More problematic is his inclusion of work parties – those where everyone takes turns working on each other's farms as well as those where people are working for cooked food or beer – as in *chipere ganyu*. We have not heard these practices referred to as *ganyu* and found that wherever such co-operative arrangements were strong, there was less *ganyu* labour (Marko Mwenechilanga, Karonga; Msilamoyo, Nkhata Bay).

as a watchman at Chipiku stores. That pays him MK2,440 a month. This income is added to income from farming, which he does with his wife and children, especially growing rice for sale. He also has fruit trees, which give an income as well. His wife also does small business – selling sweet (non-alcoholic) beer and groundnuts. They have four goats and sometimes he sells one (getting around MK750). They have two children in secondary school and they own a bicycle and two radios.

Kamange is unusual in that it is a peri-urban area. There are more job opportunities than elsewhere and they are well paid. By contrast, an operator of a grinding mill in Chisi is paid MK500 per month. But even this allows him to buy two 50-kg bags of maize per month (24 bags per year) – a level of food security which is difficult to reach through own-farm production[15].

7.3 Seasonality

The most important difference between *ganyu* and wage labour is its seasonality. For the half of the year following the harvest there is, in much of Malawi, no *ganyu* to be had even if you want it very badly. Nevertheless, there are households which run out of food as early as July or August. They have to bridge the period before the main agricultural season begins and *ganyu* is once more available with selling produce from dimba gardens or doing crafts like basket making and mat making.

Only in Nsanje did we find people for whom *ganyu* constituted their main source of livelihood. In Chisi village was it possible to do *ganyu* in the dry season as well as the rainy season because the farming system was composed of two parts: uphill dryland farming in the rainy season and wetland farming near the river in the dry season. In Katsukunya, Dowa, people also went for *ganyu* throughout the year, but in this instance they worked on an estate where a variety of agricultural activities took place over the whole year. These were usually short spells of contract labour, but working on estates comes closer to wage labour than to *ganyu*. People talked about it as a dependable source of income throughout the year.

7.4 Payment for *ganyu*

Rates of pay for *ganyu* vary enormously from place to place, but they are generally lower – often much lower – than for wage labour. For example, we found that *ganyu* labourers were paid 2kg of flour (a plate) a day in Mzimba. This implies that a person would need to work for 25 days (a month) to earn one 50-kg bag of maize. In Kankodola we found that someone was paid MK350 for clearing one acre of land. Land clearing is heavy work and this work would be likely to take someone a month.

It would be enlightening if we could compare the rates paid for *ganyu* in different places, but the measurement of tasks as well as the measurements of rewards is so heterogeneous that this is virtually impossible. Some examples are:

- “She weeded a cassava garden. For the two days work she got MK100”. (Nkhotakota)

[15] The 1999-2000 Starter Pack Evaluation found that farmers produced 14-15 bags of maize on average in 1998-99 (Levy *et al*, Chapter 4).

- "They (a woman and three children) did banking in tobacco and they were paid two pails of maize for 63 ridges". (Dowa)
- "The standard payments of weeding and banking 6 planting stations/35 ridges were: in 1998-99 MK21 or 1kg maize; in 1999-00 MK28 or 2kg of maize; and in 2000-01 MK35 or 5kg of maize". (Dedza).
- "Last year he employed three *ganyu* workers in the month of January to weed his maize garden and he paid them the sum of MK600. They weeded an acre of land. This year, he also employed three *ganyu* workers in the same garden for the same work, but this time they demanded to be given maize, hence each received two pails of maize". (Mzimba)
- "He employs an average of two *ganyu* labourers who are involved in activities like land preparation, weeding and harvesting. He pays cash, about MK500 an acre". (Nsanje)
- "If payment is in cash, then one individual will be paid MK20 a day, while if food is given one person is paid 2kg or one plate of flour a day. The working period is from 6.00 a.m. to noon". (Mzimba)

The diversity of practices in paying for *ganyu* labour is obvious from this list. In the last example, from Mzimba, payment is based on time worked and not on completing an agreed task, as is normally the case. *Ganyu* was not as common in this site, and the employees could bargain to be paid for their time and not for output.

The nature of payment for *ganyu* can be different depending on the degree to which it is used to cope with food deficits. If men do *ganyu*, this does not tend to be the motivating factor. The motive of women is said to be primarily food security, as they are feeding the household. The more food security is at stake, the more employees will ask to be paid in kind (i.e. in maize).

It can be clearly seen that *ganyu* is paid at very low rates. If, for instance, a farmer wished to save enough to buy a bag of fertiliser, which cost between MK1,000 and MK1,500 in 2000-01, it would be necessary to:

- Work 20-30 days in Nkhotakota.
- Cultivate 170-260 planting stations in Dedza.
- Weed around two acres in Mzimba.
- Cultivate two to three acres for somebody else in Nsanje.
- Work 50-75 six-hour days in Mzimba.

Working for fertiliser is seldom an issue for people who go for *ganyu*, as they do it to get food or pay for other basic consumption goods of which they are urgently in need. However, these examples illustrate the low rates of pay for *ganyu* in comparison with the high cost of the inputs that farmers need to cultivate their own farms.

7.5 Supply and demand

A key question for our study was whether Starter Pack and TIP have affected the supply of *ganyu* labour. It would be logical to expect that poor people would go less

for *ganyu* because of free inputs allowing them to produce more of their own food, and that shortages of *ganyu* labour might therefore develop. This assumes, however, that there is no excess supply of *ganyu*, which is doubtful. In the most food insecure households, food normally runs out in July or August. At this time there is no *ganyu* to be had. The household makes a precarious living collecting grass, gathering firewood or making baskets until there is the possibility to do *ganyu* at the beginning of the rainy season. Free inputs may have given them an extra two months of food and meant that they had to make less effort to feed themselves during the dry season, but the food will have run out by the time the rainy season begins. Moreover, there are other pressing cash needs, such as clothes, soap and salt. When the rainy season starts, they go for *ganyu* again to get food and other essential items. In this case, the supply of *ganyu* would remain the same, although the household has more food as a result of receiving free inputs. From this example, it can be seen that more food as a result of free inputs would only be likely to reduce the supply of *ganyu* labour if a household normally ran out of food between November and the harvest. In that case they could eat their own food produced with free inputs for a two more months and work on their own farm instead of going for *ganyu*. This might break the vicious circle of going for *ganyu* to get food and getting less food from the farm because of going for *ganyu*. However, we did not find any cases where this was said to have happened. Our conclusion is that while free inputs help reduce food insecurity, so many basic needs (including food) remain unsatisfied that it is still necessary for people to go for *ganyu*.

On the other hand, demand for *ganyu* labour may be declining, in particular in areas like Mzimba, where the big maize farms are contracting. We interviewed a farmer in Tombolombo who employed less labour in the 2000-01 season than the previous year because he did not have enough maize with which to pay for *ganyu*; he employed only five people. Big farmers continue to require *ganyu* labour in Mzimba for tobacco processing, but in the Central Region we found major problems in the tobacco sector. In Kankodola in Dedza tobacco had been quite an important crop, but as a result of the collapse of the burley club (see Village Studies: Kankodola) less labour is now required. One farmer employed 76 people in 1998-99 and only five or six in the following two years. Regularly, interviewees said that they wished to employ *ganyu*, but could not afford it. In some cases, people had ceased to employ *ganyu* because of personal circumstances. For example, in Kamange and Mkalo we found cases where remittances had fallen away as absent children died and the household had to go for *ganyu* instead of employing *ganyu* labour (see Village Studies: Kamange, Mkalo).

Case study: supply and demand for ganyu

A farmer who has done well in Kankodola, where most people are sinking deeper into poverty, told us: “despite the introduction of Starter Pack, there has been no reduction in the number of people seeking *ganyu*. I recruited more labour in the 1999-2000 season (15) than in the first Starter Pack season (8). There is more labour on the market than before and the majority are women seeking food, especially in the lean months. This year I recruited less labour (10); I am limited by the cash I have in the number I employ”.

Conclusions:

- The term *ganyu* is used in a great variety of contexts in Malawi. It has a particularly negative connotation – a poverty trap, a shameful activity – when associated with the narrowest sense in which the word is used, i.e. the need to do agricultural labour during the lean months. Driven by hunger, people will then work on other people's farms instead of on their own.
- *Ganyu* is associated with hard work for little money. Although it is difficult to generalise about payment as the units of measurement differ too much, it is clear that rates of pay are much too low to enable a rise out of poverty.
- Much *ganyu* in the lean months is done by women who are paid in kind.

- The degree to which people in a household go for *ganyu* is probably a good indicator of its level of poverty and food insecurity.
- Supply of *ganyu* is generally greater than demand for *ganyu*. We found no evidence that the supply of *ganyu* is affected by the distribution of free inputs.
- There was evidence of a decline in *demand* for *ganyu* in some areas, but this had nothing to do with Starter Pack or TIP.

Chapter 8: Impoverishment, poverty alleviation and targeting

8.1 Impoverishment

The manifestations of poverty in agriculture are interrelated and beyond doubt: population growth leads to increasing fragmentation of land; the opportunities for off-farm employment are limited; capital to invest in agriculture is scarce. In recent years, impoverishment has accelerated in rural Malawi. We found that:

First *Soils have been exhausted to such an extent that farming without purchased inputs (i.e., fertiliser and improved seed) is unproductive in many areas*. However, the rise in the cost of inputs because of devaluation is turning the terms of trade strongly against the small-scale farming sector. It is squeezed to minimal production.

Second *There are few traces of effective integration into produce markets*. The exception is direct marketing of oriental tobacco to Limbe Leaf Tobacco Company in the north of the country. Elsewhere, we found marketing channels becoming less and less reliable in recent years, whether for groundnuts in Mzimba or for pineapples in Mulanje.

These two processes have led to a sharp decrease in household wealth, which has a twofold effect:

First Farmers cannot manage to repay credit, and farmers' clubs have therefore collapsed. There are still some functioning farmers' clubs, but all the farmers' clubs that we encountered had defaulted.

Second Assets have decreased. Cattle especially have been sold, as have radios and bicycles. Theft is a also complicating factor in this depletion of assets.

It is not surprising that farmers who have diversified have usually weathered bad times better than farmers who went into one crop intensively. Neither is it surprising that successful rural people are generally to be found in trade. Trade is always profitable at a time of high inflation but, more fundamentally, the terms of trade have moved against agriculture in Malawi.

The interpretation of agricultural change has important consequences for the policy options pursued and the place of free distribution of inputs therein:

***One option stems from a belief in the efficiency of the markets, and sees the present situation as temporary*.** This school of thought argues that any switch from regulation to free market forces is accompanied by a difficult transitional phase. Trading networks do not emerge overnight, but trade and production will adapt when the prices are right. Farmers must get used to an environment of risk – for example, they must spread their risk instead of relying on a single, regulated marketing channel. The primary need in this phase is farmer organisation, so that they can be influential players in the market. The economic decline found in many farming communities will then be only a temporary phenomenon. In this period of transition, it makes sense to distribute free inputs to alleviate poverty.

The other option doubts that market efficiency is sufficient to reverse the economic decline in agriculture and argues that change must be stimulated by intervention. This school of thought argues that the terms of trade have moved too strongly against the farmer and that interest rates are too high. Malawian farmers at present have to pay around 50% interest on loans. This is crippling and can lead to destruction of productive capacity through asset depletion. Therefore, a case can be made for subsidised credit. Deficits in maize production have great social costs: households lose their feeling of independence from the market and move into a situation of mass dependency. The theoretical construct of Malawi being fed by imported food is not attractive. A case can therefore be made for subsidised fertiliser. It is worthwhile to recall the debate on fertiliser subsidy in the 1980s.[16] Higher productivity, in this scenario, is seen as something to be stimulated by outside intervention, rather than expecting it to emerge naturally as a result of market forces. Free inputs can support strategic interventions such as the increased use of improved maize.

8.2 Poverty alleviation

There are many reasons to expect a link between distributing free inputs and poverty alleviation. For poor people, food is the most basic of basic needs, and farmers in Malawi put a high value on the ability to feed themselves (see Chapter 5). Normally, when it comes to planting maize, poor people use local varieties; and, while about 60% of all land planted with maize is under local varieties, according to APRU (2000: 5), this produces only about 40% of the maize crop:

> "The results have shown that most of the smallholder land is planted to local maize. This results in low maize production since local varieties are low yielding. This implies that as long as farmers continue to grow local varieties, most households will not be able to produce enough for their families".

Increasing maize yields using better seed and fertiliser was an objective of SP1, SP2 and TIP. One could expect that food security for poor people should increase as a result of free input provision, both by allowing them to use their limited resources of land and labour more productively to increase food self-sufficiency and by increasing food supply nationally, thereby helping to depress maize prices so that those still with a food deficit could afford to buy more food. It is clear that both of these effects occurred in SP1 and in SP2 (see Appendix 1; Levy *et al,* 2000).

Poverty is more widespread and more severe in rural areas of Malawi than in urban areas, and most poor smallholder farmers are not food self-sufficient. In fact, rural households spend a larger proportion of their income on food than urban

[16] Whereas the MCP government was usually in agreement with the international financial institutions during the 1980s, the fertiliser subsidy was hotly disputed. As Lele *et al* (1989) write: 'The issue of subsidies is vexing in Malawi, because the fertiliser price/maize price ratios faced by Malawian smallholders have tended to be three to four times those in Kenya and about ten times those in Nigeria'; 'USAID and the World Bank, which had adopted a staunch anti subsidy stance during the first three Structural Adjustment Loans, have recently become receptive to maintaining the present subsidy until improvement in maize technology and increased access to credit make the existing subsidy unnecessary' (p.26). See also Lele (1990: 1213-1215).

households.[17] Consequently: "Since the main effect on poverty is through food prices, the main policy option is to increase agricultural production, particularly maize" (NEC, 2000d). As food supply has the greatest influence on the expenditure pattern of the poor, an increase in food supply (and reduction in prices) through distribution of free inputs should have an impact where it counts most: poor rural households.

The effectiveness of free inputs as a means of poverty alleviation has been most cogently argued by Devereux (1999). The severity of poverty in rural Malawi is explained by two factors. Firstly, in rural Malawi there is little opportunity for off-farm employment:

> "Although in agrarian economies, availability of off-farm employment is typically characterised as a livelihood-enhancing or income diversification strategy, there are grounds for labelling *ganyu* (off-farm labour) more pejoratively, as an erosive coping strategy" (p.26), especially as it competes with one's own (or family's) farm and the returns are low.

Secondly, it is less possible in rural Malawi than, for example, in neighbouring countries to rely on remittances from elsewhere:

> "The relative scarcity of well paid jobs in urban areas means that a much smaller pool of rural households benefits from having an employed son or daughter living in town and remitting income or commodities to their home villages on a regular basis" (p.42).

8.3 Targeting in TIP 2000-01

Free inputs would be even more cost-effective if they could be targeted at the poor only. This was the logic behind the launch of the TIP in 2000-01 (see Chapter 3). The question is whether such targeting is possible and, if so, who should be targeted?

There was widespread resistance against targeting, and it was disliked at all research sites we visited. We found in several cases that the community redistributed the targeted inputs, either by heaping all the inputs in the middle of the village and giving everybody a share, or through informal distribution (see Chapter 4). It was not uncommon to hear the statement: "Although I did not get TIP, I got TIP".

The official directive for targeting was: "widows/widowers with no source of income, the aged without any support, and families keeping orphans without support" (Lawson *et al*, 2001: 16). Where targeting was attempted, the categories 'aged', 'widows/ widowers' and 'orphans' were frequently used. This identification of such vulnerable groups was generally not considered sensible by those we interviewed: they felt that free inputs can benefit most those who are strong and can farm effectively and not the weak in society. For example:

- Harrison Jonathan (see Village Studies: Thopina) questioned the merits behind targeting: "As much as the targeted groups need special attention, do you

[17] In Malawi, 89.7% of the poor live in rural areas, while a minority of 10.3% live in urban areas. The rural headcount is 66.5% poor in rural and 54.9% in urban areas. The poverty gap is also larger in rural than in urban Malawi. The urban poor spend 54.4% of their expenditure on food, while in rural areas the figure is 63.2%. This has to be seen in conjunction with the fact that about half of the value of food consumed in Malawi originates from within the household (NEC/PMS, 2000a; 2000b).

expect the old and the lame to cultivate?… In addition, targeting the orphans has resulted in the misuse of the inputs. Some orphans are not mentally mature as such when they are given the inputs, they sell them. In this case, the guardian of the orphans has little say on the inputs and does not benefit from it. However, the responsibilities still rest upon him/her to feed the orphans".

- Philippina Chigwe, a young woman in Katsukunya (poor, non-recipient of TIP), did not welcome the change from Starter Pack to TIP because she thought that people who were targeted were not efficient in farming despite being poor. She argued that: "TIP should be given to people who are poor and at the same time energetic to have fruitful results. If anything, the current/present beneficiaries of TIP should be given free food".
- Mr. Kambale, a middle-aged man in Kamange (poor, non-recipient of TIP), questioned the merit of targeting old people, saying: "Do you expect old people to cultivate the inputs?" He argued that an old person can ask for help from a young person but the other way round is unheard of. As such it would be better to give inputs to the young and energetic who could support the old.

If the aged, widows and orphans were the targets, then it was down to chance whether the poor were reached or not[18]. Old people who are widowed and keep orphans are not necessarily poor. In one village in Dowa, the most prosperous farmer was an old lady: she got TIP. We found that the farms of older people are often in decline, but that is not necessarily a sign of impoverishment. The rise and decline of peasant farms is often commensurate with the growth and decline of a family. Peasant farms are at their peak when there are many children capable of working on the farm. This occurs after the initial years of establishing an independent household and before children hive off in independent households. The situation is complicated by the links that can exist between poor and rich households. An old person may be poor in assets and grow only a few months' food, but the seemingly independent household may be eating with (and essentially living with) a wealthier household. A young married couple, with young children and few assets because they are starting out in life may be more deserving.[19]

8.4 Social isolation, social safety nets and targeting

Community targeting or administrative targeting requires criteria in order not to be arbitrary. Using poverty criteria which see households in isolation often leads to perverse results, since social cohesion may mean that social safety nets exist for some poor households or individuals, while others are more isolated and therefore more vulnerable. If households or individuals are not seen in isolation, then targeting becomes more difficult. Huge discussions may open up about who should care for whom and whether those who do not care should be rewarded with a benefit. Once the feeling of equity in targeting disappears, it is a botched exercise.

[18] The Findings of the Monitoring Component for TIP 2000-01 show that poverty targeting failed under TIP (Lawson *et al*, 2001).

[19] Poverty surveys show that: 'the early adult years are when individuals are most likely to be able to adequately meet the basic needs of themselves and their households. However, when adults begin raising children, many households seem to slide into poverty' (NEC, 2000c). That thus seems to be a vital moment for intervention.

Female-headed households are a prime example. They are often seen as targets for poverty intervention, especially as they are poor in assets. In this evaluation, however, we encountered much heterogeneity. In Msilamoyo village, Nkhata Bay, we found a loose marriage structure and many women lived alone. They were, however, well integrated in the lineage among whom they lived and they ate from the same grain store. In Chisi, Nsanje district, we encountered very poor female-headed households, and social safety nets were undeveloped. However, poverty was widespread and a distinction in the great mass of poor between female-headed and non-female-headed households was not obvious. In peri-urban Kamange, Nkhotakota district, and in Thopina in Mulanje district, we found a pattern of single women with many children, often from different fathers, and no responsible male in the household. Even here, the situation was complicated: older women were, for example, frequently supported by sons working elsewhere. We do not deny that there are many female-headed households, or that there are many poor ones. However, the same complications in targeting apply here as with other vulnerable groups: being a female-headed household does not necessarily imply greater poverty[20].

The fewer social safety nets there are in communities, the clearer it is who are the extremely poor. There were considerable differences between research sites in the degree of inequality, and the less we found inequality, the more we found informal safety nets. In Tombolombo, Mzimba, and in Msilamoyo, Nkhata Bay, poorer farm enterprises were well integrated with richer ones. Food from the fields of a single mother or old widow may run out, but then there are other grain stores to resort to. Where social cohesion is weak, the poorer or more vulnerable people are dependent on a single or a few contacts. In such a situation, these are often immediate kin, and they are living in urban areas or even elsewhere in Southern Africa. The clearest example is peri-urban Kamange village, Nkhotakota. Poverty becomes acute if such a contact falls away and a person becomes completely isolated and without support. There must, of course, be resources for social safety nets to function. In the poorest communities, for example, Thopina in Mulanje, or Konkodola in Dedza, there simply were no resources available to provide social safety nets.

Conclusions:

- Impoverishment is accelerating in rural Malawi. Exhausted soils, expensive inputs and poor integration into produce markets are contributory factors.
- There are two different interpretations of the process of agricultural change. The distribution of free inputs has a role in both approaches.
- Free inputs are key to poverty alleviation in rural Malawi because food is the most basic of basic needs, and rural households have big food deficits. Free inputs help to increase food self-sufficiency and also increase supply of maize, depressing prices so that those still with a food deficit can afford to buy more food.
- Targeting in TIP 2000-01 was unsuccessful and unpopular.
- Where social cohesion is strong, poverty may be mitigated. The greatest vulnerability is often a result of social isolation. However, this presents a problem for targeting: social safety nets are often difficult to identify, as they are informal.

[20] It is regrettable that the 1980s' debate between Peters (1983) and Kerven (1984) about the distortion of measurement in establishing the poverty of female-headed households is not often referred to.

Chapter 9: Conclusion – The evaluation outcome

Our terms of reference for this module of the TIP 2000-01 evaluation contained a number of specific questions (see Appendix 1). Having presented our findings, we can provide the following insights as answers:

What has been the net impact of Starter Pack and TIP on farm enterprises?

- The **production** impact of TIP was less than that of SP1 and SP2. In fact, we found that the production impact of **TIP** was **negligible**, primarily because inputs had arrived **too late** to be useful for the main farming season. It may be that these will be used for dry-season farming in wetlands, but this impact could not be established at the time of the research.
- Malawi experienced **excessive rains** in the 2000-01 agricultural season. By contrast, the weather in 1998-99 and 1999-2000 was considered generally favourable. In those years, many people reported positive effects of Starter Pack. The contrast with TIP shows that free inputs can lead to **improved household food security** unless weather conditions undermine the impact.
- **Smallholder farms** suffered from deteriorating **terms of trade** in 2000-01, but this was not because of the decline in maize prices, as maize is produced mainly for consumption. Rather it was because of rising **input prices** (fertiliser) and, in some cases, a decline in prices of **cash crops** (e.g. tobacco). Indeed, the study found that many poor, rural households **benefited from lower maize prices** after the 2000 harvest as they are net purchasers of maize.
- Qualitative research is more geared to diversity than to general patterns. It is not surprising, therefore, that we found great variations of impact in different regions and among different farm enterprises. Some of our findings are quite stark, however: at **three sites** visited, the package of inputs was wholly or partially **irrelevant** for farming practices. In other cases, the packs were **insufficient**. In **major maize growing areas**, the free inputs were **marginal** in their impact on production as compared to purchased inputs. The free inputs were effective in very poor households, but here **needs were so great** that the packs were not enough to make a **clear difference** in poverty status.
- In Karonga and Nsanje we found that free maize seeds had facilitated a **transition to maize** from other staples (millet, sorghum, cassava).

What impact has Starter Pack and TIP had on economic and social relationships within the community, particularly in relation to coping strategies?

- TIP expected that communities themselves should target the packs to the most needy families. We found only one respondent who had an appreciation that targeting was necessary because government's resources are limited. In general, **community targeting was rejected**, as it is socially too **divisive**.
- We found that social life in rural Malawi is less atomistic than it is often portrayed. The more a **social safety net** connected poor enterprises to richer ones and there were strong family and social relationships, the more free inputs were **informally redistributed**. However, if there are no resources to

be mobilised, then it is impossible for social safety nets to function. In the **poorest communities** we found the **most individualistic** attitudes.

- There is an immense variety of livelihood and coping strategies, with most people struggling to make ends meet from **diverse sources of income on and off the farm**. We found no evidence to support the theory that free inputs encourage farmers to become **dependent** on handouts and lead to **laziness**.
- Free inputs can shorten the hunger period. Poverty is in many cases so severe, however, that they do not increase the **supply of food from own-farm production enough** to make a notable difference in coping strategies.

How is ganyu perceived and how does it compare with other sources of livelihood, e.g. income from crop sales?

- *Ganyu* normally has a very **negative** connotation. The term is sometimes used synonymously with **begging**. *Ganyu* contracts are often considered **exploitative**: strong people get little reward for much work. Going for *ganyu* signifies a **loss of independence**, and it is seen as corroding rather than supporting farm-based livelihoods. It withdraws labour from the labourer's farm at a time when it is most needed. Crop sales, wage labour and business activities do not draw such negative comments. However, they are seen as being on a par with *ganyu* in terms of **exposure to the risks of the outside world**. Cash-based market relations are looked at with suspicion.

How have the Starter Pack campaigns and TIP affected the balance between time spent on own-food production and ganyu?

- If households normally have to do *ganyu* in the agricultural season to get **sufficient food**, then one might expect that, in the event of their producing more food with free inputs, they would do less *ganyu*. However, if *ganyu* **lessens hung**er, but leaves stomachs **unsatisfied**, then a decline in time spent on *ganyu* is unlikely. If food stocks – including food produced using free inputs – are **exhausted** well before the start of the agricultural season, then there will be no change in time allocation between own-food production and *ganyu*. Our research suggests that the balance between time spent on own-food production and *ganyu* is therefore only likely to change among those who are **nearly food secure** in the absence of free inputs (i.e. those who would run out of food in the rainy season), but not among the **very poor and food insecure** (i.e. those who would normally run out of food in July-August).

Have farmers needed to do less ganyu because of increased food self-sufficiency owing to Starter Pack and TIP? Or have falling real incomes meant an increased need to look for work in the 'hungry period'?

- Raising issues concerning more or less **supply and demand for *ganyu*** needed considerable prompting. Rural Malawians **do not perceive significant changes**. People did, however, voluntarily and vociferously raise the question of the **falling real incomes** in rural Malawi: **specifically, farm income**. So far, this seems to have resulted more in **asset depletion** than in going more for *ganyu*. However, if the food supply in the 2001-02 agricultural season turns out to be as poor as it threatens to be (partly due to the weak contribution of TIP), then many more rural households will be forced to look for *ganyu*.

Have falling farm-gate prices and increasing input prices had any impact on demand for ganyu?

