



**GOVERNMENT OF MALAWI**

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

**HONOURABLE LOBIN LOWE, MINISTER OF**

**AGRICULTURE,**

**DURING**

**UNITED NATIONS FOOD SYSTEMS PRE-SUMMIT**

**26<sup>TH</sup> TO 28<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2021, ROME**

**Your Excellencies,**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** before I speak about the state of affairs in my country, Malawi, let me start by saying that, if we are to remember something about the year 2021, let us remember it as the year of opportunities. The recent social, economic, environmental challenges we have encountered have reminded us that as human beings, we can come together and work towards a common goal. That is why the Government of Malawi considers this “**People’s Summit**” an opportunity to contribute to a common discourse, which will serve the people and save the planet for intergeneration benefits.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** Malawi heavily depends on agriculture for food security, economic growth, and development. Basic statistics show that agriculture in the national GDP takes up to 30 percent and supports the livelihood of about 85 percent of 17.5 million people. Currently, about 90 percent of food supply in the country comes directly from the agricultural sector.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** the double dependency on agriculture in Malawi means that transforming our food system is indeed at the core of our development goals. Addressing the systemic and intrinsic challenges in food systems through a common global position will seriously close the gap between the ‘**Haves**’ and ‘**Have Nots**’ in developing countries like Malawi.

In response to the global call for the dialogue on food systems, I have led an all-inclusive national dialogue in our country to come up with actionable points to transform our food systems, serve our people and save the environment. These dialogues have taken a broader view of the entire food system. We have tackled issues of food distribution both in terms of production, marketing, social safety nets, and road networks.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** we launched the food systems dialogues on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2021 with a national wide stakeholder meeting and we have ended up with sub-national level dialogues on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021. In total we have convened 14 dialogues at national, regional and district levels across the country. We have brought together different actors in the food systems from both the public and private sector, and at the household and community levels. Our country team is now synthesizing the issues that have come out from these dialogues in order for us to come up with a consolidated country position and proposed actions to transform the food systems in Malawi.

It is, however, clear from these dialogues, that our food system is affected by several challenges. Our understanding of the spatial differences on various aspects of the food systems has also been enriched. Additionally, we have fostered a political dialogue among different actors that have different narratives about hunger, malnutrition, and poverty.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** the dialogues have helped us to build a consensus on the current challenges that beset our food systems. Allow me to share a few highlights on the key issues that have come out of our dialogues.

It has happened many times that while our country registers food surplus, it also at the same time records more food vulnerable households. This points to the issue of poor distribution in our food systems, across space and over time. Although the country has also made significant improvements in nutrition indicators, the current situation is still unacceptably dire (37 percent stunting). This underscores the importance of having game changing priorities under Action Track 1, which are applicable to our local conditions.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** the consensus on our food systems is that agriculture continues to demand more from forest land as the population increases. Our statistics show that forest cover has reduced from 47 percent in 1975 to 25 percent in 2018, making it the highest deforestation rate in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Region. This has left the agriculture sector vulnerable to effects of climate change and climate variability. In the recent past, Malawi has experienced dry-spells, droughts, floods, and infestation by new pests and infection by diseases. The need to address these challenge augurs well with the need to boost nature positive production systems and shift to sustainable consumption patterns action tracks.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** the food prices in Malawi remain volatile. The effect of low prices during harvest season and very high prices during the lean season continues to affect majority of the households who are net consumers in our country. That is why the issue of access to markets has come out strongly in our dialogues. The key challenges include non-functionality of the local marketing institutions, poor road infrastructure and limited storage facilities, especially in rural areas. In Malawi, Agricultural marketing and Development Corporation (ADMARC) is the most important backward and forward linkage market for both rural and urban households. Thus, with a growing population, advancing equitable livelihoods through functional markets can fast track development in Malawi.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** the volatility of prices is also partly attributed to post-harvest management, including the ways in which food is transported, stored, processed, prepared, and disposed. The major drivers highlighted include:

- Poor food storage and handling, limited testing infrastructure resulting in aflatoxins in key food items like groundnuts and maize;
- Low electrification rate and poor transportation system. The agriculture infrastructure index in Malawi is currently at 31 compared to the world average of 532;
- Climate impacts losses related to excess rainfall during harvest and processing;

- Vulnerability to pests and diseases such as the Fall Armyworm (FAW). Malawi registered an infestation rate of FAW that ranged between 20 and 45 percent in February 2021; and
- Food losses are also compounded by socio-cultural factors, particularly during post-harvest ceremonies like local initiations, weddings and at times funerals. At such functions, people cook excessive amounts of food, and throw away leftovers without proper disposal.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** we have also noted that household resilience to shocks is low, especially in the rural areas. Malawi prides itself in having freshwater lakes and rivers that converge in the lower Shire floodplains, located in the Southern Region of the country. However, with climate change, our pride has also become a challenge since the floodplains are now experiencing frequent floods and droughts. Overall, the extent of vulnerability in Malawi has been exacerbated by high levels of poverty, economic and gender inequalities, limited access to basic services and infrastructure as earlier indicated.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** the challenges of hunger in Malawi are not mainly an issue of food availability but more of accessibility. Poor road infrastructure, within the country and across the African region, remains one of the biggest bottlenecks in the Malawi food systems. Food prices, quality and safety are heavily compromised by the poor road and marketing systems.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** the preliminary diagnosis from the dialogues we have convened point towards the need to invest in research and innovation, develop market infrastructure and have vibrant agricultural and industrial policies within and across countries. As Malawi, our stronghold lies in developing a functional marketing system and building the capacity of our people, if we are to transform the food systems.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,** reaching this far, let me thank the United Nations for championing these dialogues and all the stakeholders taking part in this global initiative. They say, “Rome was not built in a day”. Therefore, I believe that the game-changing priorities and the new commitments that will come from this Pre-UN Food Systems Summit, as well as the UN Food Systems Summit later in September 2021, will kick-start and create a momentum to transform our food systems. I look forward to fruitful deliberations as we promote a global discourse.

Thank you very much.