



New research puts Malawi's land reform plans under the spotlight

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A research study published today (11 December 2008) finds serious shortcomings in Malawi's plans for far-reaching land reforms, currently being piloted in the south of the country.

The Community Based Rural Land Distribution Project (CBRLDP) is a World Bank-sponsored land redistribution programme, testing new approaches to Malawi's unequal land ownership patterns. Launched in 2004, the pilot has been running in four areas: Thyolo and Mulanje (sending families), Machinga and Mangochi (receiving settlers). The project aims to increase the incomes of about 15,000 families by providing land to the landless and land poor.

The new study, one of a series on the role of institutions in economic growth and poverty reduction, suggests that the pilot, widely seen as a testing-ground for national land reform, is unlikely to provide valuable lessons for a national roll-out. Although some outcomes, such as technical advances, are positive, the study finds:

- no statistically significant evidence that participation in the CBRLDP has increased investment in agriculture
- conflicts between those leading the reforms and the popular perception of how land redistribution should proceed, with widespread and unresolved land disputes in the pilot areas leading to anxiety among the settlers about the security of their land.
- lower maize productivity levels than might be expected (maize yields among beneficiaries are 31% of the potential yield and 78% of the national average maize yield).

The authors, Ephraim W. Chirwa and Blessings Chinsinga, Associate Professors at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, have produced their paper for global research consortium on Improving Institutions for Pro-Poor Growth (IPPG), funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), which analyses the role of institutions in international development.

'The major lesson from the CBRLDP experience is that the design, reform and implementation of pro-poor institutional arrangements are not merely a technical or managerial matter, but a profoundly political exercise,' says Dr. Chinsinga. 'This is underlined by the sheer determination of stakeholders engaged with the pilot to shift the burden of the reforms elsewhere, as they jostle to get the most of the evolving institutional arrangements governing land ownership and use.'

'IPPG commissioned this important study as part of its work to investigate and understand more about how political and economic institutions interact to facilitate – or hinder – growth outcomes that benefit the poor. The findings have wider implications for land reform and its administration elsewhere. This study should also remind the international community that failure to explore and understand the context of political institutions and processes in which economic activity occurs can seriously compromise well-intentioned programmes', said IPPG Co-director Dr Adrian Leftwich, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Politics at the University of York.

The authors will present their paper as part of the World Bank Seminar Series in Lilongwe next Wednesday (17 December 2008). The IPPG Policy Briefing Paper, 'The Economics and Politics of Land Reforms in Malawi: A Case Study of the Community Based Rural Land Development Programme' by Ephraim W. Chirwa and Blessings Chinsinga is available free to download at www.ippg.org.uk

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World Bank Seminar Series, Malawi: To attend the World Bank event at 2pm on 17 December, please contact Esther Lozo on: elozo@worldbank.org, or telephone: 08 340 939.

Notes to editors:

1. The **IPPG** Programme is the shorthand name for the **Research Programme Consortium on Improving Institutions for Pro-Poor Growth**. The DFID-funded IPPG supports innovative research of the highest scholarly standards, and seeks to influence development policy and practice in the interests of the realisation of the aims of the Millennium Development Goals. IPPG has funded research projects across the Programme's three partners in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The inspiration for the programme comes from two sources:
 - The recognition that 'institutions' are best understood as relatively stable social and political arrangements, which include formal rules and laws as well as informal norms and conventions. Together, the interaction of political and economic institutions exercises an important influence on patterns and rates of economic growth.
 - The recognition that while economic growth is a necessary condition for the sustainable reduction of poverty, it is not a sufficient condition. If the objectives that are reflected in the Millennium Development Goals are to be accomplished, it is necessary to think of ways in which growth can be made distinctly pro-poor.

Find out more, and download research, at: www.ippg.org.uk

2. **Background, Malawi Land Reform project:** Agriculture remains the mainstay of the Malawian economy, providing livelihoods to more than 80 percent of the population. It is not therefore surprising that government development strategies have stressed agricultural development as a vehicle for achieving pro-poor growth in Malawi. Land therefore becomes a critical variable in achieving such growth given the declining land-holding due to sub-division of customary land among family members. In 2004, in order to improve access to land, the Malawi government introduced a land reform programme that involved the titling of customary land into customary estates and a market-based land redistribution and resettlement programme, targeting the landless or near-landless. The land reform project is being piloted in four districts in Southern Malawi: Thyolo, Mulanje, Machinga and Mangochi. The resulting institutional changes provide opportunities to study the interactions of economic and political institutions (formal and informal) on land matters and how such interactions affect pro-poor growth.

IPPG commissioned a project by two Malawian researchers, Dr Ephraim Chirwa and Dr Blessings Chinsinga to understand the political, social, cultural and economic institutions governing land matters and how they affect economic growth and income distribution. Specifically the work aims to investigate the politics of land reform and land administration, and to assess the impact of the land reform programme.