- There is considerable **suppressed demand for *ganyu***: farmers cannot afford to hire labour but perceive that they could operate more profitably if they could. It is then reasonable to expect that there will be more demand if farm incomes rise and input prices fall, and vice versa in the present situation. We came across several farm enterprises who used to hire *ganyu*, but do not do so now. The common understanding is that it is **easy to hire *ganyu*** if you have the resources to do so, but more **difficult to find opportunities to do *ganyu***. These insights are impressionistic, because local variations made it difficult for us to obtain firm knowledge on supply, demand and payment of *ganyu*.

Has there been any change in the form of payment for ganyu - cash or kind - owing to SP and TIP, and have rates of pay been affected?

- *Ganyu* is a widely used word that refers to many practices. It has, however, a particular connotation to do with hunger and food. Women usually want to work for payment in kind during the hungry months. The degree to which **women do *ganyu* for food** at this time is a **good measure of poverty** in a household. It is clear that payment for *ganyu* in cash or in kind is **lower** than for other kinds of work, but, as **tasks assigned and payment rates vary so much,** it proved impossible to find a pattern in rates of pay for *ganyu,* let alone to detect the impact – if any – of Starter Pack and TIP.

Any evidence of changes in the poverty status of groups of farmers, in particular owing to the Starter Pack or TIP interventions, should be presented.

- The distribution of free inputs has a major impact on those farmers who just manage to be self-sufficient in food because of the free inputs. **Free inputs can prevent such farm enterprises getting caught in poverty traps**. In enterprises that are richer or poorer than these, Starter Pack/TIP is insufficient to have much impact on their overall poverty status, although it can help to reduce months of food insecurity. The **major influence** on the poverty status of farmers has been the **changing terms of trade** between inputs and farm produce (cash crops). Older farmers claim that the impoverishment of rural Malawi is due to **the erosion of the integrated system of extension, credit, input supply and produce marketing** as it emerged in the 1980s.

The Module 2 Part 2 study should explore the implications of its findings for future TIP interventions, including the implications for scaling down the provision of free agricultural inputs within the scope of the National Safety Net Strategy.

- The distribution of free agricultural inputs appeals more than other interventions, such as food for work, relief food, or payments in cash, to deeply held **Malawian values**. Growing one's own food is highly valued and gives dignity to the poor. Free inputs give people a greater sense of independence than other interventions. The more interventions avoid cash (which is seen as likely to lead to dependency), the more they are seen as effective poverty alleviation. **This is a good reason to distribute free inputs**.

- It is difficult to judge the impact of **inefficiencies** on free inputs programmes. **Late distribution** is a major problem. In several cases, the inputs which have been distributed are **not appropriate** to the agricultural practices in an area. The debate on whether or not to continue to distribute free inputs should separate these from other factors, but such problems **should be addressed** if TIP continues. The impact of distributing free inputs could be much greater than in recent years if such inefficiencies were eliminated.
- **Targeting** of certain households (and exclusion of others) for free inputs programmes generates resistance. The weakest members of society may not be the most appropriate beneficiaries for this sort of programme. Also, it is often **difficult to identify** the poorest. **Social safety nets** – the network of supportive social relationships – should be taken into account, as they may **protect the vulnerable** from severe poverty. However, they are often highly **informal**, so poverty criteria may not be able to capture them. Thus scaling down based on attempts to target the poorest will be **fraught with difficulty**.
- The differences in agricultural practices and social structure between various research sites are such that **packages should be tailored to local or regional requirements** in order to be effective. A national programme like Starter Pack or TIP should allow for diversity in terms of the contents of the packs.
- The major reason for rural impoverishment is the **deterioration in the terms of trade** between agricultural inputs and agricultural produce (cash crops) in recent years. Malawian agriculture is as a result presently crippled by a lack of cash and asset depletion. Free inputs can play a role in alleviating poverty, but a much more active strategy for economic development is also required.

PART II

Village Studies

Marko Mwenechilanga, Karonga – The blessings of free inputs

‘Maize is too valuable to sell’

William Kasapila, Noel Sengore and Jan Kees van Donge

Marko Mwenechilanga is a village about half way between Karonga and Chitipa, close to the Wiliro trading centre. The road is bad, and people count the number of cars that pass, which may be as few as three a day. Travelling along that road one passes relatively undisturbed brachystegia woodlands, which not so long ago covered the whole of Malawi. It is understandable that these woodlands are relatively intact here, as the environment is inhospitable: slopes are steep; soils are thin; and there is little water away from the North Rukuru, the main river. Every Tuesday, Wiliro trading centre hosts a small market. The few stores there are barely stocked however. At Wiliro there is a school, a clinic and an extension officer. The village of Marko Mwenechilanga is dispersed over a large area and consists of isolated groups of houses. All the houses have mud walls and thatched roofs.

One would expect that, in an area relatively isolated from the cash economy and population pressure, the distribution of free inputs would hardly touch the economy. The opposite is the case. The village received both SP1 and SP2. TIP, however, was not distributed as intended to targeted households. Rather, the packs of inputs were all opened and heaped together, after which they were distributed.

The impact of free inputs

Marko Mwenechilanga is a recent settlement, dating from the early 1980s. People came down from Chitipa district in search of virgin land to cultivate millet, using a slash and burn cultivation system. Millet is still widely grown, but its cultivation is under pressure. As government discourages slash and burn, and a forestry officer in Wiliro tries to enforce taxes on forest products, people have shifted to the cultivation of cassava. There is little protein to accompany the cassava however, and malnutrition is consequently a problem. The nurse at the clinic, for her part, is trying to stimulate better nutrition by encouraging the consumption of maize, which is nutritionally a better staple. Maize is therefore considered very valuable in Marko Mwenechilanga and, for this reason, is preferably not sold.

There is strong ideological opposition to selling maize. Correspondingly, there is a very strong belief in growing one’s own maize. It is said that, if people do not make enough effort to grow their own maize, then they must be thieves, as the only place where maize can be bought is Karonga (50 km away, over bad roads). At present, people will eat maize for as long as possible and then shift to cassava. There is thus not really a hungry period with no food at all, but the quality of the food differs significantly at different times of the year. In lean periods, people will undertake *ganyu* labour (‘go for *ganyu*’) in return for maize, or buy maize if they can afford it.

Maize may be highly valued, but fertiliser used to be strongly distrusted in the village. The importance of the Starter Pack programme was that it broke this taboo. The following case shows how free inputs had significant effects on a relatively large farm:

Katonga Mwambinga

Katonga is relatively young, 38 years of age. He is married and has six children varying in age from 4 to 19. The eldest four, aged between 11 and 19, help on the farm. According to many indicators, Katonga is wealthy. He has a radio and a bicycle. The family owns three head of cattle, a goat and five chickens. His farm is relatively large: four acres are under maize; in a two-acre plot he grows cassava; and on 1.5 acres he grows beans. He sells produce, including maize, in the Tuesday markets. He worked as a tax collector from 1986-89.

Katonga used the money earned in his job as a tax collector to grow maize in the late 1980s. In 1987-88 he harvested 7.5 bags of maize, of which he sold 2.5. He first started to use fertiliser in 1988/89. He bought two pails at Kapoka in Chitipa after being convinced by a friend in Karonga that fertiliser promotes high yields. He used the fertiliser secretly, as it was taboo in the village because of the belief that it spoils the soil. He harvested 30 bags (50 kg). He subsequently went through a bad time, as he was ill for a full year. Thereafter, he grew little maize and concentrated on beans and cassava. He sold beans at Wiliro market and accumulated enough money to buy two pails of fertiliser in 1996-97. He harvested 23 bags of maize (50 kg), eight of which he sold to people from Tanzania.

The following year was one of steep decline. He applied one pail of fertiliser to his maize, but the maize crop failed due to too little rain. He had ignored his cassava fields and they produced only three bags (50 kg) for the year. He ran out of food and had to go for *ganyu* himself, while previously he had been an employer of *ganyu*.

In 1998-99, SP1 gave him the chance to recover. He himself received a Starter Pack, and he bought four packs of fertiliser from other people's packs. People did not value them and, with MK85 earned through *ganyu* labour, he was able to buy very cheaply two pails of fertiliser that gave him a harvest of 28 bags (50 kg) of maize. Ten pails of that maize were paid to four people doing *ganyu* labour for him in the 1999-2000 season. He then harvested 20 bags of maize. The 2000-01 season looks bleak however. He employed only one person, to whom he paid MK500, to make ridges on 1.5 acres. As TIP was distributed throughout the whole village, he did not get inputs from that. He joined a farmers' club - Mkamaso maize club - and expected to get a loan from APIP. The club defaulted however, and nobody got a loan.

<u>Comment</u>:
Katonga Mwambinga is an exceptional farmer in Marco Mwenechilanga. He is more involved than others in the cash economy. His initiative in maize growing, using fertiliser, went against the dominant ideas in the village. His leadership role is obvious: he is chairman of the local church committee of the Roman Catholic Church as well as chairman of the Project Implementation Committee of a MASAF project.

The case shows, however, that maize farming is a struggle in the area. There are years of success and years of failure. Yet, his case shows clearly the impact of the Starter Pack programme in the area. Because of free inputs, he recovered from a position of dependence on undertaking ganyu labour to employing such labour, as he

had previously done. He was not definite, although pessimistic, about his yields in 2000-01, and lack of inputs plays a major role in that.

Conclusion: The distribution of free inputs in Marko Mwenechilanga had many of the desired effects that the policy seeks to achieve:

- It improved food security.
- It encouraged the use of fertiliser.
- It addressed problems of soil fertility.

Livelihood strategies and relations with markets

The economy in Marko Mwenechilanga is based on farming. The recent settlement of the area gives a distinct dynamic not found in villages where land is short. That dynamism is also rooted in cattle ownership and attracting labour for marriage.

The lack of cash in the area is obvious. Barter is important, and people will sell, for example, beans in exchange for salt. This salt can then be used for further barter. *Ganyu* labour is common in the area, but the biggest employers of this labour are the teachers and other minor officials at Wiliro. Their low incomes are a sound foundation for farming there. Farmers' clubs have been formed in order to obtain loans, but all of them have defaulted. Although there is little cash in the area, some cash is raised when needed. People will sell millet, beans, cassava and maize in such a situation. Crafts like basket making, weaving of mats and making wooden spoons brings in income to the poorest. Beer is important in the village and is mostly brewed for local consumption. On market days, however, there is also beer for sale. Men may have some periods of wage employment, for example with the electricity company, ESCOM, but all they have to offer is unskilled labour. Employment as a watchman, for instance, is considered desirable. Such periods were typically mentioned as good periods. Two examples are:

> "From 1998-2000, I have been experiencing good times because I secured wage labour at ESCOM, received free inputs and had reduced lean periods".
>
> "The good times I remember vividly is when I was working with ESCOM, since I was then able to buy good clothes, but I was also eating good food, I could manage a cup of tea everyday. And it goes without saying for me that the bad times are now that I am not working and I have a wife to support and a child. The clothes that I am wearing are now wearing out, and I am actually thinking of migrating to Lilongwe to try my luck there".

These quotations are from young people who are relatively well educated and represent forces of change in the area. Such changes are also evident in movement to Wiliro trading centre, because of the schooling available there.

Yet, concerns about cash income do not dominate the livelihoods of people in Marko Mwenechilanga. Labour is the major concern. It is very hard work to farm the rough and uneven terrain where ox ploughs and oxcarts cannot operate. One way to access labour is by marrying several wives. Polygamy is common, albeit that one does not find households of more than two wives. Cattle herds are small, as cattle tend to be used to pay bride price (*lobola*) as soon as possible. It is not only the older men who

use cattle to marry more wives: there is also pressure upon young men to marry. It is considered desirable to bind a young man with wife and offspring to the household.

This attitude is not necessarily in conflict with involvement in the cash economy as the following case illustrates:

Michael Kalawo

Michael originates from Misuku in Chitipa. His father left there in 1971 in search of good soil and virgin land to grow millet. Michael moved to his present location in 1988, as he wanted to be closer to the school, dispensary and road. Seven children belong to his household. Five of them are at school, with the eldest in Form II.

Michael is not a conservative person. He started farming in 1975. He was still at school then and helped his parents to grow millet. His entrepreneurship took off in the 1975-76 season. He cultivated one acre of millet and harvested two granaries full. He sold the millet locally and bought two cows for MK500 each. He also harvested seven bags of groundnuts in that year. He exchanged five of those for a radio. This radio he exchanged for a cow. He then had three cows.

In 1976-77 he produced less than in the year before: one granary of millet. He sold it in Karonga and gave the money to his father. The latter bought a bull for him and he then had four head of cattle. In 1977-78 he again produced one granary of millet, which bought him another cow. The original two cows in his herd gave birth to two calves. Hence he had seven cattle. He was still living with his parents at that time.

Michael married in 1980. He paid six head of cattle as *lobola*, leaving him with just a single cow. From 1980-81–1982-83 his main concern was to grow enough food for himself and his wife: until his marriage, he had eaten from his parents' granary. He then started to grow maize, groundnuts and cassava in addition to millet. He did some business in the years up to 1994. He sold three bags of groundnuts to people from Tanzania in 1985-86. With the proceeds he bought a cow. The cow remaining to him after marriage gave birth to a calf, giving him a total of three cows.

In 1988-89 he got a loan of three bags of fertiliser from ADMARC. His loan was deducted from the selling price when the harvest was sold to ADMARC's mobile market in Wiliro, and the profit did not reward the effort sufficiently. In the same year, he sold some groundnuts and bought a female pig. Until these years, he had avoided selling staple food, as he had to feed his growing family.

By 1994, his cattle had multiplied to five. He married a second wife to increase the labour force. He divorced her again because she was lazy, but in fact her health may have been the explanation for this. Her death, shortly afterwards, made it impossible for him to reclaim the *lobola* paid (four head of cattle, leaving him with one).

The farm enterprise was stagnant until 1998-99. The free inputs from SP1 yielded him an additional six bags of maize and one bag of groundnuts. He kept this food in order to feed his family. In 1999-2000 he received SP2. He also purchased three bags of fertiliser with the proceeds of an MRFC loan. It was given through a burley club (i.e. for use on tobacco), but he used some of it on maize. It was, however, a bad year in

the area and the club defaulted. His main concern is now to clear his balance with MRFC so that he has access to loans again.

His eldest three children are now growing an acre of millet each while still at school. They are starting in the same way as their father did.

Comment:
Michael Kalawo is deeply involved in the cash economy. He buys and sells regularly. Yet, at the same time, the dynamics of his farm enterprise are governed by factors with non-market elements. Food self-sufficiency is one, but more obvious is the stress on increasing his livestock holding, as livestock is so central to marriage and the creation a labour force. This case, as well as that of Katonga Mwambinga, shows that the Starter Pack programme had also a considerable effect on relatively larger farms.

Conclusion: Livelihoods in Marko Mwenechilanga are characterised by a hunger for cash, but there is relatively little cash in the area. People's concern to have a large family around them, wives and children, is central in their existence, as labour is seen as the major constraint in farming. This constraint can of course also be overcome by higher productivity and, in that respect, Starter Packs have been important.

Social structure and poverty

Life is harsh for some people in Marko Mwenechilanga. Labour is at a premium. To overcome labour bottlenecks, people resort to communal arrangements. These are of two types: *vare* and *ndanjira*. *Vare* is a mutual exchange of labour in which households work jointly on each household's farm. *Ndanjira* is more the work-party type of arrangement. A group of people work on somebody's land till noon, and then they are given a meal of special food, *nsima* made from maize, and meat, or beer. Both these forms of communal labour tend to exclude the poor. *Vare* arrangements are only made among matching parties: a household with a lot of labour at its disposal will not join with a household that has little labour. *Ndanjira* requires resources, but poor households do not have these resources. The poor tend also to be the weaker parties there and are less welcome than the strong, young and healthy.

Older or weaker people cannot expect much from their relatives or children either. The ideal for such people may be to live together with married children and their offspring, but the reality is often that children do not assist their parents. The withdrawal of labour from their own farm to support parents may endanger the survival of the children. The poor and the weak mainly have to resort to going for *ganyu*, but that is very poorly paid in Marko Mwenechilanga. There is not much demand for it, as people generally use their own family labour. They say: "People are going less for *ganyu* because many families are polygamous. Hence they take advantage of a large labour force to produce more food". In an environment where labour is seen as the critical, scarce factor in farming, the withdrawal of labour from a farm to undertake *ganyu* elsewhere is particular damaging. What is more, the employers dictate the terms, so g*anyu* benefits the employer more than the employee.

Some examples of *ganyu* labour payments:

Season	Type of Work	Payment
1998-99		
-November	Ridging (maize and cassava)	½ pail maize per ½ acre
-April	Weeding (cassava)	½ pail maize per ½ acre
1999-2000		
-December	Ridging (maize and cassava)	½-¾ pail maize per ½ acre
2000-01		
-December	Ridging (cassava)	MK500 per acre
-January	Ridging (cassava)	MK400 per acre
-March	Weeding (cassava)	1 ½ pails cassava per acre

Payment for *ganyu* is in cash and in kind, and rates can vary enormously. It is difficult to bring different measures under one common denominator. Therefore, it is hard to judge whether rates have risen. The common opinion was that *ganyu* rates have risen but not as much as the cost of living. If people are young and strong, they often go elsewhere in Karonga or in Chitipa to look for *ganyu* work.

Marko Mwenechilanga is the only place in our study where it was unequivocally stated that fewer people go for *ganyu* when they receive free inputs. Free inputs made a big difference for the poor here, as the following cases show:

Nyausise Mubira

Nyausise is old - he mentions 70 years. He has been living alone since his wife's death in 1981. He has no radio, bicycle or furniture. He owns no livestock. Christmas is for him a day like any other, and he eats nothing special on that day. Four of his six children are alive, and three of them are married within the village. They only rarely assist him with farm labour however. He cultivates two acres of land: one plot is under maize and, on the other plot, he grows cassava, beans, cowpeas and sweet potatoes. He sells some sweet potatoes and maize at the market in Wiliro. He barters as well: one small plate of maize for one tablet of soap or one small packet of salt.

Nonetheless, he is not food secure: from November to February he has no food from his fields. He resorts then to one meal a day and has to go for *ganyu*. He is excluded from *vare* or *ndanjira* arrangements. Free inputs have made a big difference to him: in 1997/98 he harvested one bag (50kg) of maize from local seed; in 1998-99 he got between five and six bags from local seed and SP1; in 1999-2000 SP2 resulted in five to six bags. With the little he got from TIP however, he expects no more than two bags in 2000-01.

Comment:
Nyausise Mubira's case clearly illustrates how free inputs have been effective for poverty alleviation. In Marco Mwenechilanga, people like him have no safety net to fall back upon. Because labour power is the asset most highly valued, people who have little to contribute in that respect are socially excluded.

Wiless Namphuyi

When one asks Wiless about bad times, she mentions the year of her divorce from her first husband (1982) and the year of her second husband's death (2000). She has lived all her life (38 years) in the village, to where her parents had moved from Chitipa. Two of her eight children have died, and one is chronically ill. One is married in the village and two - 16 and 15 years old - are living with her and help with farming and household chores. They have stopped going to school. Another one lives with her and is still at school (8 years old) and one is with the grandparents. She has been given a pig and a chicken by her brother this year, but otherwise does not own any livestock. They have no radio, no bicycle and no furniture. On Christmas Day, there is no special dish prepared; it is a day like all others.

She never ever goes to the grinding mill, but pounds the flour herself. Their farm is small, less than one acre, and they grow half an acre of maize and about a quarter acre of cassava. Their maize harvest is exhausted sometime in June, and then they eat cassava until mid-August. Thereafter, they have to buy food. The family brews and sells beer on market days, sells grass for thatching and sometimes beans. However, once food goes short, the family is utterly dependent upon doing *ganyu* labour. They are usually paid in cassava or maize, but Wiless also accepts maize seconds. They sometimes participate in *ndanjira* (work parties), but she is no match for other farms - notably the polygamous ones - and is therefore not invited to participate in *vare*.

Free inputs made a big difference for Wiless. She did not use fertiliser in 1997-98, and she harvested only one bag of maize from local seed. In 1998-99, with the help of SP1, she got between five and six bags. The following year, SP2 did not help her much as the rains failed and she got only 1.5 bags. In 2000-01 she is hoping for three bags from the little she got from TIP and recycled hybrid seed. This may be over-optimistic: TIP came late and little remained after sharing it out among the villagers.

Comment:
This family would qualify for poverty alleviation on a number of criteria. They are slightly untypical for Marco Mwenechilanga in that relatives care a little about them. Wiless Namphuyi's brother gave her some livestock, and her in-laws supported her when she was hospitalised in Karonga from September-December 2000, but this cannot hide the fact that the family is deeply dependent upon going for ganyu – a situation which they experience as a poverty trap because it draws labour away from their own farm. Free inputs have a direct poverty alleviating effect here, as they would optimise the use of land and labour.

Conclusion: Free distribution of inputs has a direct poverty alleviating effect in Marko Mwenechilanga. Social safety nets are poorly developed, and the poor tend to be socially excluded. The poor are caught in a poverty trap by being dependent upon going for *ganyu* at a time when work on their own farm would be most productive. Free inputs alleviate this situation, as the productivity of scarce labour time increases.

Msilamoyo, Nkhata Bay – A case of irrelevance of SP and TIP

'*Nsima yavigawu ndi njovu*' (Cassava flour gives you the power of an elephant)

Overtoun Mugemezulu, Mackenzie Chivwali and Jan Kees van Donge

Msilamoyo village lies on the shores of Lake Malawi, close to Chintheche, near the tarred lakeshore road. There are well-stocked shops nearby. The village gives the impression of being prosperous: the houses are made of burnt brick, albeit that the roofs are mostly thatched. People are well dressed, sometimes even spectacularly so, in a three-piece suit topped off with a hat. It is difficult to form definite opinions about life in Msilamoyo. As will be illustrated below, the nature of poverty was one of the most difficult things to gauge. This was not due to a lack of openness on the part of villagers: people were welcoming and some came even to collect us, as they wanted to be interviewed; and the particular culture of inhabitants of this village, who are Tonga, is engaging and open.[*] However, interviews – like most conversation in the village - often took on the nature of a performance, or a play. Opinions seemed to be ventilated primarily for effect – boasting is important in social discourse – and people were not at all embarrassed by contradictions in what they said. They could, for example, complain about a lack of capital, and the next moment boast of the large amounts of money they made from fishing (MK30,000-65,000). People could praise the quality of life in the village, and the next moment claim that they were poor. The outside world was often seen as a source of resources: people requested assistance like that given to Nsanje in the Shire Valley following the recent floods. In fact, the very heavy rain experienced during the rainy season had made life uncomfortable, but there were no floods here like those experienced in the Shire Valley.

The impact of fee inputs

The nature of this discourse coloured also the opinions on free distribution of inputs – SP1, SP2 and TIP. There was a striking discrepancy between what was being said and observable action. During interviews, for example, it was not clear who had not benefited from TIP. All respondents seemed to have received it, but the chief had prepared a neat list on which only about half of the population was regarded as entitled to it. Massive redistribution of the inputs certainly took place. Everyone we interviewed in Msilamoyo was in favour of the free distribution of agricultural inputs. However, there was little to be found in their farming practices to indicate an interest in fertiliser application, hybrid maize or legumes. Cassava and fish were the dominant concerns in economic life.

Hybrid maize has been introduced in the village three times. The first attempt to introduce it was made when the village was moved in 1975. The village was resettled in the hills rising up beyond the plains on the lakeshore. After the democratisation of Malawi, people returned to the old site. Msilamoyo is on a site where it was projected to build a pulp mill. This plan was cancelled, partly because it would pollute Lake Malawi to an unacceptable degree. In the 1980s, hybrid maize was again introduced,

[*] J. van Velzen, *The politics of kinships: a study of social manipulation among the lakeside Tonga in Nyasaland*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964, is a classic monograph bringing out the order in the seemingly chaotic and individualistic Tonga society.

as disease had destroyed the cassava plants. It was introduced for the third time via the Starter Pack programme and TIP.

It is highly likely that maize was grown for a short time in substantial quantities, but that has not lasted. Some maize is now grown, but on a very small scale. During heavy rains, maize flour is sometimes used instead of cassava flour, not because people like it, but because it is difficult to prepare cassava, as it cannot be dried - it is too wet and susceptible to rotting. The eating of maize is thus a negative choice. Against this background, it is difficult to seriously accept a lack of seed as the reason why hybrid maize has never become established as a crop. The following case illustrates the difficulty in assessing the impact of free inputs.

Howard Thunde
Howard is a young man, about twenty-five years old, married with a young child. He has a more positive attitude to maize than is usually found in the village. He got used to eating *nsima* made from maize when he was living with his parents in Lilongwe. In addition, he lives in a part of the village – between the uplands and the lakeshore - where soils are poorer. Therefore, the growing of hybrid maize, using fertiliser, is more appealing to him.

The family received two Starter Packs in 1998: one for Howard and one for his wife. This was used to cultivate one acre of hybrid maize that yielded 25 bags (50 kg). He sold six bags. Part of the crop was used to support his mother-in-law. The rest of the maize provided enough food for six months.

Howard was not a recipient of SP2. Thus, in 1999-2000 he did not cultivate maize, as he had no inputs. In 2000-01 he bought some low quality seed in order to plant some maize. An old man, who was a TIP beneficiary, gave him 10kg of fertiliser. The maize crop was poor and was all eaten as green maize. He expects to run short of food in February and March, and he will then have to buy maize or cassava. Sometimes the family skips meals at lunchtime, but they usually eat sweet potatoes instead.

Howard claims never to be short of money to buy food. His father supports him sometimes with food or cash to buy necessities. Howard is also a tinsmith and repairs watches and radios. He sometimes barters tins for chickens and cassava. Mostly he sells them and claims to have raised MK1,725 from selling tins. He undertakes a variety of other activities also. Last March, he cut trees and raised MK1,000 from this. The most profitable activity, however, is joining a fishing crew, which nets him about MK300 a day.

<u>Comment</u>:
Firstly, this case shows how difficult it is to estimate the impact of free inputs. They cannot be neatly traced to specific beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, as they are redistributed throughout the village. Boasting is likely to influence the reported effects. A yield of 25 bags of hybrid maize from one acre is possible, but it would require a rarely-found, high level of management. It is also unlikely that 19 bags of maize would provide only six months' food for such a small family, even if we take into account that some goes to the in-laws.

Secondly, the interviewee reported a high impact from the Starter Pack programme but did not retain a lasting appreciation of hybrid maize. If one looks at the income of this family, then the resources are clearly there to buy inputs. However, they grow maize only if free inputs come their way.

Thirdly, it illustrates that people talk about food security in seemingly contradictory ways. Howard claims shortage of food, but his family never goes without a meal a day. He talks of having only one meal a day, but in such a situation the family has a snack of sweet potatoes for lunch. When they talk about lean months, they do not talk primarily about hunger, but about a necessity to buy maize, as the cassava cannot be prepared due to water logging. A lack of cash to buy food is not implied.

