
Neoliberalism, Corporate Power and The Politics of Exclusion in Malawi's Tobacco Sector

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Résumé

Malawi's adoption of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the early 80s heralded the beginning of a neoliberal era in the choice and implementation of economic policy. In the agriculture sector, the paradigm shift was particularly promising to smallholder farmers who were hitherto excluded from participating in high value economic endeavors. For instance, smallholder farmers were prohibited from growing burley tobacco which was reserved for the elite-dominated commercially driven estate sector. Additionally, the State siphoned resources from smallholder farmers through a Government monopoly agriculture marketing board for investments in estate agriculture. Thus the liberalization of the sector was considered as key to countering exclusionary politics that was directly linked to the pervasive, deep and severe poverty that was, and continues to be, a feature of the country. The paper culminates from a predominantly qualitative study that was conducted to assess how the paradigm shift has delivered on its economic justice expectations. Using Steven Luke's Three Dimensions of Power and Charles Tilly's Theory of Interactive Material Inequality Generation, the paper argues that the neo-liberal paradigm has merely the political elites who were excluding smallholder farmers at the production phase of the tobacco value chain; into corporate elites who are excluding smallholder farmers at the marketing phase of the value chain. The paper identifies *exploitation and opportunity hoarding* as the main exclusionary mechanisms deployed by corporate elites in the exercise of their *decision making* and *agenda setting powers*.

Mots-Clés: Politics, Neoliberalism, Corporate Power, Exclusion, Malawi

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