EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After forty six years of independence, Malawi's affluence continues to depend on agriculture, despite some strides made in industrialization. However, this mainstay of the economy faces a myriad of challenges including extensive land degradation, underdeveloped irrigation systems, rampant deforestation, adverse effects of climate change and unsustainable land use. Nevertheless, there exists massive potential in the country to address the challenges including substantial water resources for irrigation. It is therefore the aim of this paper to unveil the water challenges affecting farmers in Africa, and Malawi in particular.

This paper is prepared from the smallholder farmer perspective, drawing from the living experience in National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM). The smallholder farmers in Malawi constitute around 90% of all farmers but traditionally the smallholder contribution is overshadowed by the numerous challenges they encounter. Some of the challenges they face in Malawi and also in parts of Africa include: high input costs, lack of markets, poor rural infrastructure, inadequate extension services, and lack of appropriate modern farming technologies which can enable them to increase their productivity, and consequently their production. Thus smallholder agriculture in Africa is bottlenecked with many challenges but the scope of this paper is limited to the water challenges in Malawi and which may also be common to other African countries since the smallholder farmers share a lot in common globally.

The water challenges principally emanates from several factors which range from farmers inadequate capacity to utilize available technologies for irrigation, water supply and conservation farming, inadequate capacity due to high illiteracy levels to uptake the modern technologies and, emerging climate change issues which smallholder farmers in Africa are yet to adapt sustainable mitigation and coping mechanisms. These water challenges are unfortunate in the first place because Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, is naturally gifted with water resources and good arable land which, if well combined with appropriate technologies, will boost Africa economies since they are all predominantly agro based. However, perennially there is overdependence on rain-fed agriculture which is now under threat due to climate change. In many parts of Africa the rainfall pattern is becoming very erratic, unpredictable and unreliable. There are increasing incidents of floods and droughts, changing seasonality and patterns, therefore the water challenges affecting farmers are long overdue for redress.

In view of the highlighted challenges, the African Union (AU) through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has developed the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) which, among other things, is addressing the issue of water in pillar one. If the member states adopted the strategies in the CAADP, the water challenges would minimize and the farmers would benefit. At national level, the Malawi Government through the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) has come up with strategies to respond to some of the water challenges. In addition there are policies on irrigation and land management that have been developed which also aim at addressing some of the challenges highlighted.

What is most interesting is the fact that smallholder farmers in Malawi are, with support from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) like NASFAM, responding to such challenges. They have adopted strategies such as: conservation agriculture, scaling up of small scale irrigation,

growing of drought resistant crops, and adoption of good agricultural practices. These strategies need to be scaled up to wider scale and the Government of Malawi should provide clear policy direction so that the practices can benefit smallholder farmers. In this regard, the paper has come up with recommendations to the Government, and CSOs on how best the challenges can be addressed. The paper holds that the multi-stakeholder approach and engagement is the key to the success of dealing with the water challenges affecting the smallholder farmer.