When assessing the impact of free inputs, one must bear in mind that there is not only a preference for cassava, but also a low esteem for farming. In the cultural ideals of the village, farming is left to women; men consider fishing as their terrain. However, this ideal is not within the reach of most households: fishing is not open to everybody and men help on the farms, especially in ground preparation when new fields are being opened.

The cultivation of cassava puts a heavy strain on women. They have not only to prepare the garden, but also to dig up the roots from day to day. Thereafter they have to peel the tubers and put them in stagnant water, called *thawali*, for fermentation. After the *thawali* treatment, the cassava is dried for a day or more depending on the amount of sunshine and then pounded into flour, being considered 'too soft' for mechanical milling. Having cassava as a staple means that women are caught in an unending cycle of daily chores, irrespective of the season. This seems also to negate any perceived need to make decisions with respect to farming. There is a widespread belief that the soil is becoming exhausted – the big tubers of the past are talked about – but fertiliser application is never taken into consideration.

The area is food secure, and therefore Starter Packs have little appeal beyond the attraction of any free gift. Although one does not see any fat people, there are no signs of malnutrition. One reason for this may be the supplementary value of fish. Nevertheless, people complain of a lack of accompaniment for their stiff cassava porridge. They are tired of eating sweet potato leaves (*chibwaka*) or cassava leaves (*chigwada*). With respect to free inputs distribution, a clear desire was expressed for groundnuts to be included as the legume in their package instead of soya beans.

Minor supplementary crops, such as sweet potatoes, rice, groundnuts, bananas, oranges and paw paws, are to be found in Msilamoyo. These are grown for home consumption only, while there is potential for much greater production. Many streams cut through the area, and there are extensive stretches of swampy land (*dambos*). This land is not, however, used for dry season cultivation in *dimba* gardens. This is especially striking as the vegetables on the market in Chintheche – including tomatoes and onions – come from Mzimba and even from abroad (Tanzania).

Conclusion: SP1, SP2 and TIP had hardly any effect in the area because:

- There is an obvious preferred choice for cassava as the main staple.
- Agriculture has a low prestige and there is no culture to improve farming.

- Agriculture – and especially cassava cultivation – is seen as the preserve of females, who may be trapped in an unending and unvarying cycle of work.
- The area is food secure.

Livelihood strategies and relations with markets

Fishing is men's business. This is apparent in a physical separation of economic spheres. Men live in grass huts on the lakeshore, and women are not seen there while the men are mending their nets or socialising with each other. Neither do they mix with females when they go drinking and gambling in the trading centre. The main reason they visit their homes behind the beach is to eat. Within the fishing community, there is a clear stratification between those who own implements and those who do not. There are fewer than five people in the village who own boats and big nets (*mkwawu*). A group of twelve to fifteen people (*asodzi*) is brought together by the owner to man the boats. These are usually relatives. The catch is shared between the owner of the boat and nets – who gets half – and the *asodzi*. The method used to share the proceeds is therefore akin to sharecropping. Fishing is the culturally-expected, aspired-to livelihood, but it is not easy to penetrate the realities rather than the publicly stated claims, as is illustrated in the following case:

Jenda Kaunda

Jenda is well-established: he is middle aged - 44 years old - and currently has two wives. Five children reside in his house. He is divorced from two other wives.

He started fishing in 1980, at which time he was assisting his father elsewhere in Nkhata Bay. He was then still at school, but when his father died in 1986 he dropped out before completing his primary education. He then became a full-time fisherman with his brothers until 1990. After this he became a hawker, with a starting capital of MK250. He also cultivated rice and produced 25 bags, which he sold at a good price. The profits from small business were minor however, and in 1997 he returned to fishing.

He bought a second-hand net for MK9,000. Thereafter, he built a boat worth MK30,000. He moved then to Msilamoyo, as fish stocks in his original village were decreasing fast. He fishes with five relatives. He estimates that he earns about a million kwacha a year. On a good day - especially in the *usipa* (sprat-like fish, within reach of the common man's purse) season - his catch will net between MK30,000 and MK80,000.

He used to bank his money at the post office - Malawi Savings Bank - but this proved too cumbersome, as he was only allowed to withdraw MK100 at a time. His mother then became his banker and financial advisor. An engine for the boat is his next goal. He does not keep his money with his wives, as he does not trust the women of the day. He lives on the beach in a grass shelter together with his relatives who crew the boat. He does not involve himself with agriculture at all, leaving that to his wives. The wives assist him sometimes drying and smoking fish. Sometimes they sell the fish, especially in the *usipa* season.

Comment:
Firstly, this case illustrates the cultural ideal for a successful man in Msilamoyo. He owns a big net and a boat; he lives on the beach together with his asodzi; his asodzi are a dependable group of relatives. Agriculture is left to the women in his household.

Secondly, it illustrates that this ideal may be elusive. It was certainly so for a time. We do not know why the original group of brothers broke up. It is clear, however, that a return to agriculture assisted in his recovery, but it was rice cultivation and not cassava. Rice is more associated with cash than cassava.

Thirdly, it illustrates the mythical and mysterious nature of fishing income. Jenda Kaunda is secretive about his earnings: only his mother is in his confidence. Investment in a boat and net seems expensive; how this money was raised is left in the dark, and may have a slightly covert aspect. Fishing does not seem to lead to investments outside boats and nets. Fishermen have the reputation of being big spenders on drink, women and especially on gambling.

There are more men interested in joining a fishing crew than there are places. However, Msilamoyo offers other means to obtain a cash income. The most important is the building trade. During the dry season, bricks are moulded: young couples usually do this. Women draw water; carry sand; cut and collect grass. They also cook. The men dig the soil and make bricks. These bricks can be made to order, but mostly they are sold on the open market. Again, this is not wage labour and neither is it working for a contracted output. There are also some building contractors in the village. The village is quite well connected to general economic life and that also creates opportunities for wage labour, for example working for the electricity company, ESCOM.

Trade in agricultural produce is minimal. ADMARC, the state marketing company, has never had a market near the village. Neither are institutions like MRFC, FFC or Farmers World active in the area. Some women sell fruits such as oranges and bananas at the Chintheche market. Occasionally, cassava or maize will be sold. Agriculture is, however, primarily an activity which is removed from the cash economy and the market.

Fishing, on the contrary, is associated with cash and the market, and trade in fish is primarily a woman's affair. Women are seen on the beach when a catch is landed. The fish stocks in Lake Malawi are declining fast, but that does not necessarily imply a decline in the trade, as fish is now more valuable. The fish trade is also seasonal, depending upon the migration of the stocks. Most money is made in May and June, when the small fish called *usipa* are on the shores of Msilamoyo. Fishing and the fish trade are the most prestigious ways to make a living and are probably the origins of the considerable amount of cash in the area – as shown in widespread ownership of houses, bicycles, radios, clothes, etc.

Remittances from outside the village were important in only a few cases. Relatives who had left the village were not found to occupy particularly high posts. There were a number of pensioners in the village – from modest backgrounds such as teaching or agricultural extension – who had returned after a career elsewhere. Their houses were

recognisable because of their corrugated iron roofs. Their livelihoods were strikingly different from the rest of the village, as illustrated in the following case:

George Bwendengu Mphande

Although George retired in 1995 from his job as a builder in the Ministry of Works, he is only 44 years old. He builds houses within the village and near the local market in Chintheche. It takes him about a month to build a house, and he charges between MK7,000 and MK15,000 per house.

George lives with his wife and seven children. He also looks after his elderly mother who lives with the family. Although he obviously belongs to the wealthier people in Msilamoyo, he was a beneficiary of SP1, SP2 and TIP. From SP1 he got four bags of maize (50 kg) and from SP2 he got seven bags. He estimated that TIP would yield him two bags, because the inputs came late and termites attacked the crop. He claimed that without Starter Packs he could not buy the inputs.

The 2000-01 season was difficult, as his cassava crop was waterlogged and rotting away. He is not expecting to go hungry, however, as he will replant cassava tubers in good time. Last year he harvested six bags of maize (90kg each). He sold one bag to ADMARC and he also sold rice in the village. The price - MK150 per 50-kg bag - was, however, too low to warrant the effort. He therefore only produces rice for home consumption.

George is on the lookout for other possibilities to grow crops for the market and intends to experiment with pepper. Sometimes he sells crops from his *dimba* garden - tomato, vegetables and sugarcane - at the market in Chintheche. The income from these sales covers small ongoing expenditure: soap, salt and paraffin. He also does some tinsmithing to raise money for small expenses - for example, in order to pay for maize milling. His main income, however, derives from his activities as a builder.

Comment:
Firstly, this case provides a contrast with most livelihood strategies in Msilamoyo. Agriculture is regarded as a way to raise a cash income – after feeding the family. George Bwendengu Mphande has made full use of the free inputs, but nevertheless does not buy inputs on his own. Rice is preferred to maize as a crop, as it requires fewer inputs. Fishing does not feature at all.

Secondly, it shows that agriculture does not pay. His sales from the dimba garden are profitable, but the return from rice is too small to be attractive. If he were dependent upon agriculture, he would be poor. Building provides his main income.

We expected to find education playing an important role in the economy of Msilamoyo, but that appeared not to be the case. Villagers were as a rule educated, but not to a high degree. Some people see education as creating problems rather than being a sound investment. There were a number of secondary school leavers in the village who saw few prospects for their future. The avenues into low-skilled clerical employment are virtually closed, and the competition to enter fishing is fierce. Working for cash is a major concern, as the following case shows:

Aggrey Muwamba

Aggrey is twenty-six, married, with one child. He is a farmer, not a fisherman. He completed his secondary education in Salima district and returned then to Msilamoyo. He did not get SP1 and SP2 as he was still at school. He did, however, receive TIP on behalf of his mother, who was in hospital.

TIP yielded him one bag of maize. He cultivates a two-acre plot with his wife and brothers. He lives with his two brothers. They plant not only cassava and sweet potatoes, but also maize. The maize runs out in May - it thus bridges the period when processing cassava is difficult. From then onwards they eat cassava. Sometimes they eat only one meal a day, not because of a scarcity of resources as such, but because the cassava tubers fail to dry or there is no accompaniment for the *nsima*.

Aggrey's main concern is to work for cash. He worked for six months for ESCOM during the 2000 dry season. The coming season he will mould bricks in order to raise money for clothes. He is one of the few people in Msilamoyo who is interested in going for *ganyu*, where he is paid between MK50 and MK200 per day. He prefers to work during the dry season when there is not much work in his own fields. This income allows him to buy soap, salt and sugar. For the same reason, he sells chickens from time to time to a restaurant owner.

Comment:
The future will show whether this case is indicative of a trend in Msilamoyo. Fishing does not play a role in this man's livelihood, and food production is seen as more problematic than is usually the case. Maize cultivation is accepted as a normal part of agricultural practice. Labouring for cash is an integral part of the livelihood strategy. It should also be noted, however, that Aggrey Muwamba's poverty is not dire in comparison to other situations in Malawi. There is no structural shortage of food and a cash income is within reach.

Conclusion: Agriculture plays a minor role in livelihoods in Msilamoyo. Fishing, the fish trade and small scale contracting, rather than agriculture, provide the core ways in which people make their living. Reliance on a diversity of income sources is typical, but fishing is the ideal source and represents the central cultural values. While other patterns of livelihood are emerging, one does not find people who are driven by hunger to look for piecework on other farms during the rainy season.

Social structure and poverty

Life in the village gives the impression of being egalitarian, despite the inequalities – the most notable ones being between fishermen and non-fisherman and between boat owners and *asodzi*. Neither the term *ganyu* – contract labour bound to output – nor 'wage labour', is applicable in fishing. The term *ganyu* is loosely used and not particularly stigmatising. There is definitely not a bifurcation in the village between those who employ other people as *ganyu* labour and those that are dependent upon *ganyu* labour as a source of income. The specific use of the word *ganyu* refers mainly to agricultural labour supplied from outside the village, mostly from Mzimba.

Life seems to be highly individualistic: everybody has, insofar as possible, his or her own house. Usually one finds a group of related women living together, each in their own house with their children. The family structure is loose, not only because of tracing matrilineal as well as patrilineal descent, but also because of the lack of concern about biological paternity. Women openly state that children are of various fathers. This loose structure of sexuality has a consequence: the AIDS pandemic is a major problem in the village.

This anarchic, individualistic impression overlooks, however, strong social ties. In all the cases described above, farm enterprises were locked in relation with others. People live dispersed in houses, but they eat together. The old and orphans are in this way fully integrated into the households of their kinsmen. We found no trace of social exclusion in the village. Besides eating together, people work together. Fields are individually owned, but the land is worked by work-parties. These are of two kinds: *chilimiziga* and *chiwira*. The first is a form of mutual support: people from different households come together to support one each other, and each is helped in turn. In the case of *chiwira*, work-parties are rewarded with a good meal of *nsima* with chicken or goat meat.

The following examples of female-headed households show how potentially vulnerable households are sheltered from poverty by their family relationships:

Lincey Phiri

Lincey is twenty years old, single, with one child. Although she lives in a separate house, her house is part of a compound of six houses: four for her brothers and one for her mother. The last one is for her father although he is divorced. Her father is important in Lincey's farming. She cultivates one acre of the six in her father's possession. Cassava is her main crop, but she also grows some rice, sweet potatoes, bananas, oranges and paw paws. She was not considered eligible for TIP, but her father was. He distributed the inputs among his children and gave Lincey maize seeds. She also got some maize seeds from relatives who had kept them from SP2.

Lincey cultivates her field by joining reciprocal labour arrangements (*chilimiziga*). She sometimes also employs *ganyu* labour, paid for by remittances from two brothers working in Blantyre and South Africa and a sister in Blantyre. They send her not only money, but also clothes and mosquito nets.

She is food secure from her own field. She may have one meal a day during the rainy season when there is not enough sunshine to dry cassava. She will then eat sweet potatoes or bananas for lunch. She also participates in meals prepared by her mother or her sisters-in-law.

Comment:
According to several poverty indicators, Lincey Phiri's household should be targeted: it is a female-headed household; she cultivates only one acre; she owns no radio or bicycle. Such targeting would not, however, recognise the relationship with her kin. For example, she receives remittances from her siblings and there are radios and bicycles in the compound in which she lives.

Apekeyo Mphande

Apekeyo is old and guesses her age to be 72. After being divorced from her husband, she has not remarried. She received SP1, SP2 and TIP. She produced a full granary from SP1 and SP2, but does not expect much from TIP, as the inputs came too late. Her staple food is cassava, and she also grows sweet potatoes and groundnuts.

She lives close to her son, who - together with his wife - does most of the work in her field. She says: “My son bars me from doing much work on my farm, because he believes I am very old”. She is never short of food and receives money from her two sons working in Karonga and Lilongwe.

Comment:
Apekeyo Mphande is a female heading a household with few resources, and she is old as well. Therefore she qualifies as a recipient of TIP. She is sheltered from poverty, however, by the support of her sons: one son cultivates her field, although he himself did not qualify for TIP, and another two sons send her remittances.

Conclusion: Social safety nets seem well developed and communal responsibility is strong in a seemingly hyper-individualist society. Consequently, targeting the poor with free inputs is complicated. TIP may not necessarily target the poor directly; it may provide support for those who assist the poorer people in the village.

Tombolombo, Mzimba – A community hungry for fertiliser

"Why can the donors not use the money for Starter Pack and TIP to buy a lot of fertiliser and sell it at affordable prices?" (R.G. Chirwa and R. Kanyinji)

Prince Kapondamgaga, Elarton Thawani and Jan Kees van Donge

Tombolombo village is located 23 km from Mzimba town, on a dirt road. The journey reveals vibrant economic life. Mzimba town is a hive of economic activity, with considerable building going on. On the road to Tombolombo, one meets many bicycles and oxcarts carrying a variety of things, especially cans of paraffin. Even more striking is the number of (old) cars bearing South African registration plates plying informal transport services (*matola*). Many houses are built of brick and have corrugated iron roofs. Ox-drawn implements are widely used.

However, agriculture is in decline in Tombolombo, and much of the economic activity is based on illegal migration to South Africa. Mzimba has always known wage labour migration, but this massive migration to South Africa – which involves labour recruiters and organised parties searching for work there – started during the 1980s. Agricultural livelihoods are highly valued – people were extremely serious in discussing their strategies – but offer fewer and fewer prospects. The main reason for this is the rise in the price of inputs.

The impact of free inputs

Several households in Tombolombo village received Starter Pack in only one of the two Starter Pack seasons and none received TIP, as the headman was ill and therefore submitted the list of TIP recipients too late. Although inputs – especially fertiliser – are highly appreciated and seen as essential for the viability of farming in Tombolombo, the general comments on free distribution of inputs were sceptical. They are appreciated as a gift, but the effects are minimal due to the inefficiency of distribution – the packs were distributed late – as well as the small size of the packs relative to need.

Fertilisers are necessary for effective farming in Tombolombo, because the soils are sandy. Villagers reacted with incredulity to our statement that the recent programmes of free inputs have taught people to grow hybrid maize (see "Five statements on TIP/SP" in Appendix 1). After the initial good crops from virgin soils in the 1940s and 1950s when many people settled from elsewhere in the region, inputs such as fertiliser and hybrid seed were widely adopted.

The years from 1970 to the mid-1980s are particularly remembered as good farming years, because of a combination of relatively cheap prices of inputs, good extension services, a stable and fair marketing structure for inputs as well as produce (ADMARC) and affordable, efficient credit provision. This institutional framework has been in decline since the late 1980s and recently the pace of decline has accelerated. However, people remain dependent upon fertiliser. Only one of the ten farmers we interviewed did not use any fertiliser. This is bought from the Farmers' World store in the nearby (5km) trading centre, Manyamala.

Credit is relatively widespread in this village: there are 22 beneficiaries out of 106 farm families. There is a club – 18 farmers, called Changoma – operating under the newly established commercial Farming Finance Company (FFC). FFC deals only in maize and registers clubs if there is sufficient collateral, registration fees are paid (MK60 a person) and a deposit of MK500 is paid. Farmers receive in return a credit package of MK4,680: one bag of maize seed and two bags of fertiliser. Repayment can be in cash or in kind (in 1999-2000: 11 50-kg bags of maize). However, this road is not lightly taken: interest rates are around 50%, the FFC threatens to be harsh on defaulters and it is late in distribution and provides poor quality fertiliser. The repayment rate in the 1999-2000 season was 57% in the Manyamala area and the manager of FFC expected the same this year. One reason is that farmers have kept inputs which arrived late for use next season.

Another scheme which operates in Tombolombo is a collaboration of a GTZ-sponsored scheme, the Foundation for Improvement of Animal Health (FIAH) and the EU-sponsored Agricultural Productivity Improvement Programme (APIP). They provide a bag of maize seed, a bag of groundnut seed and two bags of fertiliser. Three farmers, who are also organised in a club, benefited in Tombolombo. The interest rate was not known, but APIP provides inputs at non-commercial interest rates.

Thirdly, there is a club operated under the Malawi Rural Finance Company: the Kahelele Farmers' Club. This is composed of ten farmers, four of whom are female, and is crop specific for burley tobacco. Again, it is not easy to form such a club. Members are required to pay 15% of the loan value as deposit, and MRFC banks this on their account at 25% interest. The repayment interest is around 50%. In 2000-01 the Kahelele Farmers' Club obtained 34 bags of fertiliser.

At current price levels and interest rates, fertiliser use is on the decline. It is instructive to look at the fertiliser use in the past few years of the two largest farmers we interviewed:

Year	**Bags used Farmer I**	**Bags used Farmer II**
1998-99	6	20
1999-2000	3	16
2000-01*	2	12

*Expected harvest.

This indicates a cash squeeze, which is reported throughout the village. It is logical that the free inputs distributed by Starter Pack and TIP were marginal compared with this relatively high level of input use. It is to be expected that the marginal impact would be relatively greater for smaller farmers. However, here also it is difficult to see clearly identifiable effects, as is shown in the following cases:

Japson Nyirenda

Japson is between 65 and 70 years old. He worked in South Africa between 1956 and 1963. He then returned to the village where he married in 1965. All his eleven children are alive, and all except one are married. Six of them, including the unmarried one, live in the same village. Japson has no radio, no bicycle, no furniture and he lives in a grass thatched mud house. His farm is only one and a half acres,

which is small by Northern Malawian standards. He farms with the hoe only. However, he owns six head of cattle, two goats and two pigs.

Japson is food insecure. He usually runs out of food in September. He is probably then helped by his children until December. They farm jointly in mutual labour arrangements (*chikumu*). December to February are lean months. His wife and two daughters-in-law in the village at this time go for *ganyu*, which is usually recompensed with maize flour. During the hungry season, they skip meals, sell livestock for food and eat early maize.

Japson harvested 1 oxcart of maize in 1998-99 (approximately 3.5 50-kg bags), and 2 oxcarts in 1999-2000. He received Starter Pack in both years. He managed to buy a bag of fertiliser in 1999-2000 and 2000-01 but expected to harvest only one oxcart of maize this year due to the excessive rains, which eroded the land and washed away the fertiliser. He also has a *dimba* garden in which he grows bananas, guavas and paw paws. He sells this produce on the market in Manyamala, but prices are low as many people have such fruits.

Comment:
Japson Nyirenda received SP1 and SP2. In the last two years, he has bought a bag of fertiliser as well. This may help explain the good crop in 1999-2000. He attributes his low crop in 2000-01 to adverse weather conditions. TIP might perhaps have helped, had it been delivered (on time), but TIP was not distributed in Msilamoyo.

In the above case, there is still livestock and some cash to cushion the lean months, and Japson's household is well integrated with the households of two of his sons. These advantages are absent in the following case:

Taisoni Nkosi

Taisoni is around sixty years old. He left the village in 1977 to work in forestry at Chikangawa - not far from Mzimba. He worked there for twelve years and returned to the village in 1989. He lives with his wife and nine of his ten children, as well as two grandchildren. His children range in age from 11 to 32 years old. Only two of them are married and one of those lives outside the village. The household of his married son is part of his farm enterprise: they farm together and eat from the same granary. Four children - aged between 11 and 17 - are still at school. The household has no radio, no bicycle and no oxcart, but they have 17 chickens and a goat. The farm is 2.5 acres, but it must be borne in mind that two families jointly work this land. Labour - eight people - is the only significant input on the farm. They do not use implements other than the hoe. The only fertiliser ever used was 10kg from SP1. Cash income comes from a *dimba* garden - onions, tomatoes and rape - but above all from basket and mat making. Taisoni needs about a week to make either a basket or a mat for which he receives, respectively, MK27 and MK75.

Growing season	**Oxcarts**	**Bags (50kg)**
1998-99	0.5	1.75
1999-00	0.75	2.63
2000-01*	0.5	1.75

* Expected harvest.

The household produced half an oxcart of maize in 1998-99, when they received SP1, providing less than one month of food security. In 1999-2000 they produced three-quarters of an oxcart, representing just over a month of food security.

The household's income is not sufficient to buy food to cover the food deficit, and they have to go for *ganyu* when it is available. From the December weeding onwards, they work for big farmers until after the harvest. Payment is made in cash (MK20) or in food (2kg of flour) per day, with work from 6 a.m. until noon.

Comment:
This is a household where free inputs should make a difference. However, the year 1999-2000, when they received no inputs, was better than 1998-99, when they did. Favourable climatic conditions are an obvious explanation.

The impact of Starter Pack is confused in the above cases by the effect of additional purchases of fertiliser in some years (Japson) and by varying weather conditions from year to year, which were clearly a major factor affecting both farmers' output.

Conclusion: The effects of free inputs in Tombolombo are difficult to measure. The impact seem to be slight because:

- Fertiliser was already used in almost all households to improve soil fertility.
- The quantities of maize grown on farms are often so great that the marginal impact of SP is minimal.
- There are output variations related to factors other than Starter Pack which confuse the picture, even for the poorest households.

Livelihood strategies and relations with markets

In eight of the twelve interviews, there was a history of labour migration or working outside the village as a teacher, hospital orderly, etc. Three of the four who had not migrated were female-headed households. Migration is thus an important part of livelihoods for men in Tombolombo. There is also regular mention of support from children working elsewhere. However, we found few traces of the recent massive migration from Mzimba to South Africa among the interviewees in Tombolombo. The fact that 18 of the 106 farm families in Tombolombo are female-headed points to some labour migration, but not on a massive scale. Migration is associated with the perception of a threat to farming as a livelihood because it does not pay. However, Tombolombo is not an extreme case in the Manyamala area, where there are said to be villages without men.

Farming is considered a serious matter and is a livelihood entwined with strong values. The prime one among those is growing one's own food, with the preferred crop being maize. This is the case even amongst the biggest farmers who could buy maize if they stopped cultivating it. This ideal of food self-sufficiency is usually reasoned in terms of risk aversion: 'When the market for cash crops goes down, you are likely to have problems'. Maize is thus regarded as a crop outside market forces and is not grown as a cash crop. If the harvest is good or if there is dire need to raise cash, then maize will be sold.

However, there are strong links to input markets. Interviewees made it clear that inputs are needed to grow maize successfully, so households need to raise cash to buy fertiliser. Cash can be raised through non-agricultural activities, for example, owning a hammer mill, or through remittances. In most cases, however, cash crops – especially tobacco – will be the source. Tobacco is not a preferred crop, but it is grown primarily because there is a well-functioning marketing apparatus for it. Burley tobacco is grown by burley clubs, who have access to the auction floor. Oriental tobacco is also grown widely. This is propagated in a scheme of the Limbe Leaf Company, the major tobacco buyer in Malawi. Farmers sell direct to Limbe Leaf and receive cash on the nail. This receipt of cash is the prime motive for growing this type of tobacco, which is quite labour intensive.

The major crisis in farming is not felt to be the decline in soil fertility as such, but the declining possibility of buying inputs. The decline of ADMARC is deplored for that reason. ADMARC provided a marketing network that was reachable, reliable and stable – prices were fixed, pre-planting prices. Now, if farmers want to sell anything besides tobacco, they need a trader to come along. These are often scarce and, as they are so difficult to find, farmers will accept prices below what they think the produce is worth. ADMARC was also open five days a week throughout the year, and this gave the farmer the power to decide the time to sell. In addition, ADMARC combined the sale of inputs with the buying of crops. Farmers bought inputs at the same time as they received their money for the crops. That money could then not be diverted to the other pressing needs which inevitably occur in the course of a year. Farming in this area has simply become much more insecure because of the decline of ADMARC.

In Tombolombo, most farm households are food secure and seem to make a living from agriculture. Undertaking *ganyu* labour is a major coping strategy for only a few in Tombolombo. When needed, *ganyu* labour is usually recruited from surrounding villages. Yet farming is often combined with non-agricultural activities to make a living:

Ofton Nyirenda

Ofton went to school near the village where he lives and originates from. He migrated for two years to South Africa in the early seventies. In 1975 he worked for one year at Chikangawa as a labourer in the Roads Department, Ministry of Works. In 1993 he went to work as a watchman in Mzuzu with the Ministry of Education and stayed for seven years. These places are close to Tombolombo and therefore, despite wage labour, he kept close contact with the village. He did not leave for long periods and worked within reach of Tombolombo.

