**SVTP engages value chain players, communities on agriculture commercialization**

As the construction of the Shire Valley Irrigation Scheme is taking shape, the SVTP has embarked on engaging different stakeholders to share the vision of how agriculture will be commercialized in the Shire Valley.

The Programme engaged cotton and sugarcane value chain stakeholders to discuss the vision of the SVTP in terms of commercializing agriculture in the Shire Valley and also to appreciate the gains and challenges faced by the value chains in their respective sectors and to make recommendations for improvement.

Speaking during the cotton value chain meeting, Cotton Council Agribusiness Manager, Mr. Firestone Malisawo bemoaned low public and private investment in the sector. “The cotton sector had MK1.6 billion for cotton up scaling in 2011 but since then there has been low capital injection in the sector,” Mr. Malisawo said. The closure of ginning companies from 12 to 4 in 2019 due to low seed cotton production and lack of structured markets has heavily affected the sector.

Equally, during the sugarcane value chain stakeholders meeting, gains, challenges and developments were highlighted. New innovations in the sugarcane sector, the development of the Sugarcane Industry Bill which is currently underway, and the development of an investor facilitation program for out-growers in Malawi were also highlighted.

The SVTP also conducted sensitization meetings to farmers in 26 villages along the canal route. The meetings were aimed at sensitizing farmers on the pathways to be chosen when the actual farming starts. Selected farmers from Phata Cooperative who are currently practicing commercial farming were invited to make presentations as part of mentorship and to provide a clear picture of the modalities and benefits of commercial farming.

There is hope that agriculture in the Shire Valley will improve as the dream of having one of the largest irrigation schemes in Southern African is being fulfilled.