

PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until March 12th 2008

Planting Ideas

How agricultural subsidies are working in Malawi

By Blessings Chinsinga and Aoiffe O'Brien

Africa Research Institute is pleased to announce publication of *Planting Ideas*, an independent investigation into Malawi's controversial home-grown subsidy scheme for small farmers. This timely study defies much of the received wisdom to argue that agricultural subsidies can be made to work for rural populations.

Malawi is the most densely populated country in southern Africa, and the average size of smallholder plots is falling. Without affordable fertiliser and other inputs, small farmers have struggled to grow enough food from over-cultivated soils. Efficient use of fertiliser is vital to avert the dangerous and costly cycle of dependency on food aid.

Spurred to action by the food crisis of 2005, the government of Malawi acted against the advice of many development experts and advisers. Its Agricultural Input Subsidy Programme provoked fears of a return to the pervasive corruption, cronyism and waste which led international donors to demand the abolition of agricultural subsidies throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s and 1990s.

Instead, Malawi's innovative voucher-based system has brought bumper maize harvests and stable prices. The 2007 crop was the best on record, and Britain's DFID has resumed technical assistance for the subsidy scheme. The authors demonstrate, plainly and without jargon, that while more remains to be done, an important precedent has been set with implications for Africa and across the developing world.

INTERVIEW REQUESTS

Dr BLESSINGS CHINSINGA from the University of Malawi will be available for media interviews on the morning of Thursday March 13th only. Please call 07899 911 694.

TO ORDER COPIES

Please call 020 7222 4006 or email publish@africaresearchinstitute.org

Africa Research Institute is a non-partisan think tank founded in 2007.

Ends