Ofton's farm is primarily a maize farm from which he has to feed many dependants. He married twice. Five children from his first marriage are still living; three of these are married and have left home. Two of them - 13 and 12 years old - are still at school. With his second wife, whom he married after the death of his first, he has two infants. He also looks after his elderly father - the village headman - and mother. Two of his sisters live with him as well. There are thus three households connected to Ofton's farm. Many cousins and nephews come to live with him during the lean months. His family not only lives off his farm, but contributes as well. He has two oxen, and also looks after an elder brother's three cows and an aunt's three cows.

The cash needed to operate the farm is generated by Ofton through tinsmithing. He claims that in July-December it fetches him a profit of MK2,000 per month. This drops in the other months to MK500 a month. This is by far his most important source of cash income. He also sells some *dimba* crops, like onions, tomatoes and cabbages, as well as sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, cassava and beans on the local market. This income is minor, however, as compared to his tinsmithing activities.

Ofton is not short of land; he has 11 acres, but he cultivates no more than four of those. Two are under maize and on the others he grows groundnuts (0.25 acres) and cassava (1.75 acres). He farms with ox-drawn implements and he employs *ganyu* labour from surrounding villages. He employed four men from December to February, and paid them MK50 a day for the period 6-11 a.m. His most important input, however, is fertiliser. He usually buys three or four bags, but this year he had cash for only one. He turned for credit to FFC and this provided him with two bags of fertiliser and one of hybrid seed. He expects a good harvest this year and, contrary to the general experience, he had a bad harvest last year:

Growing season	**Bags (50kg)**
1998-99	31.5
1999-2000	10.5
2000-01*	28

* Expected harvest.

Comment:
Ofton Nyirenda's farm is a source of food security for many people. Yet, there are important sources of insecurity in this set-up. If his cash income were to fall away, then his dependents would have no food security any more. Also, if he has a bad crop, then there is a strong possibility that the dependants of this farm will experience hardship. Last year's bad crop and the high price of inputs made it necessary for Ofton to resort to credit. If he fails to repay FFC, then his oxen may be confiscated. The cash nexus is increasingly insecure because of the rise in input prices.

The above case is typical of a large number of farm enterprises in Tombolombo, although the cash nexus is unusual, in that it is generally tobacco or remittances that generate the necessary cash. The most prosperous households are those with good non-farming incomes. We interviewed the two most successful farmers in Tombolombo. One was a previous area chairman of MCP. He is an impressively good farmer, but it is difficult to see the growth of his farm as independent of his political activities. The best years for his farm were from 1974-87. He also owns four houses in Mzimba, which he rents out. The importance of non-agricultural income was even more evident in the other case:

Rackwell Kanyinji

Rackwell is old, and his dates may be muddled. He claims to have been born in 1927 and to have started teaching after his Junior School Certificate in 1939. He worked as a teacher until 1980 when he retired to Tombolombo, the village where he was born. He had nine children with his first wife, who died in 1974, and six with his second. These last six live with him and go to primary school. Two of his first wife's children are at secondary school. One is at home and he is sick. His other children are in Blantyre (1); Lilongwe (2); Zambia (2); and Mzuzu (1). They are educated and work in senior positions.

Rackwell's wealth is obvious: he has a radio, a bicycle, a house of urban standard (burnt bricks, corrugated iron roof, steel door and window frames), two sofa sets (settee suites) and one operational and one idle grinding mill.

He has been farming since his retirement, but is not a prominent farmer. He owns 18 acres of land, on which he grows four acres of maize and groundnuts. Apart from that, his wife farms half an acre of oriental tobacco. He uses only the hoe in farming, but he employs about 30 *ganyu* labourers from surrounding villages. He pays them one and a half plates of maize per day. The other main input is fertiliser. He keeps little livestock, only about seven goats.

His major source of income is the maize mill, which was a gift from one of his sons in Blantyre. He receives a pension every fortnight, but this is declining in value because of inflation. He used the money he got on retirement to build the house.

Comment:
Rackwell Kanyinji's wealth is beyond the reach of farmers who do well in Tombolombo. People in Tombolombo are educated, but not beyond primary school level. The regular cash income which education can bring cannot be matched in farming. It is also striking that his farming is highly labour-intensive. It is far beyond the reach of other households to employ 30 people from December to February. This is an illustration of the comparative value of agricultural and other labour. He employs a permanent labourer for his maize mill to whom he pays MK500 a month. His maize mill also puts him beyond the ordinary risks of farming, like crop pests/ diseases and weather.

Farming – especially maize farming – is a highly valued livelihood strategy in Tombolombo. It requires capital however, and this is scarce. It is thus not surprising that many people are dependent on credit. There is simply nobody with an agricultural livelihood who demonstrates that it is a road to material progress beyond a limited stage. The really prosperous people are those, like Rackwell Kanyinji, who have access to resources outside the local economy. However, in a situation where most traditional trading channels have collapsed, it is surprising that few have broken into trade. Private maize traders can make profits up to 50% buying maize in Manyamala and selling it in Mzuzu and Karonga.

Conclusion: In Mzimba the main constraint is lack of capital including cash to buy fertiliser. This poses a threat to the large group of medium-sized farmers and they

tend to look back nostalgically to the days of subsidised inputs and cheap credit. Starter Pack and TIP are not seen as addressing the real problems. Two farmers asked us: "Why can the donors not use the money for Starter Pack and TIP to buy a lot of fertiliser and sell this at affordable prices".

Social structure and poverty

The cases presented above show that farm enterprises in Tombolombo are often interlocked. Ofton Nyirenda's farm cannot be seen in isolation from his parents and his two sisters. Japson Nyirenda's farm is interlocked with those of his children. *Ganyu* labour is often mentioned in interviews, but often it is not the pure type of *ganyu* labour where a family runs out of food and agrees to undertake contract work on other people's farms in the hungry months when they would prefer to work on their own. Payment is on the basis of man-hours/days and not on the amount of work done. It was regularly stated that *ganyu* labour came from outside the village. The dividing line between *ganyu* and being connected to a bigger farm is difficult to draw. The only household we could find to be primarily dependent upon undertaking *ganyu* labour was the household of Taisoni Nkosi. In this case also, there was a link of patronage to the two largest farmers in the village.

Targeting is difficult in Tombolombo because of the interconnectedness of farms. The following case illustrates this:

Aida Lowole

Aida is very old and gives 1927 as her date of birth. She lives with her husband who is mentally ill. During the 1940s, they migrated to Zimbabwe (five years) and Zambia (one year), but thereafter they settled permanently in the village. They had seven children, three of whom died. The other four are married and two of them live in the village in houses adjoining Aida's. One of those living elsewhere is working as a teacher at a day secondary school. Aida farms two acres of land: one is devoted to maize and groundnuts; in the other she cultivates sweet potatoes and cassava.

In the last three years Aida harvested between five and seven bags of maize. No cash is coming in. However, she used one bag of fertiliser every year. Her daughter, the teacher, sends about MK200 every month. The son and daughter living nearby work on her farm. Her son ploughs and ridges her fields. The son earns a considerable income in a year. His 1999-2000 income is estimated as follows:

Source	**Income obtained in 1999-2000**
Burley tobacco	MK60,000
Oriental tobacco	MK 9,000
Timber	MK15,000
Dimba fruits	MK 6,000
Cassava	MK 6,000
Total	MK96,000

This income is of course no indication of profitability, but this man is clearly not a poor farmer.

Comment:
Aida Lowole would deserve free inputs on several targeting criteria. She is old and has a handicapped husband. This interpretation would overlook, however, her position in relationship to other households. If one takes these into account, she is actually one of the better off people in the village.

Conclusion: Isolated, socially excluded, poor households are rare in Tombolombo. The case of Taisoni Nkosi is an exception. Because of the way in which poor or vulnerable households are embedded in richer households, one is not struck by a clear divide between rich and poor. This social constellation makes it difficult to use conventional poverty criteria for targeting. Dependence on undertaking *ganyu* labour to survive seems to be the best criterion for identifying extremely poor, food insecure households, but this would be difficult to operationalise.

Kamange, Nkhotakota – Free inputs in a peri-urban situation

"Without food one can be forced to sell property to buy food" (Voster Lomance Zahave Kamange)

Overtoun Mugemezulu, Mackenzie Chivwali and Jan Kees van Donge

Kamange village qualified for free distribution of agricultural inputs under both Starter Pack programmes as well as TIP. Yet, it could well be argued that Kamange is an urban area. It is about 200 metres from the Nkhotakota District Assembly. Malawi Prisons, PTC supermarket and the NGO World Vision's office are within its boundaries. It identifies itself, despite its peri-urban character as a Chewa village, originating in the last century from Mchinji. It is not surprising, however, that in such a peri-urban setting many people from outside have settled in the village, mainly Yao from Machinga and Mangochi. At first sight, the distinction between immigrant and local seems important, but the more we got to know the village the less we found demarcations between different groups. It is a densely populated area, where the original inhabitants live in particular pockets in more traditional houses than elsewhere. However, it is not possible to make definitive statements about differences, such as 'immigrants are richer', or 'the original inhabitants are more involved in agriculture'. In significant respects, immigrants and locals are similar. The level of education tends to be low, and both groups tend therefore not to be in formal employment, despite close proximity to many employing institutions.

Links with people who have migrated to centres of paid employment are pervasive in the village. People who migrated into the village may have cut ties with their home villages, but they have a strong tie with such contacts in the urban centres of Southern Africa. Trade is important, but unlike many other peri-urban areas in Malawi, there is no flourishing industry of locally-brewed and distilled alcohol. The headman has proscribed the sale of alcohol, but alcohol consumption is allowed.

Despite Kamange's peri-urban character, agriculture is important, but not within the village boundaries. Around the houses the plots are small, and the soil is poor and stony. However, about ten km north of the village – between the Kaome and Kasamba rivers - is an area called Thiwi. This is a floodplain with alluvial soils where farming can be undertaken without fertiliser. It is possible to get two crops a year. The land's fertility stems from the sediment brought by the floods. These same floods can, however, also destroy the fields. The 2000-01 season brought a lot of rain, and many people in Kamange lost their produce and even whole plots in the floodplain.

The impact of free inputs

People in Kamange grow three staples: maize, cassava and rice, with maize being the preferred food. Cassava is resorted to when the maize stocks are exhausted. Rice is grown mainly for commercial purposes and is not really used as a staple food in this area. Establishing the influence of free inputs is complicated by this cropping pattern, as farmers can distribute inputs selectively to different crops. A second complicating factor is that the fields at Thiwi do not need fertiliser. That component of free inputs is therefore only relevant to the fields within the village, which tend to be small. Thirdly, the distribution of free inputs has been uneven. Although SP1 and SP2 as

well as TIP were distributed, there are many instances where only one of the programmes reached people. The reason may be that it is difficult to establish who actually are the villagers in Kamange. Nevertheless, there are households where the distribution of free inputs made a clear difference in the months of food security. The first case presented here illustrates how a poor household's poverty can be alleviated by free inputs.

Magret Makowa

Magret has been divorced twice and now lives alone with her mother and four children. Three of those children attend primary school and one is in Form III of secondary school. If one looks at Magret's situation, her view is understandable: "Some men are only men during the night and therefore cannot buy inputs".

Her poverty is evident for anybody nearing her house: it is in poor shape, even for a thatched house made of unburnt brick. There are no proper windows, and the door is made of bamboo sticks. She has no assets like a radio, bicycle, furniture or livestock.

She farms three plots: one near her house where she plants maize, cassava and sweet potatoes; another of less than an acre is near the lakeshore; and her third plot is in Thiwi where she plants only rice. Her sister, who married in Thiwi and thus gained access to land, gave her that plot. Rice is primarily a cash crop. Last year, for example, she harvested less than two bags, and one of those was sold to buy clothes. Maize is the preferred staple but it runs out quickly. Thereafter the household eats cassava and this provides food until February. Here, cassava is eaten young (*misipu*) and consequently does not have the role of a stored reserve food as it has elsewhere. During the lean months, members of the household may go to bed without a meal, albeit that they will have eaten a snack, such as sweet potatoes.

Ultimately, the household depends upon small business and going for *ganyu* to come through the year. Her brother, who works at the Dwangwa sugar plantations further north along the lake, finances the former. He visits his mother about once every two months and leaves the household some money, ranging from MK50 to MK100. This is used to buy sugarcane or small fish to be sold fried. Magret claims that this business is very profitable and that MK30 worth of sugarcane can easily raise MK60. These profits disappear quickly however, financing the purchase of soap, salt, sugar and paraffin.

Ganyu labour is resorted to when food is scarce during the hungry months. Last year, Magret weeded an acre of cassava together with her sister-in-law. Each got MK300 and a pail of maize worth MK100. She does not like to go for *ganyu* and is forced to take lower rewards than she wants: "Nthawi ya njala ganyu amavuta choncho timalimbirana", meaning: "During the hungry months the demand for *ganyu* is higher than the supply and we scramble/fight each other therefore for work".

She received both Starter Packs as well as TIP. SP1 yielded her four bags (50 kg) of maize. SP2 was less fruitful and she got only three bags (50 kg). Her SP2 pack contained only seeds and no fertiliser, but this was less serious for her than it would have been elsewhere as she planted the maize on the alluvial plain in Thiwi. TIP yielded only one basket of maize, as rain washed away most of the crop.

Comment:
This is an obvious case where free inputs makes a difference. The household can be considered poor on several indicators, and is clearly food insecure. Free inputs allowed the household to delay resorting to cassava in the years that they were distributed. The household has to resort to undertaking ganyu labour at the time when it needs labour for its own fields. Its poverty is slightly cushioned however: there is support from near family. There is also cash income, besides that from ganyu labour, from selling rice and from small business.

It is tempting to mention after this case examples where free inputs made only a marginal impact, as there is a steady source of income outside farming or regular remittances from relatives working elsewhere. But that could give a more sturdy impression of livelihoods in Kamange than is warranted. The next case shows this:

Mai Kanjiswa

Mai is middle aged - about 42 years old - and lives in Kamange with seven of her eight children. Her husband divorced her in 1984 and left her with the children. Only one of those is employed - far away in Karonga - as a driver. The others are living near her house and are neither working nor at school. Only one of her children proceeded to secondary school. He left after Form II as he could not raise the school fees.

Mai's children do not help her much in the fields. Her daughter sometimes brews beer to attract a work party (*chiwira*). On the rare occasions that she gets money from her son in Karonga, she employs *ganyu* labour. Her two small plots are jointly not bigger than one acre. One plot, where she grows maize, is near her house; the other is in Thiwi where she cultivates cassava and rice. She is an efficient farmer who allocates her time precisely: in November and December she plants her maize; thereafter she moves to Thiwi to plant rice; after planting the rice she comes back to her maize field for weeding; thereafter she plants cassava.

Mai sometimes raises money by selling food. Last year, for example, she sold half a bag of rice for MK200. She was short of money as her major source of cash had disappeared: until his death in 2000, every year her brother in Zambia used to send her enough money (MK6,000) to buy soap, salt and paraffin.

Unfortunately, her brother's death coincided with a breakdown in Mai's food security. She received both SP1 and SP2, as well as TIP. She never previously had the money to buy fertiliser and Starter Pack introduced her to that input. Before the Starter Pack programme, she did not cultivate the field near her house. She has achieved good yields on that field: SP1 resulted in ten bags (50 kg) and SP2 yielded her five bags (50 kg). SP2 provided her with so much food that she did not have to buy any. This year will be different: the rains leached the fertiliser from her maize field. The fields in Thiwi have been washed away. Even her cassava field was destroyed. The food from her own fields will not last after May 2001. God only knows how she will survive.

Comment:
Until 2000, Mai received a cash income from her brother, and SP1 and SP2 allowed her to become food secure. Her real problem could be said to be the children, who shun productive work, and this cannot be solved by free inputs. However, Mai is a hard worker who took full advantage of the inputs provided. Her situation has changed considerably for the worse in 2000-01 and without free inputs her yield will be low next year, as she cannot use the field near her house. Distributing free inputs in a case like this makes a clear contribution to alleviating poverty. Another striking aspect of this case is that the Starter Pack programme introduced Mai to new methods of farming, allowing her to use the plot near her house productively.

Conclusion: The distribution of free inputs through SP1 and SP2 undoubtedly had the effect of increasing food security in Kamange village. However, the impact of TIP is minimal as the fields in Kamange were particularly affected by floods and heavy rain. The distribution of free inputs is highly relevant in Kamange, despite its peri-urban character.

Livelihood strategies and relations with markets

The two cases above have illustrated the mixed character of livelihoods in Kamange. Trade is pervasive, but it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what is being bought and sold. There are no fishermen in the village, despite its location on the lakeshore, but people trade in fish. Much trade deals in what is called 'vendors' goods' in Malawi: household utensils, hardware to be used in house building, etc. Some of Kamange's trade may be covert, as it is illegal: trade in marihuana is an example. The second element that is difficult to pinpoint is remittances. Many households have urban links spread over Southern Africa. This is evident in houses being built by absent villagers and was mentioned regularly during interviews. On the other hand we found no households that had given up farming. The following case illustrates how farming and trade are complementary in a livelihood strategy:

Liznet Mustafa

Both Liznet and her husband originate from Mulanje district. They are in their thirties and have three small children. The husband came to Kamange in 1990 in order to trade in fish. She followed her husband in 1992. They have some assets: a radio and a bicycle. The latter is essential to transport fish for the fish trade.

The fish trade was relatively easy to enter in the early 1990s. There was much fish and it was cheap. Therefore, not much capital was needed. Liznet's husband travelled mostly to Kasungu, about 140km inland, to sell the fish. Nowadays, fish is scarce and prices are high. Now, he mainly sells in Nkhotakota at the market or from his house. The trade is quite profitable and on a good day he can have profits of up to MK2,000. The fish trade is an unreliable source of income however. For example, when the lake is rough there is simply no fish.

The family - husband, wife and three children - is food secure through a combination of business and farming. They have one plot of about one acre at Thiwi where Liznet grows maize. The plot was 'given by a friend' who had a very big plot in 1993.

Besides that, they have a small plot close to Nkhotakota where they grow rice, groundnuts and sweet potatoes.

Only the family works in the fields, as Liznet considers *ganyu* labour to be too unreliable. She stresses that they grow different crops to enable them to spread labour over the year. She considers rice and maize to be complementary: when the maize is planted she turns to rice, etc. During the farming season, the husband leaves the business or puts friends in charge of it in order to work on the farm. The food is mostly for home consumption; only rice is sometimes sold to private traders. They got remarkably good yields from SP1 and SP2: ten bags of maize in both seasons. Although they were not TIP recipients, they used TIP inputs. A friend received two packs and gave one of them to Liznet. Because the rains were so heavy, she only managed to get four bags (50 kg) this year, but even this is a much higher yield than is common. They are simply good farmers. In the SP years, they could eat the whole year from their own produce. Therefore their food security did not depend on generating a cash income.

Comment:
This case illustrates the multi-stranded nature of livelihoods in Kamange. The household combines trading in fish with agriculture. The latter is complementary to the fish trade. Agriculture reduces their cash needs and cushions them against the risks of trading. They own a radio and a bicycle, but are obviously not very well off. Liznet's family made full use of the free inputs with excellent results. It is striking that Liznet did not want to employ ganyu labour. She says ganyu is unreliable, but another reason may be that the supply of ganyu labour is weak. People go for ganyu only if they are really trapped and that is less here than elsewhere. There is quite a lot of liquidity in Kamange. That raises demand for ganyu, but it also diminishes the supply.

Trade, renting out houses and – to some extent – employment are found more in livelihoods in Kamange than in more rural villages. However, farming remains complementary to these activities. The following case illustrates that this remains the case, even when people are very successful:

Voster Lomance Zahava Kamange

Voster is middle aged man - 39 years old - who lives in Kamange village with his wife and five children. As the name indicates, he is a native of the village. He is also economically the most successful. That success is rooted in trade.

He left school in 1978, as the family had no money: his father's grocery was destroyed by heavy rains. However, his father gave him MK100 - then a lot of money - to start trading in maize and fish. He was a businessman until 1986 when he started working for the Dwangwa Sugar Corporation, north of Nkhotakota until 1990. He then returned home and was ill for two years. When he recovered in 1993, he started vegetable farming. He was successful and supplied the secondary school, the Islamic centre and vendors with vegetables.

Thereafter, he became a hawker, selling plastic shoes and other things made of plastic, as well as detergents. He tripled his income in three months and switched to trading in

hardware. He was the first vendor to enter that business in Nkhotakota, and he became wealthy.

Looking for another investment for his money, he was advised to build a house. He bought corrugated iron sheets and moulded bricks, employed labour and completed the house in the same year as he had started hawking hardware (1994).

He diversified his business again and sold radios to local farmers. House building continued as well: he now owns five completed houses that are rented out. He is rich in assets, which he documents assiduously: three sofa sets (settee suites), valued at MK25,000, two deep freezers worth MK29,000, three bicycles, three sets of table chairs (high-backed chairs without armrests), one television, two video recorders and four fans.

His business fortunes have suffered setbacks as well. Thieves broke into his shop and house and took MK50,000 worth of goods. Hardware attracts burglars, so he switched to trading in *kaunjika* (second hand clothes) and supplying institutions with fish, beans and maize. He has temporarily withdrawn from trading in second hand clothes, but he still has some stocks. He is, however, short of capital after the burglary, despite a loan from Malawi Rural Finance Company of MK20,000. He turned again to MRFC for a top-up loan, but they have not responded.

Voster is looking after his family. He built houses for his mother and sister. He assisted his brother in building his house. He gave his mother and sister capital to start a business selling doughnuts. Last year, he bought four bags of fertiliser and gave two to his mother and his sister.

Voster's wealth is based on business, but he is a farmer as well. He has three and a half acres of land at Thiwi. He uses only one acre, where last year he produced 30 bags of maize (50 kg). He employs *ganyu* labour, on which he spent MK4,500 in the past year.

Comment:
There is a mysterious side to this story, as it is likely that there may have been another, unmentioned source of capital. It is telling, however, that it documents trade as a source of capital rather than agriculture. The exception is his vegetable garden, and that requires few inputs. Despite the fact that he has a livelihood based upon trade and renting out houses, he continues to farm. In his view, this is essential, if only to set an example to his relatives. Livelihoods in Kamange always include some agricultural element.

Conclusion: Kamange is a peri-urban area in which there are a variety of livelihood strategies including strong market linkages through trade. Many livelihoods straddle various activities, but agriculture remains an element in all.

Social structure and poverty

It is not surprising that there is little cohesion in the Kamange village community, as it is such a mixture of diverse people in an open, urban environment. There always tends to be a fluid marriage structure in matrilineal societies, as the husband is not as

important as the male relatives in the matrilineal line. In Kamange there is a notable absence of husbands and female-headed households are common. Women in such households tend to have children by various partners who do not take responsibility for their offspring. Migration, divorce and death are forces that create such households. These are exacerbated by the AIDS pandemic, as there are now many orphans:

Wafuna Phiri

Wafuna is a widow in her late sixties. Four of her children are still living with her. She also looks after ten orphans and her old mother. Nine of the orphans were left behind when her son died last January. The tenth is a child of her daughter who died in August 2000. Two of her sons still live at home. One, however, is mentally handicapped. The other is at secondary school and goes for *ganyu* in his spare time in order to pay his school fees. One divorced daughter also lives at home and she is the only member of the household who assists Wafuna. Most of the other children are very young. They go to school and cannot help much on the farm.

In the past Wafuna was food secure, because the children who are now dead used to send her money, which she used to employ *ganyu* labour. This was particularly profitable on her field near the lake where she grows rice. Last year she harvested six bags (90kg each) from that field. Wafuna sometimes prepares food for a work party (*chiwira*) in the fields.

In Wafuna's case, most of the food she grew was for home consumption. Her other field is around her house and cannot produce much. It is here that she used her free inputs. She did not receive SP1, but she harvested two bags (50 kg) of maize from SP2. She received TIP, but the rains washed the fertiliser away. That crop was all eaten as green maize.

Instead of employing *ganyu* labour, she has had to undertake it herself in the past year. She weeded a cassava garden and got MK100 for two days work. She does not think it worthwhile to work for so little money, but she has to in order to survive. Her divorced daughter generates money through selling fish.

Comment:
The essential element of Wafuna Phiri's case is that apart from her daughter, there is literally no one to assist her. The case shows how divorce and death lead to households full of females and with many children. It shows as well the brittle nature of livelihoods in Kamange, as was also shown in the case of Mai Kanjiswa. This vulnerability is especially poignant if households are dependent upon outside support.

For many people in Kamange, the essential links are with the outside world: mostly children who have migrated. Strong social bonds within Kamange are rare. People work on their own land and communal working arrangements are scarce. Farms are not big, and therefore few people employ *ganyu* labour. The case of Voster Kamange is unusual in that he looks after his family, but these are primarily close family members. Even if one has close family living in Kamange, one cannot always expect much support:

Alaina Mtalika

Alaina is old - she does not know her age – and widowed, but still energetic. She farms two plots: together they are less than two acres. One of these is in Thiwi on the floodplain, where she grows rice for sale (she buys maize with the proceeds). The other is near her house, where she grows maize. When she farms at Thiwi, she stays with relatives there. Two granddaughters who are living with her then look after the maize plot near her house. One of the granddaughters is nursing a child. The father is absent however, and maybe not known.

The granddaughters also help her if there is no money for milling. They then fetch firewood and sell it in bundles. Alaina is normally self-sufficient in food. Her maize lasts normally until December. However, since she plants two crops a year at Thiwi, she rarely goes without a meal. SP1 and SP2 benefited her with three and two bags of maize, respectively. The fertiliser from TIP was, however, leached from the soil. Her field at Thiwi was also washed away when the river flooded.

Nevertheless, Alaina will not starve. Her son in South Africa looks after her. She herself lives in a very poor house, but next to her is an incomplete house that is being built by her son in South Africa, using good construction materials. Her own house was also built by him. He buys her clothes and generally supports her.

This relationship is in contrast to the relationships with her three daughters nearby. They are jealous of her good relationship with her son. Once she got a *chitenje* from him and that led to a fight with one of her daughters who claimed it was hers. She would not dare to go there to ask for food: “Aleke kukakuphwanyira mbale yako yopemphera chakudyao”, meaning “They can even break your plate, which you carried as you looked for food”. They will mostly hide their true feelings when you meet them, but there is no love lost between them.

