

# FISP SLASHED

Food Security

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- Reduced to K40bn from K65bn last year
- Beneficiaries down to 900 000

CHRISTOPHER JIMU, STAFF REPORTER

Government plans to reduce its spending on the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (Fisp) and redirect some of the resources to water harvesting and irrigation infrastructure development to achieve sustainable production, *Weekend Nation* has learnt.

In an exclusive interview on Thursday on the sidelines of the Guiding Investments in Sustainable Agricultural



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Chaponda: We want to provide resources for irrigation

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# Govt to peg Fisp at K40bn in 2016/17

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Intensification in Africa (Gisaia) Project research dissemination workshop at Sunbird Capital in Lilongwe, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development George Chaponda disclosed that irrespective of the benefits of Fisp, government would slash the allocation by as much as K25 billion.

The announcement to reduce Fisp beneficiaries and funding

for the programme comes two weeks after President Peter Mutharika declared a State of National Disaster aimed at sourcing humanitarian assistance for 3 million following two consecutive years of El Nino weather characterised by dry spells.

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The second crop estimates released two weeks ago show that maize harvests have this year dropped by 12.3 percent, compared to last year, representing a deficit of 1.07 million metric tonnes (MT), against a national requirement of 3.2 million MT.

Said Chaponda: "We spent about K65 billion last year to buy fertiliser which was distributed to about 1.5 million people. This year, we might spend about K40

billion to distribute fertiliser to about 900 000 people and the saved resources from this programme would be channelled towards irrigation activities.

"The effects of El Nino have made us to rethink how this programme can be fine-tuned, hence we need some money to go towards irrigation," he said, without disclosing how much will be channelled to the

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# Reforms to increase volumes

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we want to provide resources for irrigation as well," he said.

Chaponda added: "Due to climate change, Fisp can no longer offer long term solutions to the recurrent food insecurity problems faced by smallholder farmers. As you are aware, we have experienced one of the difficult seasons in as far as weather is concerned.

"Due to the negative consequences on agriculture production, the President declared a State of National Disaster. So, although farmers were given coupons and accessed fertiliser, the inputs have not been optimally utilised due to poor rainfall," he said.

On the importance of the Gisaia project, Chaponda said it was timely as its objectives are designed towards finding sustainable solutions to

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On the importance of the Gisaia project, Chaponda said it was timely as its objectives are designed towards finding sustainable solutions to support smallholder farmers and making Fisp more profitable.

In his keynote address, Dr Thomas Jayne of Michigan University said Fisp is a powerful tool for quickly raising production but it could be more effective if crop response to fertiliser could be raised.

Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Luanar) vice-chancellor professor George Kanyama Phiri said the workshop had come at the right time since research findings by scientists from the institution and the United States have brought new insights on how to make the subsidy programme profitable to farmers.

Introduced in 2005 to boost food security, Fisp has in recent years come under mounting criticism from experts who argue that it does not give the desired results. ■

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