Comment:
The most important link for Alaina Mtalika is with the son in South Africa and not with her daughters living close to her. In Kamange, relationships, even close relationships, do not necessarily lead to mutual support. Outside links are also much more profitable than links within the village. The granddaughters help Alaina, but that help is dwarfed by what she gets from South Africa.

Conclusion: Poverty and food security in Kamange is closely related to social isolation. Relationships within the village tend to be shallow, and outside links, especially to close relatives who are in employment, are very important. As one cannot easily see these links, it is difficult to target support to those who most need it.

Katsukunya, Dowa – Free inputs in a tobacco-dominated village

'We like hybrid seed because it matures earlier and shortens the hungry months'

William Kasapila, Noel Sengore and Jan Kees van Donge

The land along the main road from Lilongwe to Kasungu is bare, even by Malawian standards. Tobacco cultivation – which demands a lot of wood - is probably more important here than anywhere else in Malawi. This is evident in Katsukunya village, situated about 5 km off this main road. Sheds for curing burley tobacco are a dominant feature of this village, while grain stores (*nkhokwe*) are nowhere to be seen. The influence of the cash economy was evident in people's attitude during interviews: directly so in the value placed upon tobacco as a source of money, rather than on maize or another staple crop; and indirectly in the individualism revealed in repeated statements against gossip and the values of keeping oneself to oneself. For example: 'She has one true friend within the village because the two hate the gossiping and back-biting which are liked by other people'. In this village, free inputs were more an element of an individualised, cash-based economy than in the other sites we visited.

The impact of free inputs

Households in this village tend not to be food secure. The lean period is sharply felt: many households run out of maize, especially after January. The main coping strategy is to grow a little tobacco and sell the leaves when they are picked, but not yet cured, in January/February. Tobacco is then bought in advance, as the sellers still have to cure it. This is of course a form of distress selling, as prices are naturally low. Wage labour is widespread in the village and is also fuelled by the need to buy food. This does not, however, imply that working for other people is appreciated. People prefer to avoid it.

The hybrid maize seeds in the packages of free inputs were especially appreciated because hybrid maize matures early, shortening the hungry months. Most of it is used to make flour from sun-dried fresh maize for making *nsima* (*chitibu).*

The village received SP1 and SP2, albeit that there were irregularities. For example, some people did not receive SP2 and other people got two packs of SP1: one was for an absent son. TIP was clearly targeted in Katsukunya towards the old, the handicapped and people looking after orphans. The TIP packs all ended up with old people, which was strongly resented by the young. The targeting was felt to be inequitable, as such people are not necessarily poorer than others. This may be clarified by contrasting a case if somebody who received TIP with the case of a worse-off person who did not get it:

Noriah Kachikhada

Noriah is a twice-divorced lady of about 45 years of age. She lives with four of her five children (28, 26, 21, 9 years old) – the fifth one died - in Katsukunya. Two of them attended secondary school for some years, but then dropped out. One of them, female, returned to her mother after a divorce. They have no radio or bicycle and own only six chickens.

Noriah farms three acres of maize and one acre of groundnuts, as well as some tobacco (20 ridges). Pumpkins and cowpeas are intercropped with the groundnuts. She and three of her children do the cultivation using a hoe. They normally tend to run out of food in January. They then start to sell their tobacco bit by bit to buyers in the village. They also sell groundnuts. Their main cash income is, however, from alcohol. They themselves are teetotallers on religious grounds, but they brew beer. It would be more appropriate to say that they distil liquor (*kachasu*). They use one pail of maize seconds (*madeya*) - MK50 - and sugar (four to five packets) as ingredients. They claim to brew twice a week and earn MK200-250 a time. These are large earnings in rural Malawi, but it is difficult to raise the capital. They need to go for *ganyu* to raise this money, but going for *ganyu* may also be motivated by a worsening in their position.

Noriah's family claims not to have undertaken *ganyu* labour in the 1999-2000 season. However, at the beginning of 2001, Noriah and three of the children banked 63 ridges of tobacco for two pails of maize. She had also run out money for milling at that time and resorted to pounding the maize. The financial crisis was a result of illness: the youngest child had cerebral malaria in November 2000.

Noriah buys seed, but has never bought fertiliser. The only fertiliser she ever used was from SP1 and TIP (she did not receive SP2). The effects on the farm of free inputs are obvious:

Season	**Inputs**	**Harvest**
1997-98 Local seed	Some hybrid seed	2 oxcarts and four baskets
1998-99 Local seed	SP1	5 oxcarts; 1.5 from SP1
1999-2000	Recycled seed from SP1	3 oxcarts
2000-01 Local seed	TIP	1 oxcart; Maize from TIP finished as *chitibu*

<u>*Comment:*</u>
Noriah Kachikhada's case illustrates how economic life in Katsukunya is deeply interwoven with the cash economy. The sale of tobacco, groundnuts and beer leads to a fairly stable food supply. The household members do not skip meals in January and February, albeit that meals may be smaller. The family bought meat last Christmas, despite the hard-pressed finances. At the same time, the case illustrates the vulnerable position they are in. Labour supply in the family is at its peak: the children will probably leave home in the coming years. Their sources of income are dependent upon the tobacco economy, which is under threat because low prices.

Illness can be a poverty trap from which it is difficult to recover. It may be one of the reasons for the poor harvest – as compared to other years – in 2000-01. During planting time, they had to spend weeks in and around hospitals. Noriah considers her life from 1992 – the time of her second divorce – until now as the most difficult time in

her life. This she contrasts with the period 1971-1982 when she lived, with some interruptions, as a tenant (sharecropper) on estates: "we were working as tenants through which we were having enough food and a reasonable amount of money, despite the fact that my husband was crooked". If being a tenant is the situation to which her present situation is negatively contrasted, then her present situation is definitely not good.

Noriah Kachikhada is probably a deserving case for free inputs, but others, who are worse off, did not get TIP in 2000-01. This is illustrated in the following case:

Benedeta Jephter

Benedeta is not old. She is married and had six children - varying in age between 16 and 2 years old. One is dead; one is living with an uncle in Kasungu; a third, a daughter, is recently married and now lives elsewhere in Dowa. She is sorely missed as she used to help on the farm. Three children are living with Benedeta, but they are too young to be a significant source of labour. Benedeta is handicapped, as the eyelashes of one of her eyes are pointed inwards. This condition leads ultimately to blindness in the affected eye, if not treated.

The good times Benedeta remembers are long past - in the mid-1980s. She and her husband were newly married then and received food from the parents on both sides. From the late 1980s, they have been running short of food from August onwards. They have a mere acre on which to grow maize. They regularly eat maize seconds (*madeya*) between October and February. They grow a little tobacco (a quarter of an acre), which they sell unprocessed in January and February to tobacco growers in the village. The quality of this tobacco is poor, as they do not use fertiliser. They have virtually no assets; for example, they own no livestock at all. At Christmas they ate *nsima* with wild vegetables, as is normally the case. The bleakness of their existence shows in the remark that: "last year was a bad year like many other years before".

Benedeta's family has attempted to break out of poverty:

1. The husband makes grain stores - *nkhokwe* - but demand is low as most people make these themselves.
2. In the 1998-99 season, they got a bag of unshelled groundnuts on credit from the National Association of Smallholder Farmers (NASFAM). They had to return two bags of unshelled groundnuts or MK240. Despite the fact that the groundnuts arrived only late in January, they still planted them and devoted as much attention to the field as they could. The yield was low however, and they could not repay the loan. She and her husband had to go for *ganyu* to repay the loan.
3. In the 1999-2000 season, the husband started to work as a tenant for a rather successful tobacco farmer in a neighbouring village. However, he could not manage it and had to give it up in the middle of the contract. His biggest difficulty was that he could not undertake *ganyu* labour while sharecropping, but the need to earn money was so pressing that he quit the sharecropping arrangement. Under this type of arrangement, he would only get his money after the harvest. Thus he did not reap any reward from his sharecropping. The essence of their existence is that they are utterly dependent upon undertaking *ganyu* labour.

Free inputs can make a big difference in cases like this, but only SP2 made such a difference here. SP1 arrived too late, but nevertheless they planted. They only got some green maize from it. They did not qualify for TIP. When they plant local maize without fertiliser, they harvest about one oxcart. In 1999-2000 they harvested an extra oxcart from SP2. This meant that their food did not run out until November.

Comment:
This is an extremely resource-poor household in an environment where the economy is relatively cash-rich. The only way in which they can access cash is through their labour, which is unskilled and generally poorly paid. Free inputs have a direct ameliorating effect, but they did not qualify for TIP. The comparison of this case with the one above suggests that dependence on ganyu labour for survival is a clear discriminating criterion for poverty in rural Malawi.

Conclusion: The dominant value in farm enterprises is tobacco and not food crops. Food is brought into the household through additional money income rather than by growing one's own food. Free inputs for growing one's own food are, however, important for resource-poor households. These households can best be distinguished by their dependence upon *ganyu* labour.

Livelihood strategies and relations with markets

Growing tobacco is a major theme in livelihoods in Katsukunya. As the cases above illustrate, it is not merely a big man's crop: poor households also grow tobacco to eke out the hungry months. This is partly so because tobacco matures earlier than maize and therefore gives relief in the most difficult months, but the question as to why the effort in this minimally rewarding activity – it is distress selling – could not be channelled in growing food is pertinent.

Tobacco has the lure of money, which is especially strong for the younger men in the village. This shows as well in the tendency to divert fertiliser from food crops to tobacco. Individualism is part of this culture. Farmers are not organised in a burley club, which would give access to credit, extension and direct entrance to the auction floor. There have been attempts to form clubs, most recently a maize growing club to get loans from the Farmers Finance Company. These initiatives are mostly taken by the younger people in the village, but have not succeeded. People sell tobacco to intermediate buyers, mostly in situations of distress selling when there is an urgent need for cash.

Some people in the village are members of the Tobacco Association of Malawi (TAMA) and this gives them access to the auction floor. It is of course rewarding to cut out the middlemen (intermediate buyers). Other villagers therefore market their tobacco through TAMA members in an informal arrangement. There is little formal credit available in the village, except through TAMA. Here as well, people approach the person eligible for credit in order to obtain – on the strength of that person's name – access to credit. It is also a protection in the event of default, as only the official TAMA member is responsible for repayment. Despite the low tobacco prices, some farmers still claim to do very well out of tobacco:

Mayi Numere Sinkanako

Mayi's first husband died in 1983. She came to Katsukunya in 1988 when she married her present husband. All three of her children (23-29 years old) are married outside the village. One of her husband's sons lives in the village, however, and farms with them. Their farm enterprise is more substantial than any of those previously described. They grow two acres of maize, one acre of tobacco and one acre of groundnuts as well as some beans, soybeans and cowpeas. They own two cows, four goats and three chickens. Labour on the farm is problematic. The husband is quite old and his son only helps part time on the farm. He is also attending a day secondary school. Mayi pays the school fees. They therefore employed *ganyu* labour before Christmas last year. They paid for the labour with chickens, as they were saving money for Christmas.

They sell tobacco every year, but the year 2000-01 was better for them than any before, realising, as they did, MK10,000 from the sale. They bought a bicycle, clothes and more food than is usually the case during the lean months. Normally their food runs out in January/February. Food is bought from money reserved after selling the tobacco. The income from tobacco is also used to buy clothes, do as much milling as possible and buy soap and salt in bulk. School fees are paid from a different source: the sale of sugarcane. Sometimes, but rarely, they sell groundnuts, and they sell meat when a cow has to be slaughtered, notably when the animal is ill.

They are members of TAMA, which gives them access to the auction floor. In 1998-99 they got a loan for thirteen bags of fertiliser. Two bags were paid for transport; three bags were passed on to her husband's son in the village. This left them with eight bags, of which seven were used for tobacco and one for maize. They did not receive any credit in subsequent years, but in 2000-01 they bought inputs: two bags of fertiliser; copper for the tobacco nurseries and groundnut seed. One pail of the fertiliser was used on maize.

Comment:
This case illustrates a relatively well-to-do household, based on a farm enterprise centring on tobacco. Mayi Numere Sinkanako has not always known relative prosperity. Her bad times were between 1983 and 1988 when she was a widow and food was in very short supply. It was her marriage that made her more comfortable, and it is good for her husband to have a dynamic wife in old age. They received SP1 and SP2 as well as TIP, the latter presumably because of the old age of the husband. The packs have helped them to delay buying food for a few more months. The enterprise is, however, based upon the cash coming in from tobacco rather than on an attempt to be self-sufficient in food.

Mayi Sinkanako's case is probably incomplete: it is highly likely that she also earns money by auctioning tobacco on behalf of other people. The allegation is certainly made that people with access to the auction floors retain unreasonable amounts of money. This raises the question as to what is more profitable, growing tobacco or trading in tobacco? Probably the latter. This is also strongly suggested in the following success story:

Stafiel Kathawa

Stafiel is a young man, born in 1979 and a secondary school pupil in the fourth form of Madise Secondary School. His father left Katsukunya in search of land, and Stafiel has been living with his grandmother since 1983. He started his business together with his grandmother, but since he married in 2000 he has been on his own.

Stafiel begged his grandmother for land, and in 1997-98 she gave him one acre and a pail of fertiliser. He planted maize and harvested five bags (50 kg). He stored it until demand rose in January. He gave the MK1,000 he earned from this venture to his grandmother for safekeeping. He asked for the MK1,000 in February 1999 to buy tobacco in Katsukunya. He continued buying until he had two bales, which he sent to the auction floor using somebody else's registration card. All this business was transacted during school holidays and at weekends.

Stafiel turned the MK1,000 into MK8,000. This he used to buy 24 bags of maize and two bags of fertiliser. In the 1999-2000 season, he cultivated one acre of tobacco to which he applied the two bags of fertiliser. Four bags of maize were used in his grandmother's household. The rest remained in store until February 2000, when he started selling them. His grandmother did that on his behalf, as he was at school. The maize gave him a return of MK6,000.

Stafiel employed people to look after the tobacco. He harvested three bales from the field. He used the money from selling the maize to buy another three bales of tobacco. Six bales of tobacco were therefore sent to the auction floor and gave him a return of MK24,000. In the 1999-2000 agricultural season, he changed thus MK8,000 into MK24,000. This gave him the confidence to marry in the same year. Expenses went up: he had to pay a bride price (*lobola*); he had to pay labour; and his wife needed household necessities like soap, salt, sugar, tea, etc. He also had to pay his school fees, and he needed pocket money.

In the year 2000-01, he rented an additional acre in a neighbouring village for MK500 and farmed thus a total of two acres. Since October 1999, he has been employing a couple to work for him on a sharecropping basis. He provides them with one tin of maize a month. His wife is managing the farm and she employs *ganyu* labour when it is needed. At the time of the interview, he had harvested eight bales. Three bales had been sold already for MK28,000. The couple who sharecrop got MK5,000 out of this. After receiving money for his tobacco, he buys maize immediately after the harvest. This he sells again after January when demand for maize is high.

Comment:
This story undoubtedly shows entrepreneurial ability, energy and thrift. Above all, Stafiel establishes dependable social relationships: the sharecroppers are the prime example. The involvement of his grandmother and his wife in the enterprises shows this ability as well. However, the individual characteristics of the entrepreneur should not blind us to the economic situation in which he operates. His success is dependent upon capital, which is in short supply in Katsukunya. If that were not the case, then many other people would enter the trade in which he is involved.

Stafiel's success is based on taking advantage of the shortages of cash in households in Katsukunya. His profits from tobacco may originate partly in distress selling by villagers during January and February. Households lack the cash to buy enough maize to last a year immediately after the harvest when prices are low, whereas Stafiel has an excess of maize which he keeps to sell when prices rise in January and February. His control of a maize stock when people run out of food is also essential in the successful sharecropping arrangement. A key question raised by this case is whether it is agricultural production or trade in agricultural produce which is most profitable.

Conclusion: Farm enterprises in Katsukunya are, mainly through tobacco, more integrated in the cash economy than elsewhere. Tobacco has the lure of cash. It is also a crop that allows traders to make big profits by buying tobacco cheaply from food insecure people during the lean months and selling them maize at that time.

Social structure and poverty

We have stressed several times how people in Katsukunya see themselves more involved in the cash economy than is common elsewhere in Malawi. This also implies more individualism. Links between farming enterprises are minimal. On marriage, the woman moves to the man's village, but there is only a very small bride price. Uniting labour forces to work in turn on different farms is unknown. Mobilising labour through work parties who work in the morning in return for beer in the afternoon is sometimes mentioned. However, somebody mentioned that, if these take place, it is mostly for beer that is not selling well as the taste is not good – it will go off if not drunk quickly.

In Katsukunya, kinship does not evoke a language of solidarity. In answer to the question as to who will assist them if desperate for salt, food or other basic necessities, people often mentioned neighbours and friends, rather than relatives. If the latter were mentioned, then they were close relatives. In addition, whatever was provided was more often given as a credit than as a gift. These comments by a farmer in his declining years characterise the situation: "In case of such difficulties as no maize flour, no salt etc., the wife seeks assistance from friends and neighbours. They give it either on credit or as a gift"; "Nobody lends us money because people feel that we cannot easily pay back the debt"; "I have most contacts with my cousin because we can freely speak our mind and keep secrets". Another set of comments: "If we have difficulties, we have nobody really to help us. In the village when you beg or ask for credit or salt, or maize flour, people begin to gossip heavily about you. Hence we just endure the situation". "I have most contact with my sister-in-law, because we think more or less the same and do not like gossip and we are both poor". These comments imply a tendency to socially exclude the poor. Help in the event of illness – especially hospitalisation - may be the exception. We found support from outside the household in such cases, but it is not necessarily a gift and can be a loan.

The importance of cash cropping, especially tobacco, might suggest that there is concentration: big farmers who get bigger and the poor who become more dependent upon wage labour. But this is not really the case, as even the most successful tobacco growers in the village do not produce more than three to four bales of tobacco.

Ganyu labour is more than a coping mechanism in this village. It is not regarded positively, but it is very common. It is not restricted to coping with the lean months, but more akin to established wage labour. The main *ganyu* employer is an estate – Kapachila Banda's – outside the village. This estate offers employment throughout the year, not only in peak periods. The estate usually pays in kind and it pays little – for example, a medium plate of maize for sixty ridges. Within the village, there are only a few (two or three) employers of *ganyu* labour.

The resources from which social safety nets can be formed are thin in Katsukunya, as the following case illustrates:

Mapasula

Mapasula has three male grown up children and must therefore be in late middle age. She would be considered poor on many indicators: no radio, no bicycle, a house made of mud and thatch and no furniture. Her farm is just over one acre and the only livestock she owns is one chicken. During the lean months she eats only one meal a day and mixes maize seconds (*madeya*) with maize. Free inputs made a big difference to her. She harvested one oxcart instead of a quarter of an oxcart. Despite the improvement, her own food lasted only until November. She did not get TIP. The reason may be that within the village she is not considered old. That would explain her objection to TIP: "I am against giving TIP to the old, because some of the old people are much better off. Some are too old, such that they cannot cultivate at all".

Mapasula has not managed to be better off as she grew older, and she blames that on untrustworthy partners. In the immediate period after marriage, together with her husband she produced considerable quantities of tobacco – up to 15 bales. They sold the bales through the husband's elder brother who must have had access to the auction floor. The proceeds of this crop did not reach her, however, and was maybe swindled and certainly used by the husband on his pleasures in life. The husband left her and is now somewhere in Kasungu.

This was a change for the better, as she is now more in control of her own affairs. She is, however, utterly dependent on her three male children who have settled in the village. They - with their families - do all the weeding and ridging for her. She sells a little tobacco in January-February, but is mainly dependent upon going for *ganyu*. Last year, she went for *ganyu* at Kapachila Banda's farm and contracted to do banking in maize ridges on a quarter of an acre in return for a large plateful of flour. She failed, however, to complete the job and her sons stepped in to do the work. The children more often than not undertake *ganyu* labour on her behalf.

Comment:
Mapasula's three children form a social safety net in this case, but that is not from a position of strength. They are dependent on going for ganyu themselves and have to undertake more to help their mother. They may ameliorate the lean period, but it remains a hungry time for Mapasula.

This case also shows the attraction of tobacco. Despite her complaints about the years with her husband, the good years were those in which a lot of tobacco was produced. She continues to grow a quarter of an acre of tobacco to sell in order to

pay for immediate needs like milling new soft maize for making nsima (chitibu). Tobacco has the value of an independent source of cash.

The desire for independence has to be seen against the background of a lack of trust in the outside world. This mistrust is not only based on her relationship with the ex-husband, but is also evident in the following statements: "I sometimes tried to get flour on credit, but this is not common as people will give you a bad name when you try to get credit from friends"; "If I want credit, I would go nowhere, because I want my dignity. People tend to publicise your problem once you ask for assistance".

Conclusion: Farm enterprises in Katsukunya are more individual than elsewhere in Malawi. There is considerable distrust in the village. If poor, vulnerable people are assisted, then it is usually by close kin. These are often also poor in the sense that they are ultimately dependent upon undertaking *ganyu* labour. In such cases, free inputs directed to the individual household have a clear, positive impact on food security. More fundamental solutions to poverty in Katsukunya may, however, imply a move away from tobacco.

Kankodola, Dedza – Free inputs where agriculture is in decline

Prince Kapondamgaga, Elarton Thawani and Jan Kees van Donge

The approach to Kankodola village can give a misleading impression. On entering the village – after about 40 km of very poor dirt road branching from the main Lilongwe-Blantyre road – one passes a flourishing grinding mill at the front, and there is a beautiful plantation of gum trees at the back. These do not belong to Kankodola however, but to Chatondeza village, situated more or less within Kankodola village. Spread over the two villages, there are five lineages called Kankodola. Chatondeza has split from Kankodola. The split originated in the 1970s and 1980s, and was fuelled by envy of wealth and by witchcraft accusations. It was sparked off by the death of the headman, which led to witchcraft accusations against the head of a lineage not in power. This latter was a wealthy man who had, at that time, 15 grinding mills in operation. The accused reacted by starting a movement to split off from Kankodola and used his money to entice people to follow him. There was, however, no virgin land to which the new village could move and, as a result, the new village was situated within the existing village of Konkodola.

The Chatondeza sections are recognisable by their corrugated iron roofs, which are virtually non-existent in Kankodola. Chatondeza is also bigger than Kankodola – 300 households as compared to 87. Wealth remains a moot issue in Kankodola. One of the few households not in decline said that putting a corrugated iron roof on one's house was an unthinkable act of flaunting one's wealth. We asked the village leadership to identify farm enterprises doing relatively well, and we found that these were not particularly prosperous. Others, who were prospering, were not mentioned. The contentious nature of wealth has to be seen against a background of continuing impoverishment in Konkodola as a whole.

This culture of poverty implies also that people are not well equipped to deal with the modern outside world. The area is better provided with private trading networks than other places in Malawi, but the working of outside institutions often escapes people. That is especially the case in relation to the sale of tobacco: the working of the auction floor and the nature of deductions are a mystery to many[21]. Such factors are difficult to grasp clearly in a short visit, but these are essential to understand life in Konkodola.

Poverty pervades economic life in the village. Child mortality was high in every household we talked to. Sanitation in the village is problematic. Education levels are low – rarely had anybody completed primary school (Standard VIII). There is neither a health centre nor a school close to the village. Farms are often small and are rapidly becoming smaller through subdivision among children. There is a market for renting land. Although the keeping of livestock is valued in this Chewa area, only two households had cattle in a kraal. Theft of livestock is mentioned as the reason for dwindling herds, but disease seems to play a major role as well. Agriculture is hoe-based and the only ox-drawn implements are two oxcarts. There had been three formal credit schemes in the village: MRFC, APIP and a seed revolving fund

[21] Money is deducted for transport, auctioning, contribution to TAMA etc. This is not understood by farmers in Kankodola and the officials leave them often in the dark about these deductions by giving them a slip with the final amount written in pencil without referring to the computer printout which the burley club gets from the auction floor.

programme of Concern Universal. Both the burley club (MRFC loan) and the maize club (APIP) had defaulted, and we found little evidence on the ground of the scheme operated by Concern Universal. Migration is a dominant feature of life: the older generation has often worked in South Africa; the younger generation may be found in Lilongwe or sharecropping on tobacco estates in Kasungu. Young people are scarce in the village.

The impact of free inputs

Kankodola village did not receive any free inputs under TIP. SP1 and SP2 were distributed, but there were conflicts, as some people did not receive their packs. The identification of the effects of free inputs in poor households that run out of food after November is quite straightforward. It is more difficult to identify the impact of free inputs on households that are normally food secure. The latter tend to be in a spiral of decline due to a crisis in tobacco production, and it is difficult to disentangle the effects of free inputs in this process. In fact, this process of agricultural decline affects all households in Konkodola, but first let us consider a straightforward case:

Namadikira Mofat

Namadikira represents one of the eleven female-headed households in Konkodola. She claims to be 41 years old and has married twice. She had seven children by her first husband and only two of them are still alive. By the second husband, she had six children and two of them died. Such mortality is a clear indication of poverty. Two of her children - who are at primary school - live with her and her husband in Kankodola. Two others are married and live outside the village. The poverty of the household is evident not only in the lack of assets like livestock, but also in a dilapidated house and ragged clothes. They have quite a bit of land by the standards of the village: 2.5 acres, of which 0.5 acres is *dimba* land. On the two-acre plot she grows maize, with groundnuts intercropped. The constraints on their enterprise are considerable: the family cannot mobilise much labour, as the two children are still in primary school. They rely solely on hoe and sickle for cultivation and use no ox-drawn implements. Above all, there is no capital to buy inputs. They raise some money from groundnuts and sugarcane and are helped by the married children, but going for *ganyu* to Chatondeza - the big man of the split off village - is unavoidable almost every year.

It seemed that they might break out of their situation in 1998-99. Namadikira bought two bags of fertiliser with the sale proceeds of sugarcane. The tobacco crop grown fetched MK5,000. It was quickly spent however, as her daughter was hospitalised for some months. In the year 1999-2000, she rented an additional two acres of land, but this did not result in higher production. Even so, their situation would have been worse without the Starter Pack programme:

Season	Yield oxcarts	Yield Bags (50kg)
1998-99	2	7.0
1999-00	1	3.5
2000-01	0.5	1.75

Comment:
Namadikira's household faces many constraints, but labour is a key one. The provision of free inputs to raise the productivity of scarce labour has probably more impact than any other means of alleviating poverty.

The next case shows how well-established and relatively prosperous farm households are under threat. Their situation is changing to such an extent that free inputs, instead of being a marginal contribution, could make a big difference.

Leonard Patrick

Leonard is the headman of Kankodola village. He is 64 years old and lives with his wife and three children of primary school age (ranging from 9 to 14 years old). He had twelve children with his first wife, five of whom are still alive. After his divorce - his first wife joined those who split off from the village - he remarried, and that union brought two more children. He owns a bicycle, but no radio. Nor is there any furniture in his mud and thatch house. He owns a little livestock: two goats and five chickens.

This modest position is striking, as he spent sixteen years (1958-74) working in South Africa. His farm is large by Kankodolan standards: four acres, and a half acre rented from others. He grows about two and a half acres of maize and a half acre each of tobacco, beans, soybeans and dimba land crops. Intercropped he grows groundnuts as well. He employs about 15 people going for *ganyu* a year and pays them in maize.

He does not sell maize however. He obtains some income from beans and dimba crops (turnips and tomatoes), but tobacco is his main income earner. It may be truer to say that it used to be his main income earner, as the following figures suggest:

Growing season	**Quantity of tobacco sold**	**Amount realised (MK)**
1998-99	2 bales (150kg)	6,000
1999-00	1 bale (50kg)	1,000
2000-01	Less than 1 bale (25kg)	Not yet sold

Leonard belonged to a burley club that obtained a loan from the Malawi Rural Finance Company. They defaulted however in 1999-00, as the prices of tobacco were so low. Therefore he did not buy any fertiliser in 2000-01. This had implications for his maize crop as well, as he also used to apply fertiliser on his maize. Therefore his yields of maize have dropped considerably. The following table shows the trend in his maize production.

Growing season	**Fertiliser applied (bags)**	**Yield:**	**Oxcarts**	**Bags (50kg)**
1998-99	6		6	21
1999-00	4		5	17.5
2000-01	0		2	7.0

Comment:
SP1 and SP2 were marginal in Leonard Patrick's farm enterprise given the amounts of fertiliser applied in those years. The use of fertiliser in maize production was crucial. Maize was produced not only to feed the family, but also to pay for ganyu labour. The low prices for tobacco and the default of the burley club led to a

downward spiral from which it is unlikely that the enterprise will recover. Leonard has alternative crops to sell that may cushion the fall and he also receives remittances from two children working in Lilongwe. He complained that the amount of inputs in Starter Pack was too small, but he may be soon in a position where such small amounts are very welcome.

Conclusion: Free inputs made a big difference in the poor households in Kankodola, which are the majority. Impoverishment is increasing rapidly in the village. The crisis in tobacco cultivation will make the purchase of inputs more difficult for more households in future.

Livelihood strategies and relations with markets

Livelihoods take two forms in Kankodola. One is dependent upon employing *ganyu* labour to grow tobacco, while the other is dependent on working as *ganyu* labour to survive the lean periods. There is a strong supply of *ganyu* labour in Kankodola, especially from women during the hungry season. Villagers have to compete with those from surrounding villages that have been hit by similar economic decline. It is not surprising in this situation that the general opinion was that more people were looking for *ganyu* than before and the supply was expected to be even greater in the coming year, as the harvest in 2001 looked like being a poor one. There is not much demand for *ganyu* in Konkodola as people are too poor. There used to be considerable demand for *ganyu* to process the tobacco – especially stringing the leaves – but now tobacco cultivation is collapsing because the burley club defaulted on its loan. The biggest demand for *ganyu* comes from Chatondeza.

Against this background, it may be more interesting to look at two farm enterprises which are less typical: one which neither employs, nor goes for, *ganyu* labour; and the other which is actually progressing in the midst of decline.

Kalinyengo Sikelo

Kalinyengo is unusual in Kankodola, in that he has never left the village. He was born in 1944 and has been living with the same wife since 1962. She gave birth to nine children, of whom only three are still alive. In that sense his case exemplifies the poverty of Kankodola. His household is also asset poor: he has no furniture, no bicycle, and no livestock. Only one of his children - 11 years old and attending school - lives with him and his wife. The three of them are the only labour employed on the farm. The other two children are in Lilongwe and Kasungu.

Kalinyengo has not gone into tobacco. He has been an independent farmer since 1964 and has always concentrated on maize and groundnuts. At the start he did not need fertiliser, as the soil was rich enough. From 1990 onwards however, he started to grow hybrid maize using fertiliser, financed by credit. When the credit structure collapsed in Malawi in 1994 during the changeover to a multiparty system, he stopped growing hybrid maize. The household has been food secure in recent years because of SP. It is doubtful, however, whether they will continue to be secure in the coming year without free inputs.

Growing season	Yield:	Oxcarts	Bags (50kg)
1998-99		2	7
1999-00		2.5	8.75
2000-01		1.5	5.25

Kalinyengo does not, however, only grow maize intercropped with groundnuts (two acres). One acre is devoted to soybeans and half an acre to pure stand groundnuts. He also has some dimba land. He sells groundnuts, soybeans and sugarcane from the dimba. This does not raise much money, about MK900 in total.

Comment:
This farm is in a precarious position. It has escaped the consequences of the collapse in tobacco, but it has no other significant sources of cash. Kalinyengo Sikelo is primarily a maize farmer, but the collapse of credit in 1994 hit him hard. SP just kept the household food secure. In the 2000-01 season, there were no free inputs, excessive rain damaged his crop and he had to attend to his sister who was ill for four months. His total annual cash income would not be enough to buy one bag of fertiliser. Hence, he cannot afford inputs at present prices. The poverty trap seems unavoidable, despite his avoidance of the risks of tobacco growing and his concentration on food crops.

There was one exception to the decline in agriculture-based livelihoods in Kankodola village: a farmer who had done well in the 1990s. His case shows the potential for farming as a livelihood in Kankodola:

Sikanadze Martin

Sikanadze left Kankodola only once: he went to work for a year in South Africa. When he returned in 1974, he used his money to set up in farming, but he was not particularly successful until the early 1990s. His success has not resulted from access to a large labour force however, as he only has his wife and three young children (between 12 and 1 years old) living with him on the farm. Another of his children is married and lives elsewhere; two of his children have died.

Sikanadze never went into the cultivation of tobacco; rather, he opted for as diversified a crop pattern as possible. He does not sell maize, but he grows enough for his own family, mainly because he can afford to buy fertiliser. In the past three years he sold tomatoes, sweet potatoes, sugarcane, cabbage, onions, groundnuts, beans, soybeans and *mpiru* (mustard leaves). He buys as well as sells agricultural produce; he has traded in beans. He has opened a mini-shop selling soap, sugar, salt and paraffin. He is one of the two households in the village that own cattle (two oxen) besides four goats and four chickens. He owns an oxcart as well as a sewing machine.

Sikanadze employs up to 15 people as *ganyu* labour during the peak of the farming season. Most of them are women, whom he pays in kind. He owns about four acres of land, but rents another 1.5 acres. The 2000-01 season looks less promising than previous ones. He managed to buy only one bag of fertiliser, which was expensive and delivered late. He expects to harvest less than nine bags (50 kg) of maize, but that will be sufficient for the household. Besides maize, there are of course the other crops. The sweet potatoes have been badly affected by the heavy rains. The prices of soybeans are up, however, and the groundnut crop looks similar to last year's.

Comment:
The crucial issue in this case is: why did Sikanadze Martin do better in the 1990s than he did in the preceding decades? He himself gives branching out from agriculture into trade as a reason. When he did particularly well one year out of sweet potatoes, he followed that up by trading in sweet potatoes. Those transactions multiplied the original MK500 he got for his own sweet potatoes into MK8,000.

This exception shows how diversification has paid off for Sikanadze. It shows how crop diversification leads to a more robust farm enterprise than relying primarily on either tobacco or maize. It also is striking that he used his profits to diversify outside agriculture: he bought the sewing machine, he traded in beans and opened his shop.

Conclusion: Most livelihoods in Kankodola are steeped in poverty. Tobacco has been seen as a way out, but this has backfired badly in recent years. It may be possible to regain strength by diversifying crops and activities, but in the meantime free inputs provide a major alleviation of poverty.

Social structure and poverty

Kankodola is a Chewa village and people think in matrilineal terms: men are supposed to move to the woman's village on marriage, and the core of a community should be formed by a group of sisters and one male tracing the same matrilineal line of descent. In practice, such a structure is hardly apparent. There is little solidarity within matrilineal descent groups, and the only bond of solidarity providing some social safety is support from children, usually those that have remained in the village close to the parents, but sometimes those who have migrated to the cities and the estates further north give some support. Collective working arrangements are hardly known in Kankodola, with the exception of mutual working arrangements in processing the tobacco harvest. This mutual support usually takes place among those who are better off, as these tend to be the tobacco-growing households in Kankodola. Disaster looms if farmers on the brink of dire poverty support poorer relatives. Above we described Kalinyengo's case as a farm enterprise tottering on the brink of poverty. He supports his sister, who is already immersed in poverty:

Aina Sikelo

Aina is a divorced woman of about fifty years of age. She gave birth to nine children, only two of whom are still alive. One daughter, about ten years old and in the first grade of primary school, lives with her. A son of 24 is also still alive, but he has migrated to the tobacco estates in Kasungu. She herself has also lived in Kasungu, to where she moved in the early seventies because of food shortages.

Food shortage has been a persistent problem for Aina, and normally her food store is empty from September onwards. Her farming practice - like all others in Kankodola - is hoe based, she has a small labour force, and the 1998-99 season was the only one in which she used fertiliser, as she was a recipient of free inputs. That year she managed to harvest one oxcart of maize, providing food for around three to four months.

Aina farms about 2.5 acres of land: one acre is for maize; she grows soybeans on half an acre; another half an acre is for groundnuts and she has about half an acre of dimba land. She sells groundnuts and sugarcane. In the event of extreme difficulty, she sells livestock. She does not have much livestock however: four goats and three chickens. Normally she depends upon going for *ganyu*, but in the past year she has been ill for four months. She has had to sell livestock and is dependent on her brother, Kalinyengo Sikelo, for food.

Comment:
There is little to add to this story of dire poverty. The high mortality rate has prevented the household from having a sizeable supply of labour. Migration to the tobacco estates in Kasungu has not led to an increase in the family's assets. Aina and her daughter are dependent upon Kalinyengo Sikelo, who has little to share.

Conclusion: Poverty in Konkodola is often so deep that it is hard to imagine a way out for the people living there. It is thus no wonder that people migrate, even to situations where life is known to be hard, such as sharecropping on tobacco estates. Bonds of solidarity are few in Konkodola and, where they exist, poor people can drag other poor people into deeper poverty. In such a situation, the distribution of free inputs is an effective means of poverty alleviation through increasing food security.

Mkalo, Machinga - Free inputs along the main road

"We have been discussing serious things: discussing free inputs means discussing hunger" (Michael Kakonda, Village Headman)

Overtoun Mgemezulu, Mackenzie Chivwaile and Jan Kees van Donge

Land is short in Mkalo village, which is a common problem in the Southern Highlands. As is to be expected in such a situation, there is intensive intercropping – many different crops are planted intermixed – and off-farm income is important. There are opportunities for such income, as Mkalo is situated just off the road from Zomba to Liwonde, near the trading centre of Malosa, Malosa Secondary School and St. Luke's Hospital. On the one hand, one finds in the village people who are, or have been, employed and who are relatively well off. On the other hand, there are people who rely solely on agriculture, and they are mired in poverty. The shortage of land is especially felt because of the nearby forest reserve to the west: the Machinga Mountains. Expanding there and using virgin soils is an attractive option, but this would bring farmers into conflict with the forestry department.

The impact of free inputs

The village received SP1, SP2 and TIP. However, in Mkalo it is particularly difficult to separate the impact of these interventions from other factors. Income from sources other than agriculture often plays a role and is also used to buy inputs. The effects of being able to obtain inputs is evident. Such effects tend to be seen in households that are relatively better off. However, the use of free inputs is so much interwoven with other economic practices that the picture is complicated:

William Namalamba

William is middle aged and lives with his wife and four children in a house made of burnt brick, with a tiled roof. He is a trained bricklayer and worked for, among others, Habitat for Humanity - hence his improved house. However, Habitat for Humanity went bankrupt and all the workers were retrenched. He depends now on casual building work in and around the village, but that does not pay much. For example, he earned MK150 for building a toilet. He sells things that can be gathered free: sand for construction, bundles of grass and firewood. Last year he sold thirteen blue gum trees around his house - clearly an instance of selling assets. He is also sometimes forced to 'kupinyolitsa njinga': he obtains credit in return for lending/pawning his bicycle for use by the creditor. The bicycle is only returned after the whole sum is repaid. He does not own any livestock, as it is too risky: there is too much theft in the village. He never went for *ganyu*, nor did his wife. They are food secure if they eat cassava. Cassava is not their preferred food, but it will do.

William's household has a small field of about half an acre where they grow - intercropped - maize, cassava, groundnuts and pigeon peas. Free inputs have been important in growing more maize. He received SP1, SP2 and TIP. In the year of SP1, William got more than 15 bags of maize. In the following year, he harvested 10 bags of maize. In 2000-01, he got only 1 ½ bags of maize from the field. The explanation for these differing yields lies in the fertiliser he bought to supplement the free inputs.

William received TIP because the chief wanted to reward him for his good work as a councillor. He was given a voucher and, since there were no names on the vouchers, he did not meet any difficulty in receiving the inputs. There were, however, strong recriminations among those who did not receive TIP against those who did.

Comment:
William Namalamba's case shows how the free inputs are interwoven with other sources of income. Free inputs, in combination with inputs bought from his own resources, led to a high degree of food security. Although he has little land, he can get a sizeable crop from it by highly intensive cultivation. This requires fertiliser however, which is difficult to afford. The household is in a downward spiral: they employed ganyu labour for their farm in the past and cannot do so anymore. It is likely that in the future they will have to go for ganyu.

Conclusion: Free inputs function in Mkalo amidst diverse sources of income. The above example shows how free inputs can make a difference where land is scarce, but other sources of income may allow households to supplement the inputs provided by the state.

Livelihood strategies and relations with markets

In Mkalo, agriculture is part of people's livelihoods, but is seldom the only livelihood strategy. Many of the inhabitants or their parents moved to the village as it is close to the road and near small urban centres. Trade is not particularly dominant, but wage labour in the nearby school and hospital is. The demand for *ganyu* labour comes especially from those who work for the nearby institutions, they are the local elite. The supply comes from those who have to rely on the land only. However, there is not much space for *ganyu* labour in the lean months, as plots are so small: people in wage labour can often easily cultivate these in spare time. Skilled craftsmen have more opportunities, and there are many of these in the village. The following account of the village headman, a relatively successful man, illustrates the pattern:

Michael Kakonda

Michael is in his mid fifties and has had ten children with his one and only wife. Only two of his children have established independent households. One is a carpenter and the other has just completed a degree in civil engineering at the University of Malawi. All his other children are still at primary school, and therefore he has many dependants to look after.

He was born and brought up in Zimbabwe by Malawian parents. The family returned to Malawi in 1948, but Michael returned to Zimbabwe in 1953 with an uncle. He started his working life in a sugar factory and was trained as a carpenter. He returned to Malawi when his uncle died in 1965. He then joined St. Luke's Hospital, close to Mkalo. He left that job in 1968 and worked on various construction sites until 1995. Then he decided to retire.

Michael continues to take on jobs as a carpenter; he is also a tinsmith and he repairs radios. They have a radio and a bicycle. The latter is a present from his carpenter son. He has half an acre of land, and he also owns some livestock - nine ducks, six

chickens and twenty-two pigeons - which is highly unusual in the village. They are mostly for home consumption, but he sells sometimes. An avocado tree is the only agricultural asset which brings in cash. He is trying to make agriculture more productive. He has planted seedlings from an agro-forestry project. He was twice a member of a farmer's club, the last time being in the 2000-01 season in order to get a loan for inputs from commercially run AGORA. However, some members of the club defaulted, and thus they are not eligible for more loans.

In this household, free inputs are combined with inputs from other sources, but Michael kept his harvest from free inputs separate from his other crops. SP1 and SP2 gave him five extra bags of maize (50 kg), and TIP three bags (50 kg). In 1999-2000 he supplemented his free inputs with ten kilos of hybrid maize seed and a bag of urea fertiliser, producing an additional twenty bags. He sold one of those and gave one to assist his late brother's children. The maize was depleted in December, and he had to buy four bags at ADMARC. He stressed the heavy responsibilities he has in providing food. He grows the maize intercropped with cassava and groundnuts.

Comment:
Michael Kakonda is among the better off by the standards of Southern Malawi. He has a regular cash income. He has children that can contribute. His livelihood is not an agrarian one however. Urban and rural life experiences are mixed in his life. Nevertheless, farming is an essential part of Michael's livelihood and free inputs are a welcome addition to those he buys.

Conclusion: Livelihoods in Mkalo are multi-stranded and combine life experiences from diverse locations. Agriculture remains important however, as self-sufficiency in food is an important ideal, albeit one that is difficult to achieve, as the soil is exhausted and requires heavy use of fertiliser.

Social structure and poverty

The village is populated by many people who settled there because the location provided access to cash, most notably through employment at the hospital and secondary school. It is the degree to which one secures access to cash that determines whether one is secure against poverty. Those who rely solely on agriculture cannot make ends meet and are forced into *ganyu* or becoming dependent upon children or close relatives. In Mkalo, the village structure is not reflected in lineages of related people, so kinship offers less protection than elsewhere. The following case shows clearly the way deep poverty can assail people in Mkalo:

Datuma Kaombe

Datuma's father came from Ntaja, a village elsewhere in Machinga. Her father was a builder in Zomba and he retired to Mkalo. She is a widow and two of her children are alive. One - a son - is a street vendor in Blantyre; the other - a daughter - is married in the same village. Datuma has an intercropped plot of about one acre where she grows maize, cassava, sorghum, pigeon peas, etc. Her preferred food is maize, but the cassava and sorghum are grown to reduce risk. This desire made her also grow soya (which is discarded in most parts of Malawi), as it mixes well with the *nsima* to make it more nutritious. She mixes cowpeas in with the cassava for the same reason.

Datuma is not food secure: the maize is eaten first (October); thereafter she eats millet and cassava. The months from December–February are the most difficult ones: “This is the time I do not know what to do. Sometimes I am so troubled; to the extent of wanting to steal, but God forbid”. She thinks that most of her own cassava is stolen.

When she has no more food, she survives by winnowing rice and maize for other people at the mill. The remains, especially broken rice, are payment in such a case. It is quite humiliating to do this work. Competition is bitter, and the people who bring their crops for milling act as bosses. “The hungry do literally everything for them”.

She used not to go for *ganyu*, but in the last growing season she had to do so in order to get food. She got a small pail of maize for two weeks work. “It was a kind of punishment and a lesson at the same time”.

When she has money, she makes snuff. She buys flue-cured tobacco and grinds it. However, nowadays she does not have the money to buy tobacco.

She sees the high price of fertiliser as the main reason for her poverty. When fertiliser was first introduced, she could buy as much as she wanted. Nowadays, she simply cannot afford it anymore. She also misapplied fertiliser meant for rice on her maize crop and that harmed the soil. Above all, she has no source of cash for fertiliser. Her brother used to give her money to buy inputs, but he has died. Her son’s vending business in Blantyre is ‘in a shambles’. He used to send money to employ *ganyu* labour, but this year has not done so. She had recourse to her son for support in the past year as she fell ill in the rainy season and went to stay with him for treatment. She used to go to nearby St. Luke’s Hospital, but the user fees there are too high now.

Comment:
The striking aspect of this case is the process of impoverishment. Datuma Kaombe used to have access to cash: the father was a craftsman; the brother and the son gave her money. These sources of cash have fallen away, and her daughter who lives in the village is clearly not helping her. It is telling that her daughter who married in the same village is less important for access to cash than those living outside. Once the sources of cash fall away, she cannot buy fertiliser; she cannot employ ganyu labour; and she cannot buy tobacco and enter into small-scale trade. The free inputs from SP1 were effective. She claimed to have produced six bags of maize from them, but SP2 and TIP did not result in bigger harvests. Both were delivered late, and the fertiliser was put on her local maize without results. It is likely, however, that a shortage of cash to employ labour and her own decreasing powers due to illness contributed to the low yield.

Conclusion: Land is very short in Mkalo, and therefore agriculture is seldom a mainstay in livelihoods. In order to farm with some success, one needs money for inputs, particularly fertiliser. In the case of vulnerable people like widows, money may be needed to pay for labour as well. If one has no access to cash and no close relatives nearby who are willing and able to give support, then poverty is dire in Mkalo. Those who are forced to do *ganyu* face humiliating tasks and low rates of pay.

Thopina, Mulanje – Free inputs where maize does not grow

‘Pineapples do well when you apply fertiliser’ (Stiveria Malaya)

Overtoun Mugemezulu, Mackenzie Chivwali and Jan Kees van Donge

Thopina is a small village – only 39 households - situated on the slopes of Mount Mulanje. Despite this unique setting, it is representative of large parts of Southern Malawi: land is in desperately short supply there. The village is reached after passing through lush tea plantations and onwards to the steep slopes of the mountain. In Southern Malawi, the best land, especially if it is level, is usually used for large-scale farming. Peasant farming is pushed towards the edges, to mountainous areas and to soils that are often poor. This is often exacerbated by population growth resulting in extreme fragmentation of land. People in Thopina do not talk in terms of acres or hectares of land, but refer to land as plots or pieces (*milambala)*. There has been no crop rotation, nor fallowing, and the soils have leached badly. Therefore the essential natural asset for farming - land, and especially fertile land - is in short supply.

The impact of free inputs

Thopina received SP1, SP2 and TIP. As elsewhere, the packs are seen as gifts and there was a positive tone in discussions about them. Yet it is the only one of our nine sites where doubt about the impact of free inputs was mentioned. What is the use of free inputs when people have no land? Even if people have land, then the soils are often so poor that nothing will grow. The only crop that does well is pineapples. In one case, somebody bought fertiliser from TIP packs to apply it to pineapples.

In Thopina, the drive for food is first and foremost a drive for cash, as people simply do not have the land to grow substantial amounts of food. Food is an emotional subject, as it is in short supply – especially maize, which is the preferred food and used to be the main crop in the 1980s. Maize has become a far less important crop in recent years for two reasons. First, as is the case elsewhere in Malawi, the dismantling of the state marketing infrastructure made fertiliser scarce. Secondly, either because of exhaustion of the soil or because of disease, maize will show a promising start but wilts thereafter. Cassava has therefore replaced maize as the major staple cultivated. It is, however, greatly disliked, and children will often refuse to eat it. If people eat cassava, then they tend to mix it with maize meal to soften the taste. If people have money, they will buy maize and, if they have no money, they will eat cassava. Cassava is popular, though, as an ingredient to brew beer.

The distribution of free inputs has little effect in such a situation, and we found only one case where Starter Pack had made a difference in food security:

Harrison Jonathan

Harrison is an exceptional person in Thopina as he relies primarily on farming. This is possible because he has better land - in the valley near the river rather than on slopes - than other people. He moved, in accordance with Lomwe custom, to his wife’s village after marriage. The marriage proved stable, and Mrs Jonathan gave birth to five

children. Three of those are still alive. The eldest has married and moved out of the village. The other two are still of school-going age and live with their parents.

Harrison farms several plots. He is a member of the Zikometso Smallholder Association, part of the National Association of Farmers in Malawi (NASFAM). NASFAM promotes the cultivation of chillies. He has been growing the crop for three years now. He also grows about one acre of pineapples, his main cash earner. He has a small plot that is moist during the dry season. He grows vegetables there, which he also sometimes sells. There are two other sources of cash: he has constructed ponds in which to breed tilapia, and he occasionally does some carpentry.

His main food crops are cassava and maize. He was a recipient of SP1, SP2 and TIP. This made a big difference to his maize crop. Previously, he got at most one bag (50kg) from his half-acre maize plot. However, from SP1 he produced five bags, and nine bags from SP2. The TIP inputs gave him six bags. This year, however, he also used seeds from the previous year, as SP2 was delivered so late. He has also started using compost. His maize as well as his cassava is usually depleted by December. Thereafter the family has to buy food. It is also the peak season for pineapples, and the money generated by selling these pays for the food.

Comment:
Although Harrison Jonathan grows more food than is usual in Thopina, he relies on pineapples for cash. Free inputs made a difference, but did not make the household food secure. The diversification of sources of income is typical of the situation in Thopina, albeit that Harrison's sources are more agriculture-based than others.

Conclusion: Land is so short and soils are depleted to such an extent in Thopina that growing hybrid maize using fertiliser is normally out of the question. People are thus dependent upon cash to get food. Only where a farmer has enough good land can free inputs make a difference to food self-sufficiency.

Livelihood strategies and relations with markets

Pineapples are the dominant theme in discussions about livelihoods in Thopina. It is the only crop that does well, but the income raised from pineapples is less than it was in the past. ADMARC used to have a cannery in Mulanje that provided a guaranteed market at fixed prices. Nowadays, income from pineapples is much more indeterminate and fluctuating, as they are marketed by small traders along the road to Blantyre and in Mulanje Boma. These customers want to have pineapples with the suckers on top, while the canning factory wanted pineapples without leaf. It takes twice as long to grow pineapples from the root as it does from suckers from the top of the pineapple. In the past, therefore, pineapples yielded a better income for less work. Nevertheless, it is usually the major source of cash, as is illustrated in the case above. It is not the only source of cash however. Wage labour is quite important. People work in the tea estates or move to the tobacco estates in Central and Northern Malawi. In earlier years, some went to work in the South African mines. Trade, especially cross-border trade with Mozambique, is also important in Thopina. For example, people buy bananas in Mozambique to be ripened in Thopina and then sold along the road or in Mulanje Boma. Above all, people resort to *ganyu* to keep hunger at bay.

There is little belief in the possibility of economic progress in Thopina: everybody is poor here. People will point to the corrugated iron roofs to point to wealth. These are rusty however, and at the end of their useful life: they were bought when labour migration to South Africa was still an option. The considerable constraints faced by enterprising people in Thopina are clearly illustrated in the following case:

Stiveria Malaya

Stiveria lives with her husband and three of her four children in a very simple house. She distinguishes herself by being active and more articulate than other people in the village. The household also owns a radio, a bicycle and chairs, indicating relative prosperity.

Stiveria is clear about the source of her success: pineapples. The husband works from November to March - the high season - on the tea estates, and this provides the other major income source. When he is laid off, he trades in bananas from Mozambique.

They have little land: four plots that together do not add up to an acre, all on quite steep slopes. Besides pineapples, Stiveria cultivates cassava and legumes (pigeon peas and beans). She received SP1 and SP2 as well as TIP, but she washed the seeds and ate them. The fertiliser was used on the pineapples. She even bought fertiliser from other packs for that purpose. However, she is very pessimistic about the soil: even weeds will not grow there. Only pineapples thrive. Despite their sources of cash, she has from time to time to go for *ganyu* to get food. There is no *ganyu* available in Thopina however, and she has to travel at least six km to find a village where there is usually demand for labour.

She experimented in 1997 with loans. She took out a loan of MK2,300 from one of the micro credit institutions (FINCA). She was expected to pay weekly interest and principal and had to start immediately. That upset her cash flow: she wanted to buy bananas in Mozambique and let them ripen for resale in her house. At first she repaid from the actual sum loaned to her, but had in the end to undertake *ganyu* labour to pay off the loan.

Comment:
This is a household where initiatives are taken to relieve poverty. This leads to diverse sources of income: labour, trade and cultivation of pineapples. The main insecurity they face in their life is buying food. Although the household is perennially short of money, it is not lack of capital that constrains enterprises in the first place. The FINCA loan was consumed rather than invested.

Working for wages is usually one of several ways to raise cash. Wages give more security than other sources of income, as land is so scarce. Working for wages is a common livelihood strategy in Thopina, as are trade and cultivation of pineapples, as the following example illustrates:

Alias John

Alias John married within his own village and has two children. He had moved to Kasungu in the Central Region, because he had heard that the tobacco estates pay a monthly wage. The tea estates in Mulanje pay weekly, and he cannot manage to save on that. Payments in small amounts disappear much more quickly. He became ill in Kasungu and therefore had to return to Thopina, where he is working at the Minimini tea estate bordering the village. Nevertheless, his wage provides the foundation for a better life than is open to many, bringing him a return of MK250 a week, which would not be easily realised from other activities.

Work on the estate is only seasonal, however. The estate lays him off at the end of the rainy season. He then starts trading in bananas from Mozambique. He has also traded in fish, but that is discontinued. He says: "People shunned away from buying fish, fearing that they would enrich me". It is more likely that there was simply not enough demand as people are too poor. Trade in tobacco is still very profitable, however. He buys tobacco leaf in Mozambique, which his mother processes into snuff that is sold in the village. He owns two radios as well as a bicycle, and his house is made of burnt brick. Next year, he intends to buy a corrugated iron roof. His was the only household in Thopina where there was a sense of economic progress.

Alias would like to see himself as a farmer, despite his success in trade. He has tried repeatedly to get hold of land, but he has found this very difficult. He says: "The problem here is not farming, it is land". He had opened up a field high in the mountain that gave very good returns, as it was virgin soil, but the forestry department closed the field, as he had encroached on their area. He used to cultivate pieces of land around his house with the permission of the owner, but the latter died and his children returned from town to claim these plots. At the moment, he shares one acre with his mother-in-law where they grow maize, pineapples and cassava. He also borrows one field in a distant village where the land shortage is less extreme than in Thopina. He received SP2 and TIP. With SP2, he produced one bag of maize, while the maize from TIP was eaten green.

Alias says that his main income comes from selling pineapples. That money is especially valuable to buy food as the pineapple season is in December-March, just at the time of food shortage. He also uses the money to buy food in advance when it is still cheap, just after the harvest. He employs *ganyu* labour and also goes for *ganyu* himself. At the time of the interview, he was working together with a friend on a plot of tea, owned by an old lady. On the other hand, he employed *ganyu* labour to weed his cassava garden. This indicates the marginal status of the household.

Comment:
This is still a rural household, but it is no longer primarily a farm enterprise. Wage labour and trade takes place in an agrarian context, but farming is only a part of the enterprise because of the land shortage. Free inputs make little difference here. Alias only produced one bag of maize from SP2. With such low productivity, the household needs to buy food, and that requires raising cash. There is no single strategy for doing this: it is done in a variety of ways.

Conclusion: Livelihoods in Thopina are still rural, but farming as a main livelihood strategy is rare. Diversification into trade or undertaking wage labour is common. The diversification of activities may be a strategy to reduce risk, but it is more likely to be a sign of the despair with which people try to raise cash to feed their families in a situation where they cannot grow enough food.

Social structure and poverty

Access to cash in order to get food is crucial, and cash is scarce. 'If I have a problem (lack of cash) and I go to somebody else for help, then these have the same problem'. Our question about what had been the worst year for the village had a clear response: the agricultural season 1997-98. There was no maize then in the ADMARC depots, and neither was there a supply coming from Mozambique. Even if one had money, there was no maize to be bought. In this situation, it is not surprising that migration to centres of wage labour, such as the tobacco estates, is common. This is unskilled labour. Universal primary education has made little difference in Thopina. Education is not a priority, and children are as likely to be out of school as in school. Population growth leads to increased pressure on land that offers little future to the mass of unskilled people. The following case illustrates this process:

Odeta Eliasi

Odeta had an unusual, pronounced opinion on free inputs. She was a recipient of SP1, SP2 and TIP. She had used the opportunity to grow maize, but each time it was a failure. It was her view, therefore, that the government should send a specialist to examine the soils and recommend a suitable crop, or the government should assist people with free maize for food rather than inputs.

She has survived in the past three years on cassava and bananas. Cassava provides her with food for only two months, if mixed with maize flour, otherwise only one month. They sometimes eat cooking bananas grown around the house, but these are grown for sale as well.

There are many other strategies to get cash: the husband works on the tea estate; she is a local doctor; they have one plot under tea for the Smallholder Tea Authority (STA), which should give them a regular income. The STA should have provided them with a loan of fertiliser, but this did not come. Their field is therefore doing less well than it could have done. They have just started plucking, but the authority is slow to pay. This also affects the *ganyu* that she sometimes undertakes: plucking tea for smallholders. Farmers do not pay for *ganyu* labour before the STA has paid them. The family have the only goats in the village (3) and these are sometimes sold to buy food.

Here again is a diversified strategy for earning money, but the amounts involved are often small. For example, a whole day plucking tea may yield no more income than MK10 for 90 kg. A comparison with the price paid by the smallholder authority (MK3 per kg) makes the attraction of putting scarce land under tea understandable. Working on pineapple plots pays best, but pineapple leaves can give a nasty cut.

The household's fortunes have declined since two daughters married. They claimed - in accordance with matrilineal ideology - land from the mother, and now the

household is left with only one field apart from the plot under tea. That plot used to be under pineapples, but it is now used for cassava, which is considered an absolute necessity. Odeta and her husband have ten children and there are more daughters. Their marriages will place even more pressure on the land. Two of her sons are at present working in Kasungu on the tobacco estates. Her husband worked there as well in 1995-96. He bought a bicycle with the proceeds.

Comment:
This household has some assets and a great variety of sources of income. Yet the case illustrates particularly well how land fragmentation is undermining the economic base in Thopina. The marriage of the daughters led to a loss of land and a loss of a main source of cash: pineapples. Migration is an understandable option in such a situation. Despite the household's strong linkages with the cash economy, it is striking that ultimate preference is given to cassava (food) rather than to pineapples (the source of cash).

Wage labour is an element in most cases and life histories in Thopina. Given their inability to grow enough food, people have to find wage labour or *ganyu* in order to buy food. *Ganyu* is not readily available in Thopina, and people travel long distances to get it. It is also striking that, in Thopina, unlike the rest of the country, payment in kind for *ganyu* is rare. People consider themselves lucky to be paid in maize rather than cash.

Young people have little future in Thopina. Many young men are away at the tobacco plantations, and this migration is often interwoven in people's lives:

Mosse Masangwi

Mosse is a young man in his early twenties who is married into Thopina, and he and his wife have a small child. His home village neighbours Thopina, but he spent most of his life in Kasungu and Mchinji where he worked on tobacco estates. He returned to Mulanje when an aunt died in 2000. He has remained there, married, but he still wants to leave. According to him, life is better on the estates. He is still in Mulanje as he cannot raise the money for transport out.

He and his wife farm less than two acres of land with cassava and pineapples. They would like to grow maize, but they fail like others in Thopina. Cassava is an annual crop here. Pineapples are their source of cash, but the marketing is difficult. The price can nosedive when supply is at its peak at the beginning of the year. Pineapples do not keep well and therefore must be sold irrespective of the price.

Avoidance of hunger is associated with pineapples. Ideally, pineapples help the household to come through the lean months and leave enough to buy maize when it is cheap. Anyone failing to raise enough money from pineapples is in difficulties. But even when there is plenty of money it may be impossible to buy maize in Thopina. Mosse and his wife sometimes go without any food. In very dire situations, Mosse turns to his father. His father grows about two acres of bananas, and they use bananas as a staple then.

The money from pineapples has thus a clear target, but they also need money for soap, salt, paraffin and clothes. He has two sources for this: making brooms and going for *ganyu*. Brooms are made from grasses that grow on top of Mount Mulanje. These are seasonal however, so broom making does not provide a constant source of income. He therefore undertakes a lot of *ganyu* labour throughout the year: weeding cassava gardens, clearing bushes, etc.

Comment:
Despite attempts at diversification, this household remains ultimately dependent upon pineapples. The market for pineapples is volatile since the canning factory closed. Migration to work on a tobacco estate is seen as preferable to Mosse Masangwi's existence in Mulanje.

Conclusion: Poverty is widespread in Thopina, and the dynamics of the society – especially fragmentation of land – will make it more severe. Migration and wage labour are prominent among the options of the poorest. Agriculture is definitely not seen as a way out of poverty.

Chisi, Nsanje – Free inputs where the soil is fertile

‘Starter Pack has taught us to grow hybrid maize’

Prince Kapondamgaga, Elarton Thawani and Jan Kees van Donge

Chisi village is in the Shire Valley at the southernmost tip of Malawi. The Shire Valley is well known as having a peculiar ecological environment. The river flowing from Lake Malawi to the Zambezi is a broad flowing river the whole year through and, as such, an unusually dependable source of water. The rise and fall of the river allow for agricultural activity the whole year round. Upland farming (*chaka* or *mphala*) is rain-fed, and its cycle is similar to most farming in Malawi, lasting from October/November until April. After April, the river recedes and people plant then on the plain, which has retained moisture. The Shire Valley, unlike the rest of Malawi, also still receives some rains in June and July, accompanying the so-called *mwera* winds. The flooding and receding river is also conducive to livestock farming, as it always provides fresh grazing areas. The environment is, however, much more unpredictable than this picture of year-round activity suggests, as the Shire Valley is prone to droughts and floods. This is exacerbated by the rapid deforestation caused by the large numbers of refugees from Mozambique who lived in the area between 1984 and 1992. Agriculture is risky in such a situation and may indeed be called a gamble.

Economic life in Chisi is also influenced by another geographical feature: Malawi’s territory is narrow here and hemmed in by Mozambican territory. It is thus not surprising that interactions between Mozambique and Malawi are significant. There is a constant crossing of the river, which delineates the border here. People on both sides of the river identify themselves ethnically as Sena. The Sena are patrilineal: bride prices and cattle keeping are important.

Chisi is a big sprawling village consisting of 345 farm families. The village is well provided with shops and a market, and many government services are present here or in the vicinity. At particular places, e.g. around the market or around the hospital, it creates an almost urban impression.

It is thus not surprising that the use of Starter Packs, the livelihoods in the village and the nature of poverty are distinctly different in Chisi than elsewhere in Malawi.

The impact of free inputs

SP1, SP2 and TIP all reached the village, but coverage may have been patchy. In Chisi we did not find the acrimony surrounding targeting of TIP to be found elsewhere. The responsibility for targeting was allocated to government, a large anonymous entity, rather than to the village leadership. TIP was distributed in the whole of Nsanje in a peculiar manner after chiefs refused to do the targeting. It was allocated to every alternate household on the list of households, and these were then supposed to share it with a household that had been skipped.

The lack of controversy may also be due to the fact that the packs were appreciated here less than elsewhere in Malawi. The claim made by people in the Shire Valley that the soils in the flood plain are fertile is understandable, as the river’s flooding

leaves valuable sediment. Fertiliser is not considered relevant. In fact, there is a widespread belief that fertiliser destroys the soil. The free fertiliser in the packs was openly sold, and people came from adjoining districts, like Thyolo, to buy it.

However, hybrid maize seeds are highly prized. The main crops in the area used to be sorghum and millet. These are drought resistant crops and thus suitable for the climatic conditions in the valley, but they attract swarms of birds, which wreak havoc on the crops. Maize suffers less from this, and farmers are switching to the cultivation of maize. This switch has received a big impetus from the hybrid seeds that came in the free packs. Late delivery of seeds is less of a problem here than elsewhere, because they can be used in dry season cultivation along the river.

The provision of Starter Pack/TIP seeds can have a considerable effect on production as the following case shows:

Watson Lorry Chisi

Watson - 73 years old - is the village headman, but this does not show in outward appearances. His compound comprises two mud houses in a bad state of repair. He has no radio and no bicycle. He owns four goats and five chickens, but no cattle. There is no evidence of assets acquired during his prolonged periods of labour migration: in Zimbabwe (12 years) and in Blantyre (3 years). He married two wives - hence the two houses - who gave birth to 14 children. Six died and the others have left home. Two of them are married within the village; the others live outside Chisi.

Watson's farm comprises four acres; one acre is on the fringe of the river (dimba). He and his wife are the only ones working on the farm and they use simple tools: the hoe (*khasu*) and a large knife (*panga*).

The farm does not give him food security, and the household runs out of food in November. They then eat sweet potatoes instead of *nsima* for breakfast and lunch, and have only one real, hot meal. His salary as a chief (MK85 per month) covers some of his cash needs, the children help sometimes and go for *ganyu*.

Watson used to grow sorghum and millet, but has switched completely to maize and sweet potatoes. The latter he grows primarily for sale - last year they fetched MK230 - while the maize is for home consumption. He has benefited from both SP1 and SP2, as well as from TIP, but that has not led to large harvests:

Season	**Yield: Bags (50kg)**
1998-99	3
1999-2000	2
2000-01	0.5

Comment:
Watson is old. He has few assets and the hungry months are bridged by ganyu labour. The provision of hybrid maize seed as a free input has probably eased his switch from sorghum and millet to maize. However, output was low in SP1 and declined further in SP2. The floods that damaged many crops in the Shire Valley explain the poor harvest in 2000-01.

The shift from sorghum and millet to hybrid maize was almost universally mentioned as beneficial, especially as hybrid maize is not only high yielding but matures early as well, thus shortening the hungry months. The distribution of hybrid maize seed was mentioned as a major innovation brought by the Starter Pack programme.

It was often difficult to find clear patterns of variation in output reflecting the impact of free inputs. However, in the next case the best year was 1999-2000, and that can be clearly related to the receipt of free inputs:

Eliza Msanju Locki

Eliza would have qualified for free inputs under TIP on several grounds. She is old (probably in her seventies) and lives without a husband, but with two grandchildren. One of the latter is an orphan. Eliza gave birth to six children, but only two are still alive. They have moved away and live in Blantyre and Machinga. Her children give little assistance, if any. There are virtually no assets in her dilapidated house, and the household members are dressed in rags. She owns four acres of land: two acres in the upland area and two acres along the river. She cultivates these alone, with the help of the grandchildren. The latter should, however, also be going to school. She has never been free from hunger, and the little food they grow is consumed by August. Thereafter, they sometimes eat sweet potatoes only, or resort to one meal a day. Above all, the family is dependent upon *ganyu*, this year even more so than in others:

Season	**Yield: Bags (50kg)**
1998-99	0.5
1999-2000	2
2000-01	0

Comment:
This household is impoverished to such an extent that one cannot expect much effect from any measure. It is totally dependent upon ganyu but, at the same time, has little labour power. Free inputs have a direct poverty-alleviating effect here: in 1999-2000, the one year they got free inputs, they produced much more, albeit that the household is still far short of achieving food security.

Conclusion: SP1, SP2 and TIP had different attractions in Chisi than elsewhere. Fertiliser was only used as a source of money. The hybrid maize seed was, however, welcomed as a means to make a transition from millet/sorghum to maize cultivation. Pulses are an important crop in the Shire Valley, but people prefer common beans or guar beans to the soybeans provided in the packs.

Livelihood strategies and relations with markets

As a result of Chisi's particular environment, agriculture is often not a household's most important livelihood source. Chisi's location on the border with Mozambique leads to lively trading: there is a constant coming and going of canoes. From Mozambique, people bring mainly food, especially maize, and they return with soap, salt and other necessities. Distribution of consumer goods is better in Malawi, and therefore part of Mozambique is serviced from Nsanje. While the border with

Mozambique provides opportunities for trade, the river itself offers opportunities to make money from canoes (transport) and fishing. Young people will move into trade rather than farming. Accumulation through trade may be the cause of the glaring inequality in the village.

Whereas the young are attracted to trade, the old are often farmers dependent upon *ganyu*. *Ganyu* labour in most areas of Malawi is primarily a coping mechanism to resort to when food is short, but in Chisi there are numerous households who depend upon *ganyu* labour the whole year round. This is possible because of the farming practices that shift between rain-fed farming and the fields in the flood plain.

Households that in normal years are food secure and farming enterprises that make the major contribution to a household's income are rare. The following, however, is one such case:

April Njazi

April's compound is unusually well cared for: there are two houses made of burnt brick with corrugated iron roofs, a cattle kraal, a chicken coop, and a dovecote - as well as a tobacco barn. A brick fence surrounds the whole. The household is asset rich: there is a radio, a bicycle, a motorised saw and good furniture.

April gives his age as 71. As is common among his generation of men in Chisi, he worked for a long time (ten years between 1949 and 1961) in Zimbabwe. Five of the eight children he had with one wife are alive and have left home. One son owns a shop in Chisi village; the others are elsewhere. There are, however, eight grandchildren in the house.

April owns about 5.5 acres of land, 1.5 acres of which are along the river (*dimba*). He farms with his wife and grandchildren. Sometimes he employs *ganyu* labour, but never more than two people. They use the hoe only and have never used fertiliser. He grows tobacco and sweet potatoes in the dry season. Tobacco is sold leaf by leaf for local consumption. He sells sweet potatoes to traders who come from as far away as Blantyre. Tobacco is by far his main source of agricultural income. In the 1999-00 season, he made MK7,000 from tobacco as compared to MK800 from sweet potatoes. In the past, he grew cotton as well – then the major cash crop in the Shire Valley - but he abandoned it, as it demanded too much labour. His farm is quite diversified, as this overview of his crops in 1999-2000 shows:

Crops	**Production in 1999-2000**
Maize	1,050 kg
Sorghum	100 kg
Millet	280 kg
Tobacco	4 oxcarts
Groundnuts	100 kg
Sweet potatoes	5 oxcarts
Cowpeas	100 kg

He also owns a cattle (7), goats (17), pigs (7), chickens (15), ducks (2) and pigeons (6). He sometimes sells livestock: in the past year he sold one cow for MK8,000.

Comment:
April's farming enterprise can provide a good cash income, and in good years the household is food self-sufficient. Yet, the income from the farm is not as much as what is made along the river. They own a canoe, and transporting people from one bank to the other provides about MK100-200 per day. April also fishes occasionally, and this can bring in about MK100 a day. On top of that, they sometimes receive support from his children. He, more than other people, is well integrated with his children. He is also chairman of the village-based fisheries committee, a member of a newly formed farmers' club and an active member of the Presbyterian (CCAP) church.

In the case above, the household head is quite an old man and the son, who still lives in Chisi, is a shopkeeper. Older people complain that the younger generation is not interested in agriculture, but can be found around the market and at the place where the river is crossed to Mozambique. Younger people are keen to enter trade. Those who are successful in trade consider agriculture to be unprofitable. This is reinforced by the low prices for the main cash crops in the valley: cotton and guar beans. The next case illustrates the relegation of agriculture to a minor activity:

Kenneth Vasco

Kenneth was born in Zimbabwe of Malawian parents in 1963. He moved to Zambia in 1974. From 1983-86 he was a member of Malawi Young Pioneers, the paramilitary youth wing of the Malawi Congress Party. He was moved across the whole of the country during this time. After 1986 he returned to his father's home village, Chisi, where he married in 1987. After his marriage, he left for Nkhotakota to work on the sugar plantations in Dwangwa for a year. Then he returned to Nsanje and from 1988-92 worked with the Red Cross Society looking after refugees.

In 1992 it seemed as if Kenneth would become a true villager, as he started to farm. He grew millet, sorghum and, later, maize. He abandoned farming, however, after two years and left it to his wife. She works their land together with three of their four children. The last one is too young. They own a lot of land - 11 acres - but most of it is lying fallow. They own no cattle, but they have some livestock: six goats and four chickens.

Kenneth is himself engaged in many activities. The major one is bicycle repair and trade in bicycle parts. Bicycles are very important in Chisi as a means of transporting goods for trading. He employs two permanent workers in his bicycle business. Secondly, he contracts to make bricks and employs two people in this business when he secures a contract. Apart from that he trades in livestock - after the bicycle business, the most profitable activity - and fish.

Comment:
Kenneth Vasco has a much more cosmopolitan background than is commonly found in rural Malawi. This reflects partly the character of Chisi as a whole, as migration and trade are common. Agriculture is not really important in his life history. He thinks in terms of profit and loss and agriculture does not fit into that. Kenneth does not depend upon only one activity: he has diversified his sources of income. It may not be accidental that the household is also untypical in their agriculture, as they

continue to grow sorghum and millet in addition to maize. Even in their marginal activities, they diversify.

Arable farming may not be closely interwoven with entrepreneurial success, but livestock is. Trading in cattle is important in the life history of Kenneth Vasco, albeit that he does not own cattle himself. The greatest wealth in Chisi is concentrated in the hands of the cattle owners. These are few, and most of the cattle are concentrated in big herds, although these are declining due to theft and the requirement for cash. The ownership of cattle – the major asset in accumulation – is, however, connected to non-agricultural activities. The following case describes such a pattern of accumulation:

Redge Kamangira

Redge has one of the best houses in Chisi, although he is not a native of the village, nor is Chisi his only village of residence. He is a polygamist who has three wives in three different villages in the Shire Valley. His business interests are also scattered over several places in the valley. He worked in the South African mines from 1980 to 1988. When he returned home, he opened a bottle store in Nsanje Boma. The big expansion of his business came, however, when he bought his first maize mill in 1994, which he installed at Chisi. Thereafter, he bought three more maize mills, which he installed at different places, such as in the village of his birth and in the village of his second wife. He also bought a seven-ton lorry. He has thus a diversified set of business interests: the bottle store, the maize mills, the lorry and, above all, his livestock. He owns 176 head of cattle, twenty-five goats, three sheep, seven guinea fowl, ten chickens and ten pigeons. His cattle herd is not kept at Chisi however, but at Phokea village where his second wife and his parents now live. He had had difficulties with vandalism - wilful wounding - of his herd in Chisi.

Arable farming is outside Redge's scope of interest. There is a farm of about two acres, half of it upland and half of it along the river, but that is farmed by one of his wives. She grows maize and guar beans in the upland area and sweet potatoes on the dry season farm. She employs *ganyu* labour for that purpose. Redge employs permanent labour to tend his cattle, operate his maize mills and run his bottle store.

Comment:
In Redge's view, his wealth stems from cattle. He considers it his main money earner – he gets about MK20,000 for every beast he sells. However, the maize mills, according to him, bring in MK60,000 a month, and his bottle store MK20,000. He claims to have bought his maize mills and his lorry from the proceeds of cattle sales.

It is striking that Redge's business is not tied to Chisi village but focuses on communities over a wide area in the Shire Valley. The same is true of the relatives whom he supports: his parents, a nephew, four orphans, two sisters and their offspring are all spread over a large area. He sends his children to a prime, private, missionary primary school in neighbouring Thyolo district. He also supports three secondary school students, two of whom are at school in Ntcheu, close to the Central Region. In Redge's case, the link with the soil, which is so common in rural Malawi, is far less important than social networks cast over a relatively wide area.

Conclusion: Trade is more attractive as a livelihood than agriculture, particularly for young people. Cattle keeping continues to be important, but it is concentrated in a few hands. The distribution of free inputs does not play a role in these more dynamic sectors of the village economy.

Social structure and poverty

The section on livelihoods above may give the impression of a thriving trading community. These epithets are applicable to part of the community, but most of Chisi lives in dire poverty. Housing is the clearest indication of the contrasts. There are houses of urban standard, but most houses are poorly constructed. Many walls had collapsed after a rainy season that had brought floods, and there was no rush to repair them. Going for *ganyu* is not just a coping strategy in the lean months; rather, it is a livelihood in itself. Its character approaches wage labour, as employment is no longer a mere supplement to living on the land, as the next case shows:

Elisha S. Njota

Elisha is not particularly old - about 45 - and he has completed primary school, an unusual occurrence in Chisi. He lives alone with three of his four children since he divorced his wife in 1999. He worked during the 1980s on estates in Kasungu and Mchinji in the Central Region. In 1989 he returned to Chisi and started farming.

Farming has not brought him wealth: he has no radio, no bicycle and there is no livestock at all in his compound. He owns enough land: 3 acres upland and 0.5 acres along the river. He started growing millet and sorghum, but he switched to local maize in the mid-1990s. He has used hybrid seed when supplied through the Starter Pack programme, but he cannot afford to buy it himself. In any event, it did not make much difference. In both Starter Pack years, he harvested less than 100kg of maize. This is far from making the family food secure. He makes a special effort at farming guar beans (2 acres), but in the 1999-2000 season he harvested only two bags (50 kg). The guar beans and sweet potatoes are grown for sale.

The hungry season usually starts for the family in October. However, their food sometimes runs out earlier than that. In that situation, they have to resort to skipping meals and eating *madeya* (maize seconds). They get some assistance from a sister of Elisha's, who lives in a nearby village. He also makes some money from weaving mats but, above all, they are dependent upon working for other people (*ganyu*).

Comment:
Elisha S. Njota's case is interesting as it portrays a middle-aged man without a wife, and the problems that emerge are similar to those in many female-headed households. The assets in this household are very limited. There is no capital; labour power is limited as the children go to school and farming is not productive. Free inputs (maize seed) made some difference in the productivity of farming, but the improvement is marginal to what is needed. The depth of the household's poverty is only slightly cushioned by Elisha's sister's assistance. Ganyu labour plays a greater part in Elisha's livelihood than farming. The link with the land is getting weaker and wage labour – untied to the land – is emerging.

There are many households like Elisha's in Chisi. In previous sections of this report, we have described people dependent upon *ganyu* labour as a livelihood. Often, as in this case, these households lead an isolated existence and have at most one close relative as a contact to resort to if they find themselves in extreme difficulty.

Poverty in Chisi did not appear to be related to individual characteristics. Elisha Njota created an indolent impression, whereas an energetic woman features in the next case. But she too is also deeply trapped in poverty:

Sitimary Dimingu

Sitimary lived for a long time in Nchalo, the place where her husband came from. In 1979 she returned to Chisi, her home village. Her husband died in the mid-1980s and she is now the head of the household. She has four children who all live in Chisi. One is married and the others are of school-going age.

The poverty in the household is obvious from the dilapidated house; there is no radio or bicycle and the household has no livestock whatsoever. As is usually the case in the valley, there is no lack of land. They have about 3 acres upland and a quarter of an acre near the river. They harvest between 50kg and 75kg of guar beans, which they grow for sale.

Sitimary's household faces food shortages on a yearly basis. She received SP1 and SP2, which she said made a difference. She harvested two bags of maize in 1998-99 and three bags of maize in 1999-00. Food still ran out by September. In 2000-01 she did not receive TIP and was hit by floods; she harvested less than one bag of maize.

Sitimary makes some money from selling the guar beans and the family is helped when they are in extreme need - sickness or acute food shortages - by the son-in-law living in the village. Their major source of income, however, is *ganyu* labour. Sitimary goes for *ganyu* the whole year round - she is a very active person. She brings in about MK100 each month - which is very little money indeed.

Comment:
This is another household in which the farming enterprise is less important than working for others. Going for ganyu is not a coping strategy in this case, but a livelihood in itself. The family could not exist without ganyu.

Conclusion: Chisi has extremes of wealth and poverty. There is a large stratum of extremely poor households. As a rule, they are not integrated with nearby households and, at best, they have one close relative on whom they can rely in the event of severe need. Free inputs have made some impact on their lives as they cannot afford hybrid maize seed, but the impact on food security of SP1, SP2 and TIP is limited in comparison with the size of the problem.

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Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

CONTRACT NAME: 2000-01 TIP Evaluation Module 2 (Markets and Livelihood Security) Part 2 (Case Studies/Qualitative Research).

CONTRACT NUMBER: MAL/ /2001

APPENDIX 1: The Services

Under the Contract for **Module 2 Part 2** the Consultant shall provide the Services outlined in the following **Terms of Reference** to the Lilongwe office of the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom:

Basic Information

1.1 Module 2: Markets and Livelihood Security is part of the Evaluation Programme for the 2000-01 Targeted Inputs Programme (TIP). The Statistical Services Centre (SSC) of the University of Reading, United Kingdom, is managing the 2000-01 TIP Evaluation for DFID-Lilongwe.

Background

2.1 The 2000-01 TIP, a component of Malawi's National Safety Net Strategy, intends to provide 1.5 million rural smallholder households with one Starter Pack containing 0.1 ha-worth of fertiliser, open pollinated variety maize seed and legume seed in time for the start of the rains. The TIP campaign follows on from the Starter Pack (SP) campaigns in 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

2.2 A key objective of the TIP campaign is to increase household food security amongst rural smallholders in Malawi. The 1998-99 and 1999-2000 SP campaigns (SP1 and SP2) were designed to cover all rural smallholder households, providing 2.86 million packs. This year's TIP intends to target roughly half this number of beneficiaries. TIP 2000-01 is envisaged as a programme for transferring resources to poor households.

2.3 The Markets and Livelihood Security module aims to look at the impact of SP1, SP2 and the TIP in terms of the interaction between the macro-level (markets) and the micro-level (smallholder farming decisions and livelihood security). As most farmers get their food and other basic consumption goods from producing and selling crops, particularly maize, and from doing ganyu, this evaluation module will focus on the impact of SP and TIP on the maize market and ganyu labour relations, and the implications for farming decisions and livelihoods.

2.4 The 1998-99 and 1999-2000 SP campaigns and favourable weather conditions have produced bumper harvests in the last two years. The 1999-2000 SP Evaluation Programme estimated that Starter Pack inputs contributed almost one quarter of national maize production in 1999 and were expected to make a similar contribution in 2000. While SP1 and SP2 contributed to a substantial

increase in the food self-sufficiency of farm households, the bumper harvests led to a decline in farm-gate maize prices. Lower maize prices mean that farmers earn less from harvest sales; when combined with rising input prices, there may be a serious erosion of farmers' capacity to purchase inputs for the next planting season and a resulting negative impact on production. In 1999-2000, the impact of the bumper harvest and costly inputs appears to have been offset by the provision of free agricultural inputs for most smallholder households in the form of a Starter Pack. However, the reduced coverage of the TIP implies that around half of smallholder households will be without a pack and will therefore not have a production subsidy to offset the impact of sharply declining terms of trade. These households could face hardship.

2.5 Martin Whiteside's recent paper on *ganyu* labour in Malawi[22] notes that after own-farm production, *ganyu* (defined as casual, off-own-farm labour) is the most important livelihood source for poor rural households. Although payments in cash are at low rates and payments in kind often amount to only enough food for day-to-day survival, *ganyu* is an essential coping strategy in the hungry period when poor households run out of food. Since seeking *ganyu* suggests that the individual seeking work is poor and desperate for food, there is usually a stigma attached to it. Moreover, the need to do *ganyu* often conflicts with labour requirements for own-food production, leading to a vicious cycle of food insecurity. This is particularly the case for poor, female-headed households: female household heads are more labour-constrained than their male counterparts but have to spend more time on *ganyu* because they are paid less.

2.6 A number of questions have been raised about the impact of Starter Pack on *ganyu* labour. One area of interest is whether such interventions alter supply and demand in the labour market. The 1999-2000 Starter Pack Evaluation Programme included some information about this: it found that the pack had increased the demand for *ganyu* and reduced the supply of *ganyu* - presumably because people were working more on their own gardens; but there appeared to be so much slack in the labour market in rural areas that the SP campaigns had not led to any difficulty in hiring labour. There is a need to study further the impact of SP and TIP on *ganyu* and the implications for rural livelihoods, in particular for poor and female-headed households.

Overall Objectives

3.1 Part 2 of the Markets and Livelihood Security module ("the Part 2 Study") will provide evidence on how the SP and TIP interventions have affected the livelihoods of poor farmers, focusing on the impact of these interventions via changes in the maize market and in *ganyu* labour relations.

Scope of Work

4.1 The Part 2 study will compare income and food from *ganyu* of TIP recipients and non-recipients with income and food from own-farm production to assess whether there is a difference between the two groups and, if so, whether this

[22] Martin Whiteside: *Ganyu* labour in Malawi and its implications for livelihood security interventions - an analysis of recent literature and implications for poverty alleviation. AGREN, January 2000.

can be attributed to the direct or indirect effects of the intervention. The study will attempt to explain any reported changes attributed to SP and/or TIP by examining how they relate to smallholders' own-farm production, income earning and consumption decisions.

4.2 The Consultant's team will examine the 'farm enterprise' as a productive unit, observing how people work together and attempting to provide insight into the relations between richer and poorer households and between richer and poorer members of households. The team will consider the smallholder in the context of economic and social relationships and cultural factors.

4.3 The Part 2 study will assess farmers' coping strategies, particularly during the hungry period. It will consider the dynamics of poverty and strategies which farmers adopt to try to get out of poverty.

4.4 The study will examine how communities perceive *ganyu* labour in terms of conflicts with own-farm production and family responsibilities, the stigma attached to *ganyu*, and the low rates of pay, especially for female heads.

4.5 The study will consider the impact of the SP and TIP interventions on supply and demand of *ganyu* and the effect - if any - on rates of pay in cash or kind. It will assess the implications for *ganyu* of continuing TIP interventions.

Methodology/Approach

5.1 The work for the Part 2 study will be carried out as stipulated in the Schedule of Activities agreed with the SSC (see Appendix 2) and according to the Budget (see Appendix 3). Preparation of the methodology to be used in the main fieldwork phase will be undertaken in **Phase 1** in consultation with the SSC and the Consultants for Part 1 of Module 2. **Phase 2** (the main fieldwork phase) will take the form of case studies and other qualitative research in 9 sites, which will be selected by agreement between the Consultant and the SSC. The sites will be selected purposively, and may include some 'unusual' cases. The Consultant will carry out Phases 1 and 2 in Malawi, but may carry out **Phase 3** (the analysis and write-up phase) elsewhere. The Consultant will be required present his results at the final workshop of the 2000-01 TIP Evaluation, which will be held in Malawi shortly after the end of the project.

5.2 The methodology for the Part 2 study will comprise a combination of case studies, life histories and participatory research tools. This 'qualitative' approach will complement the household survey of Module 2 Part 1.

5.3 The study will need to identify whether particular categories of TIP recipient and non-recipient have been affected by the changes in market conditions and the move from a universal to a targeted free inputs programme. Therefore, it will present cases of households in different categories, including poverty level, gender of household head, household size and access to land.

5.4 The Markets and Livelihood Security module will attempt to integrate the results of Parts 1 and 2 of the module. The SSC will facilitate a series of joint workshops or meetings which the Consultant for the Part 2 study and his

Research Assistants will attend. The Consultant for the Part 2 study may be asked to incorporate some questions of interest to the Part 1 study, and he should attempt to accommodate such requests wherever possible.

5.5 Since the 2000-01 TIP Evaluation comprises a set of modules, the Consultant for the Part 2 study may be required to coordinate with consultants from other modules. Such coordination will be facilitated by the SSC.

5.6 The Consultant will play a leading role in carrying out the study and presenting the results, but should accept reasonable advice and guidance from the SSC on methodological issues.

Personnel

6.1 The Consultant will recruit and manage three or four Research Assistants, who will each work for three months (March, April and May). He will also recruit two or three full-time Field Facilitators for the main fieldwork phase.

Expected Outcome and Deliverables

7.1 The Part 2 study will aim to provide information on the following questions in relation to TIP recipients and non-recipients with different poverty levels and household characteristics:

- What has been the net impact of SP and TIP on farm enterprises?
- What impact has SP and TIP had on economic and social relationships within the community, particularly in relation to coping strategies?
- How is *ganyu* perceived and how does it compare with other sources of livelihood, e.g. income from crop sales?
- How have the SP campaigns and TIP affected the balance between time spent on own-food production and *ganyu*?
- Have farmers needed to do less *ganyu* because of increased food self-sufficiency owing to SP and TIP? Or have falling real incomes meant an increased need to look for work in the 'hungry period'?
- Have falling farm-gate prices and increasing input prices had any impact on *demand* for *ganyu*?
- Has there been any change in the form of payment for *ganyu* - cash or kind - owing to SP and TIP, and have rates of pay been affected?

7.2 The Part 2 study should explore the implications of its findings for future TIP interventions, including the implications for scaling down the provision of free agricultural inputs within the scope of the National Safety Net Strategy.

7.3 Any evidence of changes in the poverty status of groups of farmers, in particular owing to the Starter Pack or TIP interventions, should be presented.

7.4 The main outcome of the work will be the Consultant's final report ("the Report"). This should be around 20,000 words long and must be submitted to

Dr H Potter, DFID, British High Commission, PO Box 30042, Lilongwe 3, Malawi on diskette and hard copy by 6 July 2001, with copies to the SSC.

7.5 When submitting the Report on 6 July 2001, the Consultant must provide the SSC with diskettes containing all the data collected for synthesis in an integrated data archive. Full copies of any questionnaires or other information collection tools used in the field, including records of participatory workshops, must also be provided.

7.6 The final payment will be payable on acceptance by the SSC of the Report. Should the SSC require any reasonable amendments or additions to the Report in order that the Report shall meet the required professional standards for acceptance, the Consultant will carry out such work at no extra charge by 31 July 2001.

7.7 The Consultant will incur financial penalties for late delivery of the Report: 5% of the Consultant's fee will be deducted if the Report is received by DFID after 6 July 2001, rising to 15% if the Report is received by DFID after 13 July 2001 and 30% if the Report is received by DFID after 20 July 2001.

7.8 The Consultant will submit brief progress reports on 26 March and 22 May 2001 and will present basic accounts of expenditure on 26 March, 22 May and 6 July 2001. The basic accounts of expenditure should be presented according to the layout stipulated in Appendix 4.

Appendix 2: Checklist for interviewing

PART II OF MODULE II: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MARKETS AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITY

The focus of this module is on the way people make their living and the role that the distribution of free inputs may have in that. The particular nature of this part lies in the methodology rather than the subject. Therefore, it may be best to introduce the method making clear the links to the particular subjects as regards markets and livelihoods which we hope to cover.

Interviewing for a case study:
These relationships will be explored through cases: it is not the intention to draw general conclusions but to raise ideas on these issues through more intensive contact with farmers.

INTERVIEWING FOR THIS PART IS MEANT TO BE DIFFERENT FROM INTERVIEWING IN THE SENSE OF ENUMERATING FOR TWO REASONS:

A. IN THE LATTER, THE INTERVIEWER IS A MESSENGER WHO SHOULD AS TRUTHFULLY AS POSSIBLE RECORD WHAT IS MEANT TO BE RECORDED - THIS HAVING BEEN PREDETERMINED. IN QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING, ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS AN OVERALL PICTURE AND THERE ARE INTERESTS ON THE PART OF THE INTERVIEWER, BUT ONE INTERPRETS AS ONE GOES ALONG. IT IS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN A DIALOGUE BETWEEN OUR MIND AND WHAT WE OBSERVE
B. IN THIS CASE, THEREFORE, THE INTERVIEWER SHOULD ANALYSE WHILE ASKING THE QUESTIONS: TRY TO MAKE A MENTAL PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SITUATION AT HAND. AFTER EACH INTERVIEW, THE INTERVIEWER WILL THEREFORE WRITE DOWN THE CONTENT OF THE INTERVIEW AS A STORY.

While doing that, the interviewer should have in the back of his/her mind the concerns of this module: the issues which we would like to see clarified. There are three broad concerns:

a). TIP is targeted at the poor and therefore it is important to have an image of who the poor are. Previous evaluations, and studies on Malawian poverty in general, concentrate on households as autonomous units. That may be the case, for example remittances (therefore links with people outside the direct community) are not described as important sources of cash. In recent years, there is an increasing stress on poverty as involving social exclusion. People are, however, social beings and there may be many links with other people that do not show up easily in surveys, as we do not know which questions to ask. For example: people may cooperate in ploughing and planting; there may be long established links with people who employ farmers for *ganyu*; there may be long established links with traders who buy pigeon peas (*nandolo*). We therefore explore this area by probing in this direction. For the simple reason of gaining access, we will approach households, but our real concern is *the farm enterprise*. Who are the people involved in farming a particular set of land? How does the farm relate to other

sources of income? *Consequences for poverty targeting*: people may seem poor as they have little land, no radio or bicycle, etc., but they may, for example, be very old and live more in the household of a relative than on their own. It may be that people who are most isolated from other people are the poorest. WE SEARCH THEREFORE FOR A SET OF RELATIONSHIPS SURROUNDING THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE FARM AS AN ECONOMIC UNIT IN THE HOPE THAT WE MAY GET MORE INSIGHT INTO POVERTY AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON: ARE THE POOR EXCLUDED AND LIVING IN ISOLATION?

b). TIP gives poor people seeds and fertiliser. It has been established beyond doubt that it gives poor people more food so that they can delay buying food because their own has run out. The most common explanation is that people are short of land and that getting more from their plot through better seeds and fertiliser is the only way out of poverty. There is, however, a contrary argument that says that TIP leads to poverty alleviation and not poverty reduction; that TIP does not address the real reason for poverty. Some argue that the main problem is lack of labour. Farming in Malawi has a peak demand for labour from the beginning of the rains until after weeding. Poor people do not have the money to employ people then, or are forced through lack of cash or food to work for other people. As a consequence, their own farms do not get the attention they require. A more general argument is made that the real constraint that Malawian farmers face is marketing: they are not organised so that they get the best prices. The way out is access to finance (credit) and common dealings with traders. This way of reasoning is also against the free distribution of inputs as it gives the wrong signal: giving inputs for free discourages economic thinking. WE HOPE THEREFORE TO IDENTIFY BETTER THE CONSTRAINTS THAT KEEP AND MAKE PEOPLE POOR: LAND; LABOUR; LACK OF CAPITAL (INPUTS); MARKETING. BY STUDYING FARMS WHICH LAST YEAR GOT FREE INPUTS AND OTHERS WHICH GOT NONE, WE MAY BE ABLE TO SEE THE INFLUENCE OF STARTER PACKS ON THESE CONSTRAINTS.

c). TIP is directed at the poor and is one of several possible mechanisms to help them. It is differentiated from food aid or food for work in that it allows people themselves to grow the food, thus giving them more pride in themselves. There is a general idea that free provision of inputs gave a boost to agriculture as an important sector. In these interviews, we will try to establish how people feel about the Starter Pack programme. It was an enormously popular programme, but the reasons why, and the way people talk about it, have not been documented. We will therefore try to see whether it is true that people value growing their own food; that poverty is linked with the inability to grow one's own food; that TIP is seen as a source of pride. WE HOPE THEREFORE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE WAY PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT FREE INPUTS AS A MEANS TO MAINTAIN PRIDE.

AFTER EVERY INTERVIEW, THE INTERVIEWER MUST TRY TO STATE TO HIM OR HERSELF: WHAT HAVE I LEARNT ABOUT THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF POOR PEOPLE? WHAT HAVE I LEARNT ABOUT WHAT MAKES POOR PEOPLE POOR? WHAT HAVE I LEARNT ABOUT THE FEELINGS ON STARTER PACK/TIP?

The main focus of this module is on the relationships between TIP and poverty. That concern should guide us to the people we are seeking to study. We are interested in:

- People who got TIP this year and who are therefore considered to be poor.
- People who consider themselves poor and who did not get TIP.
- People who are not very poor and had SP last year, but no TIP this year.
- People who are relatively well off and do not need free inputs to feed themselves.

Reasons for this are:

a). By comparing poor people who got TIP with those who did not, we may see the effects of TIP on poor people. This is a comparison of groups.

b). By comparing through time how life this year differs from the year before, we may find out how free inputs influenced the lives of people who are not considered very poor/vulnerable.

c). By comparing people who are relatively well off with poor people, we may find out how poor people may be able to break out of poverty.

Tasks set for each research site:

An exercise in participatory rural appraisal: making a resource map; making a Venn diagram/social map; making a transect walk
Portraits of five farm enterprises that received TIP
Portraits of five poor farm enterprises that did not receive TIP
One or more life histories of successful people

Procedures to be followed:

This type of research gives the interviewer much freedom:
One does not have to follow strictly the issues mentioned in the checklists.
The conversation can drift in directions which are interesting but not foreseen.
We allow for the possibility that the checklist simply does not make sense.

It requires much discipline also however:

1. *In this type of research, observation plays a significant role. Seeing what happens on farms can, for example, be instructive to discover who works together with whom. Observation requires to be recorded, and therefore a daily journal needs to be kept.*
2. *A lot of writing is required during the interviews because we do not use standardised questions and precoded categories for answers.*
3. *The interview itself may have little structure and shape, but this must be brought out later in coding: on completion, the interview must be rewritten into a meaningful whole for the purpose of the research.*

The exercise will require you to keep three books: one daily journal; one in which to record interviews; one to rework the interviews and make categories of interpretation (coding).

Checklist for interviewing households that received and those that did not receive free inputs

These are not necessarily a list of questions but more a list of issues that must be raised. Except for the first element, you are free to change the order of questioning. Be on the lookout for spontaneous issues that emerge. Please, follow up any such lines that emerge in the course of the interview if possible. *General rule: It is more important that the person interviewed speaks than that you speak.*

Part I

(1) Documenting a general attitude towards Starter Packs

- Start with a general discussion of Starter Packs/TIP.
- Have they heard about Starter Pack? Whether it is a good thing or a bad thing?
- How do they feel about the change from Starter Pack to TIP?
- Turn to the experience in the past year: was it a good or a difficult year?
- Discuss the past years from 1997/98 until now and see whether Starter Pack plays a role in this.

Purpose: On past experience this will give positive responses.

(2) Establishing some elements of social position

- Age and sex of respondent?
- Married or not, how many wives?
- How long are they farming in this place? Has he or she been living elsewhere? Themes that may be broached more generally expanding on the above:
- Whether present marriage is first marriage or one of several (very carefully)?
- Has the respondent often moved in his/her life? – seeking for conflicts which may have forced people to move.
- Whether a labour history led to savings, for example in the form of a house?

After these questions, try to get a first indication of whether the person always has been poor or is only recently poor.

(3) Education and migration

- A listing of all children of the female in the interview setting; may also be the man if the conversation drifts that way. Asking females often makes more sense in matrilineal societies.
- How many children died?
- What is the educational level of their children?
- Where are they now?
- Do absent children often come home?

Note your first impression of whether the people interviewed are well connected to the outside world through their children, as these elements are so important. Try to broaden it by asking: When is the last time they travelled, if ever? Whom did they go and see?

(4) The farm enterprise

- A listing of the plots (with size according to informants, so therefore a subjective opinion) of which the enterprise consists.
- Is there borrowing or renting of land?
- How is the land worked: hoe or plough?
- If the plough is used, who owns the plough and the oxen?
- If prepared by hoe, is it done by several people or one?
- Who does the weeding?
- Who harvests and shells?
- What crops do they grow?
- What livestock do they have?
- In which month do they have to start buying food?
- Have they ever received credit?
- Do relatives elsewhere help them to buy inputs?

A note should be made of the relationships of all people mentioned: e.g., spouse; relative inside the house; more distant relative. Try to find out from what is said whether the farm is an enterprise of one household or whether households are working together.

(5) General enquiry about cash

- How do they get money to buy soap, salt, food, clothes?

(6) Cash; agricultural produce

- Which agricultural produce/livestock do they sell?
- To whom do they sell it?
- Is there a regular contact with a buyer?
- Does the buyer give advances and credit?

Form a general opinion of whether their relationships in the market are stable or not.

(7) Piecework/ganyu

- Does the respondent, or anyone living in her/his house, work for other people?
- Is it a regular contact, always at the same place?
- Is payment in cash or in kind (food)?
- Would they like to work more for people?
- Are there reciprocal relationships: working for each other?
- Does the respondent him/herself employ labour?

Form a general opinion on whether the respondent has a stable network in the labour market or not.

(8) Small business

- Does the respondent or anyone in his/her house make money through:
    - Trade (if so, in which commodities)?
    - Beer brewing?
    - Carpentry/building?

Try to find out here as well whether there are permanent partnerships, a regular, stable network of contacts or not.

(9) General enquiry about help/kuthandiza

- If they have difficulties, who helps them?
- Who can they turn to for credit, and for what type of credit?
- Are they indebted, *katapila*?

(10) General enquiry about wealth

Try to solve that through observation:

- Livestock
- Radio
- Bicycle
- Furniture

(11) General enquiry about membership of organisations or participation in community activities

- Churches
- Farmers' clubs
- MASAF or other self-help programmes.
- With whom in the community do they have most contact?

(12) General check

Formulate for yourself the poverty or economic situation of this household. Is there any indication that they have been less poor in the past? What reason has arisen for their poverty? Can you see any possibility of them rising out of their poverty? In your judgement, would TIP make much difference in their lives? Have an idea about the role of agricultural input: fertiliser, seed, etc., for this respondent and place the role of TIP/Starter Pack in that.

Part II: *Feelings, points of view, attitudes*

The purpose of these questions is to let people talk. When an opening presents itself, the interviewer may ask for a judgement on a five-point scale: (1) very true; (2) true; (3) not true; (4) not true at all; (5) no opinion. However, thereafter, the reason must be asked for. Please note down as fully as possible what is being said; go for striking sentences.

Five statements on pride in growing one's own food

(1) Not growing one's own food is a reason for shame.

(2) *Ganyu* or business is a better way to get food than working on one's own land.

(3) Life was better in the past because it was easier to get enough food from the land.

(4) When I was a child, food was no problem as people were more interested in farming.

(5) Food is not the most important crop as one can get money from other crops to buy food.

Five statements on relations between poverty and growing food

(1) Food is the major expense of poor rural families; therefore growing more food is the best way to be less poor.

(2) Poor people are only really helped by money instead of free maize or more food on the farm.

(3) As land is short, the only way to get more food is by using fertiliser and hybrid seed.

(4) People may not grow their own food, but that does not mean that they are poor.

(5) We are not poor because of land, but the soil is tired and one can therefore only get more food with fertiliser and hybrid seed.

Five statements on TIP/Starter Pack

Free inputs are good for poor people, because loans are for rich people.

Starter pack has taught people to grow hybrid.

Free inputs make people lazy.

TIP/Starter Pack has only helped those people who are also helped by others.

TIP/Starter Pack is good because it helps farmers and not people in town.

Checklist for life histories of relatively successful people

Note well: it would be easy if people gave their life history in clear chronological order. They are not likely to do that however. Dates can also be used haphazardly - for example, 'when I returned in 1945 from working in South Africa' as stated by a relatively young man. The word *kale* (long ago) has usually no precise meaning. Try to get the sequence of events right, but concentrate especially on decisive factors: particular friendships, particular business initiatives, etc.

1. *General introduction of the subject*

- Start by praising the respondent: this is a successful person and it is important to know why certain people achieve success.
- Ask whether he/she has been poor and get a general description of how poor. Ask for a general opinion on why people are successful.
- Answer will probably be: work hard, save etc. Do not query such remarks at this point.

2. *The first attempt at a chronology of events: where the person comes from and where the person is going to*

- Does the person originate from the village where he/she lives?
- Have they been educated and where? Is there a history of labour migration?
- When, at which point in the events, has the person settled where he/she is now?

3. *A history of the business*

- Start with a description of the present business: farm, transport, trade, contracting. What was the beginning?
- Follow up step-by-step how the business expanded or contracted.
- Look out especially for the moments when more capital was needed: which enterprise brought it in; did a relative help; role of credit?

4. *A history of social contacts*

- Does he/she employ people?
- If so, does he/she have a stable labour force?
- Are these piece workers (*ganyu*) or have they already been working a long time for the respondent?
- Has the respondent business partners within the enterprise?
- Has there been a learning period under another experienced businessman?
- Has there been another contact from whom the businessman learnt?
- Has the respondent long-standing contacts with suppliers and clients/buyers, or are these contacts haphazard, random and incidental?

5. *Family history*

- When did respondent get married?
- Have there been other marriages?
- List the children with approximate age, education and where they are now.
- Ask who among these are also helping in the business.

- Enquire about broader (extended) family: to what extent are they involved in the business?

6. *A first summing up*

Try to summarise the story as you have heard it now with the respondent present. Thereafter, check whether you are still missing elements of importance.

7. *If there is a feeling of insufficient information, then try to analyse from the farm enterprise. It is likely that in all cases there will be a farm*:

- A listing of the plots (with size according to informants) of which the enterprise consists.
- Is there borrowing or renting of land?
- How is the land worked: hoe or plough?
- If there is ploughing, who owns the plough and the oxen?
- If prepared by hoe, is it done by several people?
- Who does the weeding; who harvests and shells?
- Note their relationship in the case of people mentioned: e.g., spouse; relative inside the house; more distant relative or worker?
- Try to find out from who works on it whether the farm is an enterprise of one household or whether households are working together.
- What crops do they grow?
- Do they buy food?
- What livestock do they have?

8. *General enquiry about membership of organizations or participation in community activities*

- Churches
- Farmers' clubs
- MASAF or other self-help programmes.

9. *Open up a general discussion on*:

(a) Free inputs make people lazy

(b) Poor people need food or money and not fertiliser and seed.